

Sabbath Observance and the Church Manual

Rationale for the Church Manual

“The church of Christ is in constant peril. Satan is seeking to destroy the people of God, and one man’s mind, one man’s judgment, is not sufficient to be trusted. Christ would have His followers brought together in church capacity, observing order, having rules and discipline, and all subject one to another, esteeming others better than themselves.”—3T 445, the Church Manual, 2010, (CM) p.17.

The first principle regarding the Church Manual is that “the Bible is the foundation and source of belief and practice,” and “the standards and practices of the Church are based upon the principles of the Holy Scriptures.” CM, p.30, 18.

The General Conference through the years voted important changes concerning the *Church Manual*. Realizing the importance of conducting the worldwide work of the Church “decently and in order,” the 1946 General Conference Session voted that “[a]ll changes or revisions of policy that are to be made in the *Manual* shall be authorized by the General Conference session.” *General Conference Report*, No. 8, p. 197 (June 14, 1946). CM p.19.

In 1948, recognizing that local conditions sometimes call for special actions, the General Conference Committee voted that “each division, including the North American Division of the world field, prepare a ‘Supplement’ to the new *Church Manual* not in any way modifying it but containing such additional matter as is applicable to the conditions and circumstances prevailing in the division; the manuscripts for these Supplements to be submitted to the General Conference Committee for endorsement before being printed.”—*Autumn Council Actions*, 1948, p. 19. CM p.19.

This specifically empowers a Division to add material in the form of a supplement to the Church Manual where local conditions require it. Because the South Pacific Division has a specific local phenomenon regarding Sabbath around the dateline it prepared such a supplement that is included in the 2010 edition of the Church Manual. This statement on “Sabbath in the Pacific around the Dateline: Statement of Principles and Considerations” was endorsed by the General Conference.

Definition of Sabbath Observance

The current edition of the Church Manual provides the following description of Sabbath observance (page 138):

The Sabbath is a token of God's love to humanity. It is a memorial of God's power in the original creation and also a sign of His power to recreate and sanctify our lives (Ezek. 20:12), and its observance is an evidence of our loyalty to Him and of our fellowship with Him.

The Sabbath holds a special place in our lives. The seventh day of the week, from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday (Lev. 23:32), is a gift from God, a sign of His grace in time. It is a privilege, a special appointment with the One who loves us and whom we love, a sacred time set aside by God's eternal law, a day of delight for worshiping God and sharing with others (Isa. 58:13). We welcome the Sabbath with joy and gratitude.

It has been correctly observed that here the Church Manual defines the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week, from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. It therefore must be asked, does the Division supplement which addresses the conditions and circumstance created by a changed dateline in any way modify the principles contained in this section. The Division and the General Conference do not believe this to be the case.

First, Leviticus 23.32 gives a general principle of Sabbath observance that applies not just to the special feast-day Sabbaths but the weekly Sabbath as well; "from evening to evening you shall celebrate your Sabbath."

Second, the Church Manual is interpreting the language of Scripture in this place and is using cultural and not biblical language to express "Sabbath". Biblically, the Sabbath is referred to as the seventh day and not Saturday (see Genesis, Exodus 20.8, etc).

The Sabbath is therefore the 'seventh day' and is observed from sunset on the sixth day to sunset on the seventh day. This is in harmony with the first principle referred to which states that "the Bible is the foundation and source of belief and practice," and "the standards and practices of the Church are based upon the principles of the Holy Scriptures."

The supplementary material to the South Pacific Division 2010 edition of the Church Manual seeks to show that because of the change to the dateline a day has been lost by those countries affected. This has resulted in the seventh day now falling on a Sunday and not Saturday. Therefore to keep the integrity of the seven day creation weekly cycle that God established in the

creation week the Church now needs to observe Sunday in those places that have shifted the dateline. While this may create a problem for our eschatology, which emphasizes Sabbath/Sunday and allegiance to God or the Beast, it nevertheless is faithful to the Biblical principle that the Sabbath is the seventh day.

Appeal for Unity

While this is a difficult issue the Church needs to work together. Ellen White counsels the church by saying:

“Oh, how Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in his efforts to get in among this people and disorganize the work at a time when thorough organization is essential and will be the greatest power to keep out spurious uprisings and to refute claims not endorsed by the word of God! We want to hold the lines evenly, that there shall be no breaking down of the system of organization and order that has been built up by wise, careful labor. License must not be given to disorderly elements that desire to control the work at this time.”—TM 489. CM p.27.

Although all members have equal rights within the church, no individual member or group should start a movement or form an organization or seek to encourage a following for the attainment of any objective or for the teaching of any doctrine or message not in harmony with the fundamental religious objectives and teachings of the Church. Such a course would result in the fostering of a divisive spirit, the fragmenting of the witness of the Church, and thus in hindering of the Church’s discharge of its obligations to the Lord and the world. CM p.59.