

# CHAPTER 16

## ORIGIN OF FIRST-DAY OBSERVANCE

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*Sunday a heathen festival from remote antiquity - Origin of the name - Reasons which induced the leaders of the church to adopt this festival - It was the day generally observed by the Gentiles in the first centuries of the Christian era - To have taken a different day would have exceedingly inconvenient - They hoped to facilitate the conversion of the Gentiles by keeping the same day that they observed - Three voluntary weekly festivals in the church in memory of the Redeemer - Sunday soon elevated above the other two - Justin Martyr - Sunday observance first found in the church of Rome - Irenaeus - First act of papal usurpation was on behalf of Sunday - Tertullian - Earliest trace of abstinence from labor on Sunday - General statement of facts - The Roman church made its first great attack upon the Sabbath by turning it into a fast.*

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The festival of Sunday is more ancient than the Christian religion, its origin being lost in remote antiquity. It did not originate, however, from any divine command nor from piety toward God: on the contrary, it was set apart as a sacred day by the heathen world in honor of their chief god, the sun. It is from this fact that the first day of the week has obtained the name of Sunday, a name by which it is known in many languages. Webster thus defines the word:

"Sunday; so called because this day was anciently dedicated to the sun or to its worship. The first day of the week; the Christian Sabbath; a day consecrated to rest from secular employments, and to religious worship; the Lord's day."

And Worcester, in his large dictionary, uses similar language:

"Sunday; so named because anciently dedicated to the sun or to its worship. The first day of the week; the Christian Sabbath, consecrated to rest from labor and to religious worship; the Lord's day."

These lexicographers call Sunday the Christian Sabbath, etc., because in the general theological literature of our language, it is thus designated, though never thus in the Bible. Lexicographers do not undertake to settle theological questions, but simply to define terms as currently used in a particular language. Though all the other days of the week have heathen names, Sunday alone was a conspicuous heathen festival in the days of the early church. The North British Review, in a labored attempt to justify the observance of Sunday by the Christian world, styles that day, "THE WILD SOLAR HOLIDAY [i.e., festival in honor of the sun] OF ALL PAGAN TIMES."<sup>1</sup>

Verstegan says:

"The most ancient Germans being pagans, and having appropriated their first day of the week to the peculiar adoration of the sun, whereof that day doth yet in our English tongue retain the name of Sunday, and appropriated the next day unto it unto the especial adoration of the moon, whereof it yet retaineth with us, the name of Monday; they ordained the next day to these most heavenly

planets to the particular adoration of their great reputed god, Tuisco, whereof we do yet retain in our language the name of Tuesday."2

The same author thus speaks concerning the idols of our Saxon ancestors:

"Of these, though they had many, yet seven among the rest they especially appropriated unto the seven days of the week. . . . Unto the day dedicated unto the especial adoration of the idol of the sun, they gave the name of Sunday, as much as to say the sun's day or the day of the sun. This idol was placed in a temple, and there adored and sacrificed unto, for that they believed that the sun in the firmament did with or in this idol correspond and co-operate."3

Jennings makes this adoration of the sun more ancient than the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. For, in speaking of the time of that deliverance, he speaks of the Gentiles as,

"The idolatrous nations who in honor to their chief god, the sun, began their day at his rising."4

He represents them also as setting apart Sunday in honor of the same object of adoration:

"The day which the heathens in general consecrated to the worship and honor of their chief god, the sun, which, according to our computation, was the first day of the week."5

The North British Review thus defends the introduction of this ancient heathen festival into the Christian church:

"That very day was the Sunday of their heathen neighbors and respective countrymen; and patriotism gladly united with expediency in making it at once their Lord's day and their Sabbath. . . . If the authority of the church is to be ignored altogether by Protestants, there is no matter; because opportunity and common expediency are surely argument enough for so ceremonial a change as the mere day of the week for the observance of the rest and holy convocation of the Jewish Sabbath. That primitive church, in fact, was shut up to the adoption of the Sunday, until it became established and supreme, when it was too late to make another alteration; and it was no irreverent nor undelightful thing to adopt it, inasmuch as the first day of the week was their own high day at any rate; so that their compliance and civility were rewarded by the redoubled sanctity of their quiet festival."6

It would seem that something more potent than "patriotism" and "expediency" would be requisite to transform this heathen festival into the Christian Sabbath, or even to justify its introduction into the Christian church. A further statement of the reasons which prompted its introduction, and a brief notice of the earlier steps toward transforming it into a Christian institution, will occupy the remainder of this chapter. Chafie, a clergyman of the English Church, in 1652, published a work in vindication of first-day observance, entitled, "The Seventh-day Sabbath." After showing the general observance of Sunday by the heathen world in the early ages of the church, Chafie thus states the reasons which forbid the Christians attempting to keep any other day:

