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Box 80, Folder 8, Calendar reform, 1963.

Rome, October 29, 1963

From: European Office  
 To : Rabbi Tanenbaum  
 Subject: Church and the calendar

This is in reply to your cable concerning calendar reform.

What the Ecumenical Council did, essentially, was to vote that the Catholic Church would not oppose calendar reform; which, of course, is not the same thing as saying it supports it.

It will not oppose calendar reform, moreover, on certain conditions. These are the following:

1. That the Roman Catholic church comes to some kind of understanding or agreement with the Orthodox Church on this matter. This, again, is not to say that it will actively seek any such agreement. Rather, the meaning is that Roman Catholicism does not want to have any real dispute, or problem, with the Orthodox, or do anything that may cause some schism, on this issue. What the position of the Orthodox is, we here have no first-hand information. According to some reports, the Orthodox will remain intransigent on any proposal that would mean change in the present Orthodox manner of fixing Easter. Nor is it known here what might be the position at the Orthodox conference at Rhodes, with regard to this calendar issue. This might be worth checking into with Orthodox sources in New York. The two calendars—Gregorian and Julian—are already several days apart; the Roman Catholic Church, we get the impression from conversations here, does not want this difference ~~exaggerated~~ further exaggerated.

2. That any new calendar maintain the seven-day week. To this second condition, however, there are some qualifications.

If civil governments should decide to adopt a universal calendar with a seven day week, but in which there are one or two extra days inserted each year, not to count in the seven day cycle, the Church will accept this too, if there are compelling reasons for doing so. The decision as to whether the reasons are compelling rest with the Holy See.

Here, of course, is the rub. Let us assume for a moment that the obstacles have been overcome, and the Holy See finds the reasons for adoption of a suitable universal calendar compelling. Then, one year, the Jewish Sabbath may fall on a universal-calendar Monday; the next year on a Thursday; the next on some other day of the week, depending on how many extra days are, or are not, inserted.

The section on calendar reform was originally inside of Chapter V of the ~~Schema~~ Vatican Council schema, De Ecclesia. It was moved out of the Chapter itself and put as an appendix, the reason being that the Council Fathers felt that this matter was not one for decision by them, but opinion, since it affected others ~~non-Catholics~~ as well as Catholics. The vote re ~~in favor~~ of this appendix, with the conditions as stated above, was heavily in favor. The entire Chapter V, including the appendix, was put to vote this morning, and received an almost unanimous vote.

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The fact remains that whatever the qualifications and nuances, the action of the Ecumenical Council is an important weapon in the hands of calendar reform advocates; for the Church has made known that it will not throw its weight against reform "so long as it not something outlandish like a five-day week, or the kind of reform of the French Revolution," in the words of one Council expert. With its vote, the Church considers that it has made a great concession, since it has agreed, in effect, that Easter ~~xxxxxx~~ and similar "movable" holidays can now come on fixed dates.

Why it made this concession is also clear, and was expressed by the Bishop of Linz, the rapporteur in the matter—pressures of secular convenience and efficiency. It is in keeping with the spirit of those who wish a modern Church that they should pay attention to these secular desires and inconveniences. One cannot, therefore, expect any Ecumenical Council reversal of this vote; and to press for it would be worse than useless—we would come up against opposition, one can expect, from those who support us on those other issues where we should like to see the Church move in an enlightened direction.

What we can do, is to try and make the Church feel that the Jewish attitude toward this issue should be, also for it, a "compelling reason" against adoption of any calendar reform that does not meet Jewish requirements; in short, we should try to make the Holy See as conscious about Jewish opinion as it already is about Orthodox opinion.

Hasty, immediate action, in our view, however, would be unwise. Let us not begin to do battle on this issue until our other, more immediate concern, is out of the way. The Church is not going out in support of calendar reform; and there is time to impress the Jewish view upon it.

The proper channel for action would be to put a memorandum stating the Jewish position before Cardinal Bea. This action, we believe, should not be publicized. It should, moreover, as noted above, await action on the Church decree concerning Christian attitudes toward Jews.

We ~~xxxxxx~~ do not see that one could presently propose any alternative action to the Ecumenical Council. For this, it is too late. You may wish to see what can be done with the Orthodox Church.

We should appreciate immediately hearing from you with regard to any action taken by the AJC or any other groups with regard to the issue of calendar reform.

