

Sundaykeeping Adventist Churches

— ARE YOU READY TO GO ALONG WITH IT? —

In the 1960s, our people were shocked to read, in the latest issue of the *National Geographic*, that our churches in Tonga (earlier called the Friendly Islands) were keeping the Bible Sabbath on Sunday.

“Tongans are scrupulous observers of the Wesleyan Sabbath, and it is possible to be arrested for fishing on Sunday. Even the Seventh-day Adventists, who elsewhere take Saturday as their Sabbath, here observe the Sabbath on Sunday. The local Adventist pastor explained his church’s stand to me.

“ ‘When God made the world, He made the day go from west to east,’ he said. ‘On the map, the so-called Date Line actually makes a jog to the east here. We maintain that what is called Sunday in Tonga is actually Saturday, since we are really on the eastern side of the Date Line [if it ran in a straight line].’”—Luis Marden, “*The Friendly Isles of Tonga*,” *National Geographic*, March 1968, p. 358.

Obviously, this is a rationalization, since the magazine article mentions that those who work on Sunday (and catching fish is about the only work available) will be arrested by the Methodist-controlled government. So, amid a population of nearly 80,000 people on 35 inhabited islands, our Tongan Adventists work six days a week and rest on the Methodist holy day.

That is very convenient till the National Sunday Law arrives. And it will be very convenient afterward.

We have other church members who wish they lived that close to the International Dateline, so they, too, could become Adventist Sundaykeepers.

OUR SPECIAL SEPARATING WALL

How do liberal Adventists differ from other Protestants in America? Not much, and each year the differences lessen still further.

They both eat meat, drink coffee, and are saved by grace apart from obedience to the law of God. They play golf, eat the same junk food, watch movies and the same sporting events. Many of them drink wine and eat at restaurants on Sabbath.

But there is still that one barrier dividing the two,—and it is a wall which many of our liberals would like to tear down. Part of that wall (the necessity of obedience to the law of God) is now gone, but part still remains (the Sabbath church service).

It was God’s plan that His holy commandments were to be a “wall of protection” around us (*1 BC 1105*).

The Sabbath is a “separating wall between the true Israel of God and unbelievers” (*EW 33*). The church is God’s vineyard, “hedged about by the precepts of His law . . . Obedience to these principles was to be their protection” (*COL 287*). Sabbath worship would not bar evangelism, but would keep His people from assimilating to the world.

The liberals among us are trying to break down that wall. Although they have personally discarded obedience to the Ten Commandments as of any consequence, **they are still saddled with Sabbath church services. If there was but some way that one remaining hurdle could be overcome, they would be welcomed by Evangelicals and the unchurched would find our church services more inviting.**

Think not that this problem is being ignored. Not only our liberals, but some of our church leaders wish they could figure out ways to bring in non-Adventists in droves into our congregations.

The Celebration churches, with their lack of standards, were started in the late 1980s to increase attendance. Standards had been another hindrance to baptisms. In the mid-1990s, the church planting project began with the same objective in mind: **Devise a worship meeting format which worldlings would want to attend; that was the challenge.**

SEARCHING FOR A WAY TO INCREASE ATTENDANCE

In the back of one of Samuele Bacchiocchi’s books, he mentions that the Roman Catholic Church, also concerned about how to increase attendance at weekend mass, was tinkering with the idea of Saturday evening services. An increasing number of Catholics were using Sunday as a holiday to watch football games or go somewhere. So why not get the faithful to attend Saturday night mass?

In order to bring in extra money, the Vatican was willing to hold weekend worship services on the night it thought was the sixth day of the week (although it is actually the beginning of the first). **Rome was willing to sacrifice attendance on Sunday, if it could increase the inflow of donations into church coffers. Money and popularity are powerful incentives,** not only to politicians but also to many religious organizations.

It was obvious to some of our leaders that the biggest hurdle was our Sabbath morning church services. **Worldlings want to attend jazzed-up, exciting meet-**

ings; and they do not want them on Saturday morning. Church-going Protestants want worship services on Sunday; and non-churchgoers want the meetings at night or late in the afternoon, before they head off for the evening's frolic.

Roman politicians learned that lesson centuries ago. Give the people bread and circuses at a convenient time, and they will come.

