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John Sutcliff and His Northamptonshire Lord's Day Epistle

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ABSTRACT

This brief article seeks to probe further than Thornton Elwyn's *Baptist Quarterly* articles the content of John Sutcliff's 1786 Northamptonshire Baptist Association circular letter on the subject of the Lord's Day, the place of said doctrine amongst Particular Baptists and evangelicals of the time, and the inseparable relationship between this doctrine and the other Northamptonshire initiatives that led to the Association regenerating an 'expansive and confident denomination.'

KEYWORDS

John Sutcliff;
Northamptonshire Baptist
Association; circular letter;
Christian Sabbath; Lord's Day;
Baptists; Evangelicalism

From 1996 to 1997, Thornton Elwyn contributed two articles to the *Baptist Quarterly* regarding the contents of the Northamptonshire Baptist Association circular letters.¹ While summative in nature, the review revealed the contents of letters from an influential English Particular Baptist association that was not only geographically vast, but introduced into Baptist life such vital and critical movements for the eighteenth-century Baptist revival as the Prayer Call of 1784, evangelical Calvinism (or Fullerism), and the origin of the Baptist Missionary Society (1792). These circular letters, which had a readership beyond the Association itself, are truly indicative not only of the theological influence of the Association but also wider Baptist and evangelical views of the period.

In an Association known for the promotion of such notable movements within Baptist life, it is noteworthy that the Association letter for 1786 is dedicated to the doctrine of the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath. It is even more notable that this letter was penned only two years after the issue of the Prayer Call and by the same author. Historical study of the Lord's Day amongst Baptists and evangelicals has often been neglected for at least two reasons: first, its historic existence is generally assumed,² and second, the doctrine has arguably lost widespread support amongst contemporary evangelicals. However, as David Bebbington has rightly noted, this doctrine – inherited from the Puritans – was almost universally held across English speaking Evangelicalism and was a

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¹T. Elwyn, 'Particular Baptists of the Northamptonshire Baptist Association as Reflected in the Circular Letters, 1765–1820,' *BQ*, 36.8 (October 1996), 368–81; and part II, *BQ*, 37.1 (January 1997), 3–19.

²In minute books, letters, sermons, magazines and other literature, eighteenth and nineteenth century Particular Baptist documents are replete with references to Sunday as the Lord's Day or the Sabbath.

leading evangelical social cause in the nineteenth century.³ It is surprising then that there has been so little explicitly written on the subject.⁴ This brief article seeks to probe the contents of Sutcliff's letter further than Elwyn's review, the place of the doctrine amongst Baptists and evangelicals of the time, and the inseparable relationship between this doctrine and the other Northamptonshire initiatives that led to the Association regenerating an 'expansive and confident denomination.'⁵

The letter

The circular letter under consideration is *The Authority and Sanctification of the Lord's Day, Explained and Enforced in a Circular Letter from the Baptist Ministers and Messengers, Assembled at Northampton, June 6, 7 and 8, 1786*, which was written by John Sutcliff (1752–1814).⁶ Sutcliff trained for the ministry at Bristol Baptist Academy and from 1775 until his death was pastor of the Baptist church in Olney, where he also kept a residential academy. It was here he became intimately connected with a younger generation of ministers who began to adopt the affirmative side of the Modern Question and embrace Edwardsianism.⁷ The author of the Prayer Call of 1784,⁸ Sutcliff was also a founding member of the BMS and one of the triumvirate who 'held the ropes' for William Carey (1761–1834) in India.⁹ In Olney he became acquainted with the evangelical rector, John Newton (1725–1807), and his successor, Thomas Scott (1747–1821). Sutcliff was the moderator of the Association eight times and seven times was chosen to write the circular letters.¹⁰

After the standard opening of the circular letter (that included its title, the Association's credal basis and the constituent churches), Sutcliff offered the usual assessment of the state of the Association as he began the 11-page

³D. Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism in Modern Britain and America,' in *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States*, ed. by G. A. Rawlyk and M. A. Noll (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1994), p. 195.