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# Proposal for Calendar Reform 'Disturbs' Jewish Spokesmen

ROME—(RNS)—The Second Vatican Council's willingness to accept a "perpetual calendar" has aroused "some apprehensions among Jews," according to Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff of Rome.

Jewish concern, he said, is inspired by the fact that "blank days" may be used to effect a worldwide calendar. To justify such a calendar, he said, it would be necessary to insert one or two "blank" (undated) days each year.

This would be unacceptable to Orthodox Jewry, Rabbi Toaff claimed, because it would disrupt the "sanctification of the

seventh day of the week."

The rabbi's remarks were based on a paraphrased version of a decision of the Council on establishment of a fixed Easter Sunday and a perpetual world calendar. It states:

"The Council considers the wish expressed by many for a fixed Easter Sunday and a permanent calendar to be no small

moment and hence, after paying due heed to the consequences that may follow from this calendar declares:

"The Council is not opposed to fixing Easter Sunday on a determined Sunday in the Gregorian Calendar, provided this is agreeable to all others concerned with the problem, especially the Christian separated brethren (Protestants, Orthodox, Anglicans).

"Similarly, the Council is not opposed to the various initiatives for establishing a perpetual civil calendar, provided the seven-day week, with its Sunday, are safeguarded and the regular succession of weeks remains intact."

Italian Jewish circles consider the calendar reform issue as one deeply concerning them. Because of the clash with the dating of the Jewish calendar, they regard it as one of greatest interest to Jews.

According to Rabbi Toaff:

"The Ecumenical Council's vote favoring a reform of the Gregorian Calendar arouses apprehension among Jews, who in 1931, 1949 and 1954 had to struggle (against movements) and at the United Nations later to avoid the acceptance of a reform which would have hampered the observance of the Sabbath.

"A blank day would create serious difficulties for the Orthodox Jews (particularly so in areas where they are few and scattered), who so far have been able to sanctify the seventh day thanks to the five-day week adopted in most Western countries.

"If a calendar reform be adopted, we hope that it will take into consideration the necessity of the Jews that a seven-day cycle be maintained unaltered."

"Our apprehensions," he added, "are mitigated by the cautiousness of the Council announcement, stressing that the reform is acceptable provided it is agreeable to all concerned. This presumably also includes the Jews."



# THE WEEK IN RELIGION

BY RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

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## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS FOCUS NEW ATTENTION ON QUESTION OF A FIXED DATE FOR EASTER

Recent developments have focussed new attention on the perennially-debated question of a fixed date for Easter, the greatest and oldest feast of the Christian Church.

The issue was revived when the Second Vatican Council, at its second session, noted that a widespread desire existed to have a fixed date set for Easter and declared that it would not object to the proposal, "provided that those whom it may concern, especially the brethren who are not in communion with the Apostolic See, give their consent."

More recently, Home Secretary Henry Brooke told the British parliament that in view of the Vatican Council's stand, the time might be ripe to revive Britain's Easter Act of 1928, which provided that Easter should always fall on the first Sunday after the second Saturday in April.

Actually the law was to become effective only when the government found conditions "opportune." However, such a date has never been set because, as Mr. Brooke explained, "the effect would be that for a period Easter would be celebrated on a different date in the United Kingdom than in the rest of the world."

What was necessary, the Home Secretary indicated, was a worldwide agreement among the Churches on a fixed Easter. As a first step he suggested holding consultations on the matter with the Churches in Britain.

Previously, a spokesman for Dr. Arthur Godfrey Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury, had intimated that the Church of England would not oppose a fixed Easter date, provided a majority of Christian bodies endorsed the proposal.

The spokesman was Bishop Ronald R. Williams of Leicester, who described the Vatican Council's statement as "rather liberal," but cautioned that "Rome and Canterbury are not the only people involved."

Since the first Council of Nicaea in 325, Catholics (and latterly the great majority of Protestants) have celebrated Easter according to the Gregorian Calendar on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. In practice, this meant that Easter Sunday fell between March 22 and April 25, inclusive.

However, Eastern Orthodox believers, who adhere to the old Julian Calendar, observe Easter on a date different, in most years, from that of the other Christian Churches.

In use in the West from 1582, the Gregorian Calendar is so named because it was proclaimed by Pope Gregory XIII. The previous calendar was known as the Julian Calendar because it was named after Julius Caesar, who had the calendar adopted in 45 B.C.

