

CHAPTER 13

THE SUNDAY-LORD'S DAY NOT TRACEABLE TO THE APOSTLES

General statement respecting the Ante-Nicene fathers-The change of the Sabbath never mentioned by one of these fathers-Examination of the historical argument for Sunday as the Lord's day - This argument compared with the like argument for the Catholic festival of the Passover.

1The Ante-Nicene fathers are those Christian writers who flourished after the time of the apostles, and before the Council of Nice, A.D. 325. Those who govern their lives by the volume of Inspiration do not recognize any authority in these fathers to change any precept of that book, nor any authority in them to add any new precepts to it. But those whose rule of life is the Bible as modified by tradition, regard the early fathers of the church as nearly or quite equal in authority with the inspired writers. They declare that the fathers conversed with the apostles; or if they did not do this, they conversed with some who had seen some of the apostles; or at least they lived within a few generations of the apostles, and so learned by tradition, which involved only a few transitions from father to son, what was the true doctrine of the apostles.

Thus with perfect assurance they supply the lack of inspired testimony in behalf of the so-called Christian Sabbath by plentiful quotations from the early fathers. What if there be no mention of the change of the Sabbath in the New Testament? And what if there be no commandment for resting from labor on the first day of the week? Or, what if there be no method revealed in the Bible by which the first day of the week can be enforced by the fourth commandment? They supply these serious omissions in the Scriptures by testimonies which they say were written by men who lived during the first three hundred years after the apostles.

On such authority as this the multitude dare to change the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. But next to the deception under which men fall when they are made to believe that the Bible may be corrected by the fathers, is the deception practiced upon them as to what the fathers actually teach. It is asserted that the fathers bear explicit testimony to the change of the Sabbath by Christ as a historical fact, and that they knew that this was so because they had conversed with the apostles, or with some who had conversed with them. It is also asserted that the fathers called the first day of the week the Christian Sabbath, and that they refrained from labor on that day as an act of obedience to the fourth commandment.

Now it is a most remarkable fact that every one of these assertions is false. The people who trust in the fathers as their authority for departing from God's commandment are miserably deceived as to what the fathers teach.

1. The fathers are so far from testifying that the apostles told them Christ changed the Sabbath, that not even one of them ever alludes to the idea of such a change.
2. No one of them ever calls the first day the Christian Sabbath, nor indeed ever calls it a Sabbath of any kind.
3. They never represent it as a day on which ordinary labor was sinful; nor do they represent the observance of Sunday as a act of obedience to the fourth commandment.

4. The modern doctrine of the change of the Sabbath was therefore absolutely unknown in the first centuries of the Christian church.²

But though no statement asserting the change of the Sabbath can be produced from the writings of the fathers of the first three hundred years, it is claimed that their testimony furnishes decisive proof that the first day of the week is the Lord's day of Rev. 1:10. The biblical argument that the Lord's day is the seventh day and no other, because that day alone is in the Holy Scriptures claimed by the Father and the Son as belonging in a peculiar sense to each, is given in chapter eleven, and is absolutely decisive. But this is set aside without answer, and the claim of the first day to this honorable distinction is substantiated out of the fathers as follows:

The term Lord's day as a name for the first day of the week can be traced back through the first three centuries, from the fathers who lived toward their close, to the ones next preceding who mention the first day, and so backward by successive steps till we come to one who lived in John's time, and was his disciple; and this disciple of John calls the first day of the week the Lord's day. It follows therefore that John must have intended the first day of the week by the term Lord's day, but did not define his meaning because it was familiarly known by that name in his time. Thus by history we prove the first day of the week to be the Lord's day of Rev. 1:10; and then by Rev. 1:10, we prove the first day of the week to be the sacred day of this dispensation; for the spirit of inspiration by which John wrote would not have called the first day by this name if it were only a human institution, and if the seventh day was still by divine appointment the Lord's holy day.

This is a concise statement of the strongest argument for first-day sacredness which can be drawn from ecclesiastical history. It is the argument by which first-day writers prove Sunday to be the day called by John the Lord's day. This argument rests upon the statement that Lord's day as a name for Sunday can be traced back to the disciples of John, and that it is the name by which that day was familiarly known in John's time.

