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Church in Crisis

Again and again I have been shown that the past experiences of God's people are not to be counted as dead facts. We are not to treat the record of these experiences as we would treat a last year's almanac. The record is to be kept in mind, for history will repeat itself. The darkness of the mysteries of the night is to be illuminated with the light of heaven Lt 238, 1903

1938 - The world was precariously balanced on a powder keg and most people knew it. The United States was still struggling with the financial fall-out of Black Thursday that had plunged the country into the Great Depression. Europe was jittery because no matter how accommodating British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain was, Adolph Hitler still wanted more and more and more.

In this time of intensity, the Seventh-day Adventist church was confronted by a theological crisis unlike any it had ever before faced. The danger level was on a par with the Kellogg led "alpha of apostasy" nearly 40 years before, but this time the threat came from without and it wasn't pantheism.

The stakes: October 22, 1844; the Spirit of Prophecy; and the seventh-day Sabbath.

The enemy: the majority of the governments of the world.

It was a proposed Sunday law, but it didn't bear the slightest resemblance to any Sunday law ever dreamt up by Seventh-day Adventists. It was a calendar change that *would* affect the Sabbath. At a time when Seventh-day Adventists were already struggling with labor unions for the right to keep Saturday as their rest day, it promised disaster to the church.

The movement for a change of calendars started in the 1920s, but really gained momentum in the 1930s. This was not some hare-brained idea supported by a handful of visionaries. It was well-

organized, well-financed and had supporters highly placed in the Roman Catholic Church and in the League of Nations.

Let it not be thought that the effort to do this (put into place a new calendar) is insignificant and unimportant. Rather is it true that a world-wide and powerful organization has come into existence which has this as its objective. It is spending many thousands of dollars yearly for propaganda to obtain the approval of commercial, governmental, and civic bodies for the World Calendar. It has numerous subsidiary organizations throughout the world working for the adoption of the new calendar. One of these is the Rational Calendar Association of England. Under different names there are similar organizations working for the same objective in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Panama, Uruguay, Peru, Belgium, Colombia, Germany, France, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, and elsewhere.¹

The threat to the church was immediately clear. Unlike the change from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar in 1582, the proposed World Calendar would affect the continuous weekly cycle. The result would be that the first year of the change, the Sabbath would remain on Saturday; the following year, however, the new Saturday would fall on the old Friday. The year after that, Saturday would fall on the old Thursday.

The year this was to go into effect was 1945. The reason was simple: "It is best to choose a day, date, month, and year when both the old retiring and the new incoming calendars glide smoothly together."² In the propaganda widely distributed by the World Calendar Organization, it was stated that the last four months of 1944 were identical to the last four months of the new calendar, so that would be a good time to make the switch. It was a deceptive statement. There was one glaring difference between the two calendars – a blank day.

The way the calendar worked was this: the whole of the Gregorian year would remain the same until December 31. December 30, 1944, was a Saturday; December 31 was a Sunday. Under the new calendar, the day following Saturday, December 30, would not be Sunday, December 31, but simply World Day. It would not have a *date* (that is, a number) nor would it be part of the weekly cycle of Sunday through Saturday.

Instead of being recognized as Sunday, which it is, instead of being called a Sunday, or being observed as Sunday, it is set aside as an "extra Saturday, December W," and counted a blank day, or zero day.

¹ Carlyle B. Haynes, *Calendar Change Threatens Religion*, Religious Liberty Association, Washington D.C., 1944, 4, 5.

² Elisabeth Achelis, *The Calendar for Everybody*, 121 (as quoted in *Calendar Change Threatens Religion*, 5.)

Instead of going to church that day Sunday observers would celebrate a holiday, an “extra Saturday.” They would go to church the next day, Monday, the 2nd day of the week, now rechristened Sunday, and moved up, on paper, to be the 1st day. They would be asked to keep Monday during all of 1945 . . .

In 1949 Saturday, the 7th day, under this arrangement, would be called Sunday, and made the 1st day, and observed by Sunday keepers . . .

