

a brief history of
SUNDAY

from the new testament
to the new creation



JUSTO L. GONZÁLEZ

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“As he has in many other books, Justo González here puts to excellent use his singular combination of biblical, historical, theological, ecumenical, and cultural wisdom to explore a subject at the heart of individual Christian life, corporate Christian community, and public Christian witness. As it tracks variations, shifts, and controversies in ‘Sabbath’ observance from pre-Christian days to the present, this learned but wonderfully accessible book explains why corporate worship on ‘the Lord’s day’ should still be as encouraging as it has been so consistently for so many in the past.”

— MARK NOLL

author of *Jesus Christ and the
Life of the Mind*

“In his *Brief History of Sunday* Justo L. González demonstrates both an impressive command of history and a dexterous handling of sources. He concludes, provocatively, that Christian observance of Sunday in the twenty-first century might actually benefit from a reversion to the pre-Constantinian model, when Christianity was not the favored faith. This is a very good, informative, and lively book.”

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“With the extensive knowledge of an accomplished historian and the graceful skill of a storyteller, Justo González traverses the long and complex history of Sunday clearly and accessibly. Not only does he deepen our understanding of how we came to do the things we do, but he also offers a vision of the church’s future where Protestants and Catholics alike rediscover the ancient meaning of Sunday—a day of joy when we celebrate Christ’s resurrection, eagerly and actively anticipating the coming of the new creation.”

— KIMBERLY BRACKEN LONG

Columbia Theological Seminary

A Brief History of Sunday

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to the New Creation

JUSTO L. GONZÁLEZ

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Abbreviations

- 1 Apol.* Justin Martyr, *First Apology*
- ANF* *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1885-1887. 10 vols. Repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994
- Apol.* Tertullian, *Apology*
- ca.* circa
- Dial.* Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*
- Etymol.* Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*
- Inst.* John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T. McNeil. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. 2 vols. Library of Christian Classics 20-21. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960
- LW* *Luther's Works*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. Saint Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958-86
- NPNF2* *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2*. Edited by Philip Schaff. 1887-1894. 14 vols. Repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994
- NRSV* New Revised Standard Version
- PG* *Patrologia Graeca* [= *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*]. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857-1886
- PL* *Patrologia Latina* [= *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina*]. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844-1864
- Shabb.* *Shabbat*

Introduction

When I first told my friends that I was considering writing a history of Sunday, the most common reactions were what I expected. On the one hand, some of my Seventh-day Adventist friends began sending me books on the Sabbath and pointing me to other materials on the subject. On the other, some of my Methodist and Presbyterian friends encouraged me, saying that it was time for someone to speak up against the increasing secularization of Sunday with its soccer games, beach parties, and so forth.

I am afraid this book may disappoint such expectations; but I also hope it will surpass them. First, this is not a history of the Sabbath. It is not a history of how Christians came to abandon the seventh day. It is a history of Sunday, what Christians have thought about it, and how they have observed it. Therefore it touches on the Sabbath only as whatever was said or done about it touches on what was said or done on Sunday. There are evidences that the seventh day continued to be a day of great significance for many Christians for centuries, and I will refer to them as they touch on the subject of Sunday; but to follow such evidences in any detail falls beyond the scope of this book. Second, many may be surprised to learn that connecting Sunday with the fourth commandment finds very little warrant in the early church, and that calling Sunday "the Sabbath" is a relatively new phenomenon.

But beyond such disappointments lies a perhaps unexpected gift. It is the gift of rediscovering the joy and the excitement of

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Sunday as early Christians viewed and celebrated it. It is also the gift of understanding the process whereby that day of joy and celebration became a day of rest, and then a day of severe austerity—a severity whose demise some now bemoan, and others celebrate. But above all it is the gift of discovering, in this twenty-first century of increasing indifference or even hostility to Christianity, how some of the visions of Sunday as the church understood that day when it too lived in a hostile environment may be of help and inspiration to us in our day.

But that is enough. Let us begin unwrapping the gift.

The Background: Pre-Christian Calendars

Measuring Time

Keeping track of the cycles of time is a basic necessity of human life. Farmers need to know when to till and plant, when rain may be expected or not, and how long their harvest must last until the gathering of the next crop. Shepherds need to know when it is time to shear their sheep. Sailors must plan their voyages on the basis of the wind and weather to be expected at a particular time of the year. Hunters need to know when the moon will be full. Those who live by fishing need to know both the phases of the moon and the rhythm of the tides. And religious ceremonies must take place at appropriate times, relating to cycles of harvest and weather.

What immediately emerges as one thinks of these various examples is that the cyclical dimension of time is paramount. There certainly is a lineal dimension of time, for what is past will never return, and in an absolute sense every future will be unprecedented. What is of paramount importance for people in their daily life is not what happened a thousand years ago, or what will happen next century, but what tomorrow, next week, or next month will be like—that the sun will shine, that it will be cold, that it will not rain.

Such knowledge, based on the observations of generations and generations, is cyclical by its very nature. At the most basic level, there is the cycle of dawn, noon, dusk, night, and a new

dawn. At another level there is the cycle of the seasons, governed by the sun—usually directly, but sometimes indirectly, as with the flooding of the Nile or with the monsoons.

The Days of the Week

But these two cycles, the day and the year, do not suffice for the ordering of social and economic life. One is too brief, and the other too long. Hence the necessity for the intermediate cycles we usually call weeks and months. From the three-day week of the Basques, passing through the ten-day week of the ancient Chinese and Egyptians, and to the thirteen-day week of the Aztecs, every civilization needs a way of counting days so as to organize its economic, social, and religious life. As part of its “Cult of Reason,” the French Revolution proposed a supposedly more rational calendar, with ten-day weeks; but it soon became clear that the tradition of a seven-day week was too deeply ingrained in the popular mentality—particularly since the heavenly bodies would not cooperate by subjecting the rhythm of their movements to what the French considered reasonable!

The seven-day week as we now know it seems to have originated among the ancient Semitic and Mesopotamian peoples. It certainly played a central role in Jewish life—a subject to which we will return. But it was also characteristic of other cultures and civilizations in Mesopotamia itself as well as west of it. Most scholars see a connection between the lunar cycle, which is roughly twenty-eight days, and the seven-day week, which would then correspond to each of the four phases of the moon.

We do know that at least by the sixth century BCE the Babylonian calendar was organized around a lunar cycle of twenty-eight days, beginning with the new moon, and divided into four “weeks” by a sequence of special days: the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth. These special days were considered ill-suited for business, and sacred in such a way that they were sometimes deemed evil or inauspicious. But the moon would not cooperate, for its cycle is not really twenty-eight days,

but a bit more. This had to be corrected by extending the final week of some months to eight or even nine days. The days of the typical seven-day week referred to the seven closest celestial bodies: the sun, the moon, and the five planets visible to the naked eye.

The calendars of ancient Greece are notoriously confused and confusing, for each city-state had its own calendar, and in some cases more than one. Athens, for instance, had three different calendars, each applying to a particular aspect of life: festivals, politics, and agriculture. This confusion lasted until the Hellenistic period, when Alexander's conquests brought Greece into closer contact with Mesopotamia and Syria, and the more rational calendars of those areas began making their way westward into Greece. In that process, the ancient Babylonian names were translated into Greek, thus becoming the days of the Sun, the Moon, Ares, Hermes, Zeus, Aphrodite, and Chronos.

Meanwhile, the ancient Romans had an eight-day week, devoting the eighth day to the market, when people from the countryside would bring their produce to the city. This was regulated by law in the third century BCE, forbidding certain activities that might conflict with market days—notably the holding of elections. In 45 BCE Julius Caesar reformed the Roman calendar, seeking to make the calendar year correspond more closely to the solar year, but he did not adopt the seven-day week that by then was common in the eastern reaches of his domains. However, the influence of Hellenistic culture on imperial Rome was great, and by the time of Augustus the seven-day week had begun to make headway, in part because it seemed to correspond more closely with the lunar cycles, and in part in imitation of what by then was common in the East. This led to the translation into Latin of the seven days of the week, which now became the days of the Sun, the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn. But the eight-day week also continued in use, conflicting and competing with the seven-day week. By the early third century, the seven-day week had become normative, although there were still remainders of the earlier longer week. By 321 CE, when Constantine officially abandoned the eight-day week, and

adopted its seven-day counterpart, the longer week had fallen into complete disuse.

The Jewish Calendar and the Sabbath

There has been—and still is—much debate about the origin of the Hebrew calendar and its relationship with other calendars, particularly in Mesopotamia. But there is no doubt that it, like most other calendars in the Middle East, was based on the number seven and its multiples. The basic unit was the week, culminating on the seventh day or Sabbath. After seven weeks—a week of weeks—there was a special fiftieth day of celebration. For this reason historians refer to this sort of calendar as a “pentecontad calendar”—from the Greek for “fifty.” The year then included seven such “fifties” or pentecontads, which would total 350 days. The number 365 was then reached by adding an extra festival week after the first four pentecontads, another after the seventh, and an extra day before that final week ($200 + 7 + 150 + 7 + 1 = 365$). The single day immediately after the seventh pentecontad was a special day, marked by the cutting of the first grain and its presentation as a sacrifice to God. The week immediately following it, just before the first pentecontad, was a harvest festival that eventually developed into the Feast of Booths. The other special week, immediately after the fourth pentecontad, was the time when Passover was celebrated, commemorating the liberation of the children of Israel from the yoke of Egypt. During this festival the last of the previous crop was consumed or destroyed, in preparation for the harvest to take place during the first pentecontad.

The principle of building the calendar around the number seven was then carried beyond the year itself, for every seventh year—every week of years—would be a sabbatical year, and after seven sabbatical years—a “week” of “weeks of years,” completing a pentecontad of years—would come the Year of Jubilee.

It was not only among the Hebrew people that the number seven had special significance. Indeed, it was seen as evil

throughout the vast region from Canaan to Mesopotamia—to the point that even in the twenty-first century some people living in that area still consider the number seven unlucky, and some will not even pronounce its name. Since the seventh day was evil, one was expected to abstain from all labor or any other activity that might lead to harm or accidents. Among the ancient peoples of the entire region the reason for resting on the seventh day was not a religious observance, and the day itself was not joyful. Thus what Israel did was to adopt the calendrical system of the nations surrounding it, but then change its nature in accordance to Israel's faith, with the result that the seventh day, originally one of doom and gloom, became a day of joy and celebration. This was a long process, for apparently at first the Sabbath rest applied solely to agricultural work, and then expanded to all other work. Now a day of comfort and leisure, the seventh day was also understood as a joyful day. Furthermore, it was to be a time of rest not only for the people practicing it but also for all others dependent on them—slaves, sojourners, animals, and fields.

In Jewish tradition, the Sabbath had such significance that the rest of the week was counted from that pivotal point: the first day after the Sabbath, the second after the Sabbath, and so forth. Furthermore, the Sabbath had such importance that sometimes the very word was used as a synonym for the entire period from Sabbath to Sabbath. This may be seen in Luke 18:12, where what the NRSV correctly translates as “twice a week” is literally “twice a Sabbath.”

While the Sabbath always had religious significance, grounded as it was in the divine commandment, it was not particularly a day of ritual worship—which normally took place at the temple, and therefore was not often accessible to those who did not reside near Jerusalem. Then the fall of Jerusalem, the exile in Babylonia, and the continued dispersion of Jews throughout the Roman and Persian Empires made worship at the temple impossible, giving added significance to ritual gatherings for the worship of Yahweh at a more local level. The day of rest, devoted as it was to the remembrance of God's covenant, was the most natural time for such gatherings. Hence the

growth of the synagogues, where Jews gathered on the Sabbath in order to worship and to read and study Scripture, but where no sacrifice was offered, for the synagogue was not a temple. Even after the return from the exile, when the temple was rebuilt, the synagogue continued existing as a parallel institution not only in distant places but also in Judea itself—as may be seen in the Gospels and in Acts. The great feast days were celebrated at the temple, and only there were ritual sacrifices offered; but the Sabbath observances and worship at the synagogue were available to Jews spread far and wide, while the temple itself was not. Thus by the time of Jesus the Sabbath had become not only a day of rest but also the paramount day of worship—this to such a point that when the temple was destroyed in 70 CE, Judaism was able to continue and even to flourish thanks to the synagogue and Sabbath observances.

Given its historical origins, it is not surprising that throughout the history of Israel there was a tension between the Sabbath as a day of joy and the Sabbath as a day of strict observance to the point that would make it burdensome rather than liberating. As is a common occurrence in every religious tradition, there was a marked tendency to minute codification and legalistic interpretations. Thus the Mishnah (*Shabb. 7.2*) lists thirty-nine forbidden activities, such as plowing, reaping, sewing, and even tying knots. But that was not enough, for it then became necessary to determine what was a knot and what was not, some coming to the conclusion that a knot tied with one hand was not a knot. Even so, there was always a countercurrent emphasizing the comforting and freeing nature of the Sabbath, whose prohibitions had to do with joy and rest rather than with religious strictures. All of this stands at the background of the repeated conflicts of Jesus with synagogue leaders whose actions and regulations would seem to deprive the Sabbath of its joyful character and of its emphasis on providing joy and comfort also for others: servants, sojourners, beasts, fields, and all those who are hungry, ill, or suffering.

PART 1

BEFORE CONSTANTINE

Since it is often affirmed that it was Constantine who made Sunday a day of worship, and since there is no doubt that Constantine and his successors did bring about many changes in Sunday practices, it is advisable, in a history such as this, to begin by paying particular attention to pre-Constantinian Christianity. This was a time when the church had no official recognition, and therefore had to schedule its worship with as little conflict as possible with the activities and obligations of its members. It was also a period during which the church, originally all Jewish, became increasingly gentile, and therefore—as may be seen already in the New Testament—had to negotiate which Jewish customs to keep and which not.

Given that situation, one of our main interests in this first section of our history will be the obvious question of early Christian practices on what we now call Saturday and Sunday—which they would normally call the Sabbath and the first day after the Sabbath, or the first day of the week. But, since this is a history of Sunday, or of the first day of the week, we must also deal with early Christian practices during that day, as well as with the symbolism attached to it.

Therefore the main questions to be asked in this first section of the book will be: When did Christians begin the practice of gathering for worship on the first day of the week? What did they do on that day? How did they understand its significance?

Naming the Days

The First Day of the Week

All the early disciples of Jesus, as well as most Christians for several generations, were Jews. They therefore named the days of the week beginning from the Sabbath, as “the first day from the Sabbath,” and so forth. Thus, when the New Testament writers refer to what today we call “Sunday” they actually said something like “the first day [of] from the Sabbath.” The NRSV, as well as most other English versions, translate this properly as “the first day of the week.” This terminology is found in Matthew 28:1, where we are told that the women went to the grave on the dawn of “the first day of the week”—*mian sabbatōn*. With slightly different Greek words, the same reference to the “first day of the week” is found in Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1, John 20:1 (*mia tōn sabbatōn*), John 20:19 (*mia sabbatōn*), and Mark 16:9 (*prōtē sabbatou*). All of these are references to the resurrection of Jesus and his first appearance to the disciples.

While all the above are references to the resurrection of Jesus, there are two other places in the New Testament where the same terminology appears in connection with Christian life and worship. One is Acts 20:7, where the NRSV says: “On the first day of the week [*mia tōn sabbatōn*], when we were gathered together to break bread . . .” The other is in 1 Corinthians 16:2, where Paul instructs believers that “on the first day of every week [*mian sabbatou*], each of you is to put aside and save whatever you earn.”

While this terminology tended to fall into misuse as the church became mostly gentile, it did continue for some time. In the second century, Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with the Jew Trypho, declares that Jesus, “by rising on the first day of the week [*mia tōn sabbatōn hēmera*] circumcised us from error and evil” (*Dial.* 41.4).¹ And, although as we shall see the Greek and Latin churches soon began using different terminology, this ancient usage continued in the Syriac-speaking church.

The Lord’s Day

The name “the Lord’s day” appears for the first time in existing Christian literature in the Revelation of John 1:10: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day [*en tē kyriakē hēmera*], and I heard behind me a loud voice.” The “day of the Lord” is a theme that appears repeatedly in the Hebrew Scriptures as a future time when the Lord will take action against the wicked and for the righteous. It thus has eschatological overtones. It is interesting to notice that the author of Revelation, arguably the most immersed in Jewish culture and literature of all New Testament writers, seems to use the phrase “the day of the Lord” to refer to a particular day in his own life. Most scholars agree that this is a reference to the day when the church would gather in worship to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

By that time, the adjective meaning “of the Lord” [*kyriakos*] was generally employed in the Greek-speaking parts of the Roman Empire to refer to things imperial. (It is also the adjective that Paul employs in 1 Corinthians 11:20 to refer to the Lord’s Supper.) Thus, to refer to this particular day as “of the Lord” had important implications in two directions. First, it meant that the Jesus whose day this was was indeed the Lord. This obviously had political overtones, for Domitian, who reigned at the time when John wrote these words, claimed for himself the title of “Lord”—*kyrios*—with unprecedented vigor. Second, it had theological implications, for it seemed to indicate that the events being celebrated on this particular day had eschatological sig-

nificance—a theme to which we shall return when we deal with Sunday as “the eighth day.”

The Revelation of John does not say explicitly that “the Lord’s day” on which he had his vision was the first day of the week—although there is little reason to doubt it. The *Didache*, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, a document of unknown origin, but perhaps as early as 70 CE—and therefore even earlier than the Revelation of John—offers an instruction whose strange grammar would seem to indicate that by then, at least in some circles, the “Lord’s day” had become a standard way of referring to a particular day of the week. The instruction itself could be translated as follows: “gathering each Lord’s day, break bread and give thanks” (*Didache* 14.1). What the Greek actually says is “the Lord’s day of the Lord [*kyriakēn de kyriou*].” Such a repetition is best explained by taking the first as a standard reference to the particular day of the week that by then was called “the Lord’s”—*kyriaka*—and the second as referring to the Lord himself—*kyrios*. Early in the second century, in a passage whose full implications are not clear, Ignatius of Antioch, writing to the Magnesians and arguing against the “Judaizers,” claims that the prophets of old did not keep the Sabbath—literally, did not “Sabbathize”—but lived according to the Lord’s day—the *kyriaka* (*Epistle to the Magnesians* 9.1).

An indisputable identification of the Lord’s day—the *kyriaka*—with the first day of the week appears in one of the existing fragments of the Gospel of Peter, an apocryphal gospel probably dating from the middle of the second century. This text says: “During the night before the Lord’s day [*hē kyriakē*], while the soldiers were guarding [the tomb] in tandem, there was a great voice from heaven.” There are other such references to “the day of the Lord” from about the same time. Two or three decades after the writing of the Gospel of Peter, Melito of Sardis wrote an entire treatise *On the Lord’s Day—Peri kyriakēs logos*—which unfortunately has been lost.

From that point on, the Greek-speaking church used the term *kyriaka*—the Lord’s day—as the name of the first day of the week.

Meanwhile, the Latin-speaking church soon adopted the custom of referring to what we now call Sunday as the day of the Lord, of the *Dominus*. Hence the names for this day, *dominica* and *dominicus*. The earliest extant use of one of these words is in Tertullian's treatise *On Idolatry*. Arguing against Jews on the one hand and against pagans on the other, he rejects both the Sabbaths of the Jews and the religious festivals of the gentiles, and mentions two Christian celebrations that they reject, the Lord's day and Pentecost—*non Dominicum diem, non Pentecosten* (*De idolatria* 14). Likewise, in his treatise *On Fasting* he says that even in times of fasting the *dominicus* are excepted (*De jejuniis* 15). It must be pointed out, however, that it is possible to interpret some of Tertullian's references to the *dominicus* as referring to the Lord's Supper or eucharistic service; Cyprian, who was greatly influenced by Tertullian, uses the term with that meaning.

Whatever the case may be, Latin-speaking Christians soon adopted the Greek usage of referring to the first day of the week as the Lord's day—the *dominica dies*, or simply the *dominicus* or *dominica*.

The Day of the Sun

As we have seen, by the time of the advent of Christianity the Greeks had adopted the seven-day week, with each day named after a heavenly body, and the Romans had begun to follow suit. At that point the first and most important day was that of Chronos, or Saturn, followed by days dedicated to the Sun, the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, and Venus. But there was also a tendency to give increasing importance to the day of the Sun, partly because of the greater splendor of that heavenly body, and partly because the Unconquered Sun—*Sol invictus*—was worshiped by powerful political figures. Emperor Septimus Severus, who reigned at the turn from the second to the third century, paid particular homage to the Sun. Shortly thereafter, Aurelian established the solemn worship of the Sun as central to the religious practices of Rome.

