

THE FIRST SUNDAY LAWS AND THEIR ESCHATOLOGICAL COUNTERPART

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Abstract

Most Christians challenge the idea of Adventist' view regarding the eschatological Sunday law. They think that this concept is absurd and has no historical connection. This article examines how the first Sunday laws in the fourth and fifth century were conducted. It also surveys Ellen White's understanding on the eschatological Sunday law. This comparison study attempts to see whether Adventist's understanding represented by Ellen White's writings is supported by historical facts or only a theoretical delusion. Based on three indicators about what was the main factor, who was the main actor and the executor. This research finds there is a similarity between the first Sunday laws and its eschatological counterpart. It shows that Adventist' idea on the last Sunday law has historical pattern in the church history and not merely an illusion theory.

Keywords: *Sunday Law, Ellen G. White, Adventist, eschatology, early church*

Introduction

Today, Sunday laws are better-known as Blue Laws. These laws are related to the “range of behavior that is restricted covers a broad spectrum,” such as “boxing and wrestling...sales of alcohol, barbering, horse racing, hunting, motor vehicles sales, labor and retail sales.”¹ All of these activities are associated with business and since they should be decided at the court, thus, they could be as a legal or political issue.² Some people believe that Sunday laws are a social matter and have no relation with religious intention.³ Some connect Sunday laws with “humanitarian and economic grounds”⁴ and some suggests that they have connection with

¹ Besides that there are few other names like “Sunday legislation, Sunday-closing laws, or Sunday statutes.” David N. Laband and Deborah Hendry Heinbuch, *Blue Laws: The History, Economics, and Politics of Sunday-Closing Laws* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987), 3.

² Ibid, 7, 42-43. Sunday laws related to business and legal issue since “the most common statute declares an agreement illegal and void if it is made on a Sunday or is to be performed on a Sunday.” Arnold J. Goldman and William D. Sigismond, *Business Law: Principles and Practices* (Mason, OH: South-western, 2014), 190; Paul Finkelman, *Religion and American Law: An Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Garland, 2000), 711.

³ Bert B. Beach, “Religious Liberty Today: Which Way Is the Pendulum of Religious Freedom Swinging?” *Adventist Review*, June 30, 1994, 11.

⁴ Francis D. Nichol, *The Answer to Modern Religious Thinking: A Discussion of Current Religious Trends in their Relation to the Distinctive Teachings of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1936), 197.

“forbidding work and recreation”⁵ while others think that they relate closely with the issue of health and family.⁶ Nowadays, many people think that the penalty of Sunday law would not be as serious as the past even neither involves a capital sentence for the violators.⁷ Thus, people consider Sunday laws with some other thing but not religious issue. This reason causes hardly to connect the Sunday law with church power because it has no power to force a religious matter intentionally especially in the United States court because this effort is against the country’s constitution.⁸ Many Christians accept the “secret rapture” and various interpretation of “mystic number 666” as important last days events.⁹ Thus, Sunday laws concept is unthinkable for many denominations.

For many years, Adventist pioneers have understood that the Sunday laws would relate to religious thing.¹⁰ Among the pioneers, Ellen G. White was among the earliest who directing to this eschatological Sunday law.¹¹ Since many Christians see that the current Sunday laws are relating only to business, social, health and political issue thus a historical approach is needed to see the nature of Sunday laws especially at the time of their emergence at the fourth and fifth century. This work also attempts to see whether Ellen G. White’s understanding about the eschatological Sunday law is reasonable and has considerable pattern in the history or it has foreign connection.

The discussion will examine three main things. First is the main factor of the Sunday laws in the fourth and fifth century and in the eschatological Sunday law. Second is to determine the main actor behind the enacting of the first Sunday laws and the future Sunday law. The third is the executor of the Sunday laws in the early church and at the counterpart at the last days. This article is divided into two parts. The first discusses the first Sunday laws in the fourth and fifth century and the second surveys the eschatological Sunday law in Ellen G. White’s writings.

⁵ Finkelman, *Religion and American Law*, 710.

⁶ Russell R. Standish and Colin D. Standish, *The Pope’s Letter and Sunday Law* (Rapidan, VA: Hartland, 1998), 99.

⁷ Jeff Wehr, *Who Are These Three Angels? Do They Have a Message for You?* (Rapidan, VA: Hartland, 1997), 115

⁸ Francis D. Nichol, *Reasons for our Faith: A Discussion of Questions Vital to the Proper Understanding and Effective Presentation of Certain Seventh-day Adventist Teachings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1947), 409-416.

