

# Global Time

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**N**ineteen thirty-eight. 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, Christendom was met with an unprecedented crisis.

The stakes: Friday, Saturday and Sunday which are the traditional worship days within the three major religions of Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

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

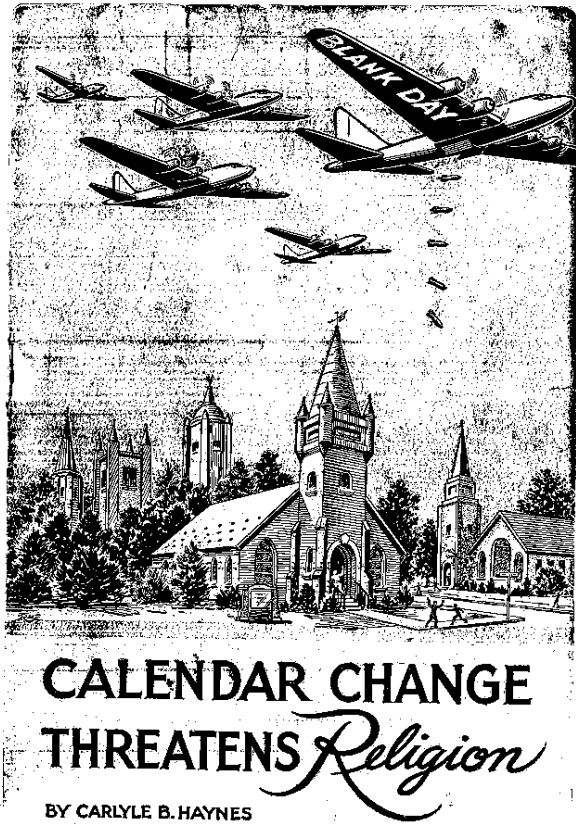
It was a calendar change that would affect the weekly cycle. At a time when religious minorities were already struggling with labor unions for the right to keep Saturday as their rest day, it promised disaster to the religious world.

The movement for a world-wide 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.<sup>1</sup>

Within individual governments, powerful men fought for the promotion of this reform in time-keeping. In the United States alone, the list of men in favor of calendar change reads like a veritable Who's Who list of influential leaders in government, industry and education. People such as:



Front cover of book, vigorously protesting calendar change, published in 1944.

Henry Ford, the Secretary of Labor, the publisher of the *New York Times*, the chief of the United States Weather Bureau, the directors of the Bureau of Standards and the *Nautical Almanac*, and the presidents of Yale University, Cornell University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, General Motors, General Electric, the National Geographic Society, the American Museum of Natural History, and the American Bar Association.<sup>2</sup> . . . The World Calendar . . . was officially endorsed by numerous scholarly societies (for example, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American astronomical, mathematical,

philosophical, and psychological associations), many presidents of colleges, various commercial organizations (such as the British Chamber of Commerce, the American Industrial Bankers Association, and the American Institute of Accountants), and various religious groups (such as the American Lutheran Church and the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Carlyle B. Haynes, *Calendar Change Threatens Religion*, (Washington D.C.: Religious Liberty Association, 1944), pp. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup> George Eastman, *Report of the National Committee on Calendar Simplification for the United States*, (Rochester: New York, 1929), pp. 8-9, 83-97. These people were actually in support of the International Fixed Calendar, but were nevertheless active advocates of calendar reform.

<sup>3</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 80; *Journal of Calendar Reform*, 1946, Vol. 16, pp. 9-12; 1947, Vol. 17, pp. 81-90, 131-137.

The threat to religious minorities 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, Saturday would remain on Saturday; the following year, however, the old Saturday would fall on the new Friday. The year after that, the Gregorian Saturday would fall on the new 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.”<sup>4</sup> 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.

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 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the week, now rechristened Sunday, and moved up, on paper, to be the 1<sup>st</sup> day. They would be asked to keep Monday during all of 1945 . . .