"1. Because of the contempt, scorn, and derision they thereby should be had in, among all the Gentiles with whom they lived. . . . How grievous would be their taunts and reproaches against the poor Christians living with them and under their power for their new set sacred day, had the Christians chosen any other than the Sunday . . . 2. Most Christians then were either servants or of the poorer sort of people; and the Gentiles, most probably, would not give their servants liberty

to cease from working on any other set day constantly, except on their Sunday. . . . 3. Because had they assayed such a change it would have been but labor in vain; . . . they could never have brought it to pass."<sup>7</sup>

Thus it is seen that at the time when the early church began to apostatize from God and to foster in its bosom human ordinances, the heathen world - as they had long done - very generally observed the first day of the week in honor of the sun. Many of the early fathers of the church had been heathen philosophers. Unfortunately they brought with them into the church many of their old notions and principles. Particularly did it occur to them that by uniting with the heathen in the day of weekly celebration they should greatly facilitate their conversion. The reasons which induced the church to adopt the ancient festival of the heathen as something made ready to hand, are thus stated by Morer:-

"It is not to be denied but we borrow the name of this day from the ancient Greeks and Romans, and we allow that the old Egyptians worshiped the sun, and as a standing memorial of their veneration, dedicated this day to him. And we find by the influence of their examples, other nations, and among them the Jews themselves, doing him homage;<sup>8</sup> yet these abuses did not hinder the fathers of the Christian church simply to repeal, or altogether lay by, the day or its name, but only to sanctify and improve both, as they did also the pagan temples polluted before with idolatrous services, and other instances wherein those good men were always tender to work any other change than what was evidently necessary, and in such things as were plainly inconsistent with the Christian religion; so that Sunday being the day on which the Gentiles solemnly adored that planet, and called it Sunday, partly from its influence on that day especially, and partly in respect to its divine body (as they conceived it), the Christians thought fit to keep the same day and the same name of it, that they might not appear causelessly peevish, and by that means hinder the conversion of the Gentiles, and bring a greater prejudice than might be otherwise taken against the gospel."<sup>9</sup>

In the time of Justin Martyr, Sunday was a weekly festival, widely celebrated by the heathen in honor of their god, the sun. And so, in presenting to the heathen emperor of Rome an "Apology" for his brethren, Justin takes care to tell him thrice that the Christians held their assemblies on this day of general observance.<sup>10</sup> Sunday therefore makes its first appearance in the Christian church as an institution identical in time with the weekly festival of the heathen, and Justin, who first mentions this festival, had been a heathen philosopher. Sixty years later, Tertullian acknowledges that it was not without an appearance of truth that men declared the sun to be the god of the Christians. But he answered that though they worshiped toward the east like the heathen, and devoted Sunday to rejoicing, it was for a reason far different from sun-worship.<sup>11</sup> And on another occasion, in defending his brethren from the charge of sun-worship, he acknowledges that these acts, prayer toward the east, and making Sunday a day of festivity, did give men a chance to think the sun was the God of the Christians.<sup>12</sup> Tertullian is therefore a witness to the fact that Sunday was a heathen festival when it obtained a foothold in the Christian church, and that the Christians, in consequence of observing it, were taunted with being sun-worshippers. It is remarkable that in his replies he never claims for their observance any divine precept or apostolic example. His principal point was that they had as good a right to do it as the heathen had. One hundred and twenty one years after Tertullian, Constantine, while yet a heathen, put forth his famous edict in behalf of the heathen festival of the sun, which day he pronounced "venerable." And this heathen law caused the day to be observed everywhere throughout the Roman Empire, and firmly established it both in Church and State. It is certain, therefore, that at the time of its entrance into the Christian church, Sunday was an ancient weekly festival of the heathen world.