⁹ William G. Johnsson, “Supplement to the Adventist Review: The Saints Victory in the End-Time,” *Adventist Review*, November 1994, 2.

¹⁰ The pioneers believed that Sunday laws related to a concept of biblical Sabbath. Joseph Bates, *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Signs, the Beginning to the Entering into the Gates of the Holy City, according to the Commandment* (New Bedford, [MA]: Benjamin Lindsey, 1846), 41, 42; idem, *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Signs, from the Beginning, to the Entering into the Gates of the Holy City, according to the Commandment*, 2nd edition (New Bedford, [MA]: Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), 97; James White, *The Bible Sabbath* (Paris, ME: n. p., 1851), 27, 38; J. N. Andrews, “History of the Sabbath and the First Day,” *Review and Herald [RH]*, July 28, 1859, 73-74.

¹¹ Ellen G. White, [“A Letter to Joseph Bates”], in *A Word to the “Little Flock,”* ed. James White (Brunswick, ME: [James White], 1847), 18-20. See also Norman R. Gulley, “Ellen White and the End-Time: Does the End-Time Scenario in the *Great Controversy* Need Modification?” *Adventist Review*, October 21, 1993, 18.

Part 1-The First Sunday Laws

The following accounts are the first ten Sunday laws in the history which was issued by the church leaders or government authorities. Even though each Sunday law was different in term of territories throughout the entire Roman Empire, it will show the same pattern of how the Sunday laws were applied.

Council of Elvira (305 AD)

This is the first church council that gave information about a Sunday law in the fourth century and also “the earliest synod on record” in Granada, Spain. There were more than eighty decisions had been made and more than forty representatives were present. One of the representatives was Hosius of Cordova.¹² In a decision made at this conference was on attending Sunday services. On the council canon number 21, it stated that “if anyone in the city neglects to come to church for three Sundays, let him be excommunicated for a short time so that he may be corrected.”¹³ This is the first account that stating the enforcement of church to the church members on Sunday service, where the law was limited to the city’s population and this verdict was in a regional synod; thus the decree did not bind the area outside the jurisdiction of the synod.

The Decree of Miltiades (311-314 AD)

At this time, Miltiades was as a bishop of Rome. He enacted a Sunday law. This church leader wanted that Sunday as the day of joy and not fasting like the custom that they had kept.¹⁴ The law states “he decreed that none of the faithful should fast on the Lord’s day [Sunday] or on the fifth day [Thursday] for any reason, because the heathen observed these days as a sacred fast.”¹⁵ This was a religious law that the bishop imposed and the congregations under his jurisdiction that they should keep the law faithfully.

Constantine’s Sunday law (321 AD)

Constantine was the first Christian Roman emperor in the history and his decision gave a deep impact to the Christian church. Since his reign, Christian church was never the same again. His action in proclaiming the decree was showing his deep concern to Christianity.¹⁶ Even though

¹² He was the adviser of the latter Roman empire in the religious matter and the one who has important role in giving the advice to the emperor in the council of Nicaea AD 325. Robert L. Odom, *Sabbath and Sunday in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1977), 236.

¹³ Hefele in Walter E. Straw, *Origin of Sunday Observance* (Takoma Park, MD: Review and Herald, 1939), 83. Cf. The original German text of canon 21 of Council of Elvira in Charles Joseph Hefele, *History of the Church Councils* (Edinburg: T.&T. Clark, 1883), 1: 145.

¹⁴ Odom, *Sabbath and Sunday in Early Christianity*, 231.

¹⁵ Louise Ropes Loomis, *Books of Pope* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1916), 1: 40.

¹⁶ George I. Butler, *The Change of the Sabbath: Was It by Divine or Human Authority?* (Payson, AZ: Leaves of Autumn, 1904), 112-113.

the decree on the surface looked like as his political strategy to unite the kingdom, yet, behind the scene, it was demonstrating the religious intention.¹⁷

The religious purpose can be seen through his two decrees. First, there were two Constantine's declarations regarding Sunday laws. The initial decree was issued on March 7, 321 AD. He enacted,

Let all the judges and town people, and the occupation of all trades, rest on the venerable day of the sun; but let those who are situated in the country, freely and at full liberty attend to the business of agriculture; because it often happens that no other day is so fit for showing corn and planting vines; lest, the critical moment being let slip, men should lose the commodities granted by heaven.¹⁸

The second decree was he issued on July 3 in the same year. He decided,

Inasmuch as it should seem most improper that the day of the Sun [Sunday], noted for its veneration, be occupied in wrangling discussion and obnoxious contention of parties, so it is agreeable and pleasing to be performed on that day what is principally vowed; and also all may have liberty on this festive day for emancipation and manumission [of slaves], and acts concerning these matters may not be prohibited.¹⁹