In 1949 Saturday, the 7<sup>th</sup> day, under this arrangement, would be called Sunday, and made the 1<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Achelis, *The Calendar for Everybody*, (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1943), p. 121.

<sup>5</sup> Haynes, *Calendar Change Threatens Religion*, 3, 4.



Illustration from *Calendar Change Threatens Religion*. Religious minorities felt very threatened by the proposed alteration in the continuous weekly cycle of the Gregorian calendar.

Protestant Saturday sabbatarians 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.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> See *The Story of a Lost Day* by F. D. Nichol, (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1930).

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.

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 365<sup>th</sup> 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 366<sup>th</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup>

The World Calendar *was* a very “user friendly” calendar. How convenient to have every *date* always coincide with the same day of the week every year! However, as with the reforms in France and the Soviet Union, it was destined to failure due to very determined resistance from religious minority groups that saw this change as a bold attack on their religious liberty.

The failure of these calendars to gain official acceptance despite all this support can be explained only by a very deep societal resistance, which was explicitly articulated only by extreme Sabbatarians, Jews as well as Christians, such as Seventh-Day Adventists, [*sic*] the League for Safeguarding the Fixity of the Sabbath, and the Lord’s Day Observance Society.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly enough, not knowing that the weekly cycle of the Biblical calendar followed the phases of the moon, thus restarting each new moon, what these religious organizations were clinging to was the continuous weekly cycle of the Gregorian calendar. They were not opposed to the idea of a perpetual calendar that would perfectly align the week, month and year. What they opposed was the *method* proposed to intercalate the needed extra days. If the left over time could be accumulated and then added in as an entire week, they would have accepted the reform.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Zerubavel, *op cit.*; J. H. Hertz, *The Battle for the Sabbath at Geneva*, (London: Humphrey Millford and Oxford University Press, 1932); M. Hyamson, “The Proposed Reform of the Calendar,” *Jewish Forum*, (12)1929: 5-7; Moses Jung, “The Opposition to the Thirteen Months Calendar,” *Jewish Forum*, (13)1930: 421-428; Isaac Rosengarten, “Religious Freedom and Calendar Reform,” *Jewish Forum*, (13)1930: 5-7; Lawrence Wright, *Clockwork Man*, (London: Elek, 1968), p. 195.

However, any interruption to the continuous weekly cycle by the proposed “blank” days would turn the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day into nomads, wandering through the new weekly cycle.

In order to appreciate why Sabbatarians regarded the debates about the World Calendar and the International Fixed Calendar as actual battles over basic religious freedom, we must realize that, if any of those calendars were to be put into effect, the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day would no longer be permanently fixed on Saturday and on Sunday, as they had been for thousands of years.<sup>10</sup>

Had these groups been able to keep their Sabbath on Saturday and Lord’s Day on Sunday, they would have willingly gone along with the proposed change. However, the suggested “blank” days:

Would have clearly interfered with the traditional Sabbatarian obligation to observe the Sabbath precisely every seven days with no exception whatsoever. The whole essence of the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day is that they are the fixed, steadfast pivots of the Jewish and ecclesiastical weeks, and the very idea of a “nomadic” Sabbath or a “floating” Lord’s Day would have been sacrilegious.<sup>11</sup>

The stumbling block clearly was based on a lack of knowledge about the original calendar established at Creation. As the Sabbath is a memorial of Creation, it is linked *to* that Creation by following the phases of the moon. As stated in Psalm 104:19: “He appointed the moon for seasons [assemblies for worship].” “The continuity and absolute regularity of the [modern] seven-day week (*which is a function of its having been dissociated from natural rhythms such as the lunar month and the solar year*) is by far its most distinctive structural characteristic.”<sup>12</sup>

As a result of vigorous opposition by Judeo-Christian traditionalists, the movement to reform the calendar gradually lost momentum and by the 1950s had largely passed from the world scene. The desire to reform the Gregorian calendar, however, has not been forgotten.

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<sup>10</sup> Zerubavel, *op cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis supplied.