OUR LAS VEGAS SUNDAY CHURCH

“Adventist Sunday Church” was the name emblazoned on the headline of the February 2000 issue of the *Pacific Union Recorder*. The lead article was all about a new Adventist congregation in Las Vegas, Nevada. **Church leaders were proud of their accomplishment and wanted the more than 200,000 Adventists in the Union to know about it.**

Was this *Pacific Union Recorder* article talking about a church service or an evangelistic effort? The article said it was merely an evangelistic effort. But **five facts loudly declared it to be a new type of Sunday morning worship service:**

- First, in the bold title, the *Recorder* called it an “Adventist Sunday Church.”

- Second, the subtitle stated “*Reaching the Unchurched in Las Vegas*”; that is, providing a church for the unchurched.

- Third, the name of the congregation (which is still in operation) had a churchy name: “*Higher Ground Community Church*”;—so prospective visitors would think it was a non-denominational community church. *When they walked in the door, that is what they were given—a church service, but more exciting than most.*

- Fourth, the advertising flyers, mailed out by the thousands, referred to it as a church. “*Is this your idea of church?*” “*It’s for people who have given up on the traditional church.*”

- Fifth, *it was an ongoing church service, Sunday morning after Sunday morning, month after month.* It did not just continue for a few weeks, as evangelistic efforts do. *Those Sunday worship services continue to be held today.*

The *Recorder* article said that Adventists are inviting non-Adventists to attend their “Sunday services.” Amazing. **Do our leaders really think it is possible to use Sunday worship services to teach the necessity of Sabbath worship services?**

Our largest Union paper had published an article on it, praising the activity and recommending it to other local congregations in Pacific Union Conference territory (seven conferences in five states, plus several western Pacific islands) as something good for them to also begin doing.

Like so many other of our “new-modeled churches,” this Sundaykeeping congregation had repudiated the name, “Seventh-day Adventist.” Their church sign said they are the “*Higher Ground Community Church*.” Our leaders will sue faithful believers who put “Seventh-day Adventist

Church” on their meetinghouses while they themselves are ashamed to use the name.

But the *Recorder* article told us more:

- In its flyers, this new congregation declared that attending regular church services is like “a sentence to prison.”

- **The Sunday worship service has a song service with drums and mike-amplified guitars, followed by a sermon.**

- This strange “Adventist Sunday Church” is another sampler of the “church planting program,” which our North American Division is urging our people to conduct in every conference in America.

The credo of these “planting programs” is “anything goes,” as long as it brings outsiders into our churches. **We live at a time when far too much is going: our standards, beliefs, and even the Bible Sabbath.** (See our book, *The Truth about Church Planting*, 44 pp. 8½ x 11, \$3.50 + \$2.50.) **We are no longer on the Scripture standard; we are now on the gold standard.**

In exchange, those who are coming are non-Adventists who never wanted our standards or teachings to begin with. They come for the coffee, rolls, and loud electrified music.

The *Recorder* article also mentioned that, at that time, Andrews University was also using a Sunday morning worship service to train our young ministers, so they can hold Sunday worship services when they go out into the field.

The *Recorder* article was obviously printed to get our members, throughout part of the nation, comfortable with the idea of Adventist Sunday church services.

Our members in Las Vegas will be ready when the National Sunday Law is enforced. They are already worshipping on Sunday.

THE RIVERSIDE SUNDAY CHURCH

Our Riverside, California, Church was searching for a way to increase its membership. Located near Loma Linda and La Sierra, the area does not lack for Seventh-day Adventists. But attendance at the Riverside Church had been dropping for several years, until it had gotten down to eighty members.

So last fall, Tami McGrew, senior pastor of the Riverside Church, drove down the street to the Southeastern Conference Office (which is also in Riverside) and asked for a grant of money to “try new things as an experiment.” **It was agreed that most anything could be done that would bring non-Adventists through the doors.**

With a sizeable part of the money, **Tami (a woman) bought all the band instruments, guitars, drum sets, electronic devices, and powerful amplification equipment needed for rip-roaring church services.**

Next, she changed the name of the church. What was needed was a nice, groovy name that would appeal to the unbeats. It is now called the *Riverside Commu-*

nity Church.Com.