From these decrees, there was no terminology about Sabbath or the Lord's day that referring to Sunday but the word that had been used to describe the day was "the venerable day of the sun" and "the day of the sun." These words were expressing the "religious impetus" of the decree. The words venerable of the Sun come from the Latin words *venerabilii die Solis* that means "was venerated, or revered, with religious regard." The second decree indicates an emphasis to respect Sunday with an expression "the day of the Sun, noted for its veneration." This proclamation shows "that the day of the Sun was so regarded was given as the religious reason... Hence the heathen of Constantin's time well understood the significance of such terminology in his Sunday laws."²⁰ Gibbon explains about the understanding of the sun in the emperor's times was as "the sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine."²¹ Although Constantine was not as a Christian officially when he issued the decrees, yet, the motivation of the laws was a religious but in paganism sense.

The second reason why these decrees were religious in nature and not merely as Constantine's political move is through the personal experience of Constantine. On 312 AD, he was engaged in war with his rival, Maxentius,²² and before the day of the battle, he thought that he had a revelation. Lactantius wrote that Constantine "received the command to place a Christian symbol on the shields of his soldiers" and Eusebius confirmed that he saw revelation

¹⁷ Justo L. Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco, SF: Harper & Row, 1984), 1: 121.

¹⁸ Butler, *The Change of the Sabbath*, 113.

¹⁹ Robert L. Odom, *Sabbath and Sunday in Early Christianity*, 256. Words in bracket are added.

²⁰ Ibid, 262.

²¹ Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 1932), 1:637.

²² Philip Hughes, *The Church in Crisis: A History of General Council, 325-1870* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1961), 28.

from heaven and heard a voice saying “in this you shall conquer.”²³ Then, he made the *Labarum*, symbol of two initial letter of Jesus in Greek. Most scholars see that this event as the symbol of Constantine conversion even though he still believed some paganism.²⁴ After he won the battle, the next year, together with Galerius he abolished the persecution to the Christian that is well-known as edict of Milan and he recognized “Christian religion as a thing legally permissible, endowed its chief shrine with regal munificence, showered civic privileges, honours, and jurisdiction on its bishops, and even began delicate task of introducing Christian ideas into the fabric of the laws.”²⁵

This is the background of Constantine before his civil Sunday laws. His Christian experience brought him to more favour to the Christian but he could not do that openly. As a clever politician he wanted to join the Christian and heathen beliefs because he “seems to have thought that the Unconquered Sun and the Christian God were compatible---perhaps two views of the same Supreme Deity.”²⁶ The Constantine’s Sunday laws were a religious issue even though it had political intention.

Council of Nicaea (325 AD)

The most significant issue in the Council of Nicaea was the controversy of the divinity of Christ.²⁷ Yet, the second important issue was to have the same day for celebrating the Passover or later on called as Easter. The Roman church wanted to encourage the celebration of it on Sunday Easter while another church, eastern church, suggested that it should be kept as the Jews did.²⁸ The result of the Council, according to Eusebius, was “they were not only united as concerning the faith, but that the time for the celebration of the salutary feast of Easter [Pascha] was agreed on by all.” Another report said, “the council decided that the Paschal feast should be celebrated at the same time in every place”²⁹ and finally they kept Easter on Sunday.

There was another decision that had been made regarding prayer in Sunday worship. In the last canon of the council, it says that “since there are some who kneel on Sunday and during the season of Pentacost, this holy synod decrees that, so that the same observance may be maintained in every diocese, one should offer one’s prayers to the Lord standing.”³⁰ This council decision on standing while offering prayer on Sunday indicates that this day was honored than the other day, including the Sabbath.

Synod of Laodecia (365 AD)

This is an important synod because it was quoted by the Convert’s *Catechism* author that the Catholic Church has changed the holiness of Sabbath to Sunday. However, this synod

²³ Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity*, 107.

²⁴ Ibid, 120-121; See also Hughes, *The Church in Crisis*, 28; Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1: 637.

²⁵ Hughes, *The Church in Crisis*, 28-29.

²⁶ Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity*, 122.

²⁷ William G. Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress press, 1980), 19.

²⁸ Odom, *Sabbath and Sunday in Early Christianity*, 268.

