

Biblical Calendar: Outlawed!

By eLaine Vornholt
Laura Lee Vornholt-Jones

Constantine the Great (c. A.D. 272 – May 22, 337) is widely known as the first Christian emperor. His “Sunday law” is viewed as the religious act of a recent convert to honor his new day of worship. Roman Catholics and the Greek Orthodox have canonized him, while Saturday sabbatarians accuse the Roman Catholic Church of influencing Constantine into changing the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. They denounce the Catholic Church for deceiving all Christendom into believing that Sunday is the proper day of worship.

This is neither accurate nor is it fair to the Roman Catholic Church.

- Constantine had not yet converted at the time of his “Sunday law.”
- The Roman Catholic Church has always been open about their role in this legislation.
- Most significantly, the “Sunday law” was actually civil legislation which outlawed the Biblical luni-solar calendar and enforced Julian calendation upon Christians and Jews.

Constantine’s “Sunday law” was actually calendar reform which laid the foundation for a massive deception: Sunday as the day on which Christ was resurrected; Saturday as the Bible’s seventh-day Sabbath.

Constantine the Convert?



Chi-Rho

Constantine’s veneration of the “day of the Sun” was not a religious act as a Christian, for he would not “convert” for two more years.¹ His decision in October of A.D. 312 to paint a Christian symbol² on the shields of his men at the battle of the Milvian Bridge was not a conversion. As with all his acts, it was politically motivated. Even after officially converting in 323, he postponed his baptism until just before his death in 337. Furthermore, he retained the office and title *pontifex maximus*, head of the state religion which he had assumed in 312, for the rest of his life.³

¹ R. L. Odom, *Sunday in Roman Paganism*, (New York: TEACH Services, Inc., 2003) p. 177.

² The monogram known as *Chi-Rho*, the first two Greek letters of the word “Christ.”

³ Various inscriptions as recorded in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 1863 ed., Vol. 2, p. 58, #481; “Constantine I”, *New Standard Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5. See also Christopher B. Coleman, *Constantine the Great and Christianity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914), p. 46.

Christianity was made by him [Constantine] the religion of the state but Paganism was not persecuted though discouraged. The Christianity of the emperor himself has been a subject of warm controversy both in ancient and modern times, but the graphic account which Niebuhr gives of Constantine's belief seems to be perfectly just. Speaking of the murder of Licinius and his own son Crispus, Niebuhr remarks,⁴ "Many judge of him by too severe a standard, because they look upon him as a Christian; but *I cannot regard him in that light*. The religion which he had in his head must have been a strange compound indeed. The man who had on his coins the inscription *Sol Invictus*, who worshipped pagan divinities, consulted the haruspices, indulged in a number of pagan superstitions, and on the other hand, built churches, shut up pagan temples, and *interfered with the council of Nicæa*, must have been a repulsive phenomenon, and *was certainly not a Christian*. He did not allow himself to be baptized till the last moments of his life, and those who praise him for this do not know what they are doing. He was a superstitious man, and mixed up his Christian religion with all kinds of absurd superstitions and opinions. . . . To speak of him as a saint is a profanation of the word."⁵

It is intriguing that this quote refers to Constantine's involvement with the Council of Nicæa as "interference." Do not doubt it: Constantine's "Sunday law" was civil legislation enacted to unite his empire via a single calendar.

Constantine: the consummate politician

Constantine was foremost a politician and a military strategist. He issued at least six decrees relating to Sunday observance, but all were for purely *political* reasons. These decrees were:

- March 7, 321: A law commanding townspeople, courts and trades to cease from labor on the day of the Sun.
- June, 321: Emancipation and manumission of slaves allowed on the day of the Sun.
- Christian soldiers allowed to attend Sunday church services.
- Pagan troops required to recite a prayer while on the drill field on Sunday.
- Sunday declared a market day throughout the entire year.
- A decree supporting the Council of Nicæa's decision that Christ's resurrection should henceforth be observed on the day of the Sun (Easter Sunday) rather than

⁴ See *History of Rome*, Eng. trans., (London: 1855), Vol. V, p. 359.