Thus the historical Sunday would be detached from its fixed place in the week and set to wandering through the weekly cycle, its own name removed and another name applied. Those who observe it as a religious day would be plunged into hopeless and endless confusion, groping about to discover their lost day of worship.³

Seventh-day Adventists suddenly found themselves uneasy bed-fellows with Jews, Muslims and Sunday keeping Protestants who did not want a calendar change that would affect the only weekly cycle they had ever known – a continuous weekly cycle.

The advantages claimed for the reformed calendar are avowedly commercial, economic, statistical. It will, we are told –

1. Fix the year in perpetuity.
2. Retain and largely equalize the twelve months.
3. Retain and equalize the quarter years.
4. Group the months uniformly within the quarters.
5. Provide 13 complete weeks within each quarter and uniformly group these weeks.
6. Reduce the inequality between months from three days to one day, and establish an equal working month.⁴

In summary, the year would always begin on a Sunday and end on a Saturday. Specific dates would no longer float through the weekly cycle, but would forever be fixed to one day. So, under the new calendar, if a child were born on Tuesday, January 10, 1947, her birthday would *always* fall on Tuesday because January 10 would always be a Tuesday.

Opponents to this change quickly denounced it as a deceptive calendar. The Gregorian calendar is based on the solar year – how long it takes the earth to revolve around the sun. The solar year is 365.2422 days long. The World Calendar, on the other hand, while officially claiming to be a solar calendar would be only 364 days long (World Day, previously known as December 31, not being counted as a day.) Every four years, leap day would be handled the same as World Day.

³ Haynes, *Calendar Change Threatens Religion*, 3, 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

The World Calendar reformers would have us observe that this calendar divides the twelve months of the year into four equal quarters, 91 days in each, 364 days in all. But as there are 365 days in ordinary years, and 366 days in leap years, they would have these taken care of by calling the 365th day Year End Day, or December W, or an extra Saturday, and have it follow December 30, not to be counted in the calendar, but considered and used as a holiday, a blank day, or zero day. Likewise would they have us provide for the 366th day in leap years, this becoming Leap Year Day, by placing the old February 29 in midyear following June 30 as another extra Saturday, and calling it June W, but not counting it in the calendar, just nonchalantly banishing it as another blank day. They cheerfully tell us that “both December W and June W are the stabilizing days in the calendar – the World Holidays.”⁵

Within the Seventh-day Adventist church, rumblings of problems with calendation principles first appeared some years earlier. Elder J. H. Wiertz had learned from his Hebrew teachers, Jewish rabbis, that the rabbinical Day of Atonement for 1844 had been observed on September 23, not October 22. Wiertz determined to investigate the issue. Taking advantage of a contact within the United States Naval Observatory, he searched for the truth.

Wiertz discovered inconsistencies in calendrical science principles that affected the date of the crucifixion. This was vital, because a correct (or incorrect) understanding of the calendar affects the interpretation of various prophecies as well as the seventh day Sabbath doctrine. He felt it was imperative that the church acknowledge and reconcile these discrepancies before our adversaries could challenge us on them. He finally wrote his findings up in a manuscript 283 pages in length. In 1932, he began appealing to various officials in the General Conference for an investigation of his findings.

The General Conference did not see the necessity for official research and he had no success in getting them to look into the topic for some time. Finally, on November 7, 1938, the General Conference appointed a committee of ministers, scholars and respected theologians to address the issues raised by Wiertz. Membership on the Research Committee reads like a veritable Who’s Who of Seventh-day Adventist leaders: Elder L. E. Froom chaired the committee; Dr. Lynn Harper Wood was secretary. Other members included M. L. Andreasen, F. C. Gilbert, and Professors M. E. Kern, Welein, and Teesdale. In January of 1939, Miss Grace Amadon, the granddaughter of Adventist Pioneer John Byington, was invited to join along with a Wilkinson, (possibly B. G. Wilkinson).

At this time, nearly 70 years later, it is impossible to definitively state which reason prompted the General Conference to appoint the Research Committee: Elder Wiertz’ persistent questioning, or

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

the increasing agitation for a World Calendar. They did study Wiertz' findings. It is also clear that they were very aware of the increasing support, world-wide, for a change in calendars, as references to that appear in their research and correspondence.