Naming the Days

By the end of the third century, Constantius Chlorus, the father of Constantine, was a devotee of the *Sol invictus*, whose worship he also promoted as a sort of solar monotheism. Constantine himself was rather ambiguous about his own religion, which at least in his early years seems to have been a solar monotheism similar to his father's, which he then combined with Christianity - the latter progressively gaining the upper hand, although Constantine did not renounce the *Sol invictus* until his baptism, which took place when he was on his deathbed. Such developments were paralleled by a tendency, already noticeable in the second century, to think of the week as no longer beginning on the day of Saturn, but rather on the day of the Sun.

Even though Christians refused to worship the Sun, on occasion they were willing to refer to their particular day of worship as the day of the Sun. The reason for this was that for the Greco-Roman world at large the week began on the day of Saturn (what we now call Saturday). Given that situation, most people who were not Jewish or at least closely acquainted with Judaism would understand any reference to "the first day of the week" as meaning the day of Saturn, or what Christians and Jews considered the seventh day of the week. Thus Justin, addressing pagan readers in his *First Apology*, would show himself willing to use the name "day of the Sun" while at the same time distancing himself from it. He tells his readers that Christians gathered "on the day *that is commonly* called of the Sun," and then goes on to say that Jesus was crucified "the day before the day of Saturn," and that he appeared to his disciples "the day after the day of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun" (*1 Apol.* 67). (Note here the lingering importance of the day of Saturn, for Justin refers to Friday, not as the day of Venus, but rather as the day before the day of Saturn.)

That this vocabulary is a concession to his pagan readers, so they may understand what he is saying, is clear when we consider the fact that in another treatise, his *Dialogue with Trypho*, who is a Jew, Justin prefers the traditional Jewish understanding, referring to what we now call Sunday not as "the day that is commonly called of the Sun," but rather in the more traditional Jewish way, as "the first day of the week" (*Dial.* 41.4).

While Justin wrote in Greek, the same policy is reflected forty years later in Latin in the writings of Tertullian. In his *Apolo-gy*, he lists popular misconceptions of Christianity, which he then refutes or simply denies. The last of these, and apparently the one that causes him most concern, is that some seem to think that Christians worship the Sun. He explains the source of such a notion: “This understanding certainly comes from our custom to turn to the east in prayer, as is known. . . . Likewise, during the day of the sun [*die solis*] we rejoice, but for a very different reason than Sun-worship” (*Apol.* 16; see also *To the Nations* 13). But significantly, as in the case of Justin, he uses this name only when addressing prospective pagan readers, for in his other writings he usually refers to Sunday as the Lord’s day.

Eventually, particularly through the influence of Constantine and his family, it became much more common for Christians to refer to the first day of the week as “the day of the Sun.” But that is a development best left to another chapter.

Naming the Other Days

As we have seen, the naming of the days of the week after the heavenly bodies and their corresponding gods goes back to Babylon, and then through Greece to Rome. As the empire became Christian, church leaders often sought to purge the names of the week from their pagan connections. They succeeded in the Greek East, with the result that in modern Greek the days of the week are named in simple order following the Lord’s day: *deutera* (second), *tritē* (third), *tetratē* (fourth), and so on. The seventh day, however, still retains its original Jewish name, the Sabbath—*sabbato*.

Such efforts had less success in the Latin and Germanic West. The most notable exception is the Portuguese language. In the sixth century Martin of Dumio (or of Braga, ca. 528–530)—in what is now Portugal—wrote against the use of pagan names for the days of the week, suggesting that, as in the Jewish calendar, the names of the days be numbered. In a letter to a bishop by the

name of Polimius, *On Correcting the Uneducated*, he says: “It is therefore a great folly that one who is baptized into the faith of Christ is not concerned over the Day of the Lord [*dominicum*] but calls the days after Jupiter, Mercury, Venus, and Saturn, to whom no days belong, for they were adulterers and sorcerers and evil in their own territory. But, as I have already said, it is with this sort of names that respect and honor is shown to the demons by fools” (*De correctione rusticorum* 9).

The result is that in Portuguese, where the first day is named after the Lord—*domingo*—and the sixth after the Sabbath—*sábado*—the other five are simply named numerically: *segunda-feira*, *terça-feira*, *quarta-feira*, *quinta-feira*, *sexta-feira*. (Martin also suggested changing the names of the planets, but in this he had less success.)

In other romance languages the church succeeded only with regard to the first and last days of the week—although there is in Italy at least one inscription from the sixth century in which Friday is called *sexta feria*. Therefore, modern romance languages use words derived from their Latin counterpart *dominica*—*domingo*, *dimanche*, *dominica*. And the name for the last day of the week derives from the Jewish Sabbath—*sábado*, *samedi*,² *sabato* (just as in modern Greek the first day of the week is called the *kyriakē*—the Lord’s day—and the last is the *sabbato*).

The Germanic peoples living beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire, east of the Rhine and north of the Danube, adopted the seven-day week from the neighboring Romans. It is impossible to determine the exact time or process whereby this occurred. But the names for the days of the week in Germanic languages indicate that this took place before Christianity gained power in the Roman Empire. Thus, while in romance languages the name for the first day of the week refers to the Lord, in Germanic languages it still refers to the Sun: *Sunday*, *Sonntag*, *zondag*, *søndag*. And the last still refers to Saturn: *Saturday*, *Zaterdag*, *Samstag*. (The most notable exceptions are in northern German, where Saturday is *Sonnabend*—the eve of the day of the Sun—and in Danish and other Scandinavian languages, where *lørdag* means “washday.”)

In summary, in most modern northern European languages, not only the day of the Sun (Sunday), but all days of the week have retained their pagan roots: Monday (the day of the Moon), Tuesday (the day of Tiw), Wednesday (the day of Wodin), Thursday (the day of Thor), Friday (the day of Frigge), Saturday (the day of Saturn). In most romance languages, the name for the seventh day of the week reflects the Jewish Sabbath—*sábado*, *sabatto*, *samedi*—while the other five retain their ancient pagan references—*lunes*, the day of the Moon, *martes*, the day of Mars, *miércoles*, the day of Mercury, *jueves*, the day of Jove, and *viernes*, the day of Venus. In Portuguese and in Greek, the church usage prevailed, naming the first day of the week the Lord's day, the second to the sixth days by ordinal numbers—second, third, and so on—and the last retaining its title as Sabbath.

Christian resistance to this retention of pagan names waned with the passing of time. The following passage from Isidore of Seville, early in the seventh century, shows that there was still an awareness of the pagan origins of the names for the days of the week, and that at least some church leaders still bemoaned the use of such names and used others—probably the ordinal numbers that Martin of Braga had suggested. But it also gives a hint that Isidore himself felt that this battle was lost, or at least not worth fighting. In his monumental *Etymologies*, a work seeking to summarize the knowledge of his time, Isidore writes:

The word “days” [*dies*] derives from “gods” [*diis*], whose names the Romans gave to some heavenly bodies. The first day they named after the sun, which is the first of all heavenly bodies. . . . The second takes its name from the moon . . . the third, from Mars . . . the fourth, from the Mercury . . . the fifth, from Jupiter . . . the sixth, from Venus . . . the seventh, from Saturn. . . . Among the Hebrews, the first day is called, Sabbath one, which we call the Day of the Lord [*dominicus*], and the Gentiles dedicated to the sun. The next day is Sabbath two. . . .

It would be most appropriate for a Christian mouth to speak as the church does. But if any are carried away by customary usage in such a way that their lips utter what the heart

Naming the Days

rejects, let them remember that all those whose names the days now bear were merely human, and that . . . they were then given divine honor, and their names became the names of stars and of days. (*Etymol.* 5.30)³

When to Meet

From Synagogue to Church

There is no doubt that, for as long as they were allowed to do so, early Christians continued attending Jewish religious services. We are told that while in Jerusalem Peter and John went to the temple at three o'clock in the afternoon, a time set aside for prayers (Acts 3:1). Later, as Paul travels, it is his custom to attend worship at the synagogue on the Sabbath. Later Christians have tended to see in this no more than a wise missionary strategy; but it is much more than that. Paul's message is that in Jesus the promises made to Israel have been fulfilled. It is therefore a message addressed first of all to the people of Israel, but also to "Godfearers"—that is, gentiles who believed in the God and the moral laws of Israel but were not ready to become Jewish proselytes—and to the world at large, who are invited to become heirs of those promises. The most appropriate locus to announce such a message is the synagogue itself. Therefore Paul goes to worship at the synagogue, not with the intention of drawing people away from it and into the church, but rather to worship with other Jews and to invite them to rejoice with him for what God has done in Jesus.

This message was not always well received, particularly since it seemed to open the floodgates for gentiles to enter into the inheritance of the people of God. A typical case is what Acts 13 tells us happened in Antioch of Pisidia. There, in the syna-

gogue, Paul addresses an audience of both Jews and Godfearers in verse 13 as “you Israelites, and others who fear God” and again in verse 26 as “you descendants of Abraham’s family, and others who fear God.” This arouses such interest that “the next Sabbath almost all the city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy” (vv. 44-45). The result is that Paul turns away from the Jews, and the gentiles rejoice. However, this does not mean that Paul has permanently turned away from the synagogue, for in the rest of the book of Acts he continues attending the synagogue in each city until he is expelled. And toward the end of his career, when he is in prison in Rome, he tells the Jews in that city that “it is for the sake of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20).

In brief, for as long as they were allowed to do so, Christians—even those of gentile birth—continued considering themselves Jews, and participating or at least attempting to participate in the worship of the synagogue. Therefore there is no doubt that early Christians did gather for worship with the Jews on the Sabbath.

The Breaking of the Bread

But Christians also had their own custom of gathering in order to break bread. This is mentioned, without further explanation, early in the book of Acts (2:42, 46). This passage would indicate that in the very early days Christians would meet daily to break bread. The three Synoptic Gospels speak of the institution of a meal when Jesus gathered with his disciples to celebrate the Passover. Therefore the Christian practice of “the breaking of the bread” always had close connections with the seder meal, by which the Jews celebrated their liberation from Egypt. As in the seder, the Christian breaking of the bread included the blessing of wine and bread. But a significant difference is that, while the seder was celebrated once a year, at the beginning of Passover, Christians gathered to break bread more often—nor-

mally at least once a week. In this sense, the Christian meal was more similar to the Sabbath meal that Jews would celebrate every week. Indeed, ancient Christian texts regarding the celebration of Communion have echoes both of the seder and of the prayers to be said at a Sabbath meal.

From Saturday Evening to Sunday Morning

Interestingly, there is no record that Christians would normally gather to celebrate this meal at the opening of the Sabbath—that is, on what today we would call the evening of Friday—as was the Jewish custom. Whenever a particular day of the week is singled out for this Christian gathering, this is usually called either “the Lord’s day,” “the first day of the week,” or—in texts addressed to gentiles—“the day of the Sun.”

The earliest such text appears in the New Testament, in Acts 20. Paul is in Troas, preparing to take ship next morning, and the narrator tells us: “On the first day of the week [literally, “the first day after the Sabbath,” *mia tōn sabbatōn*], when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them.” But this gathering takes place in the evening, for Paul goes on talking “until midnight,” and lamps are needed. In the Jewish tradition, days were not counted from midnight to midnight, as we do, but rather from sunset to sunset. Thus the evening of what today we call Saturday would be the beginning of what we now call Sunday. So this was not a Sabbath meal, but it did take place in the evening of Saturday, which to Jewish Christians was already the first day of the week, the day of resurrection.

Taking all of this into account, it would seem that these early Jewish Christians, after attending Sabbath worship in the synagogue—when they were still allowed to do so—would gather in the evening of the same day—which to them would be the next day—in order to break bread.

This would have been particularly convenient for Jews, who through the passing of generations had found ways to observe the Sabbath, either by working at trades where they could de-

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termine their own schedules—such as the tent-making that Paul and Aquilla practiced—or by amassing sufficient resources to be independent of the usual pressures of society and the marketplace—as was the case with Philo of Alexandria and his family. But it would be much more difficult for the increasing number of gentile Christians, many of whom were economically dependent—as slaves, wives, clients, or employees—on people who had no reason to give them special treatment on a particular day of the week. For these gentile Christians, it would be more feasible to gather, not in the evening when there were still chores to be attended, but very early in the morning, before dawn brought the usual and inescapable tasks and obligations.

The growth of the gentile membership of the church also brought another important change. Romans did not count days from sunset to sunset, but from midnight to midnight. This would mean that for most gentiles the evening of the seventh day would still be the same day, and not the first of the next week. For Jewish Christians, on the other hand, the first day began with sunset on the Sabbath, and continued until the next sunset. Since, as we shall see, there was much significance to the practice of gathering on the first day, as the proportion of Jews in the church decreased and the proportion of gentiles increased there was a tendency for the breaking of the bread to be celebrated very early—usually before dawn—on the morning after the Sabbath. This would make it easier to attend for those whose chores would not allow them to be free in the evening. It would also make it clearer for the growing body of gentile believers that they were meeting on the first day of the week. And Jewish Christians too would be keeping the tradition of meeting to break bread on the first day of the week. This also seemed quite appropriate in light of the tradition that it was early in the morning of the first day that the women went to the tomb and found it empty.

When this change took place is not easy to determine. The only place in the New Testament where there is a clear indication that meeting “on the first day of the week” meant meeting on the evening after the Sabbath is the already discussed passage in Acts 20. This means that quite likely at the time Acts was writ-

ten, circa 80 CE, it was still customary to meet on the evening after the Sabbath—what we now call Saturday night. But by the middle of the second century, when Justin referred to the day for the breaking of the bread as “the day commonly called of the Sun,” the gathering would normally have taken place early in the morning of what we now call Sunday, for the evening before that would not be called the “day of the Sun,” but rather the “day of Saturn.”

These changes did not take place without tension and conflict. Early in the second century Ignatius of Antioch claimed that one of the signs of having come to Christ is “no longer sabbathizing, but living according to the Lord’s day” (*Epistle to the Magnesians* 9.1). And somewhat later (the exact date is impossible to determine) another Christian writer warns his readers that they must avoid the Jewish “superstition regarding the Sabbath” (*Epistle to Diognetus* 4.1). In the mid-second century Justin Martyr affirms that Christians meet for worship on the first day of the week, and that the Sabbath law was given because of the hard hearts of the children of Israel. On that basis, says Justin, there are some Christians who refuse all contact with those who, while receiving Jesus as the Messiah—the Christ—insist on keeping as much of the ancient law as they can. Justin himself, however, is more lenient on the matter, and is willing to receive such people, and to have communion with them in all matters, as long as they do not insist that others subject themselves to such laws (*Dialogue with Trypho* 47).

The quotation from Ignatius regarding the Lord’s day that appears above is to be found in the “shorter version” of the epistles of Ignatius, which scholars agree is the original. But at some later time—most probably the fourth century—someone produced a “longer version,” which, among other things, is strongly anti-Jewish. This longer and later version says: “Let us therefore no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner, and rejoice in days of idleness. . . . But let everyone of you keep the Sabbath after a special manner, rejoicing in the meditation of the law, admiring the workmanship of God. . . . And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the

Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days."¹ This interpolation shows that, at least as late as the fourth century, some or perhaps even most Christians observed the Sabbath, and then the Lord's day on the following day. In other words, the Lord's day, celebrated on the first day of the week, was not a substitution for the Sabbath, but a separate celebration of the resurrection of Jesus.

From that point on, criticisms on the observance of the Sabbath abound, including the claim that on the cross Jesus fulfilled or abolished it, and that the true Sabbath is the reign of Christ. But the notion that Sunday has taken the place of the Sabbath is notably absent from early Christian literature. Perhaps the writer who comes closest to it is Victorinus of Pettau, who explains Christian observances during the last and first days of the week as follows:

On the seventh day He rested from all His works, and blessed it, and sanctified it. On the former day [Friday] we are accustomed to fast rigorously, that on the Lord's day we may go forth to our bread with giving of thanks. And let the parasceve [day of preparation, which the Jews observed as a preparation for the Sabbath, and Christians as a memorial of the crucifixion] become a rigorous fast, lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews, which Christ Himself, the Lord of the Sabbath, says by His prophets that "His soul hateth;" which Sabbath He in His body abolished. (*On Creation*)²

All of these texts date from before the time of Constantine. In another chapter we shall be looking at Christian views on the Sabbath after Constantine. But before we do that there are still other matters to be considered regarding early Christian practices on the Lord's day—the *dominica*.

The Significance of the First Day of the Week

The Day of Resurrection

The most obvious reason why the first day of the week had particular significance for Christians was that this was the day of the resurrection of Jesus. Besides the already mentioned accounts of the empty tomb and the encounter of Jesus with Mary Magdalene, it was “that same day” that Jesus appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13), and to the disciples who were gathered in Jerusalem behind closed doors “for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). It was the resurrection of the Lord on that particular day that made it “the Lord’s day.” It was the day of the victory of the Lord, and therefore also a day of victory for all those who believed in him.

While the custom of naming the first day after the Sabbath “the Lord’s day” apparently began in the first century, and while all seems to indicate that this was related to the resurrection of Jesus on that day, it is in the second century that we find the first indisputable connection between the two. This appears in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, a document dating from the mid-second century or slightly earlier. This author was acquainted with the four canonical Gospels, and retold the story adorning it with high portents. When coming to the story of the women’s visit to the tomb, which in the canonical Gospels takes place “on the first day of the week,” this author tells us that this was “on the morning of the Lord’s day.” While the meaning is exactly the

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same, that very fact shows the connection between the Lord's day and the resurrection of that Lord.

After that time, it is common to find Greek authors referring to the first day of the week not only as the Lord's day but also as the day of resurrection.

The connection between the Lord's day—the *dominica*—and the resurrection of Jesus could be seen in the connection of the breaking of the bread with Passover. In Passover, Jews celebrated and commemorated the liberation of the children of Israel from the yoke of Egypt on the day that the angel of the Lord slew the firstborn of the Egyptians, but “passed over” the homes of the children of Israel. A central element in that celebration was the seder meal, in which wine and bread were blessed and shared amid various other actions commemorating the glorious day of the exodus from Egypt. Now Christians gathered to bless bread and wine, and to share them, celebrating and commemorating the glorious day in which their Lord had risen from the dead, thus liberating them from the yoke of death, sin, and the evil one. This is why they referred to Jesus as “our Passover,” and also why they saw in the lamb that was slain in order to mark with its blood the doors of the children of Israel a sign or prefiguration of Jesus, the Lamb that was slain in order to save his followers. But they did this at least once a week, particularly on the blessed first day of the week, which was the day of his victory. In consequence, although Jesus had instituted this meal on the eve of his passion, this was not a funereal or gloomy commemoration, but rather a celebration of the victory that he had attained through his death and resurrection.

Thus a weekly cycle of observances revolving around the death and resurrection of Jesus developed very early. The fourth and sixth days of the week (Wednesday and Friday) were days of fasting, in remembrance of the betrayal and passion of Jesus. The seventh was a day of rest whenever possible, in observance of the Sabbath. Then the first day all things were made new. Jesus had risen!

Very early, however—perhaps from the very beginning—it made sense to have a special observance on the anniversary of

the great events that every weekly cycle commemorated. This is the origin of the celebration that in English is called “Easter,” but in Greek and in romance languages is called by names meaning either “Passover”—*Pascha, Pascua, Pâques, Pasqua*—or “the Lord’s day of resurrection”—*Domingo de Resurrección, dominica resurrectionis*. This was the earliest celebration to be set aside for particular annual observances—long before Christmas.

However, the determination of that date was not easy—partly because the Gospels did not quite agree on the relationship between the Jewish Passover and the events of Holy Week. In Asia Minor, where Johannine influence was strongest, it was customary to set this celebration on the fourteenth of the Jewish month of Nisan. When others learned of this practice, they dubbed those who followed them *quartodecimans*—literally “fourteeners.” To complicate matters, not all Jewish calendars at the time agreed, and therefore the quartodecimans often did not agree among themselves. Meanwhile, others had long celebrated this great day of resurrection on the Lord’s day, thus reflecting the practice of actually celebrating that resurrection on that day every week. The controversy that broke in the second century was long, sometimes amicable and sometimes bitter. It involved several of the most distinguished leaders of the church. Eusebius summarizes it as follows:

At about that time [ca. 190] a fairly serious debate arose, for the churches of all Asia, following a very ancient tradition, held that it was necessary to celebrate the feast of the Savior’s Passover on the fourteenth day of the month . . . and that this should be done no matter what day of the week it was. But the churches all over the rest of the world did not use to celebrate it then. Rather, following an apostolic tradition, held that [such a celebration] . . . should not be held in any other day [of the week] than in that of the resurrection of our Savior. (*Church History* 5.23.1)

Actually, by the time Eusebius wrote these words the conflict had abated, but not disappeared. At the Council of Nicaea (325 CE),

Constantine had urged the bishops to seek unity, and Eusebius reports that as a result “all agreed on the time for celebrating the feast of Resurrection” (*Life of Constantine* 3.14). Yet sixteen years after the Council of Nicaea the bishops gathered in Antioch for the dedication of a church built by order of Constantine still had to insist that “all those who dare to act contrary to the command of the great Synod, assembled at Nicaea, . . . shall be excommunicated from the church if they obstinately persist in their opposition to this most excellent decision.”¹

Similar decrees were issued repeatedly in the next few years, thus indicating that there still was no unanimity. Eventually, however, the quartodeciman party died out, and the desired unanimity was supposedly achieved.²

For the purposes of this history, the quartodeciman controversy is important because quartodecimanism was rejected for two main reasons: one, it seemed appropriate for the church to celebrate the great annual feast of resurrection on the same day on which it celebrated the resurrection every week—the *dominica*, or Lord’s day; second, it was not appropriate for the church to set the date for this great feast on the basis of the Jewish calendar. As the church grew more gentile and less Jewish, there was criticism of those who insisted on keeping the Sabbath. Thus it was decided that the date of the great Christian feast should not be determined on the basis of the Jewish calendar.