But this entire statement is false. The truth is, no writer of the first century, and no one of the second, prior to A.D. 194, who is known to speak of the first day of the week, ever calls it the Lord's day! Yet the first day is seven times mentioned by the sacred writers before John's vision upon Patmos on the Lord's day, and is twice mentioned by John in his gospel which he wrote after his return from that island, and is mentioned some sixteen times by ecclesiastical writers of the second century prior to A.D. 194, and never in a single instance is it called the Lord's day! We give all the instances of its mention in the Bible. Moses, in the beginning, by divine inspiration, gave to the day its name, and though the resurrection of Christ is said to have made it the Lord's day, yet every sacred writer who mentions the day after that event still adheres to the plain name of first day of the week. Here are all the instances in which the inspired writers mention the day:

Moses, B.C. 1490. "The evening and the morning were the first day." Gen. 1:5.

Matthew, A.D. 41. "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week." Matt. 28:1.

Paul, A.D. 57. "Upon the first day of the week." 1 Cor. 16:2.

Luke, A.D. 60. "Now upon the first day of the week." Luke 24:1.

Luke, A.D. 63. "And upon the first day of the week." Acts 20:7.

Mark, A.D. 64. "And very early in the morning, the first day of the week." Mark 16:2.

"Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week." Verse 9.

After the resurrection of Christ, and before John's vision, A.D. 96, the day is six times mentioned by inspired men, and every time as plain first day of the week. It certainly was not familiarly known as Lord's day before the time of John's vision. To speak the exact truth, it was not called by that name at all, nor by any other name equivalent to that, nor is there any record of its being set apart by divine authority as such.

But in the year 96, John says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Rev. 1:10. Now it is evident that this must be a day which the Lord had set apart for himself, and which he claimed as his. This was all true in the case of the seventh day, but was not in any respect true in that of the first day. He could not therefore call the first day by this name, for it was not such. But if the Spirit of God designed at this point to create a new institution and to call a certain day the Lord's day which before had never been claimed by him as such, it was necessary that he should specify that new day. He did not define the term, which proves that he was not giving a sacred name to some new institution, but was speaking of a well-known, divinely appointed day. But after John's return from Patmos, he wrote his gospel,³ and in that gospel he twice had occasion to mention the first day of the week. Let us see whether he adheres to the manner of the other sacred writers, or whether, when we know he means the first day, he gives to it a sacred name.

John, A.D. 97. "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early." John 20:1.

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week." Verse 19.

These texts complete the Bible record of the first day of the week. They furnish conclusive evidence that John did not receive new light in vision at Patmos, bidding him call the first day of the week the Lord's day, and when taken with all the instances preceding, they constitute a complete demonstration that the first day was not familiarly known as the Lord's day in John's time, nor indeed known at all by that name then.

Let us now see whether Lord's day as a title for the first day can be traced back to John by means of the writings of the fathers.

The following is a concise statement of the testimony by which the fathers are made to prove that John used the term Lord's day as a name for the first day of the week. A chain of seven successive witnesses, commencing with one who was the disciple of John, and extending forward through several generations, is made to connect and identify the Lord's day of John with the Sunday-Lord's day of a later age. Thus, Ignatius, the disciple of John, is made to speak familiarly of the first day as the Lord's day. This is directly connecting the fathers and the apostles. Then the epistle of Pliny, A.D. 104, in connection with the Acts of the Martyrs, is adduced to prove that the martyrs in his time and forward were tested as to their observance of Sunday, the question being, "Have you kept the Lord's day?" Next, Justin Martyr, A.D. 140, is made to speak of Sunday as the Lord's day. After this, Theophilus of Antioch, A.D. 168, is brought forward to bear a powerful testimony to the Sunday-Lord's day. Then Dionysius of Corinth, A.D. 170, is made to speak to the same effect. Next Melito of Sardis, A.D. 177, is produced to confirm what the others have said. And finally, Irenaeus, A.D. 178, who had been the disciple of Polycarp, who had been the disciple of John the apostle, is brought forward to bear a decisive testimony in behalf of Sunday as the Lord's day and the Christian Sabbath.

These are the first seven witnesses who are cited to prove Sunday the Lord's day. They bring us nearly to the close of the second century. They constitute the chain of testimony by which the Lord's day of the apostle John is identified with the Sunday-Lord's day of later times.