²⁹ Eusebius and Sozomen in Odom, *Sabbath and Sunday in Early Christianity*, 270

³⁰ Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 16.

mentioned about a Sunday law but there is no evidence about the change.³¹ The canon related to this fact is on Canon 29, it says “Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday [Sabbath in the original], but shall work on that day but the Lord’s day they shall especially honor, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do not work on that day. If, however, they are found judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ.”³²

Although in this canon there is no account explicitly about the changing of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday but it is obvious that there was a spiritual enforcement to work on Saturday and to refrain on Sunday. Therefore, the religious intention still appears in implementing the Sunday law.

Code of Theodosius (392 AD)

Theodosian code is a code collected by the king Theodosius II in 435 AD. He attempted to codify “all the general laws enacted since Constantine” but the Constantine Sunday laws were not included in this code.³³ In this compilation of laws, on April 17, political leaders at that time wrote to Proculus that “contests in the circuses shall be prohibited on the festal Days of the Sun (Sundays), except on the birthday of our Clemency, in order that no concourse of people to the spectacles may divert men from the reverent mysteries of the Christian law.”³⁴

This decree shows that the rulers prohibited certain amusement to honor the Christian day of worship that was on Sunday. This Sunday law was issued by the kings but with religious intention behind that. The reason that was explicitly written in that law was showing the favor of the emperors to the Christians day of worship.

Code of Theodosius (399 AD)

This code was announced on August 27 by three emperors, Valentinian, Theodosius and Arcadius. They addressed the command to Aurelianus, a roman leader in a particular Roman empire territory:

On the Lord’s Day, to which the name was given out of the very reverence for it, neither theatrical plays nor contests of horses nor any spectacles which were devised to effeminate the spirit shall be celebrated in any municipality. But indeed the birthday of the emperors shall be celebrated, even if they should fall on the Lord’s Day.³⁵

This decree explains that all the people under the jurisdiction need to obey and giving reverent to Sunday while certain entertainment should be restrained except the birthday of the emperors. It demonstrates that the power of the Church was not strong enough for having a single

³¹ C. Mervyn Maxwell and P. Gerard Damsteegt eds., *Source Book for The History of Sabbath and Sunday* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2002), 131F.

³² Hefele in Walter E. Straw, *Origin of Sunday Observance*, 85-86.

³³ There were more than one rulers who enacting the Sunday law. Maxwell and Damsteegt eds., *Source Book for The History of Sabbath and Sunday*, 131B.

³⁴ Ibid., 131C.

³⁵ Ibid., 131C-131D.

dominant voice in the government. However, the Church still could influence the emperors to respect the Sunday as the day of worship.

Code of Theodosius (409 AD)

This code was declared by Honorius and Theodosius to a praetorian perfect, Jovius. The kings promulgated to honor the Lord's day and the kings' day equally,

On the Lord's day, which is commonly called the Day of the Sun, We permit absolutely no amusements to be produced even if by chance as the ends of the years return upon themselves this day should be anniversary of the day when the beginning of Our reign shone forth, or if it should be the day to which are assigned the solemn rites that are due to the birthday.³⁶

This decree looks like the same with the previous codes that there is no entertainment on Sunday but the words which mentioning the Christian (Lord's day) and pagan (Day of the Sun) terms which referring to Sunday showing that they were living in harmonious to worship God on that day. All the codes of Theodosius prevailed on 439 AD in the whole the kingdom, eastern and western.³⁷ On this code, although the emperors dominated the Sunday law but their action shows that they respected the Christian day of worship.

Code of Theodosius (425 AD)

At this moment, Theodosius II and Valentinianus declared a decree to Asclepiodotus, a praetorian leader. They stated,

On the Lord's day, which is the first day of the whole week, and on the days of the nativity and the Epiphany of Christ, and also on the days of Pentecost and of Easter....all the pleasures of the theaters and of the circus throughout all cities, being denied to the people of the same, let the minds of all faithful Christians be employed in the worship of God.³⁸

In this decree, it is obvious that Sunday was dedicated to worship God. There should not be any activity that did not support religious intention of Sunday. It is interesting that the rulers added some elements of Christian festivals beside the Lord's day. It means that the Church began to have more prominent role in influencing the authorities.

Decree of Emperor Leo 469 AD

On this year, the emperor together with Anthemius declared to Armasius, a praetorian perfect, that

We decree that the Lord's day shall always be so held in honor and veneration, that it shall be free from all prosecutions, that no bail shall be exacted, that public service shall

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 131B.