No matter how the date was decided, the great annual feast of the resurrection—which, as we have seen, Christians came to name the Passover (*pascha*)—was the earliest annual Christian celebration. Soon—at a date that it is not possible to determine—it also became the preferred day on which those who had been preparing for baptism—usually for years—would be baptized, and finally join the congregation in the priestly prayer of the people, in the kiss of peace, and in Communion. Although every Lord’s day was a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, the great annual feast of the resurrection would seem to be a most appropriate time for believers to die and be raised again in Christ.

The First Day of Creation

The notion that Jesus Christ is the beginning of a new creation appears quite explicitly in the earliest Christian literature, as may be seen in the apostle Paul's famous dictum that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17). This would quite naturally relate the work of the incarnate Lord with the original creation. Thus in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel we read that the Word who was in the beginning with God, and through whom all things were made, is the Word who became incarnate in Jesus.

This would immediately lead to the connection between the celebration of the new creation, begun with the resurrection of Jesus, and the celebration of the first creation. According to the ancient tradition attested in Genesis 1, God created all things in six days, and then rested on the seventh, thus establishing the Sabbath. This would then mean that the first day of creation is also the first day of the week. This connection is expressed quite clearly as early as the middle of the second century, when Justin Martyr, using pagan terminology because he is addressing pagans, writes: "We hold this general gathering on the day of the Sun, because it is the first day in which God made the world, moving darkness and matter. It is also the day in which our Savior Jesus Christ rose from among the dead. For he was crucified the day before the day of Saturn [which among Romans was the beginning of the week and its most important day], and on the day following that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, he appeared to his apostles and disciples" (1 *Apol.* 67.7).

This vision of the Lord's day as both the day of the resurrection of the Lord and the day when the same Lord began creation would serve to strengthen the argument against gnostics, Marcion, and others who held that material creation is evil, and not the work of the same God who was revealed in Jesus Christ. However, to follow this argument throughout its development would carry us far beyond the limits of the present subject.

The Eighth Day

Christians, as well as Jews, did not believe that the repetitive cycle of a new week following another, and a new year following another, would be endless. There would be a day when that cycle would be broken, and a new age would dawn. This would be a final Sabbath, an eternal day of joy and rest. Given their observance of the Lord's resurrection on the first day of the week, and the manner they related that day with the first day of creation, Christians would soon point out that the first day of the week was also the eighth, and that therefore what they celebrated on that day, besides the resurrection of Jesus and the beginning of a new creation, was also the promise of the eighth, the beginning of eternity.

While there may be some precedents in Jewish literature,³ the earliest extant Christian writer in which this connection is explicit is the so-called Epistle of Barnabas, a document of uncertain age usually placed between 95 and 135 CE. This author is convinced that it is impossible for sinful humans to fulfill the commandment of sanctifying the Sabbath. "We are greatly mistaken," he says, "if we imagine that someone who is not pure of heart can sanctify the day that God has sanctified" (Epistle of Barnabas 15.6) This will only be possible when "once justified and in possession of the promise, we shall be able to sanctify it" (Epistle of Barnabas 15.7). Therefore God's words through the prophets condemning the manner in which ancient Israel sought to sanctify the Sabbath are to be understood as if God were saying, "Your present-day Sabbaths are not acceptable to me. The acceptable one will be the one which I have created and in which, putting all things to rest, I will create the beginning of an eighth day, that is, the beginning of another world" (Epistle of Barnabas 15.8). To which Pseudo-Barnabas adds: "This is why it is proper for us to celebrate the eighth day joyfully, for this is the day that Jesus rose from among the dead and, after being made known, ascended into heaven" (Epistle of Barnabas 15.9). In other words, the first day of the week, in which Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, is also the eighth day, and therefore points to the final day of eternal joy and rest.

A few decades later, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr similarly relates the Lord's day with the theme of the eighth day through a series of typological interpretations in which the number eight in the Hebrew Scriptures points to the eighth day of the week, the day of the resurrection of Jesus. Thus circumcision on the eighth day pointed to the resurrection of Jesus on the eighth day (*Dialogue with Trypho* 24.1; 41.4), as did also the eight who were saved through the flood in the time of Noah (*Dialogue with Trypho* 138.1).

Leaving aside some very confusing passages in which Clement of Alexandria speculates about the relationship between the days of the week and the wisdom of philosophers, physicians, and others (*Stromateis* 5.14, 6.16), and a very brief ambiguous phrase in Tertullian's writings (*On Idolatry* 14), the next text to be considered in this regard appears in the mid-third century, in a letter from Cyprian to a bishop who had asked a number of questions regarding baptism. There Cyprian once again turns to the connection between circumcision, baptism, and the eighth day. His conclusion is that "the celebration of Jewish circumcision on the eighth day was a mystery in shadows pointing to the coming of Christ. For the eighth day, the first after the Sabbath, would be the day on which the Lord would rise, thus beginning to us a spiritual circumcision. That eighth day, which was the first after the Sabbath and also the Lord's day, came before as a sign. That sign ceased once reality took its place, and the spiritual circumcision was given to us" (*Epistle* 64.4.3).

At least after Constantine's time, this symbolism was often expressed in the octagonal shape of many of the earliest baptisteries known to us, pointing to baptism as an initiation into the eighth day of eternal joy. Was this a practice before the time on Constantine? Given the lack of evidence, it is impossible to tell. The earliest baptistery that archaeologists can reconstruct, that of Dura-Europos late in the third century, is rectangular in shape, and of such dimensions that the person to be baptized would apparently kneel in it to have water poured over the head by a person standing outside of the water. But very soon after Constantine there are numerous octagonal baptisteries.

In any case, after Constantine's time references abound to the Lord's day as not only the first but also the eighth day of the week, and therefore a day of eschatological promise. St. Augustine, for instance, at the conclusion of his monumental *City of God*, a veritable review of human history as he knew it, and which he organized in terms of six ages reflecting the six days of creation, expresses this hope as follows: "The seventh age will be our Sabbath, which will have no sunset, which will come on the Lord's day, the eighth day, the eternal day, consecrated by the resurrection of Christ, and which prefigures the eternal rest not only of the spirit, but also of the body. There we shall rest and see; see and love; love and praise. Behold the essence of the endless day!" (*City of God* 22.30.5).

In brief, the first day of the week, most commonly called the Lord's day—the *kyriaka* or *dominica*—was taken as a celebration of the three great events of salvation history. It was first of all the day of the resurrection of the Lord and therefore the beginning of the new creation. It was also the very first day of the first creation, and therefore a time to rejoice in the goodness of God's bounty. And it was the eighth day of the week, and therefore a day of hope pointing to the consummation of all things.

Christian Practices on the First Day of the Week

Celebrating by neither Fasting nor Kneeling

There are very few indications of particular Christian practices for the first day of the week—or, indeed, for any other day—beyond the scope of communal worship. Those that have come to us have to do mostly with days of fasting and with prayers. As Tertullian put it, “We do not allow fasting or kneeling on the Lord’s day” (*On the Crown* 3).

The story of the various days set apart for fasting is a bit complicated and not altogether clear. There are many texts that speak of fasting on Friday, as the day of crucifixion, and almost as many referring to Wednesday, as the day of the betrayal. In what seems to be an anti-Jewish text, the *Didache* instructs its readers: “Let your fasts not be at the same time as those of the hypocrites, who fast on the second and fifth days [our Monday and Thursday]. Instead, you shall fast the fourth day and the day of preparation [our Wednesday and Friday]” (*Didache* 8.1).

Amid several texts on fasting—among which is the treatise of Tertullian *On Fasting*, addressed to some who apparently would not fast—there is a very brief chapter in Tertullian’s *On Prayer* that is germane to our subject. In that passage, Tertullian rebuffs those who refuse to partake of Communion on days of fasting¹ on the grounds that the bread and wine would break their fast. To this Tertullian responds that Communion, rather than breaking the bond established with God in fasting, strengthens it. This

passage is interesting because it is the earliest reference we have to fasting before taking Communion. The passage itself seems to imply that this became an issue on certain unspecified days of fasting. But, since Tertullian does not relate this to the Lord's day—the *dominica*—it may well refer to other days on which Communion was celebrated, or to some particular Sundays when for some reason fasting was enjoined. Tertullian simply does not say.

Just a few decades later, however, the *Didascalia*, or *Teachings of the Apostles*, depicts Jesus as commanding: “You may not fast on the first day of the week, for it is the day of my resurrection” (*Didascalia* 13). The same document enjoins fasting from the day before the Sabbath and through the first hours of the first day of the week, for this was the time when Jesus was crucified and lay in the tomb. Then follows a day of joy when fast is broken, when believers should “eat and celebrate, rejoice and be merry, because Christ has risen, and he is the firstfruits of our resurrection” (*Didascalia* 13).

There is no doubt that in this document the reason to refrain from fasting is that the Lord's day is supposed to be a day of joy and celebration—so much so that the same document opens by warning believers against being too jolly and joining assemblies in which songs are raised to idols, and where there is levity and profanity (*Didascalia* 1).

For the Christian practice of prayer, we have an invaluable document in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus. Even though this document dates from the beginning of the third century, in it Hippolytus is expounding and defending what he knew in his youth and he takes as traditional, and therefore scholars agree that this represents what was done in Rome in the middle of the second century, or even earlier. Most of the document deals with liturgical practices to which we shall return later in this chapter. But Hippolytus also outlines what should be the daily prayer practices of all believers:

Let all the faithful, whether men or women, when early in the morning they rise from their sleep and before they undertake

any tasks, wash their hands and pray to God; and so they may go on with their duties. . . .

If at the third hour you are at home, pray then and give thanks to God; but if thou chance to be abroad at that hour, make thy prayer to God in thy heart. For at that hour Christ was nailed to the tree. . . . At the sixth hour likewise also pray, for after Christ was nailed to the cross, the veil was divided and there was a great darkness. . . . And at the ninth hour let a great prayer and a great thanksgiving be made. . . . Pray again before thy body rests on the bed. . . . At midnight arise, wash thy hand with water and pray. . . . And at cockcrow rise up and pray again. (*Apostolic Tradition* 4.35–36)²

These are the practices prescribed by Hippolytus for every day, including the Lord's day. But on the basis of what we read in Tertullian, it would seem that on that day, besides attending worship and praying standing, individual Christians would follow this practice of daily prayers, with the sole difference that they would not kneel for them.

One of the signs that the Lord's day was a time of joy was the custom of kneeling or prostrating for prayer every day, except on the first day of the week, the Lord's day. One of the earliest testimonies to this practice³ appears around the year 200, when Tertullian comments on a disagreement arising from the custom of "a few" who abstain from kneeling on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week—a practice that the church at large reserved for the Lord's day and Pentecost. The passage is worth quoting extensively not only because it speaks of the custom of not kneeling on certain days but also because it offers the rationale for not kneeling on the Lord's day. (It is also worth quoting because in it Tertullian displays an irenic spirit that is quite contrary to his usual demeanor. But that is an entirely different matter!) Tertullian says:

There are some differences on the question of kneeling for prayer. This is mostly because there are a few who will not kneel on the Sabbath. And since this is now being discussed

in the churches I pray that through the Lord's grace those who dissent will either yield, or at least continue in their practice without causing offense. But what has been taught to us is that it is only on the Lord's day that we are not to kneel. Also, that on that day we must avoid not only kneeling, but any other gesture or sign of anxiety or deference . . . so as not to give any room to the devil. (*De oratione* 23)

The practice that Tertullian considered traditional was not to kneel while praying on the day of the Lord. Notice also that the reason not to kneel is that on that day one must not show the anxiety or deference one shows before a master, but rather the confidence and assurance one shows before a father. The Lord's day is the day of the believers' adoption as children of God through the resurrection of Jesus, and therefore they are not to humble themselves before God as they must every other day.

The matter was not settled as quickly as Tertullian would have hoped. Apparently by the fourth century the problem was not so much that some would not kneel on the Sabbath, but rather that some would kneel every day. In 325 CE, at the Council of Nicaea, action was taken against the practice of "some," to kneel "on the Lord's day and on the days of Pentecost." Against this practice, the council decreed that on these days prayer should be made while standing (Council of Nicaea, canon 20). Even though apparently some were resisting it at the time of the council, Tertullian's text shows that this was the practice followed for quite some time.

Back to Hippolytus, it is interesting to note that he places his reference to possible attendance at a worship service after the first prayer and before the second, thus indicating that by his time it was expected that worship would normally take place early in the morning of the first day of the week—what we now call Sunday morning—rather than, as was the case earlier, in the previous evening, when that first day had just begun—what today we would call Saturday evening. Hippolytus's church is now composed mostly of gentile converts for whom absence from daily chores is easier very early in the morning than on the pre-

vious evening. It is also composed of people who cannot simply decide to pray openly at all times, but must sometimes “pray in their heart.”

Once again, as in the case of abstaining from fasting on the Lord’s day, to refrain from kneeling on that day was a remembrance of its joyful and victorious character, as may be seen in the previously cited passage from Tertullian in which he gives the reasons for not kneeling on the Lord’s day.

Worship on the Lord’s Day

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine most of the details of Christian worship in the early centuries. First of all, there is no certainty that what was practiced in one place was practiced elsewhere, for at a time when communications were difficult, uniformity was not easy to achieve. Second, most of the extant documents depicting worship—the “church orders”—are of uncertain date, most claiming to come from apostolic times. And third, when reading a church order it is difficult to know whether it actually depicts what was being done at the time, or the document itself is rather an attempt on the part of the author to influence the manner in which worship was conducted. Even so, it is possible to develop a general outline of early Christian worship, as long as one does not make too many generalizations or attempts to bring the various witnesses into a uniform and absolutely coherent whole.

Even taking this into account, we can at least be certain that worship on the first day of the week was a joyful, rather than a funereal or somber, occasion. This is attested by all the texts quoted in the preceding pages of this book. The first day of the week was first of all a celebration of the resurrection of the Lord, and then also a celebration of the bounty of creation and of the promise of an unending “eighth day” of joy. Hence the frequent injunctions not to kneel or fast on that day.

We can also be quite certain that at the very heart of early Christian worship was a meal centered on the sharing of wine

and bread that, following the pattern of the Gospels, was taken, blessed, broken, and given. (In *Didache* 9, the wine precedes the bread, while in most other documents, and most commonly to this day, the order is reversed.) As stated above, in the earliest times this was celebrated at the beginning of the first day of the week, that is, after sunset on the Sabbath—what today we could call Saturday evening. Probably for some time believers first went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, as they had always done, to pray, sing psalms, read Scripture, and have that Scripture interpreted and applied. But as the gulf between Jews and Christians expanded, Christian interpretation of Scripture conflicted with Jewish interpretations, and Christians were no longer accepted in the synagogues, these activities—prayer, singing, reading, and interpreting Scripture—took place at the beginning of the Christian gathering, before the actual meal or Lord's Supper.

This would present some new difficulties. The meal was a Christian celebration, one in which those who had been joined with Christ in baptism were now nourished by him. The *Didache* is very clear on this point: "Let no one eat or drink from your thanksgiving, except those who are baptized in the name of the Lord, for he said 'Do not give to dogs what is holy'" (*Didache* 9.5). Thus Tertullian says that people are allowed to take Communion only after their baptism (*On the Crown* 3). The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus says that "no catechumen shall sit at the Lord's Supper" (*Apostolic Tradition* 27).⁴ But instruction in Scripture, prayer, and praise must also be open to those who, although not yet baptized, were learning of the Christian faith and preparing for their own baptism. Hence the custom, attested by various authors, of allowing and encouraging those preparing to receive baptism—the catechumens⁵—to participate in the first part of the worship service, consisting of prayer, praise, and Scripture reading and interpretation, and then to dismiss them before the actual Communion service. The most detailed ancient text in this regard is the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, where, after baptism, the neophyte is first allowed to join the priestly people of God in the "prayer of the faithful" in intercession for the

world, and is then given Communion for the first time (*Apostolic Tradition* 22–23).⁶

Thus the worship service itself was composed of two parts, commonly known at the Service of the Word and the Service of the Table—and eventually as the Mass of catechumens and the Mass of believers.

The practice of dismissing those who could not partake in Communion continued well past the time of Constantine and is attested, among others, by a synod that met in Laodicea—not the city in the New Testament, but Laodicea in Phrygia—late in the fourth century. Its nineteenth canon says:

After the homily of the bishop, first the prayer for the catechumens shall be said separately, and after the departure of the catechumens the prayer for the penitents, and when these also have received the imposition of hands and have withdrawn, then in like manner shall three prayers for the faithful be said: the first in silence, but the second and third aloud. Hereupon the kiss of peace is given. . . . And then the Holy Sacrifice (*prosfora*) [literally, the presentation of an offering, or the offering itself] shall be offered.

Some Points to Highlight

As we look at the present section as a whole, there are several points that may be emphasized in order to help us see the larger picture of the historical development of Sunday.

First, there are abundant indications that from a very early date Christians met on the first day of the week for the breaking of the bread in memory of Jesus. Since days began and ended at sunset, and in the early church most believers were Jews, this breaking of the bread early on the first day of the week most probably took place after the setting of the sun on the Sabbath, which would be the first day of the week according to Jewish reckoning, and the evening of Saturday according to ours.

Second, as the number of gentiles in the church increased,

this breaking of the bread began to take place on the same night, but now after midnight and before the sun rose again. This was done for two reasons: first, because it was less problematic for gentiles to absent themselves from their responsibilities before dawn than in the evening; and, second, because for gentiles the first day of the week began at midnight of the seventh.

Third, while there was much anti-Jewish polemic in early Christian writing, and some accused Jews of idling the Sabbath away, and some did claim that Jesus had fulfilled or abolished the law of the Sabbath, there are very few passages that might seem to claim that the Christian Lord's day has taken the place of the Sabbath, while there are others suggesting that Christians should keep the Sabbath on the seventh day, but do it in their own way, as preparation for the Lord's day.

Fourth, there is no expectation that on the Lord's day one is to rest from one's labors, and to devote all the time to prayer, meditation, and the study of Scripture.

Fifth, as a result of the previous point, the linking of the fourth commandment with Sunday observances, which would later become commonplace in Christian piety and theology, is notably absent from the ancient church.

Sixth, the first day of the week—the Lord's day—was not to be a day of particular sobriety or austerity. On the contrary, this was a day of joy and celebration, connected first of all with the resurrection of Jesus, but also with the beginning of the new creation on the same day of the week when creation began, and with the eschatological expectation of the "eighth day." Since it was a day of celebration, fasting was not permitted on the Lord's day. And since it was the day of the believers' adoption as heirs of the great King, it was a day when one should not kneel in prayer.

Finally, Christian worship on Sundays was not as simple as we have been led to believe. There were, for instance, rather elaborate rites connected with baptism, and much was communicated by way of gesture and symbol—oil, milk, honey, water, and many others.

PART 2

FROM CONSTANTINE TO THE END OF ANTIQUITY

Early in the fourth century, a momentous change took place in the life of the church: In the space of a few decades Christianity came out of the worst persecution it had ever experienced, first to be tolerated, then supported by the state, and eventually—with the exception of Judaism—the only religion officially tolerated.

The impact of such a radical change can be seen in every aspect of the church's life. Bishops and other church leaders now became important civil figures. Increasingly sumptuous churches were built. The catechumenate—the long process by which converts had been prepared for baptism—practically disappeared. There was an explosion in Christian literature—and in the interest and the means to preserve it—so that what we now have of a single writer such as St. Augustine is more than all the documents that have survived from the earlier centuries of Christianity. This in turn means that from this point on it is impossible to follow the practice of earlier chapters, where I have quoted just about every available text on the subject, and therefore I must content myself with referring to a relatively small—but hopefully typical—number of texts.