First-day writers present these witnesses as proving positively that Sunday is the Lord's day of the Scriptures, and the Christian church accepts this testimony in the absence of that of the inspired writers. But the folly of the people, and the wickedness of those who lead them, may be set forth in one sentence:-the first, second, third, fourth, and seventh, of these testimonies are inexcusable frauds, while the fifth and sixth have no decisive bearing upon the case.

1. Ignatius, the first of these witnesses, it is said, must have known Sunday to be the Lord's day, for he calls it such, and he had conversed with the apostle John. But in the entire writings of this father the term Lord's day does not once occur, nor is there in them all a single mention of the first day of the week! The reader will find a critical examination of the epistles of Ignatius in chapter fourteen of this history.

2. It is a pure fabrication that the martyrs in Pliny's time, about A.D. 104, and thence onward, were tested by the question whether they had kept the Sunday-Lord's day. No question at all resembling this is to be found in the words of the martyrs till we come to the fourth century, and then the reference is not at all to the first day of the week. This is fully shown in chapter fifteen.

3. the Bible Dictionary of the American Tract Society, page 379, brings forward the third of these Sunday-Lord's day witnesses in the person of Justin Martyr, A.D. 140. It makes him call Sunday the Lord's day by quoting him as follows:

"Justin Martyr observes that `on the Lord's day all Christians in the city or country meet together, because that is the day of our Lord's resurrection.'"

But Justin never gave to Sunday the title of Lord's day, nor indeed any other sacred title. Here are his words correctly quoted:

"And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets, are read, as long as time permits," etc.⁴

Justin speaks of the day called Sunday. But that he may be made to help establish its title to the name of Lord's day, his words are deliberately changed. Thus the third witness to Sunday as the Lord's day, like the first and the second, is made such by fraud. But the fourth fraud is even worse than the three which precede.

4. The fourth testimony to the Sunday-Lord's day is furnished in Dr. Justin Edwards' Sabbath Manual, p.114:

"Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, about A.D. 162, says: `Both custom and reason challenge from us that we should honor the Lord's day, seeing on that day it was that our Lord Jesus completed his resurrection from the dead.' "

Dr. Edwards does not pretend to give the place in Theophilus where these words are to be found.

Having carefully and minutely examined every paragraph of the writings of Theophilus several times over, I state emphatically that nothing of the kind is to be found in that writer. He never uses the term Lord's day, and he does not even speak of the first day of the week. These words which are so well adapted to create the impression that the Sunday-Lord's day is of apostolic institution, are put into his mouth by the falsehood of some one.

Here are four frauds, constituting the first four instances of the alleged use of Lord's day as a name for Sunday.

Yet it is by means of these very frauds that the Sunday-Lord's day of later ages is identified with the Lord's day of the Bible. Somebody invented these frauds. The use to which they are put plainly indicates the purpose for which they were framed. The title of Lord's day must be proved to pertain to Sunday by apostolic authority. For this purpose these frauds were a necessity. The case of the Sunday-Lord's day may be fitly illustrated by that of the long line of popes. Their apostolic authority as head of the Catholic church depends on their being able to identify the apostle Peter as the first of their line, and to prove that his authority was transmitted to them. There is no difficulty in tracing back their line to the early ages, though the earliest Roman bishops were modest, unassuming men, wholly unlike the popes of after times. But when they come to make Peter the head of their line, and to identify his authority and theirs, they can do it only by fraudulent testimonials. And such is the case with first-day observance. It may be traced back as a festival to the time of Justin Martyr, A.D. 140, but the day had then no sacred name, and at that time claimed no apostolic authority. But these must be secured at any cost, and so its title of Lord's day is by a series of fraudulent testimonials traced to the apostle John, as in like manner the authority of the popes is traced to the apostle Peter.

5. The fifth witness of this series is Dionysius of Corinth, A.D. 170. Unlike the four which have been already examined, Dionysius actually uses the term Lord's day, though he says nothing identifying it with the first day of the week. His words are these:

"To-day we have passed the Lord's holy day, in which we have read your epistle; in reading which we shall always have our minds stored with admonition, as we shall, also, from that written to us before by Clement."⁵

The epistle of Dionysius to Soter, bishop of Rome, from which this sentence is taken, has perished. Eusebius, who wrote in the fourth century, has preserved to us this sentence, but we have no knowledge of its connection. First-day writers quote Dionysius as the fifth of their witnesses that Sunday is the Lord's day. They say that Sunday was so familiarly known as Lord's day in the time of Dionysius, that he calls it by that name without even stopping to tell what day he meant.