³⁸ Abraham H. Lewis, *A Critical History of Sunday Legislation from 321 to 1888 A.D.* (New York, NY: D. Appelton and Company, 1888), 45-46.

cease, that advocacy shall be laid aside, that this day shall be free from judicial investigations...But, though giving ourselves up to rest on the religious day, we do not suffer any one to be impure pleasures. On this day the scenes of the theatre should make no claims for themselves, neither the games of the circus nor the tearful shows of the wild beasts; and if the celebration should happen to fall on our birthday it may be postponed.³⁹

This law was pronounced on December 13 at Constantinople. All the people under the jurisdiction area must observe the law, to respect the worship day by having no judicial investigation and entertainments, if not, there were various condemnations of it.⁴⁰

There was a developing influence of the church over the government. The emperor plainly says that Sunday as a “religious day” and need to be honored and venerated. Thus, it shows the increasing power of the church in the secular government in the fifth century.

Summary of Part 1

From the ten Sunday laws in fourth and fifth century, six of them were issued by government authorities or the emperors while four of them were issued by the church leaders or synods. All the decrees concern to religious purposes, including Constantine's. But his Sunday Laws was related to pagan worship. It appears in the first two centuries of Sunday laws origin that they were dominated by the government because the church was not powerful enough to force it to the whole Roman Empire. The role of the emperors was very decisive to enforce these Sunday laws. At the end of fifth century the influence of the church increased and the rulers were more respectful to the church existence.

The government had a significant role in controlling the church after the rise of Constantine as the emperor, while before, the church had a liberty in gathering synods and church council to impose the Sunday law. Since the rise of Constantine, the kings after him mostly as the executor of the Sunday law, however, the church was the main actor in influencing the secular authority to enact it. When the church leaders had enough power to force the Sunday laws they would do it, yet, if they had no or lacking power to impose they would utilize the secular government. Therefore, the church in the fourth and fifth century had a role as the “hidden” main actor and the executor was those who had the political power.

Part 2 - Ellen G. White and the Eschatological Sunday Law

In the Adventist pioneers' understanding, Sunday law was not a new concept since they knew the historical facts from other scholars⁴¹ and from Seventh Day Baptist tracts.⁴² Thus Sunday law and its relation to religious concept did not come from Ellen G. White, however, she

³⁹ Ibid, 47-48.

⁴⁰ Butler, *The Change of the Sabbath*, 123.

⁴¹ Joseph Bates, *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Signs, the Beginning*, 41; *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Signs, from the Beginning*, 96-97; J. N. Andrews, “History of the Sabbath and the First Day,” *RH*, July 28, 1859, 73-75.

⁴² White, *The Bible Sabbath*, [Preface]; J. N. Loughborough, “Enforcing Sunday,” *RH*, October 15, 1857, 189.

was the one among the earliest who points out to a future event of Sunday law that in this research called as eschatological Sunday law.⁴³

Ellen G. White's Developing View of Sunday law

Ellen G. White wrote her initial concept of the eschatological Sunday law in 1847 after she had received a vision in 1846. She says in 1882 that "Thirty-six years ago I was shown that what is now transpiring would take place, that the observance of an institution of the papacy would be enforced upon the people by a Sunday law, while the sanctified rest day of Jehovah would be trampled underfoot."⁴⁴ She received the vision after she accepted the truth of Sabbath in the fall of 1846.⁴⁵

On April 7, 1847 she wrote to Joseph Bates about the halo vision. She wrote that "the fourth (the Sabbath commandment,) shone above them all; for the Sabbath was set apart to be kept in honor of God's holy name. The holy Sabbath looked glorious - a halo of glory was all around it." She continued on the significance of Sabbath at the end time when she says "I saw that the holy Sabbath is, and will be, the separating wall between the true Israel of God and unbelievers; and that the Sabbath is the great question, to unite the hearts of God's dear waiting saints." Then, Ellen G. White connected the Sabbath and the Sunday law when she wrote:

I saw all that 'would not receive the mark of the Beast, and of his Image, in their foreheads or in their hands,' could not buy or sell. I saw that the number (666) of the Image Beast was made up; and that it was the beast that changed the Sabbath, and the Image Beast had followed on after, and kept the Pope's, and not God's Sabbath. And all we were required to do, was to give up God's Sabbath, and keep the Pope's, and then we should have the mark of the Beast, and of his Image.⁴⁶

The above statements show that the focus of Ellen G. White regarding the last Sunday law was about the Sabbath that will have a challenge from Roman Catholic. She related the enforcement observance of Pope's Sunday to Revelation 13: 13-18. It means that the second Beast will enforce the Pope's Sabbath. Even though she did not mention about Sunday law but Sabbath of Pope, however, the idea is obvious as she said that "Sabbath is, and will be, the