⁵ *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, (Sir William Smith, ed., Three Vols., AMS Press, 1967, reprint of 1890 edition), Vol. 1, p. 836, emphasis supplied.

commemorating the death of Christ on the actual crucifixion Passover date of Nisan (Abib) 14.

Constantine wanted a unified empire. With his eastern counterpart, Licinius, he had issued a decree in 313 known as the Edict of Milan which granted Christians protection under civil law. This did not promote Christianity above paganism as much as “level the playing field,” allowing Christians equal rights.

For the first time Christianity was placed on a legal footing with the other religions and with them enjoyed the protection of the civil law. Licinius was a pagan, and this law grants no privilege to the Christians that is not allowed to the heathen. It is another evidence of Constantine’s policy of maintaining peace in the religious world.⁶



Emperor Constantine the Great

Constantine was no saint. He was a tyrant guilty of murdering his own son. His motivation for a united empire was not prompted by a desire for peace. Constantine’s drive for a unified empire was founded upon his desire for greater power. Some historians connect Constantine’s tolerance

⁶ Odom, *op.cit.*, p. 181.

of Christianity with a desire to be able to enlist Christians as soldiers, thus increasing the size of his army. (Up to this point, Christians avoided enlisting.) All of Constantine's "religious tolerance" acts should be viewed in the light of a dictator seeking uniformity, and thus greater control, in his empire.

Renowned church historian, Philip Schaff, cautioned against reading too much into Constantine's "Sunday law":

The Sunday law of Constantine *must not be overrated*. He enjoined the observance, or rather forbade the public desecration of Sunday, not under the name of *Sabbatum* [Sabbath] or *dies Domini* [Lord's day], but under its old astrological and heathen title, *dies Solis* [Sunday], familiar to all his subjects, so that the law was as applicable to the worshipers of Hercules, Apollo, and Mithras, as to the Christians. *There is no reference whatever in his law either to the fourth commandment or to the resurrection of Christ.*⁷

Constantine was an equal opportunity monarch. While Christians hailed him as "the servant of God" and called him the "blessed Prince," pagans regarded him as their Supreme Pontiff. Constantine demanded unity. He forced compromise in an unexpected way: calendar reform.

J. Westbury-Jones highlights the purposeful ambiguity of Constantine's law:

How such a law would further the designs of Constantine it is not difficult to discover. It would confer a special honor upon the festival of the Christian church,⁸ and it would grant a slight boon to the pagans themselves. *In fact there is nothing in this edict which might not have been written by a pagan*. The law does honor to the pagan deity whom Constantine had adopted as his special patron god, Apollo or the Sun.⁹ *The very name of the day lent itself to this ambiguity*. The term Sunday (*dies Solis*) was in use among Christians as well as pagan.¹⁰

Of all Constantine's edicts, the one that had the greatest and most lasting effect on Christendom was his legislation supporting the Council of Nicæa's decree establishing the observance of

⁷ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916) Vol. III, p. 380, emphasis supplied.

⁸ The paganized Roman Christians had long been worshipping on Sunday by this time.

⁹ Constantine's personal motto remained *Soli Invicto* even after his "conversion."

¹⁰ J. Westbury-Jones, *Roman and Christian Imperialism*, (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1939), p. 210, emphasis supplied.

Easter. “By the time of Constantine, apostasy in the church was ready for the aid of a friendly civil ruler to supply the wanting force of coercion.”¹¹

The time was ripe for a reconciliation of state and church, each of which needed the other. It was a stroke of genius in Constantine to realize this and act upon it. He offered peace to the church, provided that she would recognize the state and support the imperial power.¹²

All of Constantine’s acts had the ulterior motive of political gain and the Council of Nicæa was no exception.

Biblical Calendar Annihilated

The significance of the Council of Nicæa is found in the fact that the decree outlawed the Biblical calendar.

