

“BY PUBLIC EDICT AND DECREE”:
A BIBLICAL PRECEDENT FOR THE OBSERVANCE
OF EXTRA-BIBLICAL FEASTS

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Throughout his classic text *Answers to Objections*, the celebrated Adventist apologist Francis Nichol underscores the fact that: “the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is completely silent about a command for Sunday.”¹ This argument may be considered the oldest and most fundamental Adventist rebuff to the sacred character of the “first day of the week.” Nevertheless, it imprudently discounts the religious obligations of a festival lacking an explicit scriptural mandate, seeing as the example of Christ suggests a very different approach to such observances.

From John 10:22, we infer that Christ traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate “the festival of the Dedication,” that is, Hanukkah, following the religious custom of first-century Judaism. However, the observance of Hanukkah was itself a late tradition, unknown to canonical scripture.² The non-canonical books of 1 Macc 4:59 and 2 Macc 10:8 record its institution as an annual commemoration of the rededication of the Second Temple following its desecration under Antiochus IV:

Then Judas and his brothers and the entire congregation of Israel decreed that the days of the dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness on the anniversary every year for eight days, from the twenty-fifth day of the month Chislev. (1 Macc 4:59)

The Jews celebrated joyfully for eight days... By public edict and decree they prescribed that the whole Jewish nation should celebrate these days every year. (2 Macc 10:6,8)

Hanukkah was not instituted by a divine command, as were most other festivals on the Jewish cultic calendar (cf. Lev 23). Rather, the

1. Nichol, Francis D., *Answers to Objections*, Washington: Review and Herald, 1952, objection 31.

2. For the sake of argument, this paper assumes the biblical canon embraced by Seventh-day Adventists, numbering 66 books.

obligation to observe the feast was enjoined by the “public edict and decree” of “the entire congregation of Israel.”³ Nevertheless, Christ did not fail to respect the sacred character of this feast, and evidently, observed it devoutly. He recognized the community of faith’s authority to institute its own religious festivals.

In later centuries, the Christian community also felt compelled to institute certain religious feasts, some annual (e.g., Christmas, Annunciation.) and others weekly (Sunday). In the light of Christ’s example, the lack of a divine mandate for their commemoration is no grounds for their dismissal. Biblical precedent dictates that the community of faith can establish, and obligate, its own religious festivals.

A thorough assimilation of these facts might provide the basis for a new Catholic-Adventist dialogue on the legitimacy and value of the Sunday commemoration. In this new conversation, the perceived lack of a scriptural precedent for the observance of “the first day of the week” as a memorial of Christ’s resurrection would no longer present a substantial obstacle for Adventists.

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3. As also was Purim (cf. Esther 9:20-32), though its institution is recorded in the canonical scripture.