At this juncture, Tami had herself all the trappings for a wayout meetinghouse. **But there was still that Saturday morning hangup.**

So Tami came up with the idea of two church services, one on Sabbath morning at the usual time, for the old-time deadbeats in the church, and a second at 5 p.m. each afternoon. **This, of course, would mean that part of each year, the second church service would be held on Sunday.**

Now, please understand: **No attempt has been made to call this second service “an evangelistic effort,” as Las Vegas tried to do. This is a full-blown Seventh-day Adventist weekly worship service held late on every Saturday afternoon. In winter, it is a Sunday service.**

Tami’s church will also be ready when the National Sunday Law comes. Just close down the morning service or switch it to Sunday morning. She is ready; and, we will learn below, she fearlessly defends her decision.

A friend in Central California Conference, who attended one of her 5 o’clock services, said **Tami walked onto the stage and up to the pulpit wearing jeans. When asked why, Tami said they helped the audience feel comfortable. The organ had been closed down, the band was in full sway, and coffee and doughnuts were among the treats.**

My friend up north also spoke of a woman who, after attending one time, said she would never return. When asked why, **she said she was unexpectedly hit in the side of her head with a beach ball! She said they were throwing them around the church, as a way “to loosen up the audience.” Welcome to the new Adventism.**

A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Yes, Sunday worship services are all right; at least that is what our liberals are deciding. And, in order to convince staid church members, they are developing a logical set of beliefs to defend their position.

I call it “desperation theology.” It is the same kind of mixed-up thinking you will find in the books written by

COME UP TO THE HELP OF THE LORD!

Write or phone the following offices of leadership, and urge that these Sunday churches be terminated:

Southeastern California Conference—P.O. Box 8050, Riverside, CA 92515 / 909-359-5800 (Regarding the Riverside Church)

Nevada-Utah Conference—P.O. Box 10730, Reno, NV 89510 / 775-322-6929 (Las Vegas Church)

Pacific Union Conference, P.O. Box 5005, Westlake Village, CA 91359 / 805-497-9457

North American Division—12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD, 20904-6600 / 301-680-6400

General Conference of SDA—12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD, 20904-6600 / 301-680-6000

our liberals, defending “women’s rights” to be pastors and church leaders. Although called “Biblical theology,” it is nothing but a stack of flimsy excuses.

These people are desperately in search of reasons to defend what they want to do. I am sure you are well-acquainted with the vacuous excuses offered by Protestant pastors, in defense of Sundaykeeping. Well, our liberals are also using similar twisted arguments.

If you speak with Tami, she will be quite willing to explain to you, as she has to others, why she holds Adventist worship services on Sunday.

- **Tami considers it “legalistic” to limit the hours within which the weekly worship service can be performed to a certain time, or a certain day, of the week.** Tami says church services should be held when the maximum amount of people will come, whenever that may be. The day of the week, she says, on which the church service is held on is not important. If there are primarily Muslims living in the area, hold it on Friday. If the objective is to reach Protestants, hold it on Sunday.

- **She says the fourth commandment does not specify the hour or day on which the church service should be held, so it can be held at any time on any day of the week.** (In reply, as with the other commandments, the fourth commandment only provide a very brief statement. Additional details are given elsewhere in the Bible.)

- **As Tami sees it, the Israelites in the wilderness did not go to the tabernacle for church services. Instead, they stayed home in their tents and rested on that day.** Attending church service has nothing to do with “keeping the Sabbath day holy.” (But we are presented with clear-cut examples of Sabbath church attendance in the life of Christ and in the book of Acts.)

- **In Tami’s thinking, the Sabbath symbolizes a rest from “works.” Resting in bed or sitting under a tree is Sabbathkeeping. But going to church, singing, and going through the other motions involved in church attendance is not.**

- **The Sabbath truth should not be mentioned in the church services, only in evangelistic meetings.** Therefore Tami says she never mentions the Sabbath at her 5 p.m. meetings for non-Adventists. **(In this way, non-believers have absolutely no idea she is an Adventist minister or they have entered an Adventist church! The sign in front merely calls it a “community church.”** Historically, the only reason for our people to hold special Sunday meetings, to which all are invited, was when evangelistic meetings were conducted. Yet Tami says it would be wrong for her to mention doctrines in her Sunday church services—*so they are clearly not evangelistic meetings!*

Two important points:

First, Tami’s radical views about the Sabbath must surely be accepted by the conference office (**The Riverside Church is the “conference church”; for it is in**

the same town as the conference office). The self-proclaimed “theologians” at Loma Linda and La Sierra must fully agree. —Otherwise, she would quickly be brought into line or fired. **It must be that her views are solidly supported by church leaders.**

Second, we have here a much more involved philosophy of thinking than I believe Tami McGrew was able to develop by herself! I see her ideas as part of a carefully thought-out theological defense, devised by theologians at Loma Linda and La Sierra, in support of a plan which many of our liberals are going to try to put into action as soon as it is feasible. They want to gradually move our churches in North America over to Sunday worship services.