As for Sunday, it too saw significant changes. First of all, it became a day of rest—a point at which Constantine's legislation is still with us. Second, there were also significant changes in worship, both in how it was conducted and in how it was understood.

Constantine and the New Imperial Policy

Constantine's Edict

On the seventh of March 321 CE, Constantine issued an edict that has led to much discussion regarding the history of Christian observance on the first day of the week. The edict itself said:

On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country however persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits because it often happens that another day is not suitable for grain-sowing or vine planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost. (*Codex Justinianus* 3.12.3)¹

On the basis of this decree, it is commonly said that it was Constantine who made the first day of the week the day of Christian worship, and that until that time Christian weekly worship took place on the Sabbath.

Such an interpretation is often supported by the reports of two of the early Christian historians writing soon after the events, and trying to claim a Christian motivation for Constantine's decree. The first is Eusebius of Caesarea, who in his *Life of Constantine* says that "he [Constantine] decreed that a certain day be dedicated primarily to prayer. I mean that day which is the

first day and the most important of all, the day of our Lord and Savior” (*Life of Constantine* 4.18).

In the next century, another historian, Sozomen, repeats this report, and makes it even clearer that in issuing this edict Constantine was favoring Christians: “He [Constantine] ordered that the day that is called the Lord’s day, the day which the Jews call the first day of the week, and the pagans dedicate to the Sun. . . . He honored this day because it was the day that Christ rose from among the dead” (*Church History* 1.9).

However, neither Eusebius nor Sozomen says or even implies that it was Constantine who decreed that Christian worship would take place on Sunday. As we have seen, there are numerous texts dating from well before the time of Constantine showing that the main day for Christian worship was the first day of the week, which Christians called the Lord’s day—the *kyriaka* or *dominica*. Eusebius himself, for instance, in commenting about the earlier heresy of the Ebionites, says “that they observed the Sabbath and the rest of Jewish rules. But on the Lord’s day [*kyriaka*] they followed rites like ours, in remembrance of the resurrection of the Lord” (Eusebius, *Church History* 3.27.5).

As we then examine Constantine’s edict more closely, we note that there is in it no mention of Sunday as “the first day of the week” or as “the Lord’s day.” Indeed, in Constantine’s time the first day of the week was not what we now call Sunday, but Saturday—the day of Saturn. So, what Constantine decreed was that the second day of the week according to the Roman calendar, the day traditionally devoted to the Sun, be a special day of rest. Furthermore, in the decree itself there is no mention of worship, but only of rest. It was Christians such as Eusebius and Sozomen who interpreted the edict as particularly favoring Christians, or as being grounded on the first day of the week being that of the resurrection of Jesus. Even so, Eusebius does not say that Constantine made this a day of prayer for Christians, but rather that he made this a universal day of prayer, and that this coincided with the Christian observance of the Lord’s day. A century later, Sozomen did go further, claiming that the reason why Constantine issued the edict was that this was the day of the resurrection of Jesus.

What in fact did occur is that Constantine and his family had long been devotees of the Unconquered Sun—*Sol invictus*. For quite some time there had been in Roman paganism a tendency toward monotheism, or at least toward a system in which the Sun was supreme over all other gods. In a way, this was a demotion of Saturn, who had long enjoyed the supremacy among the gods, and whose day—*Saturday*—marked the beginning of the Roman week. Throughout most of his life, Constantine's allegiance to Christianity was rather ambiguous, as he apparently tried to please both his Christian subjects and others who were devoted to the *Sol invictus*. He did end all persecution, and he did offer the church and its leaders all sorts of privileges. But he did not renounce the *Sol invictus*, whose high priest he was. It is said that when he was walking setting the lines that the walls of Constantinople would follow, and some asked him how far he intended to walk, he responded, "As far as the One who leads me"—which Christians could understand to be their God, and devotees of the Sun to be theirs. It was only at the last moment before his death that he was finally baptized.

Thus Constantine's decree regarding rest on the day of the Sun, which Christians such as Eusebius and Sozomen could understand as a concession to them, was most likely a combination of his purposively ambiguous religious policy and his desire to place the Sun above Saturn.

Even so, this decree did have enormous consequences for the history of Sunday. Up to this time, Christians did not relate Sunday observances with the commandment to rest on the Sabbath. Sunday was not a day of rest. It could not be for Christians who were not masters of their own time. Now that Sunday became a day of rest, civil laws had to determine what work was lawful on that day. This was soon followed by ecclesiastical laws, also determining which activities were allowed on Sunday, and which were forbidden. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that Sunday was now connected with Sabbath rest and with the commandment ordering it. This was the great change introduced by Constantine's decree. It brought about a connection between Sunday and Sabbath rest that was not present

in earlier Christian thought and devotion. In the long run, this would lead to discussions as to whether Sunday abolished the Sabbath, whether Christian worship should be on the Sabbath, and so on.

Other Decrees

After that initial decree of 321, a number of imperial decrees followed, all having to do with “the day of the Sun.”² A few months after that first decree (on the third of July), in another edict having to do with the manumission of slaves in which again no mention is made of Christianity, once again Constantine refers to this day as the day of the Sun—*die solis*. Much later, in 365, Emperors Valentinian and Valens issued a joint decree ordering that Christians not be brought to the courts on this day, which they still call the *die solis*. It is only in 386, during the reign of Theodosius, that official documents begin referring to this day at the Lord’s day—the *dominica*—as Christians had long been doing. In an edict of Theodosius issued late in 386, we find the phrase “the day of the Sun, which the forefathers called the Lord’s day.” Thirteen years later, in 399, Theodosius’s two sons and heirs, Arcadius and Honorius, issued an edict prohibiting certain spectacles on “the Lord’s day”—*die dominicus*. But even so, in 409 we still find an apparently necessary clarification: “The Lord’s day, popularly called of the Sun”—*Dominicus die, quam vulgo solis appellat*. By 425 Theodosius II would refer simply to “the Lord’s day, which is the first day of the whole week,” thus signaling both the disuse of references to the day of the Sun, and the shift to a week that now no longer began on the day of Saturn, but rather, as in Jewish tradition, on the day after the Sabbath.

The Immediate Impact of the New Policy

In spite of what many have said, there is ample evidence that long before the time of Constantine Christians gathered for wor-

ship—centered on a meal—on the first day of the week, rather than on the seventh. However, although the Christian practice of meeting for worship on the first day of the week was established long before Constantine, the imperial decree of 321, and the many that followed, did bring about some changes for Christians and their observance of the Lord's day. Some of these changes were immediate, and some took a bit longer.

The most immediate and enduring change as far as Christians were concerned was the very action of turning their day of worship into also a day of rest. Much later, as we shall see, it even came to be called the "Sabbath." But this development would take many centuries. What immediately affected the church and its members in the most direct way had to do with the time of day when Christians met. Until then, Christians would meet either in the evening after the Sabbath, when the first day of the week had just begun (as in Acts 20), or—particularly when the majority of Christians were gentiles—very early next morning, before various daily chores came to occupy them. Now that the first day of the week was an official day of rest, it was possible for Christians to meet at more convenient times—usually in the morning rather than, as before, in the early hours before dawn. This in turn made it possible to develop more elaborate liturgies. In the next three chapters we shall deal, first, with changes in the liturgy, then with the Lord's day as a day of rest, and third with Christian appropriation, rejection, and transformation of the Jewish Sabbath.

Changes in Christian Worship

The Continuation of a Tradition

Although our purpose here is not to outline a history of Christian liturgy, since Sunday was the day when most communal worship took place it is necessary to look, however briefly, at the changes in Christian worship brought about by the new policies inaugurated by Constantine.

The impact of the new order on worship was a process by which liturgy became ever more elaborate. However, this does not mean that early Christian worship was denuded of rite or symbol, as many of us have come to think as a result of Puritan influence. The oldest church building whose ruins have survived—at Dura-Europos, in Syria—is abundantly decorated with frescoes allusive to various biblical passages such as Adam and Eve, the flood, the Good Shepherd, the miracles of Jesus, and the resurrection. As early as the *Didache*, orders of worship begin to appear that seem to be moving at once toward setting rite and the words to accompany it toward uniformity. The order Hippolytus gives for baptism is anything but simple. Among many other details, we are told that those preparing for baptism are to fast the sixth day of the week. On the seventh day—the Sabbath—the bishop is to gather them, bid them kneel, exorcize them by laying his hands on each of them, breathe on their faces, make a sign of sealing on their foreheads, ears, and noses, and then instruct them to get up and spend the night in vigil. The

next day (the Lord's day), after having a prayer said over the water, they are to be baptized. There are to be two different vessels with oil (the "oil of thanksgiving" and the "oil of exorcism"). Presbyters and deacons have specific functions in the ceremony. Each person to be baptized must individually renounce Satan and evil, and enter the water naked. In the act of baptism, the person must affirm a form of what we now know as the Apostles' Creed. After a further anointing, and after being dressed once again, those who have been baptized will join the congregation for another series of ceremonies, which Hippolytus describes in similar detail.

Thus the notion that Christian worship before the time of Constantine was a simple affair, with no decoration and no rite or ceremony, is not supported by the existing textual and archaeological evidence. What we have is rather a series of symbols and rites whose purpose is not to embellish what is being done, but rather to point beyond them to the significance of what is being done and celebrated. As Gregory Dix puts it, "The impression left by the early evidence about the celebration of the Eucharist is not so much of simplicity as of great directness."¹

Furthermore, it seems clear that even before the time of Constantine there were efforts to follow orders of worship that, while not identical from place to place, were however similar to one another. The quartodeciman controversy is a clear example of how this process took place: various churches had different practices, each claiming great antiquity. But as contact among these churches grew there were efforts—often resulting in bitter controversies—to resolve the disparities among them. Something similar seems to have happened with the liturgy in general. There has been much discussion regarding the relationships among the various orders of worship that have survived from pre-Constantinian times and early thereafter, and this is not the place to deal with such debates. But as one looks at the various documents it seems clear that, even while there were important differences, there were also attempts to resolve these differences, and to come to some sort of general liturgical procedures. These efforts were not wholly successful, with the result

that historians of worship can point to several different liturgical traditions—the Syrian, the Byzantine, the Roman, the Gallican, and so forth. But even while acknowledging these differences, the similarity among the various rites is striking, thus indicating that the changes that took place after Constantine were not so much the creation of something altogether new but rather a series of adaptations—many of them quite radical and far-reaching—of the worship practices of an earlier age.

New Buildings and New Congregations

Apart from the end of persecutions and the fact that now the Lord's day was also a day of rest, the change that many Christians would most note was the construction of new, often sumptuous buildings for worship. At an earlier time, Christians normally met in homes, or in cemeteries such as the Roman catacombs. By the third century, there were private homes that had been converted into places of worship—such as the already mentioned church in Dura-Europos. But now, with the patronage of Constantine, his family, and his successors, buildings were erected with the specific purpose of serving as places of worship. Quite often they followed the basic plan of earlier Roman public buildings traditionally called “basilicas” because they belonged to the emperor—the *basileus*, or king. By the fourth century, such basilicas would normally have a central nave separated from side corridors by rows of columns, as well as an atrium at one end and an apse at the other, where the altar was placed. A transept gave the building the shape of a cross. Closer to the people, often in front of the altar, was a pulpit from which Scripture would be read and interpreted. While many of these Christian basilicas were relatively unadorned, others were sumptuous.² Without exception, they were much larger than the buildings where Christians had worshiped until the time of Constantine.

These larger buildings were not a mere luxury. They were becoming necessary as, following the lead of the emperors and their most respected counselors, throngs demanded baptism. Al-

though estimates vary, all agree that when Constantine and his co-emperor Licinius put an end to the persecution of Christians, these were a fairly small minority throughout the empire. Yet seventy years later most of the population that was not Jewish had been baptized, and eventually the old religion was called “paganism,” for it survived mostly among the rustic folk of the countryside, the *pagani*.

Such explosive growth had consequences. The former practice of requiring a long period of preparation for baptism was no longer possible. There simply were not enough teachers for all who requested to join the church. The result was a drastic reduction of the period of preparation for baptism—the catechumenate. A few years before the end of persecution a synod in Spain had decreed that the catechumenate should last two years (Synod of Elvira, canon 42). But this period was progressively shortened as increasing numbers were baptized as children. In 506 a synod gathered in Agde, in the South of present-day France, decreed that Jews wishing to become Christians were to follow the rules for catechumens, who had to wait for eight months. Soon the catechumenate had practically disappeared, and it was only converts from Judaism, or converts in some missionary outposts beyond the former borders of the empire, who were required to undergo even a minimum program of preparation for baptism.

This radically changed what took place on Sunday worship. At an earlier time, after receiving instructions and participating in some prayers, catechumens were dismissed, and the eucharistic celebration was limited to those who had already been baptized. This practice continued for some time after Constantine. As shown above, half a century after Constantine, the Synod of Laodicea still retained the ancient custom. But soon, as practically everybody was baptized and there were hardly any catechumens, the dismissal of the catechumens tended to disappear.

At the same time, worship was rapidly becoming more splendid and complicated. This could be seen, for instance, in clerical vestments. A century before Constantine, Tertullian had written a brief response to those who criticized him for having

abandoned the more prestigious Roman toga in favor of the simpler mantle called a pallium. He had argued that the toga was a sign of Roman conquest and of power, while the pallium was a sign of simplicity, and therefore it was more befitting a Christian. And he concluded: “Rejoice, pallium, and exult, for now that you have become a Christian vestment you are honored by a better philosophy” (*On the Pallium* 6). A hundred years after Constantine, in 428, Pope Celestine rebuked the bishops in what is now southern France for allowing the use of special customs denoting various offices.³ Yet Celestine’s was a losing cause, for everywhere special vestments denoting particular ranks and levels of authority were emerging. The result was a complicated set of vestments from shoes to headdress, each justified by claiming for it symbolic significance, but most simply regarded in awe by the rank and file of the laity.⁴

Similar developments took place with regard to liturgical artifacts, gestures, and particularly music—which became increasingly elaborate, to the point that a choir was needed to sing it, and the task of the congregation was simply to listen and admire.

This does not mean that the service was meaningless for the majority of the congregants. On the contrary, it was endowed with such a mystical power that simply being present at it was in itself an act of deep devotion.

The great drama of the Eucharist was now the high point of most people’s lives. As it had always been, it was a drama of celebration and hope amid a world of pain and despair. In a drab world of colorless routine, every week began with this joyful, overwhelming drama of God coming to dwell among humans, dying and rising for them, giving them a future to hope for.

Even then, however, there were other forces tending to suppress this joyous dimension of Christian worship and to substitute for it a more funereal tone. But that is a development that properly belongs in another chapter.

Laws Regarding the Lord's Day

The Lord's Day as a Day of Rest

While we have several Christian texts from pre-Constantinian times urging Sabbath rest, condemning it, or allowing a certain measure of freedom on that matter, there are no texts from that time relating the Christian *dominica*—the Lord's day—with rest. Even though the Lord's day—the first day of the week according to Jewish reckoning—was a day of worship from the earliest times, there was no requirement or expectation that it also be a day of rest. Had there been such an expectation, it would have been extremely difficult to fulfill in a society in which Christians had to adjust to the general tempo of life. In this respect, Constantine's edict of 321 did change matters radically, for now the law ordered a day of rest, and this was also the day on which Christians had traditionally met for worship in the breaking of the bread.

The earliest text we have in which ecclesiastical authorities connected the Lord's day with rest is canon 29 of the aforementioned Synod of Laodicea, some sixty years after Constantine's edict. This canon not only favors—without requiring—rest on the Lord's day but also forbids keeping the Jewish Sabbath: "Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday, but shall work on that day; but the Lord's Day they shall especially honour, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from

Christ.”¹ The very fact that this canon was deemed necessary would seem to indicate that the matter of Sabbath rest was still an issue. This is corroborated by the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions*, a document probably originating in Syria at approximately the same time the Synod of Laodicea met. Regarding Sabbath rest, the *Constitutions* offer the following instruction, supposedly in the name of Peter and Paul: “Slaves are to work five days. But on the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day they are to have freedom to attend church in order to receive religious instruction. We [Peter and Paul] have ordered this for the Sabbath because of creation; and for the Lord’s day because of the resurrection” (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8.33).

For the most part, however, it was left to the civil authorities to legislate on what nonreligious activities would be allowed on the Lord’s day, while ecclesiastical authorities legislated only on matters such as whether it was permitted to kneel or to fast on that day.

A notable exception to this rule is a canon enacted in 401 by a synod in Carthage forbidding theatrical performances on the “day of the Sun”—*die solis*. This canon is particularly interesting because it is the most notable of rare exceptions in which ecclesiastical bodies refer to the Lord’s day as the “day of the Sun”—and this at a time when, as we have seen, civil authorities were beginning to refer to it as the Lord’s day—the *dominica*. It would seem that what the synod was doing was simply reaffirming the edict issued two years earlier by Emperors Honorius and Arcadius prohibiting the same activities. Interestingly, however, while the emperors referred to this day as the *dominica*, the bishops gathered at Carthage called it the *die solis*. Thus, while the empire was adopting Christian terminology, the church seemed willing to embrace traditionally pagan terminology.

Other Imperial Legislation

Meanwhile, imperial legislation sought to define what activities would be allowed on that particular day. Constantine’s first edict

of the subject, quoted above, ordered that the courts be closed and all work cease, except for agricultural tasks that could not wait. The second edict on the subject, issued jointly with his son Crispus a few months after the first, may show the influence of Christian views on charity on imperial legislation, for it allowed for the emancipation of slaves even on this day—but such influence is by no means certain.

As the fourth century progressed, laws on religious subjects abounded, many having to do with Sunday. According to Eusebius, shortly after his famous edict of 321, Constantine himself ordered that all soldiers offer a prayer on the day of the Sun, and even prescribed the words for that prayer. But here again, Constantine's characteristic ambiguity prevails, for the prayer is simply addressed to "you, our only God and our king"—which might be taken to be either the God of Christians or the Unconquered Sun that Constantine's family had long worshiped.

As to activities allowed on Sunday, there soon were frequent edicts forbidding public spectacles on this day—for instance, those issued by Theodosius and Valentinian in 386, by the same two joined by Arcadius in 392, by Arcadius and Honorius in 399, by Arcadius and Theodosius II in 409, and by Theodosius II in 425. The very frequency of these laws would seem to indicate that there was general resistance to them, and they were not universally obeyed.

As one examines these laws, it seems clear that, just as references to the day of the Sun—*die solis*—tend to disappear in favor of references to the Lord's day—*dominica*—there were some laws in which Christian influence is more likely. Most notable among these is the edict issued by Theodosius II in 409, in which he orders that on the Lord's day judges are to inquire about the conditions in which prisoners are kept.

There was also increasing importance granted to a particular Sunday, the annual great celebration of the resurrection of Jesus—what we now call Easter. According to Eusebius, after the council of Nicaea Constantine wrote to all the churches urging them to follow the decision of the council regarding the day of Easter. However, this was not presented as an imperial order, but

rather as something that made sense, particularly since such a date is already observed by “all the churches in the West, South, and North, and some also in the East” (*Life of Constantine* 3.19). In the second half of the century, beginning in 367, emperors would sometimes celebrate Easter by granting a limited amnesty. That year, in a joint decree, Emperors Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian established a precedent:

Because of the day of Easter [*pascha*], which in our innermost heart we celebrate, we dissolve the bonds of all persons whom accusation constrains and prison confines.

But nevertheless the traitor, the necromancer, the poisoner or the magician, the adulterer, the rapist, the homicide should be barred from share in this boon.²

By decreeing a similar amnesty in 368, these emperors established a tradition that, though not repeated every year, gave special significance to this particular Sunday. In 380, just before issuing his decree on amnesty, Emperor Theodosius, jointly with Gratian and Valentinian II, suspended criminal trials during the entire time that we now call Lent: “During the forty days which anticipate the paschal time . . . all trial of criminal inquisitions should be prevented.”³

And in 389 (now jointly with Valentinian II and Arcadius) he expanded the Easter holidays. After declaring that the first day of the year and the birthdays of Rome and Constantinople should be days of rest, this decree goes on to say: “We number in the same observance Easter’s sacred days, which either precede or succeed them (in each case seven in number), and also the Days of the Sun.”⁴

Christian Views on the Sabbath

Early Views and Polemics

Although it is often said that after the time of Constantine Christians absolutely rejected the Sabbath, or forgot it, or simply transposed into Sunday the previous practices of the Sabbath, this is not exactly true. Suffice it to remember that throughout the Middle Ages Greek-speaking Christians continued referring to the seventh day of the week as the *sabbaton* and Latin-speakers as the *sabbatum*—a usage that continues to this day both in Greek and in romance languages. Sometimes, as was common practice before the advent of Christianity, a *sabbatum* is not just the seventh day of the week, but the entire week. Sometimes the verb *sabbatizare*—to “sabbathize”—has positive, and sometimes negative connotations. In actuality, the development of Christian views regarding the Sabbath is quite complex. But most commonly the *sabbatum* is simply the seventh day of the week.

