



Sabbath Extra 6-29-24

Shall the Old-Time Sunday Blue Laws Be Revived?

By JOHN L. SHULER, *The Signs of the Times*, January 18, 1921

THERE is a distinct and formidable movement on foot to impose a general Sunday law on this country through Federal action. Bold, aggressive, and determined to win, the Sunday reformers are now making their plans through their lobby at the national capital, to secure the enactment of a law in favor of a strict observance of Sunday. They have begun by demanding from Congress a law that will prevent all manner of work and recreation on what they mistakenly call the Sabbath day, in the District of Columbia, and in the territories under the jurisdiction of the United States. That is the first step in their program.

Then, having things well in hand, the lobby's next move will be to demand that Congress submit to the legislatures of the several states an amendment to the Constitution, making the law created for the district the law of the entire land; and the supreme court has said that this can be done, regardless of the strenuous objection that a minority of the states may make to this invasion of the rights of the states. Legislatures are easily controlled by this nationwide lobby, and it will be the easiest thing in the world for them to put this new movement over, in spite of the fact that the vast majority of the people of the country will or ought to object to it.

These Sunday law reformers plainly state that this is the object of their present campaign. The Rev. E. C. Dinwiddie, legislative superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League, says that the District of Columbia Sunday Bill is but an entering wedge of a Federal constitutional amendment enforcing nationwide Sabbath observance.

And then, having imposed a day of quietness upon all the people; having prohibited the movement of railway trains, of street cars, of automobiles; having stopped the use of telegraph lines and telephones; having prohibited amusements and recreations of all kinds on that day,—the next step will be to provide that the people, all of them, shall assemble in their churches on Sunday and listen to the instruction that will be good for them. In other words, the plan contemplates the establishment of the Christian religion as a part of the government despite the present constitutional inhibitions, and to make people righteous by law.

The Puritan of three centuries ago paved the way for all this. He not only prohibited labor and amusements on Sunday, but he insisted that all within the jurisdiction of the colony should attend church regularly, and severely punished those who violated the law relating to church attendance. And that is what is coming to this country unless the people exercise that eternal vigilance which is said to be the price of liberty.

We stand opposed to all Sunday laws, not because, as most intelligent men know, Sunday is not the Sabbath, and not because the seventh day, Saturday, is the Sabbath, as every one ought to know, but because the Sabbath is truly and only a religious institution, and Sabbath keeping is a religious exercise. Therefore, to enforce Sabbath keeping by civil law is to enforce religion by civil law. It is impossible to give preference to one day in the week over any other in the matter of legislation except on religious grounds.

Although I am an observer of the seventh day, I would stand just as much opposed to a law enforcing Saturday keeping as I do to one enforcing Sunday keeping. All such laws are wrong, because they are outside the proper realm of civil authority. The enforcement of religious enactments by civil law is a union of church and state, and against such an unholy alliance we make unqualified protest.

Civil government was ordained to protect the rights and liberties of man, which his Maker has given him. Sunday laws are enacted to protect a “day.”

Every Sunday law is a denial of the right and privilege of every man to worship God how or when he will, or not to worship, provided he does not interfere with the equal rights of his fellow men. Whenever the state steps in and says that Sunday must be observed as a day of rest and worship, it robs every citizen of his God-given right to select his own day of rest and worship. Therefore every Sunday law is contrary to the principles of true government; and as Patrick Henry said, when government does not protect man in his rights and liberties, “government is an evil.”

CONTRARY TO JURISPRUDENCE

The province of the state is to prohibit incivility on all days of the week; but it cannot rightly make an act uncivil on Sunday that is civil on other days of the week. What constitutes a crime? Does the day on which a deed is committed measure the offense? Or does the deed, regardless of the day, decide the question? The reply of every intelligent person would be that as far as the state is concerned, all days are alike, and therefore the name of the day has nothing to do with it; to do a person an injury is just as wrong on one day as on another. Then tell me, why will our legislatures pass bills to fine a man for operating a moving picture show on Sunday, when he is permitted to operate his show every other day in the week without restraint? In this not making the day, instead of the act, measure the offense? Every one can see that this kind of legislation is based on principles which are wholly wrong.