⁴Many implicit references to the subject can be found amongst related period works on Evangelicalism but sometimes complete silence exists even where it would be expected. Nigel Scotland's *Evangelical Anglicans* would be an example of an exception (see N. Scotland, *Evangelical Anglicans in a Revolutionary Age, 1789–1901* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), Chapter Eight: 'Sunday Observance,' pp. 181–204). To support this claim a survey of the Baptist Historical Society Transactions, 1908–1921 reveals no articles on the subject. Likewise a survey of the *Baptist Quarterly*, 1922 to present, reveals that only two articles have been published on the subject over the course of the journal's run (both by W. T. Whitley, 'Catholic Holy Days and Puritan Sabbaths,' *BQ*, 2.8 (1925), 365–73; and 'Seventh Day Baptists in England,' *BQ*, 12.8 (1947), 252–8). In wider literature the Puritan Sabbath has received attention, as has the Victorian Sunday; however, work directly related to the Lord's Day amongst Baptists and evangelicals has been scant.

⁵B. Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 146.

⁶For more on the life of Sutcliff, see M. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, His Friends, and His Times* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1994).

⁷The 'modern question' asked whether it was the duty of all to whom the Gospel was presented to repent and believe in Christ. Edwardsianism is the form of Calvinism set forward by the New England theologian Jonathan Edwards.

⁸For more on the Prayer Call, see E. A. Payne, 'Prayer Call 1784' (London: Baptist Laymen's Missionary Movement, 1941); and Haykin, ch. 8 'The Prayer Call of 1784,' pp. 153–71.

⁹J. W. Morris, *Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (London: 1816), p. 101.

¹⁰T. Elwyn, *The Northamptonshire Baptist Association* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1964), pp. 100–1.

letter. Central to this assessment was the continued promotion of revival through prayer. He reported how ‘the monthly meetings of prayer, for the general spread of the gospel, appear to be kept up with some degree of spirit. This, we hope, will yet be the case.’¹¹ He also highlighted how other churches, even those of different denominational persuasions, had ‘voluntarily acceded to the plan.’ He then switched from an exhortative to a more pastoral tone and stressed how their yearly ‘epistles’ on ‘various important branches of Christianity’ had always been written out of ‘sincere affection’ for the readership’s ‘spiritual welfare’ and practical utility, with the authors annually abiding by the ‘deep sense of excellence of the truths they contain, and the importance of your paying a proper attention to those doctrines they are designed to explain’ (p. 2). Sutcliff continued:

The natural, but serious question having been proposed, ‘What shall be the subject of our next annual letter?’ — We laid one to another, ‘What will be most suitable? What is most necessary? What can we think of, that will be most for general advantage?’ — We paused. We thought? — We freely spoke our sentiments. — At length we determined. The subject on which we have fixed, is that of the *sabbath*. We attend to it the more cheerfully, because we know you will approve of our choice. You love that sacred day; it is dear to your very souls. (p. 2)

Significantly, the Association had not decided to speak on matters pertaining to the Arminian-Calvinist controversies as they had during the 1770s, nor matters pertaining to Enlightenment encroachments upon orthodox Christianity, nor the Modern Question, nor even to continue the recent theme of prayer and revival that ultimately led to later letters being written on missions; rather the subject that was chosen was the Sabbath. That the Lord’s Day finds such placement, given equal importance even to the promotion of prayer, speaks to its centrality in the worldview held by these Particular Baptists.

As the title indicates, Sutcliff structured his letter around the authority and sanctification of the day. He set out his explanation of the Sabbath as ‘a laying aside of our usual business.’ Not only must this be the case, he argued, but lest the sacred day be disparaged, it must be put to its proper use; it is not merely a day for inactivity and sloth but rather must be used ‘*for religious ends and purposes*’ (pp. 2–3). Pages three to seven are used to assert the truth of the day (its authority), and pages 7–11 prescribe the proper attitude and practice for the day (its sanctification). The basis for his reasoning is the moral law as indicated in Exodus 20:8: ‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,’ which itself recalled Genesis 2:2–3. The Sabbath is the appointed day that God had set apart for his worship. God therefore gives the precept its authority and sanctity and so means it for the increase of his glory and humanity’s good (pp. 3–4).