If the mere survival of the Jewish name for the seventh day of the week were not enough, there are abundant texts that show that many Christians, while meeting for worship on the first day of the week, still regarded the seventh in a special way. Eusebius’s reference to the Ebionites, already quoted above (*Church History* 3.27.5), shows that this is precisely what they did. The same is true of the instructions that the *Apostolic Constitutions* ascribe to Peter and Paul (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8.33). There is also

a homily preached on a Sabbath gathering, commonly attributed to Athanasius, but perhaps of his contemporary Marcellus of Ancyra, which declares: “We assemble on the Sabbath day, not that we are infected with Judaism (for we have never embraced its pseudo-sabbaths), but we assemble thus on this day to worship Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath” (*Homilia de semente* 1). At about the same time, in a passage emphasizing the different practices among Christians on a variety of subjects, Socrates Scholasticus wrote that, while most churches celebrated Communion on Sundays, many did so both on Saturdays and Sundays, and some only on Saturday: “Nor is there less variation in regard to religious assemblies. For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the sabbath of every week [besides Sundays], yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this. The Egyptians in the neighborhood of Alexandria, and the inhabitants of Thebais, hold their religious assemblies on the sabbath, but do not participate of the mysteries in the manner usual among Christians in general [that is, on Sundays]” (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.22).¹

In the following century, a similar passage by Sozomen also speaks of the custom in some churches of meeting both on the Sabbath and on Sunday, and in another of meeting on the evening of the Sabbath (which, as has been explained, would no longer be the seventh, but the beginning of the first day): “The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed in Rome or in Alexandria. There are several cities and villages in Egypt where, contrary to the usage established elsewhere, the people meet together on Sabbath evenings and . . . partake of the mysteries” (*Ecclesiastical History* 7.19).²

On the other hand, there are also indications that some Christians feared that keeping the Sabbath would lead believers back to Judaism—for this was a time when Judaism was still a proselytizing faith, often competing with Christianity. One such indication is the nineteenth canon of a synod that met in Laodi-

cea of Phrygia, at an undetermined date in the second half of the fourth century: “Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord’s Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.”³

As we have seen, already in the period before Constantine there were among Christians varying attitudes toward the Sabbath—views that were usually parallel to attitudes toward Judaism. In the second century, in a passage that is capable of various interpretations, Ignatius exhorted the Magnesians “not to sabbathize, but to live according to the Lord’s day” (*Epistle to the Magnesians* 9.1). Pseudo-Barnabas does not seem to have much sympathy for the keeping of the Sabbath; but there is in this writing no hint that the Lord’s day has taken the place of the Sabbath. Justin Martyr did not keep the Sabbath, but was quite willing to accept those who did, as long as they did not try to force others to do as they did. During that entire period, while Christians observed the Lord’s day as the time for their eucharistic meetings, there is little indication that they saw this as a substitute for the Sabbath, or that they saw the Lord’s day as a day of rest—that is, as a Sabbath. And the repeated reference to the Lord’s day as “the first day of the week” is a clear indication that they agreed with Judaism, that the Sabbath was the seventh day of the week.

Early Christian polemics against the keeping of the Sabbath did not have to do with whether one should keep that day or the next. They usually had to do rather with the meaning of the Sabbath law itself, which Christians refused to take literally. The *Epistle to Diognetus* simply continues some of the polemics found in the Gospels when it says that “to imagine that God forbids us to do good on the Sabbath is an insult to God” (*Epistle to Diognetus* 4.3). Irenaeus would say that a Christian, who speaks directly with the Father, does not need to be reminded of what they ought to do, “nor will he be commanded to leave idle one day of rest, who is constantly keeping sabbath, that is, giving homage to God in the temple of God, which is man’s body, and at all times doing works of justice” (*Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 96).⁴

Now, in the fourth century, we still find a variety of attitudes toward the Sabbath—again, attitudes parallel to attitudes toward Judaism. In general, however, it would seem that, as Socrates and Sozomen seem to indicate, the earlier custom of meeting for Communion early on the first day—that is, on the evening of the Sabbath—still prevailed in rural and remote areas, but not in large cities such as Rome or Alexandria, where Christians were now meeting on what was clearly the first day of the week by both the Jewish and Roman calendars.

Church Legislation on Rest

It is only after Constantine that the issue of rest comes to the foreground. The emperors having decreed repeatedly that the Lord's day—also the day of the Sun—was a day of rest, the question would arise of the relationship between such a day and the Jewish Sabbath. But this process would take a long time, for—although, as we have noted, the emperors did issue some legislation regarding the scope of this rest—it was relatively late that the church took up the question of what activities—besides supposedly lascivious ones such as attending the theater—were forbidden.

While there was abundant civil legislation on the matter, it was mostly in the sixth century and beyond, after the demise of the Western empire, that the church began developing more specific legislation regarding activities on the Lord's day. Even as late as the Synod of Laodicea (ca. 380) there was disagreement in this regard, for while the synod rejected Sabbath rest at approximately the same time the *Apostolic Constitutions* enjoined rest both on the Sabbath and on the Lord's day.

The Sabbath as a Type of Things to Come

Early Christians—as many other Christians throughout history—had difficulties with a literal interpretation of much of Hebrew

Scripture. What were they to say, for instance, about God's order that all living things in Jericho should be destroyed? Very soon they developed means of interpreting these ancient texts, particularly when their literal meaning was objectionable. These means were inspired by Jewish antecedents as well as by the ways in which the Greeks had come to interpret stories about their gods that were equally objectionable. Sometimes these Christian interpretations of Scripture read those ancient texts as allegories not referring to actual events, but rather to the hidden meaning of the words themselves. Sometimes they took those texts as historically true, but also foreshadowing or pointing to future events. Since such signs or pointers to the future were called "types," this sort of interpretation is usually called "typology." In both cases, difficult texts were interpreted as having a meaning beyond themselves.

When it came to the interpretation of the Sabbath laws, Christians followed these methods, often mingling the two so that they are practically undistinguishable. They saw those laws as either allegories or shadows pointing to a different meaning and fulfillment. Soon the notion that the Sabbath was a "type" or prefiguration pointing to Jesus became standard among Christian theologians. While there are countless texts that may exemplify these, this is not the central subject of the present history, and therefore a brief selection will suffice.

In a frequently quoted passage, Athanasius declared that "the first creation ended on the Sabbath. The second creation began on the Lord's day, when he renewed and restored the old. Therefore, just as he prescribed that in the past they should observe the Sabbath in remembrance of the first things, so do we now honor the Lord's day as a remembrance of the new creation" (*On Sabbath and Circumcision* 3).

John Chrysostom, one of the most famous preachers of all time, affirms the value of Sabbath laws, but then declares them to have been superseded by the gospel.

True, in the beginning the observance of the Sabbath brought a great many advantages. For instance, the Sabbath made the

Jews gentler and more humane with their own kin, taught them to acknowledge God's providence . . . and was thus instructing them so that, a step at a time, they would leave evil aside and would be led to pay more attention to things of the spirit. . . . In this manner, through the shadows themselves, the Lord revealed the truth to them. Now, did Christ come to destroy all this? Certainly not! What he did was to underscore it. The time had now come to reveal higher learning to humankind, and there was no longer need to tie down those who were free from evil and ready to rise toward all good. . . . If one lives in a continual feast, as a citizen of heaven, what need is there for the Sabbath? Let us therefore live in a continual feast and abstain from evil, for such is the true feast. Let us stress the spiritual and move away from the material. Let us practice a spiritual rest or idleness by keeping our hands away from greed, and freeing our body from useless and senseless toil. (*Homilies* 39.3)

In this homily Chrysostom mentions in passing a puzzling word that appeared in the manuscript he had of Luke 6:1—a word that modern translators have opted to omit by following a different manuscript tradition. In that verse, the story of Jesus and his disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath is placed “on the second-first [*deuteroprōtos*] Sabbath.” At about the same time in the West Ambrose, while commenting on the Gospel of Luke, could not avoid the question of the meaning of this strange word. His answer is grounded on his understanding of the present value of the Sabbath.

It is remarkable that in Luke it says “second-first, *deuteroprōtos*” rather than “first-second,” for that which is first should be preferred. It is a “second Sabbath” because there had earlier come another by virtue of the law, which prescribed punishment for any who would work. But it is also first because this other Sabbath that came earlier, the Sabbath of the law, has been abolished. And this other Sabbath, which came later, has been made the first. For, since it is no longer forbidden

to work on the Sabbath, and such work is no longer punished, the Sabbath of the law is no longer valid, and is nothing but a name. If that other Sabbath was first in its origin, this other Sabbath is first in its results, and therefore is no longer second, even though it came later. Likewise the first Adam cannot be compared with the second Adam. . . . There is good reason why the second Adam became first: because the first brought death, and the second brought life. Likewise this is a “second-first” Sabbath, for although in its numeric order it is second, in its good it is first. The Sabbath in which guilt is forgiven is better than the Sabbath by which guilt is prescribed. (*On the Gospel of Luke* 5.31)

It is important to note, however, that Ambrose is not saying that the Lord’s day—Sunday—has come to take the place of the Sabbath. What has come to take that place is the new order that has dawned in Christ. The “second Sabbath” that has become first is not a different day of the week, but rather a different way of relating to God. In another passage in the same commentary, referring now to the woman whom Jesus healed on a Sabbath (Luke 13:10–17), Ambrose once again speaks of the Sabbath as being superseded, not by another weekly observance, but rather by a different relationship with God: “The observance of the Sabbath [in the law] is a sign of the future life, for all who have fulfilled the law and lived in grace will be freed by Christ’s mercy from the misery of their sick bodies. And thus the reality of sanctification was given to Moses as a sign to the future exercise of sanctification and for spiritual observance by abstaining from the works of the world” (*On the Gospel of Luke* 7.173). Shortly thereafter, St. Augustine wrote:

Christ freed us from the very heavy yoke of so many observances, so that we no longer have to be circumcised in the flesh, nor sacrifice animals, nor follow the sabbatical cycle, so that every seven years we would have to cease all necessary work. Rather we are to keep all these things in a spiritual manner and, leaving aside the shadows that pointed to truth,

we are to keep these laws according to as spiritual understanding. . . . We [are freed] from the carnal observance of the Sabbath, which points to spiritual sanctification and rest. (*Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* 3.4.10)

The reason for this is that Christ is the fulfillment of what was foreshadowed in the Sabbath law: “It is the Lord who will show us clearly the mystery of the Sabbath, whose observance was given to the Jews at a time as a sign. But the true fulfillment of this mystery was to come in him” (Augustine, *Commentary on John* 17.13).

And, in a passage that also shows his mistaken understanding of Judaism, he goes on to say:

The Jews understood the observance of the Sabbath in a carnal way. They also believed that, after working six days in the creation of the world, God sanctified this day and has been asleep ever since. There is a mystery in the law given to our ancestors that as Christians we do observe; this we do spiritually, by abstaining from all manual labor, that is, from all sin. . . . This provides rest for our heart, that is, spiritual peace. . . . It is said that God rested after creating all things so that we might know that we too shall rest after our good works. (*Commentary on John* 20.2)

Again, it is important to note that these texts do not say that, while Jews keep the Sabbath, Christians are to keep the Lord’s day. It is not a matter of substituting one day for another. It is rather a vision in which the observance of the Sabbath was a sign of a promised order, and in which that order has now come—at least in part—in Christ. Therefore, the new observance, which most of these writers connect with spiritual peace, is not a matter of a particular day of the week, but rather of the new day that has dawned in Christ.

As to physical rest, very little is said. When rest is mentioned, it is usually the peace of the soul that rests in Christ. And abstention from physical work is most often understood

allegorically as abstaining from sin—as in Augustine’s text just quoted.

Even so, the Sabbath in the literal sense, as the seventh day of the week, was not entirely forgotten, as attested by the already mentioned fact that in Greek as well as in the romance languages that developed in the western half of the Roman Empire the seventh day of the week is still known by words derived from its ancient Jewish name.

Some Points to Highlight

Once again, as we come to the end of a major section in this study, it is well to stop and highlight some of the major developments of this particular period, thus helping us see the larger picture of the processes that are taking place. Obviously, the most important factor during this period is the changed status of Christianity from a persecuted faith to the official religion of the Roman Empire, and therefore all the points to be highlighted now are related to that changed status.

The first point to be made in this regard is that now for the first time Sunday was connected with rest. This is where Constantine’s impact on the history of Sunday was most notable and immediate. Contrary to what has been said, it was not Constantine who decided that Christians were to gather to worship on Sunday. They had been doing that for a long time. But Constantine did make it easier for Christians to gather, without having to be concerned over their work or employment obligations. This in turn accelerated the process begun earlier, whereby, rather than meeting at the very beginning of the first day of the week, that is, after sunset on the seventh day, Christians began meeting mostly after the following sunrise.

Although the laws that Constantine and his successors issued regarding Sunday rest were similar to some of the laws regarding the Sabbath, this had not led to the notion that the fourth commandment was now to be obeyed by Sunday observance. For many Christians the Sabbath was still significant, and many

still worshiped on the evening after the Sabbath (which by traditional Jewish reckoning was the first day of the week, but by Roman reckoning was still the seventh).

On Sunday itself, worship became more elaborate, with spacious and often quite ornate buildings, vestments highlighting the relative importance of various participants, and choirs singing music that congregations could not sing.

PART 3

THE MIDDLE AGES

Most probably Augustine wrote the words quoted at the end of the previous chapter around the year 415. At about the same time he was visited by his disciple Paulus Orosius, who collaborated with him on a portion of his *City of God*. Shortly thereafter Orosius returned to his native and beloved Hispania—more precisely, to Braga, in what is now Portugal—and found not only Hispania, but most of Western Europe, overrun by Germanic “barbarians.” He was completing a work in seven books, *A History against the Pagans*, and as he was closing that work as well as his life—he died shortly thereafter—he wrote a final assessment whose poignancy still moves us today.

If the only reason why the barbarians have been sent within the confines of the Roman borders was that throughout the East and West the church of Christ will be full of Huns and Suevi, of Vandals, and Burgundians, of diverse and innumerable peoples, then the mercy of God is to be praised and exalted, because so many people have attained a knowledge of truth that they would never have had without these events, even though it may be through our own loss. (*History against the Pagans* 7.41)

The changes that Orosius was witnessing had swept through Western Europe, and were then moving into northern Africa. There, as Augustine lay on his deathbed in 430 some fifteen

years after Orosius's last visit, the Vandals were at the gates of his city of Hippo, and would soon conquer it.

The words by Orosius upon returning to Hispania are noteworthy because they are an excellent summary of what was happening: (1) the old Roman Empire was being occupied by people who had long lived beyond its borders; (2) these invaders brought with them much pain and destruction; (3) the church had to find ways to bring the new masses into its fold, which led to a brief revival of the catechumenate; and (4) eventually out of that process would emerge both a new church and what we now call Western Civilization.

Orosius is not talking about distant experiences. He was born in Braga, in what was then the Roman province of Gallaecia, in about 375 CE. At that time Braga was one of the largest cities in Hispania, and a center of ecclesiastical life. But in 410—the same year that the Visigoths sacked Rome—it was taken by the Suevi, who made it their capital. Then in 470, half a century after Orosius's death, it was taken by the Visigoths, who also conquered most of Hispania. Since both the Suevi and the Visigoths were Arian (that is, Christians who did not believe in the eternal preexistence of the Son), this posed new challenges for the church that already existed there.

Although it might have seemed to the former inhabitants of those lands that these Germanic invaders had come to destroy Roman civilization, that was not the case. They had come to conquer and rule; but they had also come to learn and adapt to a civilization they admired. There are many signs of this. In 506, less than a century after the sack of Rome, King Alaric II of the Visigoths issued a vast collection of Roman law known as the *Lex Romana Visigothorum* (Roman law of the Visigoths). This was intended to apply only to the former inhabitants of his dominions, while the Visigoths would continue living under their own laws. In 589 another king of the Visigoths, Recared, renounced the Arian faith of his Visigothic ancestors and declared himself a Catholic—the neighboring Suevi had already done so.

These developments, parallel to what was taking place among other Germanic peoples, affected the church in many

ways. One of them was that, after allowing the catechumenate to die out because supposedly everybody was a Christian, some deemed it necessary to revive it. One such case is the treatise by Hildephonsus, bishop of Toledo, *On the Knowledge of Baptism*, which he wrote some seventy years after Recared's conversion from Arianism, but in which he proposes a catechetical procedure very similar to what had existed in the times before Constantine.

The story of those changes is too vast and complicated to be even summarized here. Indeed, it may well be said that Western Civilization was born out of the encounter of Greco-Roman and Germanic cultures and traditions. But as we continue looking at the history of Sunday we must keep in mind this new environment and the new reality that was emerging.

A New Sunday Piety: From Feast to Funeral

Communion as a Renewed Sacrifice of Christ

For centuries before the Germanic invasions, Christianity in the Latin-speaking West had been developing its own distinct characteristics and emphases. Oversimplifying things for the sake of clarity, one may say that, while in the East sometimes the emphasis lay on Christianity as the “true philosophy”—a perspective that had long been pursued in Alexandria—most often it lay on the victory of Christ over the powers of evil. Central to that victory was his resurrection from among the dead, as was also his coming again in glory. It was this victory that Communion celebrated, usually at least every Sunday, and most joyously at the Great Sunday of Resurrection—what we now call Easter Sunday.¹

The piety and theology that had been developing in the West was much more influenced by the Roman emphasis on law and order. Here God was seen primarily as a legislator and a judge, sin as a debt owed to God for having broken the law, and Christ as the sacrificial victim atoning for sin. Salvation then was the result of having such a debt wiped away, either by the merits of Christ or by one’s own merits—or, most commonly, by a combination of both. This is why from a relatively early date we find in the West a growing concern over postbaptismal sins. If in baptism sins are wiped away, what is one to do about sins committed after baptism? The response of the church was the development

of an entire penitential system that after centuries of evolution would lead to practices such as the sale of indulgences.

All of this, however, falls far beyond the scope of our present inquiry, which must be limited to the question of how these developments affected Sunday life and worship. Along these lines, the most important point to underscore is the shift from a view in which Communion was a celebration of Christ's victory to a more somber view in which Communion was the repetition of his sacrifice.

The connection between Communion and the notion of sacrifice was not entirely new. Indeed, it appears as early as the *Didache*, whose readers are instructed to confess their sins before breaking the bread, "so that your sacrifice may be pure" (*Didache* 14.1). And similar language may be found also in other pre-Constantinian writers such as Ignatius, Justin, and Cyprian. But one must note that a "sacrifice" was anything given to God—including prayers, which are often called "our sacrifice." In none of these texts is Jesus the sacrificial victim at the Eucharist. Even so, early references to him as "the Lamb that was slain" make it clear that his sacrifice was not forgotten. But in the earliest such references this is overcome by a sense of victory. Thus in the book of Revelation—which was probably written to be read at Communion—we read:

Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and blessing. . . .
To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might
forever and ever! (*Rev.* 5:11-13)

From what we have seen regarding the early meanings of the first day of the week—the day of the resurrection of Jesus, the first day of creation, the eternal eighth day of joy—it is clear that what prevailed in Communion was a sense of joy and gratitude. However, in the midst of the new conditions in which violence and death became ever more common, and probably influenced

by the religious traditions of some of the Germanic invaders, among whom bloody sacrifices were still common, Communion tended to focus more on the sacrifice of Christ, to the point that it came to be seen as the bloodless repetition of that sacrifice, and therefore something to be approached with stern seriousness and a deep sense of sin.

While this is not the place to provide even an outline of this development, a fairly extensive quotation from Gregory the Great (pope from 590 to 604) should suffice to illustrate the new mood. The same passage also shows that by that time the doctrine of purgatory is firmly established, as is the practice of saying Masses for the dead. Gregory says:

We have to realize that it is better and safer to do for oneself while still living what one wishes others will do in one's favor after death [to say Masses on one's behalf]. It is much more blessed to leave this world free of sin, than to be in prison seeking to be freed [from purgatory]. It makes sense therefore that we should wholeheartedly disdain that which at best is ephemeral, and offer to God our daily sacrifice of tears, and the daily sacrifice of his body and blood [Communion]. For this sacrifice has particular power to free us from eternal damnation. It mysteriously renews for us the death of the son of God. Having risen from the dead, he no longer dies, and death will not lay hold of him. But while he lives now immortal and without decay, he is sacrificed once again in the mystery of our holy offering. For in it his body is received and his blood is distributed for the salvation of all. In it his blood is no longer shed at the hands of the unbelieving, but poured into the mouths of believers. Let us therefore consider the nature of this sacrifice ordained for us and which repeatedly represents the passion of the Son of God for us. . . .