That this heathen festival was upon the day of Christ's resurrection doubtless powerfully contributed to aid "patriotism" and "expediency" in transforming it into the Lord's day or Christian Sabbath. For, with pious motives, as we may reasonably conclude, the professed people of God early paid a voluntary regard to several days, memorable in the history of the Redeemer. Mosheim, whose testimony in behalf of Sunday has been presented already, uses the following language relative to the crucifixion day:

"It is also probable that Friday, the day of Christ's crucifixion, was early distinguished by particular honors from the other days of the week."[13](#)

And of the second century, he says:

"Many also observed the fourth day of the week, on which Christ was betrayed; and the sixth, which was the day of his crucifixion."[14](#)

Dr. Peter Heylyn says of those who chose Sunday:

"Because our Saviour rose that day from amongst the dead, so chose they Friday for another, by reason of our saviour's passion; and Wednesday on the which he had been betrayed: the Saturday, or ancient Sabbath, being meanwhile retained in the eastern churches."[15](#)

Of the comparative sacredness of these three voluntary festivals, the same writer testifies:

"If we consider either the preaching of the word, the ministration of the sacraments, or the public prayers: the Sunday in the eastern churches had no great prerogative above other days, especially above the Wednesday and the Friday, save that the meetings were more solemn, and the concourse of people greater than at other times, as is most likely."[16](#)

And besides these three weekly festivals, there were also two annual festivals of great sacredness. These were the Passover and the Pentecost. And it is worthy of special notice that although the Sunday festival can be traced no higher in the church than Justin Martyr, A.D. 140, the Passover can be traced to a man who claimed to have received it from the apostles. See chapter thirteen. Among these festivals, considered simply as voluntary memorials of the Redeemer, Sunday had very little pre-eminence. For it is well stated by Heylyn:-

"Take which you will, either the fathers or the moderns, and we shall find no Lord's day instituted by any apostolical mandate; no Sabbath set on foot by them upon the first day of the week."[17](#)

Domville bears the following testimony, which is worthy of lasting remembrance:

"Not any ecclesiastical writer of the first three centuries attributed the origin of Sunday observance either to Christ or to his apostles."[18](#)

"Patriotism" and "expediency," however, ere long elevated immeasurably above its fellows that one of these voluntary festivals which corresponded to "the wild solar holiday" of the heathen world, making that day at last "the Lord's day" of the Christian church. The earliest testimony in behalf of first-day observance that has any claim to be regarded as genuine is that of Justin Martyr, written about A.D. 140. Before his conversion, he was a heathen philosopher. The time, place, and occasion of his first Apology or Defense of the Christians, addressed to the Roman Emperor, is thus stated by an eminent Roman Catholic historian. He says that Justin Martyr

"Was at Rome when the persecution that was raised under the reign of Antoninus Pius, the successor of Adrian, began to break forth, where he composed an excellent apology in behalf of the Christians."[19](#)

Of the works ascribed to Justin Martyr, Milner says:

"Like many of the ancient fathers he appears to us under the greatest disadvantage. Works really his have been lost; and others have been ascribed to him, part of which are not his; and the rest, at least, of ambiguous authority."[20](#)

If the writings ascribed to him are genuine, there is little propriety in the use made of his name by the advocates of the first-day Sabbath. He taught the abrogation of the Sabbatic institution; and there is no intimation in his words that the Sunday festival which he mentions was other than a voluntary observance. Thus he addresses the emperor of Rome:

"And upon the day called Sunday, all that live either in city or country meet together at the same place, where the writings of the apostles and prophets are read, as much as time will give leave; when the reader has done, the bishop makes a sermon, wherein he instructs the people, and animates them to the practice of such lovely precepts: at the conclusion of this discourse, we all rise up together and pray; and prayers being over, as I now said, there is bread and wine and water offered, and the bishop, as before, sends up prayers and thanksgivings, with all the fervency he is able, and the people conclude all with the joyful acclamation of Amen. Then the consecrated elements are distributed to, and partaken of, by all that are present, and sent to the absent by the hands of the deacons. But the wealthy and the willing, for every one is at liberty, contribute as they think fitting; and this collection is deposited with the bishop, and out of this he relieves the orphan and the widow, and such as are reduced to want by sickness or any other cause, and such as are in bonds, and strangers that come from far; and, in a word, he is the guardian and almoner to all the indigent. Upon Sunday we all assemble, that being the first day in which God set himself to work upon the dark void, in order to make the world, and in which Jesus Christ our Saviour rose again from the dead; for the day before Saturday he was crucified, and the day after, which is Sunday, he appeared unto his apostles and disciples, and taught them what I have now proposed to your consideration."[21](#)

This passage, if genuine, furnishes the earliest reference to the observance of Sunday as a religious festival in the Christian church. It should be remembered that this language was written at Rome, and addressed directly to the emperor. It shows therefore what was the practice of the church in that city and vicinity, but does not determine how extensive this observance was. It contains strong incidental proof that apostasy had made progress at Rome; the institution of the Lord's supper being changed in part already to a human ordinance; water being now as essential to the Lord's supper as the wine or the bread. And what is still more dangerous as perverting the institution of Christ, the consecrated elements were sent to the absent, a step which speedily resulted in their becoming objects of superstitious veneration, and finally of worship. Justin tells the emperor that Christ thus ordained; but such a statement is a grave departure from the truth of the New Testament.