¹¹J. Sutcliff, *The Authority and Sanctification of the Lord’s Day, Explained and Enforced in a Circular Letter from the Baptists Ministers and Messengers, Assembled at Northampton, June 6, 7 and 8, 1786* (Bristol Baptist College Archives, Acc. No. 13254), p. 1. All spelling in quotations has been modernized. Further quotations from the letter will be noted in the text.

Sutcliff then moved to examine the practice amongst the patriarchs and cited Isaac Watts' commentary, which likened the Sabbath's relative silence throughout the patriarchal period to the New Testament: 'that there is an *express institution* of a *sabbath* in the beginning of the bible, without any plain and uncontested *example* of the *practice* in the *patriarchal* ages; so in the first *christian* age, there are several plain *examples* of the *practice* of keeping the *Lord's day*, without any *express institution* of it [or change of day] in the *New Testament*' (p. 4).¹² Passing over 'a variety of [self-evident Sabbath] passages' in the Old Testament, Sutcliff looked to a prophecy in Isaiah that for him described 'the state of things under the New Testament' (Isaiah 56:1–8) (p. 4), thereby transitioning from an examination of the subject in the Old Testament to that of the New. He stressed that 'a day was observed as a Sabbath, by the apostles, and the first christian churches, is plain from the inspired historic pages.' Turning to ecclesiastical history, he purported that when 'any eminent measures of the life and power of religion have been discovered, a proportionable regard for the *sanctification of the Lord's day*, has been manifested.' Again, he passed over many important New Testament considerations to address the change of day and interestingly aligns himself more with Seventh Day Baptists than those who denied their 'obligations to observe a *sabbath* at all.'¹³ While differing with such sabbatarians, he nevertheless reprobated the latter groups 'sentiments with the warmest abhorrence. Sentiments like these are pregnant with mischief.' Such laxity was 'dreadfully injurious' and 'awfully pernicious' to the souls of men, the interests of religion and the welfare of the country. With respect to the change of day, Sutcliff leant on and also appealed to the argument and authority of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), 'a late pious and judicious divine,' by quoting his sermon on *The Perpetuity and the Change of the Sabbath* (pp. 5–6).¹⁴ The Old Testament day honoured the Creator and creation whereas the New Testament Sabbath – 'properly called the LORD's DAY' – was a memorial to commemorate something 'infinitely more astonishing': the Redeemer and the new creation. Jesus' resurrection, appearances to the disciples, ascension [he omitted Pentecost], and the apostolic practice of worship (itself taken from divine instruction), together with this practice's rootedness in the moral law, all constituted 'satisfactory evidence' that the doctrine should be embraced. Speaking in this letter to Baptists, and thus at liberty for a measure of humour, he concluded his lists of

¹²See I. Watts, 'The Sabbath Perpetual, and the Lord's-Day Sacred,' in *Sermons, Discourses and Essays, on Various Subjects*, vol. II (London: Paternoster Row, 1753), p. 399.

¹³For more on Seventh Day Baptists, see Bryan W. Ball, *The Seventh-Day Men: Sabbatarians and Sabbatarianism in England and Wales, 1600–1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2009). During the eighteenth century 'Sabbatarian' had a different connotation than its present usage (i.e. the belief in the Lord's Day as the appointed day or rest and worship). When Sutcliff used 'Sabbatarian' he referred to those who held the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) as the correct Sabbath over and against the Lord's Day (or Sunday).

¹⁴Sutcliff quotes excerpts from J. Edwards, 'The Perpetuity and the Change of the Sabbath,' in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. II, ed. by E. Hickman (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), pp. 96–7. This citation demonstrates that Sutcliff was well acquainted with Edwards' works beyond the level of Edwards' major titles, many of which Sutcliff himself was responsible for publishing in England.

evidence by stating that, 'had we as fair a precedent for the latter [infant baptism], as we have for the former [the Lord's Day], we should, without hesitation, directly attend to the practice' (pp. 6 and 10).