But it is not honest to present Dionysius as a witness to the Sunday-Lord's day, for he makes no application of the term. But it is said he certainly meant Sunday because that was the familiar name of the day in his time, even as is indicated by the fact that he did not define the term. And how is it known that Lord's day was the familiar name of Sunday in the time of Dionysius? The four witnesses already examined furnish all the evidence in proof of this, for there is no writer this side of Dionysius who calls Sunday the Lord's day until almost the entire period of a generation has elapsed. So Dionysius constitutes the fifth witness of the series by virtue of the fact that the first four witnesses prove that in his time, Lord's day was the common name for first day of the week. But the first four testify to nothing of the kind until the words are by fraud put into their mouths! Dionysius is a witness for the Sunday-Lord's day because that four fraudulent testimonials from the generations preceding him fix this as the meaning of his words!

And the name Lord's day must have been a very common one for first day of the week because Dionysius does not define the term! And yet those who say this know that this one sentence of his epistle remains, while the connection, which doubtless fixed his meaning, has perished.

But Dionysius does not merely use the term Lord's day. He uses a stronger term than this - "the Lord's holy day." Even for a long period after Dionysius, no writer gives to Sunday so sacred a title as "the Lord's holy day." Yet this is the very title given to the Sabbath in the Holy Scriptures, and it is a well-ascertained fact that at this very time it was extensively observed, especially in Greece, the country of Dionysius, and that, too, as an act of

obedience to the fourth commandment.[6](#)

6. The sixth witness in this remarkable series is Melito of Sardis, A.D. 177. The first four, who never use the term Lord's day, are by direct fraud made to call Sunday by that name; the fifth, who speaks of the Lord's holy day, is claimed on the strength of these frauds to have meant by it Sunday; while the sixth is not certainly proved to have spoken of any day! Melito wrote several books now lost, the titles of which have been preserved to us by Eusebius.[7](#) One of these, as given in the English version of Eusebius, is "On the Lord's Day." Of course, first-day writers claim that this was a treatise concerning Sunday, though down to this point no writer calls Sunday by this name. But it is an important fact that the word day formed no part of the title of Melito's book. It was a discourse on something pertaining to the Lord - *d peri tes kuriakes logos* - but the essential word *emeras*, day, is wanting. It may have been a treatise on the life of Christ, for Ignatius thus uses these words in connection: *kuriaken xoen*, Lord's life. Like the sentence from Dionysius, it would not even seem to help the claim of Sunday to the title of Lord's day were it not for the series of frauds in which it stands.

7. The seventh witness summoned to prove that Lord's day was the apostolic title of Sunday, is Irenaeus. Dr. Justin Edwards professes to quote him as follows:[8](#)

"Hence Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp, who had been the companion of the apostles, A.D. 167 (it should be A.D. 178), says that the Lord's day was the Christian Sabbath. His words are, 'On the Lord's day every one of us Christians keeps the Sabbath, meditating on the law, and rejoicing in the works of God.' "

This witness is brought forward in a manner to give the utmost weight and authority to his words. He was the disciple of that eminent Christian martyr, Polycarp, and Polycarp was the companion of the apostles. What Irenaeus says is therefore in the estimation of many as worthy of our confidence as though we could read it in the writings of the apostles. Does not Irenaeus call Sunday the Christian Sabbath and the Lord's day? Did he not learn these things from Polycarp? And did not Polycarp get them from the fountain head? What need have we of further witness that Lord's day is the apostolic name for Sunday? What if the six earlier witnesses have failed us? Here is one that says all that can be asked, and he had his doctrine from a man who had his from the apostles!