This statement of reasons for Sunday observance is particularly worthy of attention. He tells the emperor that they assembled upon the day called Sunday. This was equivalent to saying to him, We observe the day on which our fellow-citizens offer their adoration to the sun. Here both "patriotism" and "expediency" discover themselves in the words of Justin, which were addressed to a persecuting emperor in behalf of the Christians. But as if

conscious that the observance of a heathen festival as the day of Christian worship was not consistent with their profession as worshipers of the Most High, Justin bethinks himself for reasons in defense of this observance. He assigns no divine precept nor apostolic example for this festival. For his reference to what Christ taught his disciples, as appears from the connection, was to the general system of the Christian religion, and not to the observance of Sunday. If it be said that Justin might have learned from tradition what is not to be found in the New Testament relative to Sunday observance, and that after all Sunday may be a divinely-appointed festival, it is sufficient to answer, 1. That this plea would show only tradition in favor of the Sunday festival. 2. That Justin Martyr is a very unsafe guide; his testimony relative to the Lord's supper differs from that of the New Testament. 3. That the American Tract Society, in a work which it publishes against Romanism, bears the following testimony relative to the point before us:

"Justin Martyr appears indeed peculiarly unfitted to lay claim to authority. It is notorious that he supposed a pillar erected on the island of the Tiber to Semo Sanchus, an old Sabine deity, to be a monument erected by the Roman people in honor of the impostor Simon Magus. Were so gross a mistake to be made by a modern writer in relating a historical fact, exposure would immediately take place, and his testimony would thenceforward be suspected. And assuredly the same measure should be meted to Justin Martyr, who so egregiously errs in reference to a fact alluded to by Livy the historian."[22](#)

Justin assigns the following reasons in support of Sunday observance: "That being the first day in which God set himself to work upon the dark void in order to make the world, and in which Jesus Christ our Saviour rose again from the dead." Bishop Jeremy Taylor most fittingly replies to this:

"The first of these looks more like an excuse than a just reason; for if anything of the creation were made the cause of a Sabbath, it ought to be the end, not the beginning; it ought to be the rest, not the first part of the work; it ought to be that which God assigned, not [that] which man should take by way of after justification."[23](#)

It is to be observed, therefore, that the first trace of Sunday as a Christian festival is found in the church of Rome. Soon after this time, and thenceforward, we shall find "the bishop" of that church making vigorous efforts to suppress the Sabbath of the Lord, and to elevate in its stead the festival of Sunday.

It is proper to note the fact also that Justin was a decided opponent of the ancient Sabbath. In his "Dialogue with Trypho the Jew" he thus addressed him:

"This new law teaches you to observe a perpetual Sabbath; and you, when you have spent one day in idleness, think you have discharged the duties of religion. . . . If any one is guilty of adultery, let him repent, then he hath kept the true and delightful Sabbath unto God. . . . For we really should observe that circumcision which is in the flesh, and the Sabbath, and all the feasts, if we had not known the reason why they were imposed upon you, namely, upon the account of your iniquities. . . . It was because of your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers, that God appointed you to observe the Sabbath. . . . You see that the heavens are not idle, nor do they observe the Sabbath. Continue as ye were born. For if before Abraham there was no need of circumcision, nor of the sabbaths, nor of feasts, nor of offerings before Moses; so now in like manner there is no need of them, since Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was by the determinate counsel of God, born of a virgin of the seed of Abraham without sin."[24](#)

This reasoning of Justin deserves no reply. It shows, however, the unfairness of Dr. Edwards, who quotes Justin Martyr as a witness for the change of the Sabbath;<sup>25</sup> whereas Justin held that God made the Sabbath on account of the wickedness of the Jews, and that he totally abrogated it in consequence of the first advent of Christ; the Sunday festival of the heathen being evidently adopted by the church at Rome from motives of "expediency" and perhaps of "patriotism." The testimony of Justin, if genuine, is peculiarly valuable in one respect. It shows that as late as A.D. 140 the first day of the week had acquired no title of sacredness; for Justin several times mentions the day: thrice as "the day called Sunday;" and twice as "the eighth day;" and by other terms also, but never by any sacred name.<sup>26</sup>

The next important witness in behalf of first-day sacredness is thus presented by Dr. Edwards:

"Hence Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp, who had been the companion of the apostles, A.D. 167, 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.' "<sup>27</sup>

This testimony is highly valued by first-day writers, and is often and prominently set forth in their publications. Sir Wm. Domville, whose elaborate treatise on the Sabbath has been several times quoted, states the following important fact relative to this quotation:

"I have carefully searched through all the extant works of Irenaeus and can with certainty state that no such passage, or any one at all resembling it, is there to be found. The edition I consulted was that by Massuet (Paris, 1710); but to assure myself still further, I have since looked to the editions by Erasmus (Paris, 1563), and Grabe (Oxford, 1702), and in neither do I find the passage in question."<sup>28</sup>

It is a remarkable fact that those who quote this as the language of Irenaeus, if they give any reference, cite their readers to Dwight's Theology instead of referring them to the place in the works of Irenaeus where it is to be found. It was Dr. Dwight who first enriched the theological world with this invaluable quotation. Where, then, did Dwight obtain this testimony which has so many times been given as that of Irenaeus? On this point Domville remarks:

"He had the misfortune to be afflicted with a disease in his eyes from the early age of twenty-three, a calamity (says his biographer) by which he was deprived of the capacity for reading and study. . . . The knowledge which he gained from books after the period above mentioned [by which the editor must mean his age of twenty-three] was almost exclusively at second hand, by the aid of others."<sup>29</sup>

Domville states another fact which gives us unquestionably the origin of this quotation:

"But although not to be found in Irenaeus, there are in the writings ascribed to another father, namely, in the interpolated epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians, and in one of its interpolated passages, expressions so clearly resembling those of Dr. Dwight's quotation as to leave no doubt of the source from which he quoted."<sup>30</sup>

Such, then, is the end of this famous testimony of Irenaeus, who had it from Polycarp, who had it from the apostles! It was furnished the world by a man whose eyesight was impaired; who in consequence of this infirmity

took at second hand an interpolated passage from an epistle falsely ascribed to Ignatius, and published it to the world as the genuine testimony of Irenaeus. Loss of eyesight, as we may charitably believe, led Dr. Dwight into the serious error which he has committed; but by the publication of this spurious testimony, which seemed to come in a direct line from the apostles, he has rendered multitudes as incapable of reading aright the fourth commandment, as he, by loss of natural eyesight, was of reading Irenaeus for himself. This case admirably illustrates tradition as a religious guide; it is the blind leading the blind until both fall into the ditch.

Nor is this all that should be said in the case of Irenaeus. In all his writings there is no instance in which he calls Sunday the Lord's day! And what is also very remarkable, there is no sentence extant written by him in which he even mentions the first day of the week!<sup>31</sup> It appears, however, from several statements in ancient writers, that he did mention the day, though no sentence of his in which it is mentioned is in existence. He held that the Sabbath was a typical institution, which pointed to the seventh thousand years as the great day of rest to the church;<sup>32</sup> he said that Abraham was "without observance of Sabbaths;"<sup>33</sup> and yet he makes the origin of the Sabbath to be the sanctification of the seventh day.<sup>34</sup> But he expressly asserts the perpetuity and authority of the ten commandments, declaring that they are identical with the law of nature implanted from the beginning in mankind, that they remain permanently with us, and that if any one does not observe them he has no salvation."<sup>35</sup>

It is a remarkable fact that the first instance upon record in which the bishop of Rome attempted to rule the Christian church was by AN EDICT IN BEHALF OF SUNDAY. It had been the custom of all the churches to celebrate the passover, but with this difference: that while the eastern churches observed it upon the fourteenth day of the first month, no matter what day of the week this might be, the western churches kept it upon the Sunday following that day; or rather, upon the Sunday following Good Friday. Victor, bishop of Rome, in the year 196,<sup>36</sup> took upon him to impose the Roman custom upon all the churches; that is, to compel them to observe the passover upon Sunday. "This bold attempt," says Bower, "we may call the first essay of papal usurpation."<sup>37</sup> And Dowling terms it the "earliest instance of Romish assumption."<sup>38</sup> The churches of Asia Minor informed Victor that they could not comply with his lordly mandate. Then, says Bower:

"Upon the receipt of this letter, Victor, giving the reins to an impotent and ungovernable passion, published bitter invectives against all the churches of Asia, declared them cut off from his communion, sent letters of excommunication to their respective bishops; and, at the same time, in order to have them cut off from the communion of the whole church, wrote to the other bishops, exhorting them to follow his example, and forbear communicating with their refractory brethren of Asia."<sup>39</sup>