It is no more a crime to play baseball on Sunday than it is on Monday. We stand opposed to all Sunday laws, because they make the performance of legitimate and honest toil a criminal offense if performed on Sunday, and therefore make honest and upright citizens appear as criminals. Although many Christian people are urging these Sunday laws, such laws are plainly unchristian. Jesus Christ never asked for the power of the state to enforce any of His ideas upon men by law. In Matthew 26: 47-53, He forbade His church to use temporal power in His cause. The Christian religion is a religion of love, and not of force. Every lover of genuine Christianity will oppose any effort to enforce a religious observance.

Civil laws were never employed by Jesus Christ to advance His cause. Nothing but the love of God can transform the human heart. It is the changed heart, not the striped suit, that reforms the evildoer. It is in the secret closet of prayer, and not in the chain gang, that we conquer our evil natures. It is spiritual regeneration, and not civic reformation, that transforms the malefactor. Jesus did not try to reform the government, but to convert the individual. And this is the work to which the church should confine its activities to-day. The church should see that people are not made religious by law.

UNCONSTITUTIONAL

The Constitution prohibits Congress from making any religious law. Sunday laws are religious, and therefore unconstitutional. The selection and enforcement, by the state, of the day of rest, is one of the first and fundamental steps in the establishment of a national or state religion. This is utterly contrary to the first amendment to the Constitution.

If the government has the right to tax men one seventh of their time on account of religion, it has the right to tax them a portion of their income for the support of religion. The latter proposition was long ago repudiated. It is high time the former should be likewise disposed of.

Suppose the legislature should attempt to settle, by civil statute, whether men should be sprinkled, poured, or immersed, or whether they should be baptized at all. There would be voices of protest everywhere. The voters all over this fair land would say, "We sent you to the legislature to represent us in civil things only, and we never gave you the right to legislate concerning our religious duties or convictions."

As well might civil government attempt to enforce the Lord's Prayer, the Lord's baptism, the Lord's Supper, as to enforce the Lord's day. If we concede the right of government to enforce one, we are bound, logically, to concede that it has the right to enforce all.

The state cannot select the day observed by the majority, without discriminating against the day observed by the minority. Chief Justice Terry, of California, gave judgment upon this point in the following language: "The enforced observance of a day held sacred by one of the sects, is a discrimination in favor of that sect, and a violation of the freedom of the others." "Considered as a municipal regulation, the legislature has not the right to forbid or enjoin the lawful pursuit of a lawful occupation on one day of the week, any more than it can forbid it altogether."

Hence Sunday legislation means class legislation; with all the perniciousness that springs from it. The observers of the first day of the week as the Sabbath can ask no more for their religious convictions than can those who observe the seventh day.

UNJUST

Before God, and under the Constitution establishing and conserving equality, the seventh-day keeper has the same right to observe his day, that the Sunday keeper has to observe his day; but the Sunday law now demands that the seventh-day observer, after he has conscientiously observed one day, shall observe another, not only contrary to his conscience, but against his temporal interests.

The Sunday law therefore demands one sixth of the seventh-day observer's time, or sixteen and two thirds per cent of his income, which it does not demand of the first-day observer. And it demands this not because of any relation he may sustain to the state or to his fellows, but solely because of the other man's religion—solely to honor the other man's religious day. A tax of sixteen and two thirds per cent is thus laid upon men to support a religious institution held by a class. Is this just? Nay, is it not the rankest injustice? Can any truly just Sunday observer stand for such a law?