Having in his view established the biblical authority behind the day's observance, Sutcliff turned to examine the 'manner in which it should be observed' (its sanctification). While permitting 'works of *necessity* and *mercy*,' one was to 'abstain from whatever is *unlawful*,' noting that what might be lawful on other days may be 'absolutely sinful on this.' 'Why are you to lay aside your worldly employ?' he asked, answering 'that you may be at leisure to serve God.' Such religious business was divided into the private and public, or into three classes – the house of God, the family and 'the closet.' Sutcliff recommended a number of points to get the most spiritual benefit from the day. One was to approach the day with expectation and to rise early as 'sacred hours are precious.' Much closet business awaited such as the reading of the scriptures, prayer and praise, meditation and self-examination (p. 7). The heads of families were required to read the word, instruct and to pray in a manner filled with diligence and activity. The day was also to be attended in a spiritual manner of warmth, gratitude and sincerity, for the authority of the institution called for '*reverence* and holy awe' rather than a carnal spirit (p. 8). From the closet to public worship one was to guard one's mind against the 'tendency to *carnalize*' the day [focus on the world]. Having one's best weekly meal on this day was an occasion for 'excessive indulgence' and caused families to 'be detained from divine service.' Such meals lent to 'drowsiness, listlessness, and inattention' in the afternoon service. Worshippers were to dress well but not to vainly fuss over their appearance in the '*looking-glass*,' which detracted from prayer and study. Regular and punctual attendance to worship was stressed, along with focusing during the services. Another matter that showed that the 'love of the world' had 'the predominance over your heart' was the disgraceful and hurried manner congregations noted 'who could quit the place first! Such persons seem as if they thought, that they had been in prison.' People were also to shun 'avocations and amusements by which sacred time is often wasted.' Likewise, worldly conversation was to be traded for that which delighted and focused attention upon the Lord (Isa 58:13) (p. 9).

For Sutcliff, balancing the authority and sanctity of the day made its observance more than a mere duty. The recognition of the day's spiritual nature, as well as its duty, combined to form a day to be observed with great alacrity. Sutcliff puts forward what the day meant to him and how it should be viewed by others:

Pleasant were the hours when you retired from the world, and enjoyed your God. You then said, 'a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.' When at a distance, you longed for its arrival. When it drew nigh, you welcomed its approach. You spent the sacred hours with sweet delight. You thought a seat at the feet of Jesus, a happy place. You met his saints; and pleasure ran through your souls; joy smiled in your

countenances. You envied not a monarch on his throne. — But the day closed. You mourned its departure. You were ready to exclaim, 'O for an eternal Sabbath!' ... This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it. (p. 10)

Proper observance combined with a true relish was seen as 'evidence, that your religion is genuine.' Evaluating your life by how you attended to this precept was a 'measure' of 'the state of religion in your souls' (p. 11). Sutcliff noted that 'the course of wickedness ... often begins with this sin,' which was of 'an hardening nature' (pp. 10–11). Such a sin distanced one from communion with God and grieved the Holy Spirit. The joys that attended its proper observance were thus contrasted with perennial 'sabbath breakers' who threatened 'heavy judgements' upon themselves and the nation (Jer 17:27) (p. 10).