Why then does not this establish the authority of Sunday as the Lord's day? The first reason is that neither Irenaeus nor any other man can add to or change one precept of the word of God, on any pretense whatever. We are never authorized to depart from the words of the inspired writers on the testimony of men who conversed with the apostles, or rather who conversed with some who had conversed with them. But the second reason is that every word of this pretended testimony of Irenaeus is a fraud! Nor is there a single instance in which the term Lord's day is to be found in any of his works, nor in any fragment of his works preserved in other authors![9](#) And this completes the seven witnesses by whom the Lord's day of the Catholic church is traced back to and identified with the Lord's day of the Bible! It is not till A.D. 194, sixteen years after the latest of these witnesses, that we meet the first instance in which Sunday is called the Lord's day. In other words, Sunday is not called the Lord's day till ninety-eight years after John was upon Patmos, and one hundred and sixty-three years after the resurrection of Christ!

But is not this owing to the fact that the records of that period have perished? By no means; for the day is six times mentioned by the inspired writers between the resurrection of Christ, A.D. 31, and John's vision upon Patmos, A.D. 96; namely, by Matthew, A.D. 41; by Paul, A.D. 57; by Luke, A.D. 60, and A.D. 63; and by Mark, A.D. 64; and always as first day of the week. John, after his return from Patmos, A.D. 97, twice mentions the day, still calling it first day of the week.

After John's time, the day is next mentioned in the so-called epistle of Barnabas, written probably as early as A.D. 140, and is there called "the eighth day." Next it is mentioned by Justin Martyr in his Apology, A.D. 140, once as "the day on which we all hold our common assembly;" once as "the first day on which God . . . made the world;" once as "the same day (on which Christ) rose from the dead;" once as "the day after that of Saturn;" and three times as "Sunday," or "the day of the sun." Next the day is mentioned by Justin Martyr in his Dialogue with Trypho, A.D. 155, in which he twice calls it the "eighth day;" once "the first of all the days;" once as "the first" "of all the days of the (weekly) cycle;" and twice as "the first day after the Sabbath." Next it is once mentioned by Irenaeus, A.D. 178, who calls it simply the first day of the week." And next it is mentioned once by Bardesanes, who calls it simply "the first of the week." The variety of names by which the day is mentioned during this time is remarkable; but it is never called Lord's day, nor ever called by any sacred name.

Though Sunday is mentioned in so many different ways during the second century, it is not till we come almost to the close of that century that we find the first instance in which it is called Lord's day. Clement, of Alexandria, A.D. 194, uses this title with reference to "the eighth day." If he speaks of a natural day, he no doubt means Sunday. It is not certain, however, that he speaks of a natural day, for his explanation gives to the term an entirely different sense. Here are his words:

"And the Lord's day Plato prophetically speaks of in the tenth book of the Republic, in these words: 'And when seven days have passed to each of them in the meadow, on the eighth they are to set out and arrive in four days.' By the meadow is to be understood the fixed sphere, as being a mild and genial spot, and the locality of the pious; and by the seven days, each motion of the seven planets, and the whole practical art which speeds to the end of rest. But after the wandering orbs, the journey leads to Heaven, that is, to the eighth motion and day. And he says that souls are gone on the fourth day, pointing out the passage through the four elements. But the seventh day is recognized as sacred, not by the Hebrews only, but also by the Greeks; according to which the whole world of all animals and plants revolve."[10](#)

Clement was originally a heathen philosopher, and these strange mysticisms which he here puts forth upon the words of Plato are only modifications of his former heathen notions. Though Clement says that Plato speaks of the Lord's day, it is certain that he does not understand him to speak of literal days nor of a literal meadow. On the contrary, he interprets the meadow to represent "the fixed sphere, as being a mild and genial spot, and the locality of the pious;" which must refer to their future inheritance. The seven days are not so many literal days, but they represent "each motion of the seven planets, and the whole practical art which speeds to the end of rest." This seems to represent the present period of labor which is to end in the rest of the saints. For he adds: "But after the wandering orbs (represented by Plato's seven days) the journey leads to Heaven, that is, to the eighth motion and day." The seven days, therefore, do here represent the period of the Christian's pilgrimage, and the eighth day of which Clement here speaks is not Sunday, but Heaven itself! Here is the first instance of Lord's day as a name for the eighth day, but this eighth day is a mystical one, and means Heaven!