But it is also required that as we do these things we also in repentance make of ourselves a sacrifice to God almighty. For as we celebrate the mystery of the Lord's passion we ought to imitate it. This will truly make us a sacrifice to God, as we offer ourselves as a sacrifice. Thus we must take care that, after

having spent as much time in prayer as God's grace allows, we think only of him, so that no thought will lead us to fall, and no silly gaiety will come into our hearts. Otherwise such passing thoughts will make the soul lose all it had previously attained by means of its repentance. (*Dialogues* 4.58–59)

The Awesome Miracle of the Eucharist

The sense of overwhelming awe resulting from being present at such a sacrifice of none other than Christ was made even stronger by another development in the understanding of Communion. From very early times Christians had a sense that what took place when they shared this meal was no ordinary event. This was where Christ made himself present to the community. This presence was clearly connected with the bread and the wine that were at the very center of the celebration, but in the early church there had been no attempts to explain exactly how it happened, nor the exact way in which Christ was present when believers gathered to break bread. Furthermore, in many earlier texts—such as 1 Corinthians 11—the focus was not on the bread and the wine, but rather on the community—the body of Christ—gathered for this common meal.

Now, as those present were no longer those few from among society at large who had decided to join the church, but practically everybody in the community, the focus shifted from the community to the bread and the wine. People would no longer attend church in order to share in the bread and wine as a community, but rather to witness the miracle that was taking place, and to be blessed by it—this to such a point that it was no longer necessary to take Communion in order to receive its benefits, for mere attendance was already a means of blessing.

Within that context, there was a growing sense that the miracle of the event was in the bread and the wine, which somehow became the body and blood of Christ. The process whereby this happened took centuries. Once again, this is not the place to trace that development, but simply to call attention to it, and

then show its significance for the meaning and observance of Sunday.

In this regard, as is commonly the case, popular piety and experiences in worship moved ahead of theological development, and much of the latter was actually a more sophisticated expression of what people had long believed and practiced. What we now know as the doctrine of transubstantiation was not declared to be a dogma of the church until 1215, when the Fourth Lateran Council declared, "Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the appearance [*sub specibus*] of bread and wine, the bread being transubstantiated into body, and the wine into blood by the power of God."²

But long before that the general consensus was moving in that direction, and by the ninth century we already have a theological statement that, without using the exact words of transubstantiation, amounts to the same. This comes from the pen of Haymo of Halberstadt.

It is an evil madness that there be in the minds of the faithful any doubt that the substance of the bread and the wine which are placed upon the altar become the body and blood of Christ through the priestly mystery and the action of grace, God doing so through his divine grace and secret power. We therefore believe and faithfully confess and hold that this substance of the bread and the wine is substantially turned into another substance, that is, into flesh and blood, by the operation of a divine power, as has already been said. For it is not impossible for the omnipotence of the divine reason to transform created natures into whatever it will, as it was not impossible for it to create them out of nothing when they did not exist, according to its will. For if it can make something out of nothing, it is not impossible for it to make something out of something. Therefore the invisible priest, through his secret power, transforms his visible creatures into the substance of his flesh and blood. But although the nature of the substances has completely been turned into the body and blood of Christ, in the miracle

of partaking the taste and appearance of this body and blood remain those of bread and wine.³

After that time, even before the declaration of the Lateran Council, any other opinion was suspect and often suppressed. Most famously, in 1079 Berengar of Tours was forced by Gregory VII to recant his former beliefs and declare:

I Berengar do with my heart believe and with my mouth confess, that the bread and wine that are placed on the altar by virtue of holy prayer and the words of our Redeemer are substantially converted into the very true vivifying body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was born of the Virgin and which for the salvation of the world hung on the cross, and which is now sitting at the right of the Father. . . . This I believe, and will no longer teach against this faith.⁴

Such statements were the result of generations of believers who were convinced that the bread and wine did in fact and quite literally become the body and blood of Christ. What convinced these people was not a theological argument, but rather the experience of being part of a drama that had no parallel, as well as the multiple stories that circulated regarding eucharistic miracles. Quite a few of these stories follow a pattern in which an unbelieving person—often a Jew—is shocked and converted by the sight of a bleeding consecrated host. The most famous during the early Middle Ages was the eighth-century story of an Eastern monk who, while in Lanciano, Italy, had doubts about celebrating the Eucharist with unleavened bread—which by then was the custom in the West, but was contrary to the Eastern use of leavened bread. He feared that such a communion would not be valid, but was convinced of his error when he saw the host turn into flesh and the wine into blood.

Such miracles were often adduced not only to prove the transformation of the bread and wine but also to prove the efficacy of Communion for salvation. The most famous of these was told by Pope Gregory the Great. As he tells the story, while he was

the superior of his monastery in Rome (before becoming pope), a monk by the name of Justus had violated the law of poverty, for which sin Gregory excommunicated him and, when Justus died, had him buried outside hallowed ground. But then Gregory had pity, and ordered that thirty Masses be said for his soul. At the end of this period, Justus appeared to a brother declaring that he was now happy, because he had been freed from purgatory (*Dialogues* 4.57).

While this particular story is told by Gregory himself, another story about Gregory comes from the pen of his biographer Paul the Deacon. According to that story, while Gregory was celebrating Communion he noticed that one of the women who had prepared the bread was laughing, saying that she could not believe that the bread she had made would become the body and blood of Christ. Gregory refused to serve her, and prayed that she be convinced. At that point the bread that she had prepared turned into flesh and blood and the woman—quite understandably!—was convinced of her error and repented.

Allaying the Fear of Communion

These two major developments in the understanding of Communion—that it was an unbloody repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, and that in it the bread and wine literally became the body and blood of Christ—radically changed the mood of the Sunday service. What until then had been an occasion for joy, celebrating the victory of Christ—and therefore of his followers—over all the powers of evil now became a fearsome experience. People would not take the bread and the wine lest they bring damnation on themselves by somehow desecrating it.

This in turn resulted in changes in the bread itself, as well as in the manner in which the bread and the wine were taken. In ancient times there seems to have been no discussion as to the kind of bread to be used in Communion. The most ancient (apart from the Gospels themselves) text adduced by those who question the use of unleavened bread appears in the second century,

when Justin Martyr spoke of “common bread or ordinary drink” (*Apol.* 66.2; see also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.18). But since it is impossible to know what was “common bread” in Justin’s time and context, this does not prove much.

The truth seems to be that from time immemorial some churches used unleavened bread, and some leavened. This had caused no great debate until the eleventh century, when the growing distance between the Eastern and Western churches finally resulted in a permanent schism (1054). While the schism was mostly the result of complex political realities, each side soon began justifying it on theological grounds. One of these was that the West used unleavened bread, while the East used leavened.

It is not clear when the Western, Latin-speaking church began using exclusively unleavened bread, eventually developing into the eucharistic host. The first unquestionable references to unleavened bread appear in the writings of the Venerable Bede, early in the eighth century (*In Lucae Evangelium exposito* 6.12).⁵ By the next century, at the time of the Carolingian renaissance, it seems to have been a well-established practice.⁶

Although after the schism of 1054 Western theologians sought theological, biblical, and patristic confirmation for their use of unleavened bread, it seems that such use—although perhaps quite ancient in some areas—became common practice at least partly as a result of the manner in which the bread was now seen. A loaf of common bread was crumbly, and this made it difficult to prevent pieces of consecrated bread falling on the ground and thus being desecrated. This would be quite a burden of conscience that must be avoided. To that end a “bread” that would not crumble came into use: the communion host or wafer. A consecrated wafer was a sacred and awesome thing. To show this, the custom arose in the twelfth century in France, and soon became universal in the Western church, of elevating the host at the moment of consecration.

Even so, a host could still crumble, or a piece might fall to the ground. Lotario de Conti di Segne would become Pope Innocent III—the most powerful pope in history and the one who in

1215, through the Fourth Lateran Council, would make transubstantiation official doctrine of the church. Shortly before being elected pope, he asked himself what would happen if a piece of the host dropped to the ground and a mouse ate it. To those who do not understand the awesome reality of the presence of Christ in the host, this may seem idle or even ridiculous speculation. But it was not so for Innocent's contemporaries. Innocent was dealing with a question raised earlier by Peter Lombard, who simply said that, while an animal would not eat the body of Christ, he did not know how to explain this. Innocent and the early Franciscan theologians would say that somehow the host ceased to be the body of Christ. Eventually the most commonly held position was that of St. Thomas Aquinas: "If a mouse or a dog eats the consecrated host, the substance of the body of Christ remains in it for as long as it still has the accidents of bread. The same is true if it is cast into mud. None of this deters from the dignity of the body of Christ, who willingly was crucified for sinners without loss of dignity" (*Summa theologica* 3, q. 80, a. 3).

This view of the sacredness of Communion bread affected not only the frequency—or rather, infrequency—with which it was taken but also the manner in which it was received. Late in the fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem had called those about to take Communion to place their right hand on their left, making as a throne to which a king would come, and then to be careful not to lose any, for the loss would be worse than receiving grains of gold, and letting some of them drop (*Catechetical Lectures* 23.21). However, as the bread became increasingly worthy of awe the practice became more common of placing the host directly on the tongue of the person receiving it. And, although at first this seems to have been mostly a matter of making sure that no crumbs fell to the ground, eventually it became a matter of the consecrated host being so sacred no layperson was worthy of touching it. Thus in the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas wrote:

It pertains to the priest to administer the body of Christ for three reasons: First, that . . . just as Christ consecrated his body at the Supper and gave it to others, the priest too should

consecrate and distribute. Second, because the priest is an intermediary between God and the people. . . . Third, because the reverence to the sacrament requires that it not be touched by anything that is not consecrated. The Communion cloth and the chalice are consecrated, and so are the hands of the priest. Therefore, no one else may touch it, unless it is necessary, as when it falls to the ground, or in similar cases. (*Summa theologica* 3, q. 82, a. 3)

At approximately the same time Thomas was writing these words, the solemn day of Corpus Christi was instituted by Pope Urban IV (1264). Since it is celebrated on a Thursday, it touches only tangentially on our topic; but its very institution is a sign of the great devotion surrounding the consecrated host.

Something similar happened to the wine, although what was changed out of a sense of devotion was not the wine itself, but the manner in which it was—or was not—received. For a long time, chalices were made out of any material at hand—clay, wood, or metal. Shortly after Constantine’s time, it became common for the “sacred vessels” of large churches to be made out of gold or silver; but this was not mandatory, and not even expected in poorer churches. But as time passed it became customary to use metal chalices—if possible, of gold or silver. This was in part a sign of respect for what took place in the chalice, and was also closely connected with the growing pomp of Christian worship. But it was also the result of the growing sense that the wine in the chalice, having become the blood of Christ, must be drunk to the last drop, and not left to dry in a porous substance such as clay or wood.

There was some opposition to this. There is the famous quip by Boniface of Mayence, often called “the apostle to the Germans”: “In the past golden priests celebrated with wooden chalices, and now wooden priests celebrate with golden chalices” (quoted in the acts of the Synod of Trebur [near Mayence], in 895). But in spite of such opposition, very soon it became the rule that the chalice was to be of gold or silver, which would not absorb any of the sacred blood.

For reasons parallel to what we have seen leading to the

practice of placing the wafer on the tongue of the believer, there was a tendency to give the laity only the host, and not the chalice, for it was easy to spill the wine, or to have it remain on the beard. Although in speaking of this development historians often refer to the “withholding” of the chalice from the laity, it would seem that what actually took place in the early stages was not that the clergy withheld the cup, but rather that the laity would refuse it. This seems to have been the case as early as the fifth century, when Pope Gelasius said: “We have noted that some take only the sacred body of Christ and abstain from the chalice. Although I do not know the nature of their superstition, they must either receive the sacrament as a whole or not at all” (*Epistle 37*, to Majoricus and John).

Communion with bread alone had been common for a long time in exceptional circumstances. For instance, those who could not attend the Supper for reason of illness would have the bread brought to them. But at the service itself people were expected to partake of both the bread and the wine. The matter was still being discussed in the thirteenth century, when Thomas Aquinas, while preferring Communion in both kinds—the bread and the wine—allows for exceptions:

On the use of this sacrament, the question should be looked at from two perspectives. From the perspective of the sacrament itself, it is proper to receive both the body and the blood, for their perfection is in both. Therefore the priest, who both consecrates the sacrament and completes it, must never take the body of Christ without his blood. But from the perspective of those who receive it much reverence and care are required, so that nothing may happen that would insult such a mystery. This might be the case with the blood, which, if taken without care, could easily be spilled. And since there is a growing number among the people of God who are elderly, or young, or infants, among whom many do not have sufficient understanding to be properly careful on receiving the sacrament, some churches do not give the blood to the people, but only the priest takes it. (*Summa theologica* 3, q. 80, a. 12)

On this score, however, Thomas's opinion would not prevail. A few years after Thomas's death, John Peckham, who had long had serious disagreements with Thomas, and who was now archbishop of Canterbury, presided over a council at Lambeth (1281), which ordered that the laity receive only unconsecrated wine, and that the priest alone drink the consecrated cup.⁷ Other theologians and councils continued legislating on the matter, to the point that by the fourteenth century the withholding of the cup from the laity was universal practice in the Western church—not in the Eastern churches, which continued offering the laity Communion in both kinds.

By the early fifteenth century the practice of withholding the cup from the laity had become so ingrained that when Jan Hus was taken before the Council of Constance, one of the "heresies" for which he was condemned was claiming that the laity should partake of Communion in both kinds. And after his death one of the issues for which his followers in Bohemia were willing to fight several crusades sent against them was their right to have the cup restored to them—a claim called *utraquism*, from a word meaning "in both."

From Participation to Attendance

The result of all this was the loss of that "directness" to which Gregory Dix referred as characterizing early Christian worship. Rather than an event in which all participated, the central act of Christian worship, the Eucharist or Lord's Supper, became a mystical spectacle in which very few actually partook of the bread and wine, and the rest were expected to be drawn closer to God by simply being present.

By the year 506, shortly after the end of antiquity, the above mentioned Synod of Agde affirmed the obligation of all Christians to attend Mass, but at the same time required them to partake of Communion at least three times a year—on Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. This is a clear indication that Sunday devotions no longer centered on being part of a community of

faith that gathered to share in the bread and the wine, but simply on attending Mass.

Seven centuries later this had come to such a point that the Fourth Lateran Council decreed that every person having reached the age of discretion had the obligation to receive Communion at least once a year, on Easter: "After reaching the age of discretion, all faithful of both sexes shall confess their sins before their own priest at least once a year, and having fulfilled their penance at their best, they shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least on Easter [*in Pascha*], unless their own priest advises them to abstain from it. Otherwise they will be cut from the church during their lives and not have a Christian burial."⁸

What in ancient times had been a joyful privilege had now become an obligation imposed by fear of excommunication. In theory—and to some degree in practice—Sunday was a day of joy, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. This is why in counting the forty days of Lent Sunday would be excluded. But in the worship service itself what was done and how it was interpreted would have seemed more appropriate for Good Friday than for a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus.

A further result of the medieval understanding of the Eucharist as a meritorious sacrifice, and of centering on the bread and wine rather than on the community of believers, was the practice of celebrating private Masses, either for the benefit of the priest himself or, quite commonly, for the benefit of a patron paying for them. Once again, what was important was not to partake in Communion, nor even to be present, but simply to have it celebrated.

A Day to Pray and to Play

Continuing Legislation on Rest

The legislation of late antiquity regarding activities forbidden on the Lord's day continued throughout the Middle Ages in decrees from emperors, kings, and ecclesiastical authorities. In the East, where the empire survived throughout the Middle Ages, there was a seemingly unending series of imperial decrees on the Lord's day. In 469 Emperors Leo I and Anthemius issued a decree that may well serve as a summary of most of the ensuing legislation on Sunday observance.

We decree that the ever-venerable Lord's Day must be venerated in such a way that one should be excused from all indictments, no correction should press anyone, no collection of surety should be demanded, service of legal documents should be at rest, advocacy in court should lie hid, the said day should be free from trials in court, the court crier's rude voice should be silent, litigants should recover breath from controversies, they should have an interval of truce, opponents should come to each other without fear, reciprocal repentance should enter minds, they should make joint covenants, they should talk about agreements.

And, however, while relaxing these activities of a religious day, we do not allow anyone to be engaged in obscene pleasures. On the said day the theatrical stage or the contest of

the circus or the tearful spectacle of wild beasts should claim nought for themselves.¹

This was appropriated into the Code of Justinian in 529 and from that point on became standard Roman law, usually accepted and supported by rulers not only in the Byzantine empire but also in the West. Furthermore, even before Justinian, Alaric II—at that point the most powerful ruler in Western Europe—was issuing his *Roman Law of the Visigoths*, which included much of the earlier imperial legislation in this regard, and would repeatedly find echo in other royal and imperial decrees throughout Western Europe.

Two things are relatively new during this period. One is the development of ecclesiastical legislation claiming authority not only over purely ecclesiastical matters but also over the population in general. The second is a high degree of overlapping and agreement—at least in theory—between civil and ecclesiastical legislation. This may be seen quite clearly in ecclesiastical as well as civil legislation regarding the Lord's day.

In the Frankish kingdom—to take one area as an example—King Childeric decreed late in the fifth century that no work would be allowed on Sunday, except the necessary preparation of food. In 787 a synod presided by Boniface of Mayence (the same one who quipped about golden chalices) ordered that if a man was caught plowing on Sunday his right-hand ox would be confiscated—apparently because the right-hand ox was normally the one leading the team (Synod of Mayence, canon 23). In 827 Louis the Pious reaffirmed a decree of his father Charlemagne.

We ordain according to the law of God and to the command of our father of blessed memory in his edicts, that no servile works shall be done on Sundays, neither shall men perform their rustic labours, tending vines, ploughing fields, reaping corn and mowing hay, setting up hedges or fencing woods, cutting trees, or working in quarries or building houses; nor shall they work in the garden, nor come to the law courts, nor follow the chase. But three carrying services it is lawful to do

on Sunday, to wit carrying for the army, carrying food, or carrying (if need be) the body of a lord to his grave. Item, women shall not do their textile works, nor cut out clothes, nor stitch them together with the needle, nor shear sheep: so that there may be rest on the Lord's day. But let them all come together from all sides to Mass in the Church and praise God for all the good things He did for us on that day!²

Similarly, in 589, two centuries before Boniface and further west, in Narbonne, which was then part of the Visigothic kingdom, a council decreed: "Let no man, be he noble or serf, Goth, Roman, Syrian, Greek, or Jew, do any work on Sunday. Let oxen not be yoked, unless there is the need to move elsewhere. And if anyone dares do these things, and he is noble, let him pay to the count of the city the sum of a hundred soldi. And if he is a serf, he shall receive a hundred lashes" (Council of Narbonne, canon 4).³

And much later and further east, in Hungary, a synod convoked by King Ladislaus in 1092 ordered:

If a layman hunts on Sunday or another feast day, his punishment shall be the loss of a horse or an ox. If it is a clergyman who hunts, he shall be suspended from his office until he does penitence. Anyone trading on the Day of the Lord will also be penalized with the loss of a horse. If a shop owner opens his shop, he will be ordered to destroy his shop, or at least pay fifty-five pounds. And finally, if a Jew works on Sunday, he shall lose the tool he has employed.⁴

Other medieval legislation regarding Sunday shows that the earlier concern over bawdy or otherwise inappropriate behavior continued. What is new is that, while earlier legislation simply decreed a day of rest, proscribing only a few activities such as taking a case to court, now rest is required, the list of forbidden activities grows, and they are carefully defined—for instance, what carrying one may or may not do. What is most striking as one looks at these laws is that the manner in which they discuss and define what sort of work is lawful or forbidden is very similar

to the parallel rabbinical discussions regarding the Sabbath. This is one of the first indications of a shift that would become more noticeable in later years, a shift whereby Sunday will eventually become a Christian Sabbath. Meanwhile, the seventh day of the week was still called the *sabbatum*. But what both civil and ecclesiastical legislation prescribed for it was fasting, and not rest.