In context¹⁵

Far from being alone in his views, Sutcliff represented the prevailing position amongst evangelicals of both Calvinistic and Arminian, paedobaptist and credobaptist persuasions. Sutcliff's closest friends in the Association, both prominent denominational figures in their own rights, John Ryland Jr (1753–1825) and Andrew Fuller (1754–1814), were together 'one heart and one soul'¹⁶ with Sutcliff and shared his conviction concerning the Lord's Day. In a sermon on the contempt of God, Ryland referred to the gross violation of the Sabbath. In another sermon he quoted the fourth commandment and then said, 'if you have a soul, is one day in the week too much to mind it?'¹⁷ In an impassioned letter on the subject dated 25 August 1805, Fuller wrote to challenge a friend on the subject and stated, 'I must write you a few thoughts on the Lord's day. Your views on that subject, I am persuaded, are injurious to your soul, and to the souls of many more ...'¹⁸

¹⁵What precipitated Sutcliff's letter on this subject? *The Society for Promoting the Observance of the Sabbath*, formed in 1809, and Sabbath concerns during the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars were often kindled in the context of anti-Catholic and revolutionary fears, the Sabbath was viewed as a means to ward off the terrors and impending judgements that accompanied the godlessness perceived in the events in France. Against this backdrop and the English governments proposal to drill the militia on Sunday John Newton declared:

if the breach of the Sabbath was authorized by law, it would alarm me much more, than to hear that fifty or a hundred thousand French were landed or that our Great Fleet was totally destroyed. I should consider it as a decided token that God has given us up. (Quoted from J. Newton, Wrangham MSS, Box 3, cited by Bradley, *Call to Seriousness*, p. 15 by Scotland, p. 184)

No such fears existed in 1786 and so it is likely its selection represented a consistent appeal to obey God's word as with any other subject of general Christian importance, or at the least was a reminder of it during an age in which society was rapidly developing.

¹⁶Cf. Acts 4:32; Haykin, p. 12.

¹⁷J. E. Ryland, *Pastoral Memorials Selected from the Manuscripts of the Late Rev'd. John Ryland, D. D. of Bristol a Memoir of the Author in Two Volumes* (London: Holdsworth, 1827), vol. I, 'On the Contempt of God,' p. 74; and 'Unbelief Not Owing to Want of Evidence,' p. 282.

¹⁸A. Fuller, 'The Christian Sabbath, Kettering, Aug. 25, 1805,' in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, vol. III, ed. by J. Belcher (Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), pp. 828–9.

A century earlier it had been the sin of Sabbath breaking that first awakened John Bunyan and led to his conversion.¹⁹ The 22nd chapter of the Second London Baptist Confession serves as an example of how the Lord's Day became embedded in Particular Baptist confessions:

7. As it is the law of nature, that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, be set apart for the worship of God, so by his Word, in a positive moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy unto him, which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week, which is called the Lord's day: and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week being abolished.

8. The Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering their common affairs aforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all day, from their own works, words and thoughts, about their worldly employment and recreations, but are also taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.²⁰

Such ardent sentiments were not limited to Calvinistic Dissenters who shared the Westminster tradition in common. The Lord's Day was also an important conviction to evangelical Anglicans and New Dissent.

In a letter dated 4 September 1800, William Wilberforce (1759–1833) wrote that, 'There is nothing in which I would advise you to be more strictly conscientious than in keeping the Sabbath day holy ... I can truly declare that to me the Sabbath has been invaluable.'²¹ The evangelical rectors at Olney were also in agreement with their Baptist brother, John Sutcliff. 'Father Newton,' who was much beloved by the Northamptonshire Baptists as well as by Wilberforce, was also known for his affection for the day.²² His hymn 'The Sabbath and the Sanctuary' is but one example of this.²³ His successor, Thomas Scott, was likewise in alignment with Sutcliff. He wrote, 'there is in force a divine mandate for hallowing the sabbath, which all are bound to

¹⁹Bunyan wrote:

But one day, amongst all the sermons our parson made, his subject was, to treat of the Sabbath-day, and of the evil of breaking that, either with labour, sports or otherwise. Now I was, notwithstanding my religion, one that took much delight in all manner of vice, and especially that was the day that I did solace myself therewith, wherefore I fell in my conscience under his sermon, thinking and believing that he made that sermon on purpose to show me my evil doing; and at that time I felt what guilt was, though never before, that I can remember; but then I was, for the present, greatly loaden therewith, and so went home when the sermon was ended, with a great burden upon my spirit. (J. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* [1666] (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 22–3)

²⁰W. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (USA: Judson Press, 1969), p. 282. A survey of many local confessions also demonstrates the inclusion of statements regarding the Lord's Day at a congregational level.