But Clement uses the term Lord's day once more, and this time clearly, as representing, not a literal day, but the whole period of our regenerate life. For he speaks of it in treating of fasting, and he sets forth fasting as consisting in abstinence from sinful pleasures, not only in deeds, to use his distinction, as forbidden by the law, but in thoughts, as forbidden by the gospel. Such fasting pertains to the entire life of the Christian. And thus Clement sets forth what is involved in observing this duty in the gospel sense:

"He, in fulfillment of the precept, according to the gospel, keeps the Lord's day, when he abandons

an evil disposition, and assumes that of the Gnostic, glorifying the Lord's resurrection in himself."[11](#)

From this statement we learn, not merely his idea of fasting, but also that of celebrating the Lord's day, and glorifying the resurrection of Christ. This, according to Clement, does not consist in paying special honors to Sunday, but in abandoning an evil disposition, and in assuming that of the Gnostic, a Christian sect to which he belonged. Now it is plain that this kind of Lord's-day observance pertains to no one day of the week, but embraces the entire life of the Christian. Clement's Lord's day was not a literal, but a mystical, day, embracing, according to this, his second use of the term, the entire regenerate life of the Christian; and according to his first use of the term, embracing also the future life in Heaven. And this view is confirmed by Clement's statement of the contrast between the Gnostic sect to which he belonged and other Christians. He says of their worship that it was "NOT ON SPECIAL DAYS, as some others, but doing this continually in our whole life." And he speaks further of the worship of the Gnostic that it was "not in a specified place, or selected temple, or at certain festivals, and on appointed days, but during his whole life."[12](#)

It is certainly a very remarkable fact that the first writer who speaks of the Lord's day as the eighth day uses the term, not with reference to a literal, but a mystical, day. It is not Sunday, but the Christian's life, or Heaven itself! This doctrine of a perpetual Lord's day, we shall find alluded to in Tertullian, and expressly stated in Origen, who are the next two writers that use the term Lord's day. But Clement's mystical or perpetual Lord's day shows that he had no idea that John, by Lord's day, meant Sunday; for in that case, he must have recognized that as the true Lord's day, and the Gnostics' special day of worship.

Tertullian, A.D. 200, is the next writer who uses the term Lord's day. He defines his meaning, and fixes the name upon the day of Christ's resurrection. Kitto[13](#) says this is "the earliest authentic instance" in which the name is thus applied, and we have proved this true by actual examination of every writer, unless the reader can discover some reference to Sunday in Clement's mystical eighth day. Tertullian's words are these:

"We, however (just as we have received), only on the Lord's day of the resurrection (solo die dominico resurrectionis) ought to guard, not only against kneeling, but every posture and office of solicitude; deferring even our business, lest we give any place to the devil. Similarly, too, in the period of Pentecost; which period we distinguish by the same solemnity of exultation."[14](#)

Twice more does Tertullian use the term Lord's day, and once more does he define it, this time calling it the "eighth day." And in each of these two cases does he place the day which he calls Lord's day in the same rank with the Catholic festival of Pentecost, even as he does in the instance already quoted. As the second instance of Tertullian's use of Lord's day, we quote a portion of the rebuke which he addressed to his brethren for mingling with the heathen in their festivals. He says:

"Oh! better fidelity of the nations to their own sects, which claims no solemnity of the Christians for itself! Not the Lord's day, not Pentecost, even if they had known them, would they have shared with us; for they would fear lest they should seem to be Christians. We are not apprehensive lest we seem to be heathens! If any indulgence is to be granted to the flesh, you have it. I will not say your own days, but more too; for to the heathens each festive day occurs but once annually; you have a festive day every eighth day."[15](#)

The festival which Tertullian here represents as coming every eighth day was no doubt the one which he has just called the Lord's day. Though he elsewhere[16](#) speaks of the Sunday festival as observed at least by some portion of the heathen, he here speaks of the Lord's day as unknown to those heathen of whom he now writes.

This strongly indicates that the Sunday festival had but recently begun to be called by the name of Lord's day. But he once more speaks of the Lord's day:

"As often as the anniversary comes round, we make offerings for the dead as birth-day honors. We count fasting or kneeling in worship on the Lord's day to be unlawful. We rejoice in the same privilege also from Easter to Whitsunday (the Pentecost). We feel pained should any wine or bread, even though our own, be cast upon the ground. At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign [of the cross].