THE REAL OBJECT

The primary object of this movement is church attendance and enforced Sunday observance by law. Let me cite a statement from the Rev. S. V. Leech in the *Homiletic Review*:

“Give us good Sunday laws, well enforced by men in local authority, and our churches will be full of worshipers, and our young men and young women will be attracted to the divine services. A mighty combination of the churches of the United States could win from Congress, the state legislatures, and municipal councils, all legislation essential to this splendid result.”

There can be no mistaking the meaning of this. Compulsory Sunday laws are set forth as the means of filling the churches with worshipers.

The danger is none the less because the Lord’s Day Alliance does not openly ask for union of church and state. While they deny such a desire, they work with might and main to accomplish it.

So we protest against this proposed Sunday law and all similar legislation, because we believe it is subversive to the principles of true government, contrary to the sound principles of jurisprudence, unchristian, unjust, un-American, and unconstitutional.

Bible Workers

Can You Name in the Bible a —

silversmith	Acts 19:24
physician	Colossians 4:14
tax collector	Mark 2:14
cup bearer	Nehemiah 2:1
tanner	Acts 9:43
coppersmith	2 Timothy 4:14
herdsman	Amos 1:1
centurion	Acts 10:22
chariot driver	2 Kings 9:20
tentmaker	Acts 18:3

Sharing Literature

SOME years ago a young Methodist Sunday school teacher in the north left home and went to sea as an employee of the Marconi Company. He spent his spare time examining the Bible, gradually finding the Sabbath question of absorbing interest, although at the time he was not aware of any particular controversy over this issue. So interested did he become that he searched various books for knowledge.

In due time his ship put in at Cape Town, South Africa. One day a bundle of old magazines was put on board for the officers and men. Two magazines came into the young man's hands. The editorial of one of these attracted his attention, for it dealt with the matter so long troubling him. This magazine was the *Signs of the Times*, published in South Africa. The editorial was so convincing that he began to recognize the seventh-day Sabbath, without making an all-out stand, how ever. Later, arriving home on leave, he waved the *Signs* magazine before his parents, saying, "I told you so; here is the evidence!"

Force of circumstances then brought him to Calcutta, India, where he prayed earnestly that if the seventh day was to be kept as the Sabbath, he might somehow meet people of like belief, if there were such anywhere. So he searched the city from church to church, but without avail. One morning a native servant handed him the daily paper and his eye caught an insertion advertising the first of a series of lectures on Bible prophecy. The meetings were conducted by two Seventh-day Adventist evangelists. He attended, accepted their instruction, and joined the church.

Although he lost touch with the believers ashore when his ship sailed for the Middle East, he was able, by the help of God, to observe the Sabbath as the one Adventist on board. After about a year in these circumstances he joined a vessel bound for England. On the way home he became convinced that he was soon to part company with his sea faring life, but for what reason he could not then see.

While on leave he interviewed his employers for the purpose of securing official sanction of his having the Sabbath free, but after prolonged consideration they found it impossible to grant his request. So he resigned his position as chief radio officer.

This made him eligible to be called up under the Military Service Act, and it was not long before he was required to appear before the tribunal in Newcastle, where one of our pastors gave evidence for him as witness. The ruling authority was so favorably impressed by the young officer's sincerity and his willingness to leave a reserved occupation on religious grounds that a verdict of unconditional exemption was returned.

About this time the publishing committee had decided that, owing to the paper shortage, no more recruits to the colporteur work could be enlisted. However, when this young radio officer made application and his remarkable story became known, it was unanimously agreed that God had worked wonders to bring into His service a recruit of His own choosing. So it came about that our brother attended the colporteurs' conference, where he commenced training for the literature ministry. He was then associated with a man of long experience, and together they have been blessed with good success in circulating our full-message book *The Bible Speaks*.

As we recount the sequence of providences in the life of this young radio officer and his call to the work of God at a time when ordinary recruiting has ceased, we see how remarkably God can take matters into His own hands and supply us with men from sources outside our own planning. Thus we are led to appreciate once again the great importance and place of the literature ministry.