⁴³ For the pioneers, the understanding of the last Sunday law came from the guiding of Ellen G. White. After her writing in 1847, Joseph Bates commented on this idea two year later that "This ungodly power from which God's people have been called out, Rev. 18:4) will yet, as it now appears, enact a law for the express purpose of making all bow down and keep the Pope's Sabbath, (Sunday,) and all who do not, will have to cease their intercourse, for this law will not allow them to buy or sell, 17th verse. This will test the power there is in the true Sabbath, 'the seal of the living God' I say amen, and amen." In this topic he related the last Sunday law not only with Revelation 13 but also Revelation 14 and 18. Joseph Bates, *A Seal of the Living God: Hundred Forty-Four Thousand, of the Servants of God Being Sealed in 1840* (New Bedford, [MA]: Benjamin Lindsey, 1849), 37. Loughborough reacted to a Sunday law in United States and said that he sees this law would be as a "universal Sunday law." J. N. Loughborough, "Enforcing Sunday," *RH*, June 17, 1857, 35. However, *Review and Herald* wrote a state Sunday law for the first time in 1857 and second was in 1858. "Baltimore-Sunday Law," *RH*, July 23, 1857, 96; "California Sunday Law," *RH*, June 17, 1858, 35.

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 5: 137.

⁴⁵ Robert W. Olson and Roger W. Coon, "Ellen G. White: A Chronology," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 114.

⁴⁶ Ellen G. White, ["A Letter to Joseph Bates"], in *A Word to the "Little Flock,"* 19.

separating wall between the true Israel of God and unbelievers.” According to White that “all we were required to” follow the Sabbath of Pope which means that Sunday worship would be enforced to all humankind. In several years later she called it as “Sunday law.”⁴⁷

In 1858, Ellen White repeated the last Sunday law’ idea in her *Spiritual Gift*. She wrote under the section of “The Time of Jacob’s Trouble,” that preceding of God’s wrath that will be poured out to the wicked, she stated about the Sunday law, “I saw a writing, and copies of it scattered in different parts of the land, giving orders, that unless the saints should yield their peculiar faith, give up the Sabbath, and observe the first day, they were at liberty, after such a time, to put them to death.”⁴⁸ Once again the focus of Ellen White on the last Sunday law was that this law will challenge the true Sabbath and it would be enforced and accompanied with a capital punishment but she also emphasized that the faith of the righteous in God would help them. She says “But in this time the saints were calm and composed, trusting in God, and leaning upon his promise, that a way of escape would be made for them.”⁴⁹

The escalating of her writing on Sunday law happened in 1880s when some of the Adventists experienced punishment even death in jail because of the Sunday laws which were executed in some states in United States.⁵⁰ In 1882, she mentioned that the Sabbath of the Pope, in which, it will be imposed at the end time called as “Sunday law.”⁵¹ Subsequently she wrote a book on *Spirit of Prophecy* series in 1884:

None of these have received the mark of the beast. There are true Christians in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion. The test upon this question does not come until Sunday observance is enforced by law, and the world is enlightened concerning the obligation of the true Sabbath. Not until the issue is thus plainly set before the people, and they are brought to choose between the commandments of God and the commandments of men, will those who continue in transgression receive the mark of the beast.⁵²

In this statement, Ellen G. White explicitly says that eventually “Sunday observance is enforced by law” but this issue closely related with the true Sabbath. Thus, the escalating words of Ellen G. White regarding the term “Sunday law” beside the Sabbath of Pope were expressed since there were some persecutions suffered by the Adventists in the late 1870s to 1880s.⁵³ Her more expanding idea on the enforcement of the Pope’s Sabbath or Sunday at the last days is found in her *Great Controversy*.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5: 137.

⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1858), 1: 201.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 201-202.

⁵⁰ Dennis Pettibone, “Sunday Legislation,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1202-1204.

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5: 137.

⁵² Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1884), 4: 282.

⁵³ Dennis Pettibone, “Sunday Legislation,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 1202-1204.

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan during the Christian Dispensation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1888) and idem, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911).