The Research Committee confirmed that October 22 was indeed the Day of Atonement for 1844, even though it conflicted with the rabbinical date of September 23. As such, the status of Ellen White as a prophet remained safe and secure. The one unwelcome and completely unexpected element brought to light was that the Biblical calendar used to establish October 22, 1844, as the great anti-typical Day of Atonement also appeared to affect when the Sabbath fell. This caused unprecedented confusion. For a time, the committee considered implementing the luni-solar calendar as church policy.

In an undated letter to fellow-committee member, Grace Amadon, M. L. Andreasen expresses his fear that adopting the calendar used by the Millerites would only result in confusion. He did not see how such a calendar could be adopted by a worldwide church nor how it could be explained to the church members, let alone, the world. His own confusion (as well as some incorrectness in understanding how the luni-solar calendar worked) is evident:

It would not be easy to explain to the people that the God who advocated and instituted such an arrangement would be very concerned about the exact seventh day.

If an explanation were possible, and the people were at last adjusted to the shift in the feast day and the stability of the seventh day, it might be supposed that in time they would get used to the arrangement. But they would no sooner have become accustomed to this, till another shift is made. Now they shift back to where they were before. But neither is this settled or stationary. Another shift comes, and another and another . . . There is no uniformity and just as the people get used to a certain arrangement, the day is changed again. Such is more than the common people can understand, and if we go to the people now with such a proposition, we must expect that confusion will result. And our enemies will not be slow to point out the difficulties and ring the changes on them . . .

If in the new calendar scheme we are considering adopting it should be admitted that local communities have the right of making their own observations [of the moon] that would determine the new year, it would yet remain a question if the proper men competent for such observation would be available . . . The seventh-day sabbath is clear and distinct. A child can understand its computation. Let not the people observing God's holy day sponsor a calendar that means confusion, and make our work unnecessarily hard. For while the proposed scheme does not in any way affect the succession of the days of the week, and hence does not affect the Sabbath, nevertheless if the people observing the Sabbath also advocate

the new scheme of calendation, the resulting confusion will not be of any help to us . . .

The committee has done a most excellent piece of work. The endorsing, unreservedly, of the plan now before us seems to me . . . in its implications so loaded with dynamite, with TNT, that we might well beware. I would most earnestly warn the committee in this matter. I am afraid that the repercussions of such endorsement at this time will be felt in wide circles . . .

Seventh-day Adventists will soon have enough matters on their hands so that it will not be necessary to make trouble for ourselves before the time. *The blank day may yet confront us.*⁶ We cannot afford to start trouble of our own. To the world it will look that the present proposed calendar is advanced for a specific purpose – not for the purpose of adoption, for we will find that it is impossible of universal application, – but for the purpose of supporting the 1844 date. I do not believe that we are under that necessity. It must be possible to establish October 22, 1844 without resorting to such devices.

A possible solution: I suggest that we make a report to Brother McElhaney⁷ of what the Millerites believed and how they arrived at their conclusions, without, at this time, committing ourselves upon the correctness of their method. Let Brother McElhaney publish this report in any way it may be thought best, and *let us await the reaction*. This, of course, would be only a preliminary report, and would be so designated. *We will soon [see] what fire it will draw*. In the mean time let us study further on the final report. *The reaction to the preliminary report may determine the form of the final.*⁸

The confusion arises over the fact that the Gregorian calendar has a continuous cycle of weeks, while the luni-solar calendar does not. Therefore, when the solar Gregorian calendar is superimposed over the luni-solar Biblical calendar, the luni-solar dates seem to “float” through the Gregorian week. Andreasen’s confusion is evident from the fact that, while he recognizes the luni-solar calendar floats through the Gregorian week, at the same time he thinks it does not affect the Sabbath. This is incorrect. The seventh-day Sabbath on the luni-solar calendar only rarely falls on the Gregorian Saturday.

It is not entirely clear whether or not the Research Committee saw the affect on the Sabbath. Various statements are quite ambiguous and could be interpreted either way. Definitely some of

⁶ This is a clear reference to the proposed World Calendar facing the church at the time.