Why is there such a frenzied determination to increase church attendance, even though it costs us our doctrinal beliefs? Unfortunately, the answer is money.

I assure you that **if Tami’s project meets with success, Sunday worship services will be started in other areas, first in Southeastern California Conference and then elsewhere.** The ultimate objective is for Seventh-day Adventist pastors to be able to switch over, whenever they desire, to full-blown Sunday worship services.

You thought you were getting ready for the National Sunday Law. Our liberals are getting ready for it too!

If they succeed, Sabbathkeeping will die out from among us. This is because the church service is the heart of the weekly cycle for believers. Change it to Sunday, and we have become Sundaykeepers!

Tami said that both Adventists and non-Adventists are now attending her afternoon service. She is meeting with some success.

Her father, Ted Tessner, former liberal pastor of the Claremont Church in San Diego, has come up to strengthen her efforts. He is now associate pastor at Riverside and also enjoys the full support of the conference office.

Perhaps he helps her scrounge through the toy stores, searching for new gimmicks with which to enchant the folk who come to the 5 o’clock worship services. Perhaps they will start buying magician’s stage tricks next, start a lending library in Harry Potter books, and install video game machines and Coke dispensers in the foyer. **The sky is the limit, because the conference fully backs her project. Anything goes, if it pertains to standards and doctrines. Anything can be brought in, if it excites worldlings or is approved by Sundaykeepers.**

What identifies a church as being part of the “Babylon” mentioned by the third angel of Revelation 14?

“After the warning against the worship of the beast and his image the prophecy declares: ‘Here

are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.’ Since those who keep God’s commandments are thus placed in contrast with those that worship the beast and his image and receive his mark, it follows that **the keeping of God’s law, on the one hand, and its violation, on the other, will make the distinction** between the worshipers of God and the worshipers of the beast.”—*Great Controversy*, 445-446.

It is true that both Sundaykeeping and the natural immortality of the soul are two special teachings of Babylon. But **the Sabbath/Sunday issue will be the special test in the Final Crisis, separating those who receive the mark from those who receive the seal.**

What does it mean “to keep Sunday”? It means Sunday church service worship (even though Tami coyly says that church services do not constitute an act of worship)! **We must not let it happen!**

The Spirit of Prophecy has said that, when the Sunday Law crisis hits, we can evangelize on Sunday or quietly stay in our homes on that day. But we cannot participate in Sunday worship meetings! To do so would be to bow to the image on the plains of Dura. —And Tami wants to do more than attend Sunday services, she wants to pastor them!

When the Sunday Law crisis hits, willingness to attend Sunday worship services will be the point on which large numbers of our people will go out from among us and be lost.

Here are several Spirit of Prophecy passages to look up. Each one deals with Sunday observance:

It is a virtual recognition of the fundamental principles of Romanism (*5T 712*). The papacy will receive honor in the homage paid in doing it (*GC 579*).

It will be the worship of the beast and his image (*GC 449; TM 133*) and will fulfill Revelation 13:11-16 (*GC 578-579*), because it is the mark of the authority of Rome (*Ev 234*) and honors the pope above God (*GC 449*). It is the mark of the beast (*7 BC, 976-980; Ev 234-235; GC 449; 8T 117; TM 133*).

It is a plain contradiction of God’s law, for those who do it after light has come (*6T 193*), because it is a homage paid to Rome (*GC 449*). For those who do so, knowing they should not do so, it is idolatry (*FE 287*). It is a recognition of the cornerstone principles of Romanism (*5T 712*), an act of homage to the papacy (*SR 383*), and allegiance to a power opposed to God (*GC 605*).

Its enforcement [by a Sunday Law] will be a sign that the end is near and that God’s forbearance has been reached (*5T 451*). Men in responsible positions will urge it upon the people (*ChS 155*). —*vf*