The Great Controversy and the Eschatological Sunday law

In this book, Ellen G. White has written that the concept of Sunday law would be neglected. She stated that “the question of enforcing Sunday observance is widely agitated, the event so long doubted and disbelieved” however it “is seen to be approaching.”⁵⁵ She placed the Sunday law issue under the Great Controversy theme. She believed that the controversy between God and Satan has started in heaven and “Satan's policy in this final conflict with God's people is the same that he employed in the opening of the great controversy in heaven.” The last Sunday law will be as part of this controversy.⁵⁶

The main factor of the last Sunday law, according to White, is a religious matter. She focused on the Sabbath and not the Sunday law. Regarding the last controversy of the Sunday law she wrote “The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty.”⁵⁷ In this statement, Sunday law only as the sign of evil power to reject the authority of God in human life. Therefore, the Sunday law will be as a matter of religious since it has close relationship with the true Sabbath. As far as all the believers follow the true God they should never worry about the persecution. She also elaborated her argument through the early and medieval eras. In the early church, she mentioned about Constantine who enacted the Sunday law and how he attempted to combine the heathen and Christian religion through the Sunday law.⁵⁸ The medieval era showed the connection of Sunday law to religious issue. She wrote:

As foretold by the prophecy the papal power cast down the truth to the ground. The law of God was trampled in the dust, while the traditions and customs of men were exalted. The churches that were under the rule of the papacy were early compelled to honor the Sunday as a holy day. Amid the prevailing error and superstition, many, even of the true people of God, became so bewildered that while they observed the Sabbath, they refrained from labor also on the Sunday. But this did not satisfy the papal leaders. They demanded not only that Sunday be hallowed, but that the Sabbath be profaned; and they denounced in the strongest language those who dared to show it honor. It was only by fleeing from the power of Rome that any could obey God's law in peace.⁵⁹

Through this statement, she wanted to emphasize that the enacting of Sunday law has a purpose to profane the true Sabbath. To prove the religious intention of the Sunday law, the church says that they had got “divine authority.”⁶⁰

She also articulated that the reason of the promulgation of this last Sunday law will be on a moral issue. Those who propose this legislation will endeavor to install the law based on the escalating moral corruption and the cause of it is the neglecting of Sunday observance but actually this issue happens because the ignoring of the Biblical principle especially on God's law.⁶¹ She also referred to spiritualism as a supporter belief to Sunday law. The supporters of

⁵⁵ White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages*, 606.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 582, 591.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 605.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 574.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 65.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 577

⁶¹ Ibid., 587, 588.

Sunday observance confirm the corruption of the world because human being have had “desecration of Sunday.”⁶²

The other spiritual connection to the eschatological Sunday law is that she connected the acceptance of the last Sunday law with the receiving of the mark of the beast In Revelation 13.⁶³ Thus, through these elements Ellen G. white strongly believed that the actual factor of the last Sunday law is a religious matter.

The main actor or the power behind the enforcement of the last Sunday law will be the papacy or Roman Catholic Church. Ellen G. White built this argument since she saw this pattern from the history. She wrote regarding the Sunday law of Constantine,

It was the emperor’s policy to unite the conflicting interests of heathenism and Christianity. He was urged to do this by the bishops of the church, who, inspired by ambition and thirst for power, perceived that if the same day was observed by both Christians and heathen, it would promote the nominal acceptance of Christianity by pagans and thus advance the power and glory of the church.⁶⁴

She saw that behind the decree of the emperor, the church had had a purpose to gain popularity in this new kingdom. She also recognized that the Roman Catholic was the one who changed the holiness of the true Sabbath to Sunday. She stated “Roman Catholics acknowledge that the change of the Sabbath was made by their church.”⁶⁵ It means that she identified that the Roman Church as the main actor or the principal actor of the Sunday law.

She pointed out to the Catholic church “is unchanged. Every principle of the papacy that existed in past ages exists today. The doctrines devised in the darkest ages are still held. Let none deceive themselves.”⁶⁶ Then she wrote “Romanism as a system is no more in harmony with the gospel of Christ now than at any former period in her history.”⁶⁷

Regarding how the attitude of the Roman Catholic indicates a tolerant approach, Ellen G. White explained that “Romanism is now regarded by Protestants with far greater favor than in former years. In those countries where Catholicism is not in the ascendancy, and the papists are taking a conciliatory course in order to gain influence” they will show different appearance. She continued “Let the restraints now imposed by secular governments be removed and Rome be reinstated in her former power, and there would speedily be a revival of her tyranny and persecution.”⁶⁸ Ellen G. White believed that “The Roman Church is far-reaching in her plans and modes of operation. She is employing every device to extend her influence and increase her power in preparation for a fierce and determined conflict to regain control of the world, to re-establish persecution, and to undo all that Protestantism has done.”⁶⁹ Ellen G. White sees that, the papacy or Roman Catholic, the main actor in the past Sunday law will be the same actor in the future since she is not change.

⁶² Ibid., 591.

⁶³ Ibid., 605.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 53

⁶⁵ Ibid., 448

⁶⁶ Ibid., 571.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 565.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 563, 564.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 565-566.