"If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. Tradition will be held forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer. That reason will support tradition, and custom, and faith, you will either yourself perceive, or learn from some one who has."[17](#)

This completes the instances in which Tertullian uses the term Lord's day, except a mere allusion to it in his discourse on Fasting. It is very remarkable that in each of the three cases, he puts it on a level with the festival of Whitsunday, or Pentecost. He also associates it directly with "offerings for the dead" and with the use of "the sign of the cross." When asked for authority from the Bible for these things, he does not answer, "We have the authority of John for the Lord's day, though we have nothing but tradition for the sign of the cross and offerings for the dead." On the contrary, he said there was no Scripture injunction for any of them. If it be asked, How could the title of Lord's day be given to Sunday except by tradition derived from the apostles? the answer will be properly returned, What was the origin of offerings for the dead? And how did the sign of the cross come into use among Christians? The title of Lord's day as a name for Sunday is no nearer apostolic than is the sign of the cross, and offerings for the dead; for it can be traced no nearer to apostolic times than can these most palpable errors of the great apostasy.

Clement taught a perpetual Lord's day; Tertullian held a similar view, asserting that Christians should celebrate a perpetual Sabbath, not by abstinence from labor, but from sin.[18](#) Tertullian's method of Sunday observance will be noticed hereafter.

Origen, A.D. 231, is the third of the ancient writers who call "the eighth day" the Lord's day. He was the disciple of Clement, the first writer who makes this application. It is not strange, therefore, that he should teach Clement's doctrine of a perpetual Lord's day, nor that he should state it even more distinctly than did Clement himself. Origen, having represented Paul as teaching that all days are alike, continues thus:

"If it be objected to us on this subject that we ourselves are accustomed to observe certain days, as for example the Lord's day, the Preparation, the Passover, or Pentecost, I have to answer, that to the perfect Christian, who is ever in his thoughts, words, and deeds, serving his natural Lord, God the Word, all his days are the Lord's, and he is always keeping the Lord's day."[19](#)

This was written some forty years after Clement had propounded his doctrine of the Lord's day. The imperfect Christian might honor a Lord's day which stood in the same rank with the Preparation, the Passover, and the Pentecost. But the perfect Christian observed the true Lord's day, which embraced all the days of his regenerate life. Origen uses the term Lord's day for two different days. 1. For a natural day, which in his judgment stood in the same rank with the Preparation day, the Passover, and the Pentecost. 2. For a mystical day, as did Clement,

which is the entire period of the Christian's life. The mystical day, in his estimation, was the true Lord's day. It therefore follows that he did not believe Sunday to be the Lord's day by apostolic appointment. But, after Origen's time, Lord's day becomes a common name for the so-called eighth day. Yet these three men, Clement, Tertullian, and Origen, who first make this application, not only do not claim that this name was given to the day by the apostles, but do plainly indicate that they had no such idea. Offerings for the dead and the use of the sign of the cross are found as near to apostolic times as is the use of Lord's day as a name for Sunday. The three have a common origin, as shown by Tertullian's own words. Origen's views of the Sabbath, and of the Sunday festival, will be noticed hereafter.

Such is the case with the claim of Sunday to the title of Lord's day. The first instance of its use, if Clement be supposed to refer to Sunday, is not till almost one century after John was in vision upon Patmos. Those who first call it by that name had no idea that it was such by divine or apostolic appointment, as they plainly show. In marked contrast with this is the Catholic festival of the Passover. Though never commanded in the New Testament, it can be traced back to men who say that they had it from the apostles!

Thus the churches of Asia Minor had the festival from Polycarp who, as Eusebius states the claim of Polycarp, had "observed it with John the disciple of our Lord, and the rest of the apostles with whom he associated."[20](#) Socrates says of them that they maintain that this observance "was delivered to them by the apostle John."[21](#) Anatolius says of these Asiatic Christians that they received "the rule from an unimpeachable authority, to wit, the evangelist John."[22](#)

Nor was this all. The western churches also, with the church of Rome at their head, were strenuous observers of the Passover festival. They also traced the festival to the apostles. Thus Socrates says of them: "The Romans and those in the western parts assure us that their usage originated with the apostles Peter and Paul."[23](#) But he says these parties cannot prove this by written testimony. Sozomen says of the Romans, with respect to the Passover festival, that they "have never deviated from their original usage in this particular; the custom having been handed down to them by the holy apostles Peter and Paul."[24](#)