Since the second century A.D. there had been a divergence of opinion about the date for celebrating the paschal (Easter) anniversary of the Lord’s passion (death, burial, and resurrection). The most *ancient practice* appears to have been to observe the fourteenth (the Passover date), fifteenth, and sixteenth days of the *lunar* month regardless of the day of the [Julian] week these dates might fall on from year to year. The bishops of Rome, desirous of enhancing the observance of Sunday as a church festival, ruled that the annual celebration should always be held on the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday *following* the fourteenth day of the lunar month.¹³ In Rome, Friday and Saturday of Easter were fast days, and on Sunday the fast was broken by partaking of the communion. This controversy lasted almost two centuries,¹⁴ *until Constantine intervened in behalf of the Roman bishops and outlawed the other group.*¹⁵

The point of contention appeared deceptively simple: Passover versus Easter. The issues at stake, however, were immense. The only way to determine when Passover occurs is to use the Biblical luni-solar calendar, for only by observing the moon can one count to the 14th day *following* the first visible crescent. Because the seventh-day Sabbath was also calculated from

¹¹ Odom, *op.cit.*, p. 175.

¹² Michael I. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, (Oxford, England: The Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 456.

¹³ This insured that the Catholic Easter would never fall on the Jewish Passover.

¹⁴ The controversy rose in the second century and reached its height during the time of Victor I, around A.D. 198.

¹⁵ Odom, *op.cit.*, p. 188, emphasis supplied.

the first visible crescent,¹⁶ a ruling in favor of Easter being observed on a Julian date would also affect the seventh-day Sabbath. Prior to this time, true Christians commemorated Passover, ignoring the pagan Easter.

Up until the Council of Nicæa, the Christian Easter, especially in the East, had been celebrated for the most part at the time of the Jewish Passover, . . . [but] on the contrary, in Europe, “some earlier, some later, were intercalating the months . . . the Europeans were placing their cycle at the equinox, and were celebrating the Passover on the next full moon after the equinox.”¹⁷

These contentions had agitated the churches of Asia since the time of the Roman bishop Victor, who had persecuted the churches of Asia for following the “14th-day heresy” as they called it, in reference to the Passover.¹⁸ . . . *The future Easter observance was to be rendered independent of Jewish calculation . . .*¹⁹

This is civil legislation enforcing the pagan Julian calendar. Calendars calculate time and at the Council of Nicæa it was decreed that Christians were to remain independent of *Jewish* calculation because the paganized Christians did not want to be associated with the Jews in any way.

This is a fact well-known to Jewish scholars and historians. The Jewish Publication Society of America published the following statement:

Then the world witnessed the hitherto undreamt-of spectacle of the first general convocation of Nice [Nicæa], consisting of several hundred bishops and priests, with the emperor at their head. Christianity thought to celebrate its triumph, but only succeeded in betraying its weakness and internal disunion. For on the occasion of this, its first official appearance, in all the splendor of its plenitude of spiritual and temporal power, *there remained no trace of its original character . . .* At the Council of Nice the last thread was snapped which connected Christianity to its parent stock. The festival of Easter had up till now been celebrated for the most part at the same time as the Jewish Passover, and indeed upon the days calculated and fixed by the Synhedrion [Sanhedrin] in Judæa for its celebration; but in future its observance was to be rendered *altogether independent of the*

¹⁶ “The New Moon is still, and the Sabbath originally was, dependent upon the lunar cycle” (“Holidays,” *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, p. 410.)

¹⁷ Joseph Scaliger, *De Emendatione Temporum*, (Francofurt, 1593), p. 106.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*; see also Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Ch. 24.

¹⁹ Grace Amadon, “Report of Committee on Historical Basis, Involvement, and Validity of the October 22, 1844, Position”, Part V, Sec. B, p. 17, emphasis supplied; Box 7, Folder 1, Grace Amadon Collection, (Collection 154), Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Jewish calendar, “For it is unbecoming beyond measure that on this holiest of festivals we should follow the customs of the Jews. Henceforward let us have nothing in common with this odious people; our Saviour has shown us another path. It would indeed be absurd if the Jews were able to boast that we are not in a position to celebrate the Passover without the aid of their rules (*calculations*).” These remarks are attributed to the Emperor Constantine . . . [and became] the guiding principle of the Church which was now to decide the fate of the Jews.²⁰

Notice that the decrees of the Council of Nicæa are clearly perceived by Jews themselves to be the act of Christians stepping “independent of the *Jewish calendar*.”