One also notes in this legislation an anti-Jewish prejudice. Jews may decide to work or not to work on the Sabbath; but on Sunday they must not work. And this leads to the suspicion that, as the Christian Lord's day becomes more like the Jewish Sabbath, a day of rest, there is a tendency for the difference between the Sabbath (the *sabbatum*) and the Lord's day (the *dominica*) to be defined merely in terms of what day of the week one observes, and becomes a mark of Christian orthodoxy vis-à-vis Judaism. The name *sabbatum* is still reserved for the seventh day, but—even without using that name—the Lord's day has become a Christian Sabbath. Furthermore, the verb *sabbatizare*, to “sabbathize,” is sometimes used pejoratively, referring to keeping the Jewish Sabbath, and sometimes simply in the sense of resting—or, more specifically, resting for religious reasons.

The Ideal: A Day to Pray

While in most of these laws the emphasis lay on rest as an obligation, there was a somewhat different current within the monastic tradition. There too the Lord's day was a day of rest. But in most of the monastic tradition the purpose of rest was not mere leisure, but rather to devote the entire day to prayer, meditation, and devotional reading. Significantly, at a time when secular and ecclesiastical authorities were defining ever more stringently the sort of work that was allowed on Sundays, Benedict's *Rule* places Sunday rest under a different light.

Likewise, on the Lord's day [*dominico*] let all be free to be occupied in reading, except those who have tasks assigned to them.

And if someone is so negligent and apathetic as to be unable or unwilling to meditate or read, let him be assigned some work, so he will not be idle. (*Rule* 48.22–23)

In other words, Sunday is to be a day of rest, but not of rest for the sake of rest itself. Important duties—such as those of the cooks—are to be fulfilled. And idleness is to be avoided. The purpose of Sunday rest is prayer and meditation.

Less than a century after Benedict, Isidore of Seville issued another of the many monastic rules of the time—all of which would eventually be eclipsed by Benedict’s. In discussing the days in which fasting is to be encouraged or allowed, he reasserted what was a common view at the time—and had been at least since the second century—that Sunday was not to be a day of fasting. And the reason he gave is very similar to what we have found much earlier as to why Sunday was not to be a day of sorrow: “The feasts that monks are to observe by not fasting are the following: First of all, the venerable Lord’s Day, devoted to Christ. For since this day is solemn because of the mystery of the Resurrection of the Lord, it should be a festive solemnity for all his followers” (Isidore of Seville, *Rule* 10).⁵

The Reality: A Day to Play

The draconian laws regarding rest on the Lord’s day, and the apparent need to reissue them again and again, prove not only that such rest was considered of utmost importance but also that it was not universally observed. While the ideal was the monastic goal that people would devote their time of rest on the Lord’s day to worship, prayer, and good deeds, in fact most people, having completed their obligation to attend Mass, devoted the rest of the day to activities for which they did not have the leisure during the rest of the week. The earlier edicts against theater and dances on the Lord’s day had to do mostly with professional entertainers whom people went to watch; but now the issue was traditional dances and festivals that the Germanic peoples had brought with

them, and that still continued, usually under a Christian veneer. A historian of the theater describes what would then take place of feast days—particularly Sundays: “Choruses of women invaded with wanton *cantica* [songs] and *ballationes* [dances] the precincts of the churches and even the sacred buildings themselves, a desecration against which generation after generation of ecclesiastical authorities was fain to protest. . . . The struggle was a long one, and in the end the Church never quite succeeded in expelling the dance from its own doors.”⁶

It is unlikely that the majority of the population participated in such events. The claims of lasciviousness and ribaldry may well have been exaggerated by more pious souls. But still Sunday (jointly with other feasts of the church) was the day when jugglers, dancers, minstrels, and other entertainers gathered crowds to themselves in the plazas. Since these plazas were usually in front of the church, ecclesiastical authorities often railed against such activities, and in turn crowds led by dancers and other entertainers often invaded the churches with their own festivities. In some cases, church leaders used these occasions for promoting performances having to do with miracles, morality, and Christian teaching—and this was one of the sources of modern theater. But the most common situation was one in which the funereal solemnity of the Mass contrasted with the ribald celebrations of the rest of the day. Sunday thus became a day of profound dualism between the sacred, which was overpoweringly solemn and somber, and the rest of life, which on Sundays was particularly festive and even wild.

On the other hand, one must remember that, while in towns and cities Sunday may have been marked by this dualism between the somber and the boisterous, in lands owned by monasteries or close to them the reality may have been different. Like the rest of society, most monastic rules stressed the importance of rest on the Lord’s day, although not as a time for leisure and lighthearted pleasure, but rather as a time for prayer, reading, and meditation. Peasants and others living in lands owned by monasteries were undoubtedly influenced by them. The monastery’s bells calling to the various hours of prayer would be their

main means of keeping time. On Sundays, many of them would attend Mass at the monastery. They would note that the monks, while taking a day off from their normal labors, devoted this time to prayer and meditation. One may therefore surmise—although there is little proof of it—that the Sunday dualism between solemnity and boisterous ribaldry was more pronounced in towns and cities than in monastic lands.

A Letter from the Lord

At some point around the year 600 Bishop Licinianus of Cartagena in Spain wrote to a fellow bishop on the Balearic island of Ibiza, chastising him for believing the story that a certain document was a letter sent directly from heaven, and for having read it out loud in church. He is probably referring to a *Letter on the Lord's Day*, which was beginning to circulate at that time. Even as late as the nineteenth century this document would still be highly regarded by some who believed what it claimed to be, as its full title suggests: *Epistle from Our Saviour, Lord and God Jesus Christ*. According to the legend contained in the document itself, St. Peter appeared to the bishop of Rome in a dream, telling him to go look at a letter that was floating in midair above the altar of the church. The bishop saw the letter and convoked the entire community of believers, who prayed constantly for three days and three nights, until finally the letter descended into the bishop's hands. It was an extraordinary document, for in it Jesus affirmed that it "has not been written by human hands, but comes from the very hand of the unseen Father."⁷

This letter interests us here because its main subject is the need to keep the Lord's day—which, like the *Didache* much earlier, it tautologically calls "the Lord's day of the Lord": *kyriakē kyriakēs*. In it we find references to the three main symbolic connections of the Lord's day: (1) that it is "the day holy above every other day, in which Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, rose from among the dead"; (2) that "in the first day I made heaven and earth and the beginning of days and times"; and that (3) "on

the holy Lord's day I shall judge the entire earth." To these are then added several other supposed reasons why this day is particularly sacred: this was the day on which Abraham entertained angels; the day on which the law was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai; the day of the Annunciation; the day on which the Lord was baptized.

It is interesting to note that, although in the official services of the church much of the emphasis on the joy of the resurrection of Jesus and on the eschatological hope of believers had been obscured by the funereal solemnity of a Mass centered on the cross and the passion, whoever wrote this document saw the Lord's day as a day of joy and hope, connecting it not only with the traditional emphases on the resurrection, the beginning of creation, and the second coming, but also with other joyful events such as the giving of the law, the Annunciation, and the baptism of the Lord.

But there is also a more austere side to this letter. The manner in which this Lord's day is to be kept may be seen in a series of "woes" that will fall on those who fail to do so in various ways. Many of these have to do with attendance at church and religious observance: "Woe to those who chatter during the divine liturgy"; "Woe to those who do not believe the divine Scriptures." Others have to do with moral issues: "Woe to the monk given to fornication." And finally, several deal with social issues: "Woe to those who join house to house, and land to land, so there is no room for others"; "Woe to those who withhold their salaries from laborers"; "Woe to those who loan money in usury"; "Woe to those who offer their gifts at the temple and are at war with their neighbors." Another series of woes are designed to guarantee that the letter is read: "Woe to the priest who does not read this letter out loud." Clearly, the purpose of the unknown author was to promote a reformation that would include greater piety, higher moral standards, and more just dealings with others. Such a reformation would be grounded on strict observance of the Lord's day.

While these were goals that many among the leadership of the church also sought, most of that leadership, like Licinianus

of Carthage, considered the legend attached to this letter, and its claim to have come down from heaven, not only spurious but even blasphemous. Quite possibly many followed the lead of Bishop Licinianus himself, who after reading the legend at its very beginning simply burned it before even reading the rest. But still the letter circulated, copied by credulous monks who apparently believed the legend and agreed with its call to reform.

This is precisely what the letter is: a call to reform. It is not a learned call to reform the church—of which there were many throughout the Middle Ages. It is rather an expression of the faith of common folk—people who read it as indeed a letter from the Lord, as well as monks who copied and preserved it. In this piety of reform, Sunday plays a central role. Its observance is the foundation for all the other reforms—which include a renewed morality and justice. Its survival even against official opposition would seem to indicate that what we have here provides us with a truer glimpse into how common pious folk understood Sunday and its implications.

Medieval documents abound that, like this supposed letter from heaven, made spurious claims to authority—although probably none as incredible as this one! While the church never sanctioned most of these, and even declared some to be spurious—like Licinianus did in this particular case—they continued circulating, and probably shaping medieval life and practice at least as much as official church teaching.

Aquinas on Sunday and Sabbath

The Place of the Sabbath in the Decalogue

While the *Letter from the Lord* and other documents like it were circulating and shaping much of personal piety, theologians continued their work. To review what various medieval theologians have to say on Sunday would be too extensive an enterprise to be undertaken here. In general, as time progressed and regulations were issued regarding Sunday rest, the notion came to prevail that the Sabbath was a sign or shadow of Sunday, and that once the reality had come the shadow was no longer necessary. Quite often this is grounded in anti-Jewish sentiments. John of Damascus, for instance, declared that the Sabbath law was given by God in view of “the denseness of the Israelites and their carnal love and propensity towards matter in everything,” but that what it means for us, once “the veil is rent asunder,” is “the complete abandonment of carnal things, the spiritual service and communion with God” (*On the Orthodox Faith* 4.23).¹

Eventually this led the scholastics to consider why the commandment on the Sabbath appears in the Decalogue at all. After all, the rest of the Decalogue deals with matters of justice and morality that are valid for all humans, Christian or not. But that is not the case with the Sabbath. If the church enjoins the keeping of all the other commandments, why not the Sabbath?

The discussion of the matter by Thomas Aquinas is illustrative of the issues involved, and of the response given by scholas-

tic theologians. This appears in the *Summa theologiae*, in a section devoted to the Decalogue. At the beginning of this section, Thomas affirms that the commandments in the Decalogue are laws of justice. They are “the first precepts of the law, that natural reason immediately recognizes as most evident” (*Summa theologiae* 2-2, q. 122, a. 1). They are precepts of justice, because justice has to do with relationships—relationships with God and relationships with others. Of these, the first three commandments deal with relationships with God, and the rest deal with relation with others. (Thomas, as well as most of the medieval and Roman Catholic renderings of the Decalogue, count the commandments differently than do most Protestants. To Thomas, the first commandment includes what most Protestants count as the first and second, with the result that the commandment on the Sabbath, which others consider the fourth, is the third.)

The Moral and Ceremonial Law

This particular commandment presents Thomas with a difficulty, for if the Ten Commandments are first principles of conduct, known to all through natural reason and to be always obeyed by all, it would follow that the commandment to keep the seventh day of the week should be followed just as much as the commandments not to have alien gods or not to commit adultery. In order to respond to this difficulty, Thomas has recourse to a long-established theological tradition that distinguished between ceremonial law and moral law. The purpose of the first was to point to Jesus and to redemption in him. Thus laws regarding sacrifices, diet, special days, and the like were ceremonial, and are no longer binding. In contrast, laws that set forth basic principles of morality are still binding, and must be obeyed. Thomas has already said that the commandments of the Decalogue are commandments of justice, that is, principles of behavior that the natural mind knows and that all must obey. But now, as he comes to the third commandment, he asserts that it is partly a moral first principle and partly a ceremonial law.

If taken literally, the commandment to sanctify the Sabbath is partly moral, and partly ceremonial. It is a moral precept inasmuch as it sets aside part of the time of one's life for the worship of divine things. There is in humans a natural inclination to set aside a certain time for each necessity, such as nourishment, sleep, and others. Therefore it is also part of the moral ordering of things, dictated by natural reason, that requires that a certain time be set aside for divine things. But inasmuch as this Commandment sets aside a special time as a sign of the creation of the world, it is a ceremonial precept. Likewise, it is ceremonial as a figure of Christ's rest in the tomb, which took place on the seventh day. It thus symbolizes the ceasing of every sinful act, and the mind's rest in God—even though in this sense it is also moral. . . . Therefore the precept on the sanctification of the Sabbath is included in the Decalogue inasmuch as it is a moral precept, and not as a ceremonial one. (*Summa theologica* 2-2, q. 122, a. 4)

For these reasons, Thomas declares, the commandment to rest is a moral law, and must be obeyed by all Christians. But all the various details as to how and when Sabbath is to be kept are ceremonial matters prefiguring Christ, and therefore are not to be continued once what they signified and promised has already come. Actually, to insist on the ceremonies that pointed to Christ is to deny that in him the promises of the Old Testament have been fulfilled. The consequence of this argument is that, while keeping the Sabbath rest is a commandment still to be obeyed, those elements of the Sabbath that were pointing to the one to come are no longer to be followed: "In the new law, observance of the Lord's Day [*observatio diei Dominicae*] has succeeded the observance of the Sabbath, not with the power of a legal precept, but rather by the organization of the church and the usage of Christians. This observance is not symbolic, as was the case with the observance of the Sabbath in the ancient law. Thus certain activities that were forbidden on the Sabbath, such as cooking, are now allowed" (*Summa theologica* 2-2, q. 122, a. 4).

In general, most medieval theologians who lived after

Thomas made a similar distinction. This allowed for obeying the commandment without following all the laws and practices surrounding it. Also, as we shall see, Thomas's assertion that it was the church that determined that the Sabbath was to be observed on the first day of the week rather than on the seventh would eventually be used as an argument against the insistence of Protestants on the sole authority of Scripture, for here was something that Protestants still observed, and had been established by the church rather than by Scripture.

Some Points to Highlight

As we come to the end of our quick review of Sunday in the Middle Ages, several points stand out—points that in many ways will explain later developments.

The first of these is the continued issuance of legislation regarding rest on Sunday. Constantine's famous edict was followed by thousands of similar decisions by authorities high and low, civil and ecclesiastical.

Second, that very legislation, often connected with the commandment on the seventh day, furthered a process whereby Sunday was increasingly seen as the Christian Sabbath. Quite often this supposed substitution of Sabbath by Sunday was couched in anti-Jewish sentiments, claiming that the Sabbath was for "carnal" Jews, while Sunday was for "spiritual" Christians. At other times, this substitution was explained on the grounds that, while a day of rest is part of the moral law, a particular day of rest was a ceremonial law foreshadowing Christ, and was no longer to be followed once the promise became a reality.

Third, the focus of attention in Communion shifted from the body of Christ as the fellowship of those present and partaking of it to the body of Christ now present in the bread itself.

Fourth, with the growing emphasis on Communion as the renewed although bloodless sacrifice of Christ, that ancient rite, originally one of joy and victory, took funereal overtones, centering not on the resurrection and on eschatological hope,

but rather on the cross and human sin that made the cross necessary.

Fifth, in consequence of the preceding, Communion became a divine drama from which one benefited by mere attendance. Thus, while attendance at Mass was quite regular, actual partaking of Communion was exceptional.

Sixth, since what was important in the Mass was the sacrifice rather than the people present and partaking of it, the celebration of private Masses for the benefit of those absent or dead became quite common.

Seventh, Sunday was still a day of celebration, as it had been in the early church. But what was now celebrated was not the resurrection of Jesus, but rather the day of leisure. Once one had fulfilled the obligation to attend Mass, the rest of the day was a time for jugglers and jesters, for singing, dance, and even ribaldry. Thus Sunday was both the day of the great and overwhelming spectacle of the renewed sacrifice of Christ and the day of many other spectacles that often showed precisely why that sacrifice was necessary.

PART 4

THE REFORMATION AND BEYOND

As we come to the sixteenth century, new complexities appear along the way of our research into the history of Sunday. Two among these are paramount, one resulting from the invention of the movable-type printing press, and the other from the Protestant Reformation. The printing press soon began producing a veritable flood of written materials, so that, if for the earliest periods our task was to try to discover references to our subject in a fairly limited amount of materials, and later it was to deal with such references in a greater abundance of materials, mostly drawn from medieval manuscripts, now it will be to try to discern, within an overwhelming abundance of materials, which are most important and helpful to our inquiry.

The second difficulty, which is parallel to the first, arises out of the variety of opinions, movements, and churches emerging from the Reformation. In previous sections, we were able to follow a relatively simple narrative within what was then—at least in the West—a single church. While I have noted differences in perspectives and emphases, as well as a clear process of development, there was a general agreement on the basic theological issues. Now, as we enter the sixteenth century, that agreement will break down, resulting in competing and often antagonistic theological traditions, all of which must be taken into account. In some of these traditions there has been considerable debate regarding Sunday, its meaning, and its observance; in others not as much, and often not at the same time.

Given these two complicating factors, the chapters that follow will be organized chronologically, dealing first with the period of the Reformation itself, and then moving to later centuries. They will also have to be selective, discussing those points at which Sunday became a subject of discussion, or when changes took place in its observance, and generally ignoring simple repetition of what others had said or done before.

The Reformation

The Catholic Church

There are indications that already in the fifteenth century there may have been some who insisted on keeping the Sabbath. The Council of Florence (1438–1445) joins Sabbath keeping with circumcision, declaring that any who observe them will not partake of eternal salvation—although it is not clear whether this refers to Christians who keep the Sabbath, or is simply one more of the myriad attacks on Jews and Judaism.¹ Such discussions continued at the time of the Reformation, but seldom came to the foreground of theological debate. Thus the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which tried to legislate on just about every subject under discussion, apparently did not deem it important to say much on this issue. Indeed, the notion that Sunday had taken the place of the Sabbath was so generally held that in their polemics against Luther's principle of *sola scriptura* Catholics often used the argument that the practice of Sunday worship was established by the authority of the church, and not of Scripture.² At the Council of Trent, in a sermon before the council shortly before its conclusion, Gaspar del Fosco, archbishop of Reggio, used the same argument in favor of the authority of the church over Scripture: "The Sabbath, the most glorious day in the law, has been changed into the Lord's day. Circumcision, enjoined upon Abraham and his seed under such threatening that he who had not been circumcised would be destroyed from among his peo-

ple, has been so abrogated. . . . These and other similar matters have been changed by the authority of the church.”³ As we shall see, Luther himself had provided the basis for this argument.

On other matters pertaining to Sunday observances, the Council of Trent had much to say. Most of this was repetition and reaffirmation of traditional doctrine—for instance, the doctrine of transubstantiation and that the Mass is a sacrifice. But part was also an attempt to safeguard uniformity in response to the variety and even confusion of liturgical practices that had emerged since the beginning of the Reformation. Thus the council declared that the Mass was to be said in Latin, although its meaning should be explained to the people in their own tongue (session 28, canon 8).⁴ In a continuation of this stress on uniformity, in 1580 Pope Pius V published a missal to be strictly followed by all, with no deviation or addition in the least detail. According to the pope, what this missal enjoined was to be valid—with some prescribed exceptions—not only everywhere but also for all time.

Martin Luther

The greatest change that the Reformation brought about in connection with Sunday practices and observances was the use of the vernacular in the liturgy. While the Catholic Church insisted on Latin for the sake of uniformity, Luther proposed the vernacular for the sake of relevance to the people. For him, this was not just a matter of language but also of enculturation. In 1525, when some wished to carry the Reformation further and faster than Luther thought proper, and insisted that the Mass must be said in German, Luther said, “I am happy that the mass now is held among the Germans in German. But to make a necessity of it, as if it had to be so, is again too much” (*Against the Heavenly Prophets*).⁵ He also felt that a “German mass” was not just a matter of language but also of the culture in which it was embedded. Thus almost immediately after affirming that the Mass is being held in German, he makes it clear that a true German Mass is still to be awaited. “I would gladly have a German mass today. I

am also occupied with it. But I would very much like it to have a true German character. For to translate the Latin text and retain the Latin tone or notes has my sanction, though it doesn't sound polished or well done. Both the text and notes, accent, melody, and manner of rendering ought to grow out of the true mother tongue and its inflection, otherwise it becomes an imitation, in the manner of the apes" (*Against the Heavenly Prophets*).⁶

The Mass on which Luther here says that he was working was published the following year, in 1526. It was all in German, except for the *Kyrie*, which was still sung in Greek. And the words and music were not simple translations or adaptations, but serious attempts to celebrate a liturgy that would resonate with the German people. It was a Mass in which all could participate, including the singing, which was simplified and adapted to the more common forms that people were used to. For Luther, this was one of the signs of good liturgical music. The other was that it should be Christocentric, and express the gospel.