If the Sunday-Lord's day could be traced to a man who claimed to have celebrated it with John and other of the apostles, how confidently would this be cited as proving positively that it is an apostolic institution! And yet this can be done in the case of the Passover festival! Nevertheless, a single fact in the case of this very festival is sufficient to teach us the folly of trusting in tradition. Polycarp claimed that John and other of the apostles taught him to observe the festival on the fourteenth day of the first month, whatever day of the week it might be; while the elders of the Roman church asserted that Peter and Paul taught them that it must be observed on the Sunday following Good Friday![25](#)

The Lord's day of the Catholic church can be traced no nearer to John than A.D. 194, or perhaps in strict truth to A.D. 200, and those who then use the name show plainly that they did not believe it to be the Lord's day by apostolic appointment. To hide these fatal facts by seeming to trace the title back to Ignatius the disciple of John, and thus to identify Sunday with the Lord's day of that apostle, a series of remarkable frauds has been committed which we have had occasion to examine. But even could the Sunday-Lord's day be traced to Ignatius, the disciple of John, it would then come no nearer being an apostolic institution than does the Catholic festival of the Passover, which can be traced to Polycarp, another of John's disciples, who claimed to have received it from John himself!

1 The writer has prepared a small work entitled, "The complete Testimony of the Fathers of the first Three Centuries concerning the Sabbath and First Day," in which, with the single exception of Origen, some of whose works were not at that time accessible, every passage in the fathers which gives their views of the Sabbath and first-day is presented. This pamphlet can be had of the publishers of the present work for fifteen cents. To save space in this History, a general statement of the doctrine of the fathers is here made with brief quotations of their words. But in "The Complete Testimony of the Fathers" every passage is given in their own words, and to this little work the reader is referred. <[Return](#)>

2 Those who dispute these statements are invited to present the words of the fathers which modify or disprove them. The reader who may not have access to the writing of the fathers is referred to the pamphlet already mentioned in which their complete testimony is given. <[Return](#)>

3 See the testimony on page 189 of this work. <[Return](#)>

4 Justin Martyr's First Apology, chap. lxvii. <[Return](#)>

5 Eusebius's Eccl. Hist., book iv. chap. xxiii. <[Return](#)>

6 See chap. xviii. of this History. <[Return](#)>

7 See his Ecclesiastical History, book iv. chap. xxvi. <[Return](#)>

8 Sabbath Manual, p. 114. <[Return](#)>

9 See chap. xvi. of this work; and also Testimony of the Fathers, pp. 44-52. <[Return](#)>

10 The Miscellanies of Clement, book v. chap. xiv. <[Return](#)>

11 The Miscellanies of Clement, book vii. chap. xii.; Testimony of the Fathers, p. 61. <[Return](#)>

12 The Miscellanies, book vii. chap. vii.; Testimony of the Fathers, p. 62. <[Return](#)>

13 Kitto's Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature, original edition, article Lord's Day. <[Return](#)>

14 Tertullian on Prayer, chap. xxiii.; Testimony of the Fathers, p. 67. <[Return](#)>

15 On Idolatry, chap. xiv.; Testimony of the Fathers, p. 66. <[Return](#)>

16 Ad Nationes, book i. chap. xiii.; Testimony of the Fathers, p. 70. <[Return](#)>

17 De Corona, sects. 3 and 4; Testimony of the Fathers, pp. 68, 69. <[Return](#)>

18 An Answer to the Jews, chap. iv.; Testimony of the Fathers, p. 73. <[Return](#)>

19 Against Celcus, book 8. chap. xxii.; Testimony of the Fathers, p. 87. <[Return](#)>

20 Eusebius's Eccl. Hist., book v. chap. xxiv. <[Return](#)>

21 Socrates's Eccl. Hist., book v. chap. xxii. <[Return](#)>

22 Anatolius, Tenth Fragment. <[Return](#)>

23 Socrates's Eccl. Hist., book v. chap. xxii. <[Return](#)>

24 Sozomen's Eccl. Hist., book vii. chap. xviii.; see also Mosheim, book i. cent. 2, part ii. chap. iv. sect. 9. <[Return](#)>

25 Socrates's Eccl. Hist., book v. chap. xxii.; McClintock and Strong's Cyclopedia, vol. iii. p. 13; Bingham's Antiquities, p.1149. <[Return](#)>

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