The historian informs us that "not one followed his example or advice; not one paid any sort of regard to his letters, or showed the least inclination to second him in such a rash and uncharitable attempt." He further says:

"Victor being thus baffled in his attempt, his successors took care not to revive the controversy; so that the Asiatics peaceably followed their ancient practice till the Council of Nice, which out of complaisance to Constantine the Great, ordered the solemnity of Easter to be kept everywhere on the same day, after the custom of Rome."<sup>40</sup>

The victory was not obtained for Sunday in this struggle, as Heylyn testifies,

"Till the great Council of Nice [A.D. 325] backed by the authority of as great an emperor [Constantine] settled it better than before; none but some scattered schismatics, now and then

appearing, that durst oppose the resolution of that famous synod."[41](#)

Constantine, by whose powerful influence the Council of Nice was induced to decide this question in favor of the Roman bishop that is, to fix the passover upon Sunday, urged the following strong reason for the measure:

"Let us then have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews."[42](#)

This sentence is worthy of notice. A determination to have nothing in common with the Jews had very much to do with the suppression of the Sabbath in the Christian church. Those who rejected the Sabbath of the Lord and chose in its stead the more popular and more convenient Sunday festival of the heathen, were so infatuated with the idea of having nothing in common with the Jews, that they never even questioned the propriety of a festival in common with the heathen.

This festival was not weekly, but annual; but the removal of it from the fourteenth of the first month to the Sunday following Good Friday was the first legislation attempted in honor of Sunday as a Christian festival; and as Heylyn quaintly expresses it, "The Lord's day found it no small matter to obtain the victory."[43](#) In a brief period after the Council of Nice, by the laws of Theodosius, capital punishment was inflicted upon those who should celebrate the feast of the passover upon any other day than Sunday.[44](#) The Britons of Wales were long able to maintain their ground against this favorite project of the Roman church, and as late as the sixth century "obstinately resisted the imperious mandates of the Roman pontiffs."[45](#)

Four years after the commencement of the struggle just narrated, bring us to the testimony of Tertullian, the oldest of the Latin fathers, who wrote about A.D. 200. Dr. Clarke tells us that the fathers "blow hot and cold." Tertullian is a fair example of this. He places the origin of the Sabbath at the creation, but elsewhere says that the patriarchs did not keep it. He says that Joshua broke the Sabbath at Jericho, and afterward shows that he did not break it. He says that Christ broke the Sabbath, and in another place proves that he did not. He represents the eighth day as more honorable than the seventh, and elsewhere states the reverse. He states that the law is abolished, and in other places teaches its perpetuity and authority. He declares that the Sabbath was abrogated by Christ, and afterward asserts that "Christ did not at all rescind the Sabbath," but imparted "an additional sanctity" to "the Sabbath day itself, which from the beginning had been consecrated by the benediction of the Father." And he goes on to say that Christ "furnished to this day divine safeguards - a course which his adversary would have pursued for some other days, to avoid honoring the Creator's Sabbath."

This last statement is very remarkable. The Saviour furnished additional safeguards to the Creator's Sabbath. But "his adversary" would have done this to some other days. Now it is plain, first, that Tertullian did not believe that Christ sanctified some other day to take the place of the Sabbath; and second, that he believed the consecration of another day to be the work of the adversary of God! When he wrote these words he certainly did not believe in the sanctification of Sunday by Christ. But Tertullian and his brethren found themselves observing as a festival that day on which the sun was worshipped, and they were, in consequence, taunted with being worshipers of the sun. Tertullian denies the charge, though he acknowledges that there was some appearance of truth in it. He says:

"Others, again, certainly with more information and greater verisimilitude, believe that the sun is our God. We shall be counted Persians, perhaps, though we do not worship the orb of day painted on a piece of linen cloth, "having himself everywhere in his own disk. The idea, no doubt, has originated from our being known to turn to the east in prayer. But you, many of you, also, under pretense sometimes of worshipping the heavenly bodies, move your lips in the direction of the sunrise. In the same way, if we devote Sunday to rejoicing, from a far different reason than sun-

worship, we have some resemblance to those of you who devote the day of Saturn to ease and luxury, though they, too, go far away from Jewish ways, of which they are ignorant."[46](#)

Tertullian pleads no divine command nor apostolic example for this practice. In fact, he offers no reason for the practice, though he intimates that he had one to offer. But he finds it necessary in another work to repel this same charge of sun-worship, because of Sunday observance. In this second answer to this charge he states the ground of defense more distinctly, and here we shall find his best reason. These are his words:

"Others, with greater regard to good manners, it must be confessed, suppose that the sun is the god of the Christians, because it is a well-known fact that we pray toward the east, or because we make Sunday a day of festivity. What then? Do you do less than this? Do not many among you, with an affectation of sometimes worshipping the heavenly bodies likewise, move your lips in the direction of the sunrise? It is you, at all events, who have even admitted the sun into the calendar of the week; and you have selected its day (Sunday), in preference to the preceding day, as the most suitable in the week for either an entire abstinence for the bath, or for its postponement until the evening, or for taking rest, and for banqueting. By resorting to these customs, you deliberately deviate from your own religious rites to those of strangers."[47](#)

Tertullian, in this discourse, addresses himself to the nations still in idolatry. With some of these, Sunday was an ancient festival; with others, it was of comparatively recent date. But some of these heathen reproached the Sunday Christians with being sun-worshippers. And now observe the answer. He does not say, "We Christians are commanded to celebrate the first day of the week in honor of Christ's resurrection." His answer is doubtless the best that he knew how to frame. It is a mere retort, and consists in asserting, first, that the Christians had done no more than their accusers, the heathen; and second, that they had as good a right to make Sunday a day of festivity as had the heathen!

The origin of first-day observance has been the subject of inquiry in this chapter. We have found that Sunday from remote antiquity was a heathen festival in honor of the sun, and that in the first centuries of the Christian era this ancient festival was in general veneration in the heathen world. We have learned that patriotism and expediency, and a tender regard for the conversion of the Gentile world, caused leaders of the church to adopt as their religious festival the day observed by the heathen, and to retain the same name which the heathen had given it. We have seen that the earliest instance upon record of the actual observance of Sunday in the Christian church, is found in the church of Rome about A.D. 140. The first great effort in its behalf, A.D. 196, is by a singular coincidence the first act of papal usurpation. The first instance of a sacred title being applied to this festival, and the earliest trace of abstinence from labor on that day, are found in the writings of Tertullian at the close of the second century. The origin of the festival of Sunday is now before the reader; the steps by which it has ascended to supreme power will be pointed out in their proper order and place.

One fact of deep interest will conclude this chapter. The first great effort made to put down the Sabbath was the act of the church of Rome in turning it into a fast while Sunday was made a joyful festival. While the eastern churches retained the Sabbath, a portion of the western churches, with the church of Rome at their head, turned it into a fast. As a part of the western churches refused to comply with this ordinance, a long struggle ensued, the result of which is thus stated by Heylyn:

"In this difference it stood a long time together, till in the end the Roman church obtained the cause, and Saturday became a fast almost through all the parts of the western world. I say the western world, and of that alone: the eastern churches being so far from altering their ancient custom that in

the sixth council of Constantinople, A.D. 692, they did admonish those of Rome to forbear fasting on that day upon pain of censure."[48](#)

Wm. James, in a sermon before the University of Oxford, thus states the time when this fast originated:

"The western church began to fast on Saturday at the beginning of the third century."[49](#)

Thus it is seen that this struggle began with the third century, that is, immediately after the year 200. Neander thus states the motive of the Roman church:

"In the western churches, particularly the Roman, where opposition to Judaism was the prevailing tendency, this very opposition produced the custom of celebrating the Saturday in particular as a fast day."[50](#)

By Judaism, Neander meant the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath. Dr. Charles Hase, of Germany, states the object of the Roman church in very explicit language:

"The Roman church regarded Saturday as a fast day in direct opposition to those who regarded it as a Sabbath. Sunday remained a joyful festival in which all fasting and worldly business was avoided as much as possible, but the original commandment of the decalogue respecting the Sabbath was not then applied to that day."<sup>1</sup>

Lord King attests this fact in the following words:

"Some of the western churches, that they might not seem to Judaize, fasted on Saturday, as Victorinus Petavionensis writes: We use to fast on the seventh day. And it is our custom then to fast, that we may not seem, with the Jews, to observe the Sabbath."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the Sabbath of the Lord was turned into a fast in order to render it despicable before men. Such was the first great effort of the Roman church toward the suppression of the ancient Sabbath of the Bible.