²¹W. Wilberforce, 'Letter from Wilberforce to Mr. Ashley, Bognor, Sept 4, 1800,' in *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce*, vol. I, ed. by Robert and Samuel Wilberforce (London: John Murray, 1840), pp. 213–14; see also p. 101. Wilberforce also addressed this issue in his work *A Practical View* (1797).

²²G. Gordon, *Wise Counsel: John Newton's Letters to John Ryland Jr* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), p. 403.

²³*Methodist Hymn-Book* (Toronto: Methodist Book and Publishing House, 1879).

obey, and contract guilt by neglecting.²⁴ Such views extended beyond those branches of Evangelicalism influenced most directly by Calvinism, to the Arminian Methodism of the Wesleys showcased in John Wesley's (1703–1791) sermon titled 'A word to a Sabbath breaker.'²⁵ New Connexion General Baptist minister John G. Pike (1784–1854) also preached a sermon titled, 'The Strict Observance of the Sabbath essential to the Maintenance of Personal Religion and the Prosperity of Christian Churches,' which was consistent with article two of the New Connexion laid down in 1760, 'On the Nature and Perpetual Obligation of the Moral Law.'²⁶ From even the most basic survey of Evangelicalism it is clear that Sutcliff's letter was congruent with the prevailing evangelical sentiment of the times.

Inseparability

The doctrine of the Lord's Day was essential to the worldview of John Sutcliff, his companions and indeed seventeenth- (and eighteenth-) century Evangelicalism. Why was this so? How were the convictions put forward in this circular letter related to the wider Association foci of prayer, evangelical Calvinism, missions, spiritual vitality and growth? Sutcliff's letter itself provides three clues to this hermeneutical question, most notably in the title, *the authority ... of the Lord's Day*.

For Sutcliff, the divine origin and therefore authority of the Bible was paramount. 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God,' was a belief Sutcliff held that had been inherited from earlier divines (cf. the biblical tradition, 2 Tim 3:16).²⁷ It was an 'infallible guide' and 'unerring rule.'²⁸ In 1797, he again wrote an Association circular letter, *The Divinity of Christian Religion*, in which he appealed to the inspiration and authority of the Bible as proof of the divine nature of Christianity. In 1813, he wrote yet another letter, *On Hearing the Word of God*, in which he affirmed that the Bible's 'divine origin, its high authority, its unrivalled excellency, place it on a throne before which every other book must bow.'²⁹ Indeed, those without it, or who did not heed it 'with a sacred awe' were left in 'dark despair, without a ray of hope.'³⁰ Divine revelation and not unaided human reason was where authority rested. Sutcliff wrote his 1797 letter in response to *The Age of Reason* (1794, 1795) written by Enlightenment

²⁴Scott, Thomas, 'Concerning Hallowing the Sabbath: An Appendix to the Discourse upon Repentance,' in *The Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Scott*, vol. I, ed. by John Scott (London: L.B. Seeley and Son, 1823), 237–48. For a testimonial of his move to stricter Sabbath observance, see John Scott, *The Life of the Rev. Thomas Scott D.D.* (New York: John P. Haven, 1822), p. 92.

²⁵J. Wesley, 'A Word to a Sabbath Breaker,' in *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*, vol. VI, ed. by John Emery (New York: J. Collord, 1835), pp. 352–4. See also J. Wesley, 'On the Sabbath,' in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. IV, ed. by A. C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), pp. 268–78.

²⁶Lumpkin, p. 343.

²⁷J. Sutcliff, *On Hearing the Word of God, 1813* (BBCA, 06785), p. 2.

²⁸Haykin, 207. Quoted from 'Jealousy of the Lord of Hosts Illustrated' preached April 27, 1791 (Haykin, 'Appendix II,' pp. 355–65). This is Sutcliff's only sermon to survive in a complete form.