The Council of Nicæa accomplished three goals, all of which are still in effect today. The decree served to:

Standardize the planetary week of seven days making *dies Solis* the first day of the week, with *dies Saturni* the last day of the week.

Guarantee that Passover and Easter would never fall on the same day.

Exalt *dies Solis* as the day of worship for both pagans and Christians.

By establishing Easter on the Sunday following the full moon after the vernal equinox, the Roman Catholic Church guaranteed that it would *never* fall on the Jewish Passover. At this time, the Jews were still using the luni-solar calendar of Creation, intercalating by the barley harvest law of Moses. Because the seven-day weeks of the Biblical lunations cycled differently than the pagan solar calendar, Passover, the sixth day of the Biblical week, would fall on different days of the Julian week. Likewise, First Fruits, the true day of the resurrection on the first day of the Biblical week, appeared to wander through the Julian week, sometimes falling on *dies Martis*, or *dies Veneris*, etc., and only rarely coinciding with *dies Solis*.

Vestiges of the resulting confusion when attempts are made to reconcile a solar calendar to a luni-solar calendar may still be seen. Easter is never on the same date of the Gregorian calendar from one year to the next. The feast of First Fruits, when calculated by the Biblical calendar, *always* falls on the 16th of the month, a First Day. Easter, however, because it is linked to a corruption²¹ of lunar calculation does not fall on any specific date, as does Christmas, nor a

²⁰ Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1893), Vol. II, pp. 563-564, emphasis supplied; see also Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, Book III, Chapter 18.

²¹ The corruption of lunar calculation was in tying Easter to the vernal (spring) equinox. The law of Moses intercalated months off of the barley harvest, not the vernal equinox. Calculation off of the equinox was a purely pagan method.

specific day of the month, such as Thanksgiving in the United States, which always falls on the fourth Thursday of November. Thus, while the *true* date of the resurrection always falls on the same day of the week and the same date of the month, Easter on the Gregorian calendar appears to “float” through March and April.

The long-term effect was that “Easter Sunday” entered the Christian paradigm as The Day of Christ’s resurrection. The corollary to this realignment of time calculation was that the day preceding Easter Sunday, Saturday, became forever after The True Bible Sabbath. This is the true significance of Constantine’s “Sunday law” and it laid the foundation for the modern assumption that a continuous weekly cycle has always existed.

The fall-out from this edict was immediate. The law made it illegal to use the Biblical calendar and it persecuted those who still tried to use it. David Sidersky says, “It was no more possible under Constance to *apply the old calendar*.”²²

In subsequent years, the Jews went through “iron and fire.”²³ The Christian [papal Roman] emperors *forbade the Jewish computation of the calendar*, and did not allow the announcement of the feast days. Graetz says, “The Jewish [and apostolic Christian] communities were left in utter doubt concerning the most important religious decisions: as pertaining to their festivals.”²⁴ The immediate consequence was the fixation and calculation of the Hebrew calendar by Hillel II.²⁵

The decrees of Nicæa, “destroyed the Temple of the Law in Judea,” as it were, and the ancient regulation of Moses for harmonizing the course of the moon with that of the sun was ultimately replaced by calculations involving the vernal equinox,²⁶ after which the nearest full moon was chosen to be the paschal moon. From this equinoctial point, the [Catholic] church built up her ecclesiastical calendar and its Easter feast. *It is easy to gloss over the real significance of the Council of Nicæa and its bearing upon the Jewish system of time, for though the church desired to depart from Jewish calculation, and to adopt a movable feast,*²⁷ *yet in the end, it turned out that both the Jewish and Roman Catholic festivals came to be computed from the same point of time – . . . the vernal equinox.*²⁸

²² David Sidersky, *Astronomical Origin of Jewish Chronology*, Paris, 1913, p. 651, emphasis supplied; as quoted in Amadon, *op. cit.*, p. 8, footnotes.