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1 Vol. xviii. p. 409. <[Return](#)>

2 Verstegan's Antiquities, p. 10, London, 1628. <[Return](#)>

3 Antiquities, p. 68. <[Return](#)>

4 Jewish Antiquities, book iii. chap. i. See also McClintock and Strong's Cyclopedea, 4, 472, article Idolatry; Dr. A. Clarke on Job 1:26; and Dr. Gill on the same; Webster under the word Sabianism, and Worcester, under Sabian. <[Return](#)>

5 Id. book iii. chap. iii. <[Return](#)>

6 1 Vol. xviii. p. 409. <[Return](#)>

7 Pp. 61, 62. <[Return](#)>

- 8 2Kings 23:5; Jer.43:13, margin. <[Return](#)>
- 9 Dialogues on the Lord's day, pp. 22, 23. <[Return](#)>
- 10 Apology, chap. lxxvii.; Testimony of the Fathers, pp. 34, 35. <[Return](#)>
- 11 Apology, sect. 16; Testimony of the Fathers, pp. 64, 65. <[Return](#)>
- 12 Ad Nationes, book i. chap. xiii.; Testimony of the Fathers, p. 70. <[Return](#)>
- 13 Eccl. Hist., cent. 1, part ii. chap. iv. note <+> to sect. 4. <[Return](#)>
- 14 Eccl. Hist. cent. 2, part ii. chap. i. sect. 12. <[Return](#)>
- 15 History of the Sabbath, part ii. chap. i. sect. 12. <[Return](#)>
- 16 Id. part ii. chap. iii. sect. 4. <[Return](#)>
- 17 Hist. of the Sabbath, part ii. chap. i. sect. 10. <[Return](#)>
- 18 Examination of the Six Texts, Supplement, pp. 6, 7. <[Return](#)>
- 19 Du Pin's Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p. 50. <[Return](#)>
- 20 Hist. Church, cent. 2, chap. iii. <[Return](#)>
- 21 Justin Martyr's First Apology, translated by Wm. Reeves, p. 127, sects. 87, 88, 89. <[Return](#)>
- 22 The Spirit of Popery, pp. 44, 45. <[Return](#)>
- 23 Ductor Dubitantium, part i. book ii. chap. ii. rule 6, sect. 45. <[Return](#)>
- 24 Brown's Translation, pp. 48, 44, 52, 59, 63, 64. <[Return](#)>
- 25 Sabbath Manual, p. 121. <[Return](#)>
- 26 Dialogue with Trypho, p. 65. <[Return](#)>
- 27 Sabbath Manual, p. 114. <[Return](#)>
- 28 Examination of the Six Texts, pp. 131, 132. <[Return](#)>
- 29 Id. p. 128. <[Return](#)>
- 30 Id. p. 130. <[Return](#)>
- 31 See his full testimony in the Testimony of the Fathers, pp.. 44-52. <[Return](#)>
- 32 Against Heresies, book iv. chap. xvi. sects. 1, 2; Id. book v. chap.. xxviii. sect. 3. <[Return](#)>

33 Id. book iv. chap. xvi. sects 1, 2. <[Return](#)>

34 Id. book v. chap. xxxiii. sect. 2. <[Return](#)>

35 Against Heresies, book iv. chap. xv. sect. 1; chap. xiii. sect. 4. <[Return](#)>

36 Bower's History of the Popes, vol. i. pp. 18, 19; Rose's Neander, pp. 188-190; Dowling's History of Romanism, book i, chap. ii. sect. 9. <[Return](#)>

37 History of the Popes, vol. i. p. 18. <[Return](#)>

38 History of Romanism, heading of page 32. <[Return](#)>

39 History of the Popes, vol. i. p. 18. <[Return](#)>

40 Id. pp. 18, 19; Giesler's Eccl. Hist. vol. i. sect. 57. <[Return](#)>

41 History of the Sabbath, part ii. chap. ii. sects. 4, 5. <[Return](#)>

42 Boyle's Historical View of the Council of Nice, p. 52, ed. 1842. <[Return](#)>

43 Hist. Sab. part ii. chap. ii. sect. 5. <[Return](#)>

44 Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, chap. xxvii. <[Return](#)>

45 Id. chap. xxxviii. <[Return](#)>

46 Tertullian's Apology, sect. 16. <[Return](#)>

47 Tertullian Ad Nationes, book i. chap. xiii. <[Return](#)>

48 History of the Sabbath, part 2, chap. ii. sect. 3. <[Return](#)>

49 Sermons on the Sacraments and Sabbath, p. 166. <[Return](#)>

50 Neander, p. 186. <[Return](#)>

51 Ancient Church History, part i. div. 2, A.D. 100-312. sect. 69. <[Return](#)>

52 Enquiry into the Constitution of the Primitive Church, part ii. chap.. vii. sect. 11. See also Schaff's "History of the Christian Church," vol. i. p. 373 <[Return](#)>

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