The Gregorian Calendar, though an improvement on the Julian Calendar, is still imperfect since it brings about an error six days in 10,000 years. Many proposals -- some by ecclesiastics -- have been made to remove its imperfections by means of a universal and perpetual calendar. But this has entailed some religious difficulties since it implied the fixing of a date for Easter and other movable feasts, including Ascension Day, Pentecost and Advent.

Under the best known system of calendar reform -- one proposed by the World Calendar Association -- the year would be divided into four trimesters, each composed of 13 weeks of 91 days. The months would all consist of 30 days, except the four that begin the trimesters, which would each have 31. To make up the 365 days of the year would be a day without a date. Another extra date would be added on leap years.

According to this system, New Year's Day would always fall on a Sunday and Easter would always be on Sunday, April 8.

The Second Vatican Council has also spoken out on the issue of an unchanging, perpetual calendar, saying that it "does not oppose efforts designed to introduce a perpetual calendar into civil society."

At the same time, it stressed that its attitude of "no objection" applied only to "those systems which retain and safeguard a seven-day week with Sunday, without the introduction of any days outside the week, so that the succession of weeks may be left intact, unless there is question of the most serious reasons."

"Concerning these," it added, "the Apostolic See shall judge."

Strong objections to a world calendar based on a fixed number of weeks have been voiced by Jewish groups and leaders of the Seventh-day Adventists and Seventh Day Baptists, as well as by the Lord's Day Alliance of the United States on various religious grounds.

The main Jewish objection to a world calendar is that over a number of years, if it were adopted, and Jews continued to use their own lunar calendar, Jews often would be observing their sabbath in the middle of the week. The most organized protest has come from a "Committee To Combat the World Calendar Proposal" which was formed in 1962 under the auspices of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate.

In a statement last November, Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff of Rome declared that the Vatican Council's vote favoring a reform of the Gregorian Calendar "arouses apprehension among Jews, who, in 1931, 1949 and 1954 had to struggle against movements for a perpetual civil calendar that would have hampered the observance of the Sabbath."

The Council's action on calendar reform was viewed as "my Magna Carta" by Franciscan Father Evarist Klesaszca of Our Lady of Fatima monastery in Kenosha, Wis., who has worked for 33 years to perfect a new calendar. He has a calendar which eliminates leap year, making February a 30-day month, as well as January, March, April, September and November, all the rest having 31 days.

Under the priest's calendar, Easter Sunday would fall on April 9, New Year's Day would always be a Sunday, and Christmas Day always on Monday.

His calendar would replace "leap year" with a "leap week" every five or six years to compensate for the difference between the calendar year and the solar year. Solar time gains several hours on the calendar in the course of a year.

It is recalled that in 1896 the director of the Berlin Observatory issued a circular on the subject of a fixed Easter that was addressed to many scientific, political and religious personalities throughout the world. Among them was Pope Leo XIII, who replied by cautioning against the danger of "introducing greater divisions into Christendom."

The Pope added, however, that "if this danger could be overcome and if the relative stability of the Easter feast were to be universally demanded, owing to a movement of public opinion as further enlightened by the learned world, the initiative for such a reform could then be taken into consideration by the Holy See, especially in a General Council."

The Second Vatican Council was still in preparation in August, 1962, when the Christian Century, ecumenical weekly published in Chicago, suggested that the Catholic Church "initiate" an international meeting of Christian leaders who would set a permanent annual date for Easter celebrations.

"Proponents of calendar reform and the adoption of a World Calendar," it said, "argue that a fixed date for the Easter observance is essential. And after nearly 2,000 years of unhappy and sometimes near tragic experiments with the shifting date of Christendom's principal holy day, the churches should no longer leave to astronomical science the annual appointment of Easter."

In a book published in 1960, Noele M. Denis-Boulet, a French Catholic writer, wrote that it was valid to inquire "whether the variability of the feast of Easter...belongs in the domain of essential tradition...or whether, on the contrary, the Church is competent to dispense with this tradition in such a way as to give up the movable Easter it has known since the beginning in favor of an Eastern fixed in the solar year."

"After all," he added, "our Christian religion has a mainly solar aspect and in all ages it has assimilated every kind of progress. Why should it be tied indefinitely to a luni-solar calendar, which is transitional in human history, one whose grave imperfections were felt by liturgists long before modern states worried about them? After all, the calendar is made for man, not man for the calendar."