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### The Launch Pad

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# the launching pad

With C. MERVYN MAXWELL  
Department of Religion, Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska



**Q. Is there any "ecumenical movement" going on among Jews to eliminate the differences they have among themselves, as there is among Protestants?**

A. Yes and no.

As is well known, Judaism in North America is organized in three great movements, Reform (the most liberal), Orthodox (the most traditional), and Conservative (somewhere in between). There is no overt ecumenical movement currently under way to draw them together.

However, at the forty-ninth biennial assembly of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations held in Montreal last November, Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, president of the union, expressed his conviction that the "rigidities" which divide the three main bodies of Judaism have "softened" considerably. According to RNS, he noted that North American Jews have, in fact, generally worked together through the Synagogue Council of America, the American Conference on Soviet Jewry, and in support of Israel, and he pointed to the fact that the convention he was addressing had chosen as its theme, "Unity in Jewry and Judaism."

Rabbi Eisendrath did not have much other evidence to present, however; and it must be noted that the three thousand delegates to his convention were from Reform Judaism, the wing that has always been most receptive to cooperative ideas.

**Q. From reading your column I gather that you don't feel that the ecumenical movement will succeed in uniting the churches. Recently I ran across a news item that shows how wrong you are. The Anglican Vicar of Ludham, near Great Yarmouth, England, now attends the local Methodist church—because his own congregation recently shrank to himself and his organist. This just goes to prove that as ecumenism brings its doctrine of less and less to more and more, all surviving Christians may well yet be gathered into one church—and a small one at that! [Oregon]**

A. Your conclusion is unassailable.

**Q. I read the "Launching Pad" for Sept.-Oct., 1966, with interest. Could you tell me how you**

**arrived at your figures on church attendance. While I know that very few people attend church in some European countries, I never realized that 44 per cent of the American people attend church on Sunday morning. Please enlighten me. [California]**

A. My statement was based on a Gallup Poll conducted and reported in 1966: "Forty-nine per cent of [American] adults in 1958 said they attended church in a typical week; the 1966 figure is 44 per cent."

I asked Harold Lindsell his opinion as associate editor of *Christianity Today*. He replied, "In rough terms from my own knowledge and from things which I have seen from time to time, I am practically certain that Sunday church attendance, other than at Christmas and Easter, is less than 50 per cent on any given Sunday, and probably does not exceed 20 per cent or 25 per cent."

My point was that Sunday church attendance in member-supported American churches is much better than in state-supported European churches. Even Lindsell's lowest figure confirms this position.

**Q. Some kind person has twice donated a *Liberty* subscription to me. As an attorney, I am favorably impressed with your concept of religious freedom; but I am puzzled! The Saturday religious observance is stated to be based on a Biblical passage. Surely freedom does not trip on a Bible verse. If it did, "heavens forbid," a newly found Dead Sea scroll could disrupt matters beyond repair! It might contain a saying of Jesus clearly dealing with a different "when" of observance. Thus, while I find no objection to Saturday or Sunday (or any other day of observance), I cannot see the necessity of requiring it as a tenet of belief or practice. [New York]**

A. The Sabbath position taken by *Liberty* is not based on any single Bible verse, but on many passages of Scripture and also on a total concept of the relationship of man—made in the image of God—to his Creator and Saviour.

Your fantasy about a Dead Sea scroll is fascinating. Of course, it is my conviction that such a saying, were it ever to come to light, would not conflict with Scripture already revealed.

But suppose it might—is it not incumbent on a man to take his stand today on what he knows today, rather than on what he may possibly come to know in the indefinite future? I mean, doesn't your argument that a person should not take a stand on this issue in view of the possibility of a future conflicting discovery, lead to the conclusion that he shouldn't take a stand on any issue but should always defer to the "argument from silence"?

Let us not take a stand on integration, a person could say; someone someday may discover an irreversible genetic reason why Negroes ought to be kept inferior. Let us not teach our children democracy; democracy may ultimately prove unworthy of our people. Let's not defend an accused man in court; having done so may turn out someday to have been against his best interests. And so on.

Or does not the dignity and significance of humanity demand that a man commit himself to good according to what he knows, rather than to hesitate interminably in view of what he thinks he may not know as yet?

Jesus said, "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you. . . . While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may become the children of light" (John 12:35, 36).

**Q. If I don't keep the Sabbath, will I go to hell? If I do keep it, should I not observe all the other laws of the Old Testament, such as the food laws, et cetera?**

A. The Bible says, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

The "law" in question here is not the Mosaic code but the moral code of the Ten Commandments, as the next verse makes plain: "For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law" (James 2:11).

God does not condemn the man who sincerely keeps another day through ignorance of the true Sabbath, but graciously concedes that "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). On the other hand, those who worship God ignorantly but acceptably lose a real measure of blessing, for Jesus said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you . . . , that your joy might be full" (John 15:10, 11).

**Q. A Florida reader in the "Launching Pad," March-April, 1967, said that if printers would put Sunday "at the end of the week instead of at the**

**beginning, Sunday would be the seventh day. It's as simple as that."**

**It happens that this reader is not very original. A calendar displaying Sunday in the seventh column is already in use, at least to some extent, in Chile. How do Seventh-day Adventists overcome this problem when working with semiliterate Chilean Indians? Do they have any success in that country? [Ohio]**

A. To find out, I wrote D. K. Sullivan, president of the Adventist work in Chile. He replied by sending me a Chilean calendar with Sunday printed as the seventh day of the week, and this note attached (in English):

"I have never heard that this presents a problem. The official dictionary states that 'Sabado' (the day before Sunday) is the seventh day of the week, and the official Catholic version of the Bible translates the Sabbath commandment as, 'Remember the "Sabado" to keep it holy.' . . . Probably it is easier to prove which day is the Sabbath in Spanish than it is in English."

**Q. I have heard that at a recent meeting of the National Council of Churches violence was condoned to correct social evils. Is this so?**

A. What you are referring to is probably the report of a study group of the U.S. Conference on Church and Society which was held last October in Detroit at the instigation of the National Council of Churches.

The resolutions of this study group are *unofficial* and so are not binding on any church in the United States; however, having been adopted unanimously, they will no doubt have considerable influence at subsequent meetings of the National Council of Churches.

The resolutions criticized the church for virtually supporting what the conference calls "systematic violence" through a conspiracy of silence. (According to Religious News Service, "systematic violence" was defined as practices that exact exorbitant interest rates from the poor, inadequate health systems which result in low life expectancy and high infant mortality, inadequate housing which results in fire fatalities, police practices which result in definite injury, and so on.)

While urging Christians to make every effort short of violence to thwart this type of thing, the conference urged that Christians must increasingly move beyond mere marches or picketing to massive campaigns, civil disobedience, noncooperation with the state, and economic boycotts. During riots, it said, church buildings ought to be havens for those who are in danger, and the church should both place observers in police stations and provide legal assistance to persons mistreated by police.

Send your questions to **THE LAUNCHING PAD**  
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