⁷ Probably Elder J. L. McElhaney, General Conference President.

⁸ M. L. Andreasen, “Objections To The Use Of The Wandering Lunar Day Line As Basis In Determining Jewish Feasts And The Beginning Of The Biblical Jewish New Year,” Box 2, Folder 4, Grace Amadon Collection (Collection 154), Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, emphasis supplied. Here after referred to as simply Grace Amadon Collection.

the members chose to ignore certain scientific proof that did not agree with their preconceived ideas of the Sabbath.

However, it should be understood that this was no “cover-up” on the part of a General Conference. These were sincere, dedicated people who had given their lives to the message they loved. They should not be condemned because they did not perceive that God was attempting to lead them into deeper truth and more glorious light.

At the same time, the church today cannot afford to repeat their mistake. God’s invitation to His people is: “Come now, let us *reason* together.”⁹ The word translated “reason” is *yâkach* which means to be correct, to justify or convict; to reason together.¹⁰ While it is true that there will always be hooks on which to hang doubts for those who wish to do so, it is also true that God does not require blind faith. Pure faith, yes; blind faith, no. He always gives sufficient reason to believe for those who are willing to be convinced.

This must be understood. A Laodicean who discovers apparent contradictions in the Bible, can be shaken. Rather than digging deep in the mine of truth to discover the underlying principle that will reconcile the two apparently contradictory points, he will instead choose to believe the one that agrees with his belief system because it suits the tenor of his *feelings* and reject the other. Anything new is seen as unnecessary knowledge. Laodiceans, after all, are “increased with goods (knowledge) and *have need of nothing*.”¹¹ When something comes up that he doesn’t know, the Laodicean feels, “I don’t need to know that. If it were important to know, I’d already know it, because what I already know is sufficient for salvation.”

A true student of the Word, on the other hand, will never reject something simply because it contradicts a preconceived idea or cherished opinion. To him, the truth is more important than anything else. He realizes that *not* knowing the truth does not change the reality of what *is* truth. So, he would always rather *know the truth*. Understanding that feelings are not a reliable indication of what is truth, he has chosen to follow the light wherever it leads, even if it means giving up his most cherished beliefs. He has chosen to obey if it can be proven from the Bible to be correct.

The pioneers of the Advent movement understood this point very well. Listed in *The Midnight Cry* of November 17, 1842, are their “Rules of Interpretation.” Rule four states: “To understand doctrine, bring all the scriptures together on the subject you wish to know; then let every word have its proper influence, and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in an error.” The Research Committee would have done well to heed this inspired rule of Biblical interpretation. Instead, rather than studying until they could reconcile the contradictions, they chose to “cling by faith” to their errors.

The last generation will need to dig down to bed-rock for their foundation. No amount of sand can be allowed in to weather the storms soon to break upon the church. God is leading His

⁹ Isaiah 1:18

¹⁰ James Strong, #3198, “Dictionary of the Hebrew Bible”, *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990, 49.

¹¹ Revelation 3:17

people on to that rock solid foundation. Along the way, they may encounter differing truths which seem to contradict each other. At such times they must remember that God does not require blind faith. He has invited His people to come and reason with Him.

God's children don't need to fear that which they do not understand. If they are willing to obey, no matter what the cost, if they are willing to follow the light wherever it leads, He has pledged Himself well capable of providing them with sufficient *yâkach*, sufficient reasons to convict them of what is truth.

The luni-solar calendar established by God at creation is a workable, understandable calendar. It should be diligently studied by the remnant today. Isaiah 66:23¹² reveals that it is the calendar to be used in the New Earth and it is the truth God is restoring to His final generation to enable them to go out and preach the Sabbath "more fully."¹³

Let us learn from the lessons of the past.

Let us praise God for the increase of knowledge and not judge those who have gone before.

Let us trust that He who has led us thus far, is capable of revealing truth to us.

¹² "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD," Is. 66:23.

¹³ "At the commencement of the time of trouble, we were filled with the Holy Ghost as we went forth and proclaimed the Sabbath more fully" (Mar 170).