²³ Sidersky, *ibid.*, p. 640.

²⁴ Graetz, Vol. II, 571, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Amadon, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18, emphasis supplied.

²⁶ Sidersky, *op.cit.*, p. 624.

²⁷ Christopher Clavius, *Romani calendarii a Gregorio XIII restituti explicato*, (Rome, 1603), p. 54.

²⁸ Grace Amadon, *op.cit.*, p. 18, emphasis supplied.

The controversy over calendars was not resolved with Constantine's edict. Rather, it opened the door for religious persecution of Christians, by Christians. Those who were convicted by conscience that the Passover (as well as the Sabbath) should be observed by the Biblical calendar were unwilling to accept civil legislation in the realm of religion. These continued to use the luni-solar calendar in the face of intense persecution.

Christians on the fringes of the Roman Empire used the Biblical reckoning centuries after Constantine. When Catholic princess, Margaret, married Scottish king Malcolm III (1031-1093) in 1070, she was instrumental in establishing Catholicism in Scotland. Prior to that time, Scottish priests still married, still observed Passover on Abib 14 (regardless of the Julian date) and still worshipped on the seventh-day Sabbath – likely by the Biblical calendar as well, as they were observing Passover by that calendar.

The Council of Nicæa was the culmination of many years of compromise with paganism. It climaxed in legislation which outlawed the only calendar by which the true seventh-day Sabbath, and also the true date of the resurrection, may be found.

The spirit of concession to paganism opened the way for a still further disregard of Heaven's authority. Satan, working through unconsecrated leaders of the church, tampered with the fourth commandment also, and essayed to set aside the ancient Sabbath, the day which God had blessed and sanctified (Gen[esis] 2:2, 3), and in its stead to exalt the festival observed by the heathen as "the venerable day of the sun."²⁹

Counterfeit worship requires a counterfeit calendar and the Council of Nicæa provided it. Biblical calendation was supplanted by pagan solar calendation, and the planetary week replaced the Biblical week which depended upon the moon.

This planetary week was paganism's counterfeit of the true, Biblical week instituted by the Creator in the beginning of Earth's history. In the counterfeit week employed in ancient paganism "the venerable day of the Sun" was esteemed by the heathen above the other six days because it was regarded as sacred to the Sun, the chief of the planetary deities . . . Just as the true Sabbath is inseparably linked with the *Biblical* week, so the false Sabbath of pagan origin needed a weekly cycle. Thus we have found that the planetary week of paganism is Sunday's twin sister, and that the two counterfeit institutions were linked together³⁰

²⁹ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, (Oakland, California: Pacific Press, 1888), p. 52.

³⁰ Odom, *op. cit.*, p. 243-244, emphasis supplied.

When the historical facts of the Julian calendar are understood, it becomes clear that Sunday is not the only worship day founded upon paganism. Saturday, *dies Saturni*, as the original first day of the pagan week, is also a counterfeit. As the seventh day of the modern week, it is a counterfeit for the true seventh-day Sabbath of the Bible.

In 321 A.D., Constantine, emperor of Rome . . . by civil enactments made “the venerable day of the Sun,” which day was then “notable for its veneration,” the weekly rest day of the empire . . . The enforcement of the weekly observance of Sunday gave official recognition to the week of seven days and resulted in the introduction of it into the official civil calendar of Rome. The Romans passed that calendar down to us, and in it we have still the ancient planetary titles of the days of the week.³¹

The aftershocks of the Council of Nicæa are still felt, world-wide, today. Of any direct or indirect attack against the truth of God, this one act has had the most profound and far reaching affect. All the world has united in using this calendar in its modern, Gregorian form. Entire churches base their religious observance off of this pagan calendar. The foundation laid by Constantine’s “Sunday law” is the reason why Saturday and Sunday keepers worship on the days they do. The decrees of Nicæa legislated into place an entire counterfeit system of religion with its pagan solar calendar. Thus the knowledge of the Creator’s calendar with His true seventh-day Sabbath has been buried under the accumulated weight of centuries of continuously cycling weeks.

³¹ *Ibid.*