Ellen G. White understood that the executor of Sunday law will be the civil authorities and in the sense of the second beast of Revelation 13 it will be United States. She built this argument from the early church history. She referred to the past history that “Royal edicts, general councils, and church ordinances sustained by secular power were the steps by which the pagan festival attained its position of honor in the Christian world.”⁷⁰

She continued to the medieval era that “the decrees of councils proving insufficient, the secular authorities were besought to issue an edict that would strike terror to the hearts of the people and force them to refrain from labor on the Sunday.”⁷¹ When she pointed out to the eschatological Sunday law she showed that the pattern is the same. She wrote “even in free America, rulers and legislators, in order to secure public favor, will yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance” and in many places “civil authority” helps to implement it.⁷² At this last Sunday law she explained that “The church appeals to the strong arm of civil power, and, in this work, papists and Protestants unite. As the movement for Sunday enforcement becomes more bold and decided, the law will be invoked against commandment keepers.” The church is no longer the Catholic Church alone but also the Protestant but they still need the civil government to execute it.⁷³

In this moment, when the eschatological Sunday law will be launched, she wrote, “As the Sabbath has become the special point of controversy throughout Christendom, and religious and secular authorities have combined to enforce the observance of the Sunday, the persistent refusal of a small minority to yield to the popular demand will make them objects of universal execration.”⁷⁴ Thus, the joining force of religious and secular leaders will make the Sunday law as a reality. The church will impose the Sunday law through the civil government.

In plainly words, Ellen G. White wrote that “It has been shown that the United States is the power represented by the beast with lamblike horns, and that this prophecy will be fulfilled when the United States shall enforce Sunday observance, which Rome claims as the special acknowledgment of her supremacy.”⁷⁵ She believed that United States will be the main executor to run the Sunday law of the whole world.

Summary of Part 2

The Adventist pioneers has connected the Sunday law to religious issue. They related it as against the true Sabbath. Joseph Bates has expressed this idea for the first time among the Sabbatarian Adventists before Ellen G. White accepted the truth about Sabbath. Nevertheless, Ellen G. White, in 1847, was the one among the earliest who directed Sunday laws to its eschatological significant. This idea was accepted by Joseph Bates in 1849 and the other pioneers. The escalating writing of Ellen G. White regarding Sunday law was in 1880s as there were several Adventists suffered punishment for violating the Sunday law local enactment. The main focus of Ellen G. White when she talked about Sunday law was the true Sabbath and not the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 574.

⁷¹ Ibid., 575.

⁷² Ibid., 592, 606.

⁷³ Ibid., 607, 615-616.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 615; cf. 586.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 579.

Sunday law itself since she placed the significant event of the last Sunday law in the light of the great controversy theme between Christ and Satan. She emphasized that the true Sabbath would become the sign to distinguish who are the followers of God and Satan.

The survey of the view of Ellen G. White regarding the eschatological Sunday law in the *Great Controversy* shows that Ellen G. White did not ignore the facts of Sunday law in Christian history. She began with the historical facts and referred to the same pattern in the future. In this account, she showed that the main factor of the eschatological Sunday law will be religious matter. The main actor or the master mind of the Sunday law will be the papacy who will prosper in converting Protestant to her side. Then, at the end time, she will utilize the civil authority or secular government to execute her purpose, in the sense of Revelation 13, it refers to United States. It means that the country which is described as the second beast will execute the Sunday law to the whole world including in buying and selling. It seems the eschatological Sunday law outwardly will be on business and political matter but deep inside the law will be about the spiritual issue.

Conclusion

Some comparison facts of the early church history of fourth to fifth century to Ellen G. White's *Great Controversy* demonstrates the similar pattern of Sunday law even though the first Sunday laws and the eschatological Sunday law are different in time for thousand years. The first had happened and the latter will take place in the future.

The result of this study indicates that the main factor is religious issue. The main actor or the master mind shows the same result that is the papacy or the Roman Catholic Church, yet, for the eschatological Sunday law the second actor is added that will be the Protestant Church which did not exist yet in the early century. The main executor of the first Sunday law and the last Sunday law is the same that is the civil authority or secular government, however, for the last Sunday law there is a more specific actor indicated that is United States. Thus, Ellen G. White view on the eschatological Sunday law or the last Sunday law is not a strange view but reasonable from the historical perspective.

The First Ten Sundays Laws		The Eschatological Sunday Law
Main Factor	Religious	Religious
Main Actor	The Church (Papacy or Roman Catholic Church)	The Church (Papacy or Roman Catholic Church as the principal contributor and Protestant as the follower or second actor)
Main Executor	Civil authority or secular government	Civil authority or secular government (United States)