²⁹Sutcliff, *On Hearing the Word of God*, p. 2.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 2–3.

thinker Thomas Paine (1737–1809). Paine had cast off his Quaker roots and the acceptance of any credal authority beyond the authority of his own reason, stating, ‘my mind is my own church.’³¹ For Sutcliff, truth was not indiscernible as deists claimed, nor was it something that rested in human reason alone as claimed by the rationalists, but rather that truth was derived from the authority of divine revelation.

If God was the Bible’s author the book ought to be obeyed (p. 3). Sutcliff reasoned that if one believed scripture, and that moral law was still in force for all of humankind in all ages, then one would arrive at his own conclusion concerning the Lord’s Day. Here he was not addressing Enlightenment thinkers but antinomians whom he perceived represented an altogether different danger to vital religion in the eighteenth century. Speaking of the moral nature of the Sabbath precept, he wrote that, ‘Certainly this reason applies now with force quite equal to what it ever did. There is nothing in it either temporary or local’ (p. 3). He put great emphasis on one bringing their whole life into conformity with the Bible, including obedience to the moral law within it, if one believed in its inspiration. By the Bible Sutcliff believed one was ‘to test the reality of his faith and the purity of his doctrine, experience, worship and lifestyle.’³²

It was a common view of the period that taking an anti-Sabbath stance diminished scriptural authority, and thus Sutcliff’s defence of the Lord’s Day was seen as synonymous with defending the inspiration of scripture and its author. In a sermon entitled ‘Jealousy of the Lord of Hosts Illustrated’ preached 27 April 1791 from 1 Kings 19:10, Sutcliff defined jealousy for God as to have ‘love to and tender concern for ... the divine honour and interest in the world.’³³ He went on to say that there were three attitudes that were intimate companions of having a jealousy for God, the first of which was ‘an implicit regard to the Word of God.’³⁴ Being convinced of the Sabbath’s place in the moral law and therefore its synonymy with a ‘regard’ to scripture, he believed that with ‘this sin’ (i.e. Sabbath breaking) began ‘a hardening nature’ (i.e. towards the authority of the Bible and God) (p. 11). Consequently, Sutcliff was equally jealous in his letter to advocate for the authority and sanctification of the Lord’s Day, seeing them both as necessary for the success of experimental [gospel] religion or vital Christianity. The day was viewed as a chief means of grace, and its proper use was essential to bring spiritual blessing to all levels: the individual, family, church and nation. This is why the Sabbath also came to feature centrally in evangelicals’ foreign missions, with two primary objectives before the missionaries: the gospel of Christ and the observance of the Sabbath.³⁵ Sutcliff was

³¹Haykin, pp. 287–8; T. Paine, *The Age of Reason*, intro. Philip A. Foner (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1974), p. 50.

³²Haykin, pp. 206–7.

³³Ibid., ‘Appendix II,’ p. 356.

³⁴Ibid., p. 357.

³⁵D. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 135. The reference summarized by Bebbington is attributed to Henry Martyn (1781–1812).

zealous for the Sabbath because he was equally jealous for the Bible, godliness and the advance of Christianity. In his mind, these were inseparably intertwined.

For these reasons, Sutcliff saw the doctrine of the Lord's Day as inherent in what it meant to be Baptist and evangelical. As such, this doctrine and its promulgation are to be taken seriously as an historic belief if John Sutcliff, the Northamptonshire Association and the Evangelical Revival are to be properly understood. These cannot be divorced. Coming to a greater awareness of this inseparability will yield greater insight into the study of the period. An academic survey of contemporary literature relating to the significance of the doctrine of the Lord's Day amongst Baptists specifically and evangelicals more broadly is a work that warrants further attention. Because of his belief in the authority of Scripture, Sutcliff envisaged that any Christian system based upon this premise would have at its heart the observance of the Lord's Day, a practice which was based upon an unchangeable moral law and was therefore necessary for the sanctification of the church, the nation and the world.

Notes on contributor

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