Before issuing the German Mass, Luther had already published a Latin Mass, which was essentially the traditional Mass purged of anything that would imply salvation by works, human merits, transubstantiation, or the Mass as a sacrifice of Christ. In general, the German Mass follows the same order, although now using music and words that were more akin to German culture. Luther, however, would not insist on uniformity of worship. On the contrary, in the preface to the German Mass, he declares:

Above all things, I most affectionately and for God's sake beseech all, who see or desire to observe this our Order of Divine Service, on no account to make of it a compulsory law, or to ensnare or make captive thereby any man's conscience; but to use it agreeably to Christian liberty at their good pleasure as, where, when and so long as circumstances favour and demand it. Moreover, we would not have our meaning taken to be that we desire to rule, or by law to compel, any one.⁷

And then, after basing this statement on Christian liberty, but also warning against uses of such liberty that might offend oth-

ers, he insists: "Still, I do not wish hereby to demand that those who already have a good Order or, by God's grace, can make a better, should let it go, and yield to us. Nor is it my meaning that the whole of Germany should have to adopt forthwith our Wittenberg Order."⁸

Although this is not the subject of the present inquiry, the significance of worship in the vernacular, and the corresponding translation of Scripture into the various languages of Europe, cannot be overstated. For the first time in centuries, common worshipers could understand what was being said. Thanks to such translations and to the printing press, Bible reading at home, both privately and in family gatherings, became much more common, particularly on Sundays.

As is well known, Luther laid great stress on preaching, which normally would take place at the celebration of the Mass on Sunday, but also on other days and settings. Such preaching, however, must never focus on the preacher or his authority, but only on the one being preached. In his last sermon, preached on February 15, 1546, he made this point quite clearly: "Right preachers should diligently and faithfully teach only the Word of God and must seek only his honour and praise. Likewise the hearers should also say: I do not believe in my pastor, but he tells me of another Lord, whose name is Christ: him he shows to me, I will listen to him, in so far as he leads me to the true Teacher and Master, God's Son."⁹

In brief, the central activity that should characterize Sunday was the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacrament, both as expressions of the gospel of salvation by grace, through the cross of Jesus Christ. Anything that went beyond that, risking the possibility that Sunday might be seen as a "work" that believers must do in order to attain salvation—even the "work" of not working—was suspect.

For similar reasons, private Masses were abolished. First of all, they ignored the importance of the worshiping and partaking community. Second, they made of the Mass a meritorious act, or "work."

Luther had to deal with the issue of Sunday observances in response to the treatise *On the Sabbath*, published by Andreas

Bodenstein von Karlstadt in 1524.¹⁰ According to Karlstadt, the commandment regarding the Sabbath is part of the moral law, and therefore is still to be obeyed. It was given by God after the fall as an act of mercy, freeing humanity from constant toil. Karlstadt's point was not that the church did wrong in worshiping on Sunday, nor that Saturday would be a better day than Sunday. On the contrary, he declared that there is freedom to choose the day on which Sabbath rest is to take place. The reason why each one is not free to choose a particular day of the week to rest is that in order to have common attendance to the preaching of the Word it is good to have a commonly set day. He distinguished between an "external" and a "spiritual" Sabbath. The former is a particular observation every seven days. The latter is an attitude that must prevail at all times, which must be kept "holy and be without work on every working day," so that one can experience the tranquility (*Gelassenheit*) of the gospel. As for this practice of a spiritual Sabbath, its purpose is to cease in our efforts to work and to please God, and to allow God to work in us. This is why Sabbath is commanded in Exodus: because "our works impede God's work." As to how to observe this spiritual Sabbath, it is mostly a matter of mournful repentance, with the head bowed down and hands covering the face.

Luther would have none of this. In response to Karlstadt he says:

We should be grateful to Paul and Isaiah, that they so long ago freed us from the fractious spirits. Otherwise, we should have to sit through the Sabbath day with "head in hand" awaiting the heavenly voice, as they would delude us. Yes, if Karlstadt were to write more about the Sabbath, even Sunday would have to give way, and the Sabbath, that is, Saturday, would be celebrated. He would truly make us Jews in all things, so that we would have to be circumcised, etc. (*Against the Heavenly Prophets*)¹¹

What most bothered Luther about Karlstadt's work on the Sabbath was not that he claimed that the law was to be obeyed

by keeping the seventh day rather than the first—which Karlstadt did not claim. What bothered Luther first of all was Karlstadt's suggestion that the Sabbath was to be observed as a time of mourning for sin, rather than of celebration of grace. And second, what Karlstadt was proposing as "not working" but simply letting God do was a sort of more subtle work and still a way to gain God's favor, thus leading back to justification by works—which was also Luther's main objection to the mystics whom he had found so comforting in his early years. But Luther did agree with Karlstadt that there was nothing special about Sunday, beyond the special usage that the church has set for it, to make this a day of worship. He disagreed with the common tradition of the Middle Ages that Sunday had substituted the Jewish Sabbath, and that therefore the precepts regarding the Sabbath that are found in the Decalogue were to be followed. Besides this, as a matter of justice, Luther also affirmed that it was necessary to set aside one day in seven to allow a respite from work for servants and others who otherwise would have to toil continuously.

Apparently, what Luther suggested—that if Karlstadt's principles were followed to their conclusion circumcision would be necessary—did come to pass. In 1538 Luther published an open letter to a friend, *Against the Sabbatarians*. At the opening of this letter, Luther says that his friend has informed him "that the Jews are making inroads . . . with the venom of their doctrine, and that they have already induced some Christians to be circumcised and to believe that the Messiah or Christ has not yet appeared."¹² Unfortunately, this leads to one of Luther's most virulent attacks against Jews and Judaism, to the point that he actually says relatively little about the Sabbath. In this regard, he claims that the part of the commandment that sets the seventh day of the week as the day of rest was given only to the people whom God led out of Egypt, but that the commandment to be silent and to sanctify the day of worship has universal value. "Therefore the seventh day does not concern us Gentiles."¹³

Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Bucer

Zwingli laid special stress on Sunday, and—as did Luther—abolished the many saints' days and other such celebrations and observances that had developed during the Middle Ages. Preaching became the center of Sunday worship, and often also on weekdays. Communion took place only quarterly, for Zwingli was convinced that what was important in Communion was that it reminded believers of the sacrifice of Christ and feared that, if celebrated too frequently, that meaning would be eroded. As a means of stressing the authority of Scripture over church and tradition, the lectionary was abandoned in favor of preaching *seriatim* through an entire book of the Bible. (Zwingli himself began this practice by preaching on the genealogy in Matthew!) Even on Sundays, the center of worship was not Communion, which was to be celebrated only four times a year, but preaching. It should be noted, however, that while the practice of celebrating Communion every quarter made it less frequent than the traditional practice of celebrating it at least every Sunday, Zwingli expected all believers to commune, and therefore to take Communion much more frequently than had become the medieval standard of once a year. Zwingli's own revised liturgy for Communion was published before Luther's, in 1525. His own service was rather austere, for it sought to comply with biblical tradition to the point of excluding music, and reciting the Psalms antiphonally. However, many who followed Zwingli's theological views did not accept this point, and therefore in other parts of Switzerland otherwise Zwinglian churches did include singing in Sunday service, and even published hymnals for that purpose. Thus, while Zwingli himself favored the austerity of Sunday observance that later became common in much of the Reformed tradition by excluding singing in worship, not all his followers agreed with him on this point. Ironically, some of the music that he composed, but refused to use in church, was included in hymnals published after his death.¹⁴

Martin Bucer, the reformer of Strasbourg, believed that the good ordering of a Christian state required that the directives

of the Decalogue regarding the Sabbath be applied on Sunday. Since the law has a “third use,” which is to guide society in its attempt to moderate evil doings, Christian rulers should follow its guidance, and therefore should make rest on Sundays a matter of obligation. However, Bucer was not able to convince the government in Strasbourg that Sunday rest should be enforced by civil authorities. In Zürich, Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli’s successor, held similar views.

Anabaptists

At first mostly in Zwingli’s Zürich, but eventually throughout central Europe, a movement developed that came to be known as “Anabaptism.” While Luther would retain any religious practices that did not contradict Scripture, and Zwingli would only allow those to be found in Scripture, Anabaptists went further, seeking to shape their life and churches after the pattern of the New Testament.

Most Anabaptists simplified the Sunday service, making it much less formal, often discussing a biblical text rather than having someone preach on it, and culminating with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper as a common meal—often sitting at a common table. Some insisted on sanctifying the day of rest as directed by Scripture. Still others, however, carried the principle of doing everything according to Scripture to the point of insisting that worship should be on the seventh day of the week, and not on the first, and also that this should be a day of strict rest.

Thus when one speaks of “Sabbatarianism” a distinction must be made between two meanings of the term. Some Sabbatarians were called such because they insisted that Sunday was to be kept in accordance with the guidelines set in Scripture. For them, Sunday was the Sabbath, and should be kept as such. But then other Sabbatarians, whom henceforth we shall call Seventh-Day Sabbatarians, affirmed that the real Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, and that Sunday worship and

observances were inventions either of the popes or of Constantine—or of both.

Such Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism appeared quite early during the Reformation. Luther spoke of a “foolish group” in Moravia, and later also in Austria, who claimed that the Sabbath should be kept according to Jewish custom, but did not say much about them. Then, in 1538, he wrote an “open letter” against Sabbatarians to which we have already referred. In this last document it is clear that Luther is attacking Seventh-Day Sabbatarians—Sabbatarians who, if Luther is to be taken literally, practiced not only the keeping of the seventh day but also circumcision.

Although it is clear that most Anabaptists were not Seventh-Day Sabbatarians, and that others were Sabbatarians in the sense of seeking to apply Sabbath laws on Sundays, some did follow and promote Seventh-Day Sabbatarian practices. The fluidity and multiplicity of Anabaptist groups makes it impossible to trace the development of Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism within them.¹⁵ Quite a bit is known, however, of some of the main Anabaptist proponents of such Sabbatarianism. A former Lutheran pastor who had been expelled from Austria and settled in Moravia, Oswald Glait, was converted to Anabaptism by Balthasar Hübmaier, a leading Anabaptist theologian. He then broke with Hübmaier on the issue of pacifism—which Glait supported and Hübmaier rejected. Eventually—it is not clear when—Glait became a Sabbatarian, and published a book under the title *Booklet on the Sabbath*, which has been lost. However, from one of the treatises refuting his views some of it may be gleaned. Glait held that the Sabbath had been celebrated by Adam before the fall, and later by the patriarchs, that Adam had been expelled from Paradise for not obeying the commandments, and that therefore any who refuse to obey the commandment on the Sabbath will be excluded from Paradise. This Sabbath, which is the day of worship ordained by God, is the seventh day of the week and cannot be altered, as it was the popes who instituted Sunday worship.¹⁶

Another Anabaptist Sabbatarian, and Glait’s coworker, Andreas Fischer, also wrote in defense of Sabbatarianism.¹⁷ The

main argument in his writings is that the keeping of the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments, and therefore must be obeyed. It was Constantine—so Fischer claims—who instituted the keeping of Sunday, while it was God who instituted the Sabbath.

There were numerous responses to Anabaptist Sabbatarianism. As we have seen, Luther himself rejected and criticized it. So did many other leaders of the Reformation. This early form of Sabbatarianism seems to have eventually disappeared, although it continued in Transylvania and nearby regions at least until the twentieth century.¹⁸

John Calvin

Clearly the dominant Protestant theologian of the second generation was John Calvin. Like the other reformers, Calvin also laid special stress on Sunday, and on abolishing any feast days and solemnities that might detract from it. Under his inspiration, in 1550 the Consistory of Geneva issued a decree declaring that Sunday was ordained by God as a day of worship, and would henceforth be the only feast day to be allowed. In Geneva, he had to contend not only with various sorts of Sabbatarians but also with a certain Colinaeus, who claimed that to observe a day of worship and rest was to imitate the Jews, and therefore to obscure the freedom of the gospel. As a result, Colinaeus was imprisoned, and prejudice against him was such that Christophe Fabri, who had visited him in prison as an act of mercy, was accused of holding similar views.¹⁹ Calvin responds both to those who would keep the Sabbath and to those such as Colinaeus, who would abolish it altogether: “We transcend Judaism by observing these days because we are far different from the Jews in this respect. For we are not celebrating it as a ceremony with the most rigid scrupulousness, supposing a mystery to be figured thereby. Rather, we are using it as a remedy needed to keep order in the church” (*Inst.* 2.8.33).

According to Calvin, those to whom Paul refers in Galatians

as “observing days” “abstained from manual tasks not because they are a diversion from sacred studies and meditation, but with a certain scrupulousness they imagined that by celebrating the day they were honoring mysteries once commended” (*Inst.* 2.8.33). And the reason why the church now observes Sunday rather than Saturday is that “because it was expedient to overthrow superstition the day sacred to the Jews was set aside” (*Inst.* 2.8.33).

The substitution of the “Lord’s day” for the Sabbath was wisely done by “the ancients” both in order to avoid such superstition and in remembrance of the Lord’s resurrection, which is the beginning of the “true rest” that is our goal. But even so, Calvin makes it clear that this decision is not binding. He will cling neither to a particular day nor even to the number seven. And therefore, he declares, “I shall not condemn churches that have other solemn days for their meetings, provided there be no superstition” (*Inst.* 2.8.34). However, even though the fourth commandment is mostly ceremonial in nature, this does not mean it should be disregarded: “When I said that the ordinance of rest was a type of a spiritual and far higher mystery, and hence that this Commandment must be accounted ceremonial, I must not be supposed to mean that it had no other different objects also.”²⁰

These other reasons for observing the Lord’s day are: it helps us keep in mind the goal of the final Sabbath rest; it provides special opportunity and leisure to meditate on God’s works; and it prevents us from oppressing those subject to us (*Inst.* 2.8.28). But what Calvin would not tolerate, as he says, were those who “cling to their superstitions [and] surpass the Jews three times in crass and carnal Sabbatarian superstition” (*Inst.* 2.8.34).

Calvin brings the Protestant emphasis on preaching to its full conclusion, making it clear that word and sacrament go together and cannot be separated.

The right administering of the Sacrament cannot stand apart from the Word. For whatever benefit may come to us from the Supper requires the Word. . . . Therefore, nothing more

preposterous could happen in the Supper than for it to be turned into a silent action, as has happened under the pope's tyranny. For they wanted to have the whole force of the consecration depend upon the intention of the priest, as if it did not matter at all to the people, to whom the mystery ought most of all to have been explained. (*Inst.* 4.17.39)

This connection between word and sacrament, which is most commonly exhibited on Sunday worship, is so important for Calvin that he makes it the essential mark of the church: "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists" (*Inst.* 4.1.9).

This emphasis on the connection between word and sacrament led Calvin to wish to restore in Geneva the ancient practice of celebrating Communion every Sunday—a practice that both Catholics and Lutherans conserved, but had been abandoned in most Protestant Swiss cities, mostly as a result of Zwingli's influence. Furthermore, all believers should partake of it, and not simply attend the service—a practice that had become common among Catholics. In this regard, Calvin says: "What we have said so far of the Sacrament abundantly shows that it was not ordained to be received once a year. . . . [In the early church] it became the unvarying rule that no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving. The Lord's table should have been spread at least once a week for the assembly of Christians, and the promises declared in it should feed us spiritually" (*Inst.* 4.14.44, 46).

This, however, the city council would not allow, preferring the practice that Zwingli had advocated in Zürich. Thus, while Calvin himself felt that Communion should be an integral part of Sunday worship, this was not the experience of those who visited Geneva and then spread Calvinism throughout Europe. In Scotland, John Knox proposed that Communion be celebrated monthly. But even so, in 1562 the general assembly of the Church of Scotland urged that Communion be celebrated

four times a year in cities, and at least twice in smaller towns. A century later, it has become customary both among Scottish Presbyterians and Separatist English Puritans to celebrate Communion once a year.

Thus, while the Lutheran tradition emphasized the importance of preaching without detriment to weekly Communion, and Calvin had proposed the same, a process took place within the Reformed tradition whereby Sunday worship centered on preaching, and Communion became an occasional and even infrequent celebration.

The Church of England

As it began to develop its own doctrines, the Church of England based its understanding of the Sabbath and its relation to the fourth commandment on the distinction between ceremonial and moral law. This may be seen in the following quote from Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's Catechism, published in 1543:

As St. Austin [St. Augustine] saith, All the other nine be merely moral commandments, and belonged not only to the Jews, and all other people of the world in the time of the Old Testament, but also belong now to all Christian people in the New Testament. But this precept of the Sabbath, as concerning rest from bodily labor on the seventh day, is ceremonial, and pertained only unto the Jews in the Old Testament, before the coming of Christ, and pertaineth not unto us Christian people in the New Testament. Nevertheless, as concerning the spiritual rest which is figured and signified by this corporal rest, that is to say, rest from the carnal works of the flesh, and all manner of sin, this precept is moral, and remaineth still, and bindeth them that belong unto Christ; and not for every seventh day only, but for all days, hours, and times. For at all times we be bound to rest from fulfilling of our own carnal will and pleasure, and from all sins and evil desires. . . . Which things, although all Christian people be bound unto

by this commandment, yet the Sabbath day, which is called the Saturday, is not now prescribed and appointed thereunto, as it was to the Jews; but instead of the Sabbath day succeedeth the Sunday, in the memory of Christ's resurrection. And also many other holy and festival days, which the church hath ordained from time to time, which be called holy days, not because that one day is more acceptable to God than another, or of itself more holy than another, but because the church hath ordained that upon those days we should give ourselves wholly without any impediment unto such holy works as be before expressed.²¹

A Summary

In summary, as we look at the entire period of the Reformation there are several facts that stand out.

The most notable of these have to do with worship in the vernacular, and the related issue of local enculturation in contrast with universal uniformity. While Protestants promoted the use of vernacular languages and adaptation to various cultures, the Catholic Church took the opposite tack—and would continue to do so until the twentieth century, when the Second Vatican Council would follow the earlier lead of the Protestant reformers. This also resulted in more participatory worship on the part of Protestants, as well as a tendency to simplify worship, particularly among the Reformed and the Anabaptists.

Second, while among some Protestants—particularly those in the Reformed tradition—the celebration of Communion became less frequent, actual partaking of Communion on the part of the laity was greatly increased.

Third, Protestant efforts to simplify the ecclesiastical calendar, abolishing saints' days and a number of other special festivities, led to greater emphasis on Sunday.

Fourth, the need to educate the laity on the basic tenets of Protestantism, as well as the Protestant emphasis on the study of Scripture, led to great stress on preaching in general, but also

more specifically on expository preaching. Such preaching would take place at least every Sunday, and quite often also during the rest of the week.

Fifth, most Protestant reformers agreed that at some point in earlier history the church had transferred the observance of the seventh day of the week—the Jewish Sabbath—to the first day—Sunday or the Lord’s day. This was used by Catholic polemicists to show that even Protestants accepted the authority of tradition over Scripture.

Sixth, many Protestants held that the choice of the first day was somewhat arbitrary, and was mostly a convenient day to devote to rest and worship. While there are references to Sunday as the day of resurrection, such references are not as frequent nor as central as they had been in the early church. Others, particularly among the Anabaptists, held that the day of the week was not a matter of choice, but of divine commandment, and therefore was to be obeyed by observing the seventh day of the week rather than the first.

Seventh, the day of rest was often seen as a sign and a reminder that no human work can merit the grace of God. By resting from all our works we acknowledge that even our best works of charity and of obedience are nothing when compared to the work of God’s grace. Luther and others feared that too much stress on the legal observation of Sunday rest would lead to legalism, and therefore back again to salvation by works.

Eighth, the reformers did not agree among themselves as to the degree to which Sunday should be connected with the fourth commandment (the third by Catholic reckoning). Most commonly, it was held that this commandment was both moral and ceremonial. As a moral commandment, it was to be obeyed by all by devoting a day to rest and divine matters. As a ceremonial commandment, it was a shadow of things to come, and has now been superseded.

Ninth, this disagreement meant that some—particularly in the Reformed tradition—held that the “third use of the law,” to regulate society according to the will of God, meant that civil authorities should enforce the observance of Sunday by all.

Finally, in most discussions on the day of rest—be it Saturday or Sunday—there was at least a passing reference to, and sometimes a stress on, such rest being an act of justice, intended to prevent the exploitation of those who must work.

British Puritanism and the Sabbath

A Recap

The foregoing chapters outline a process whereby the Lord's day—or, as the Latins called it, the *dominica*—came to be progressively connected with the Sabbath and the commandment to keep it. This process gained impetus when Constantine made the day of the Sun a day of rest. Before that time, Christians—particularly gentile Christians—had not been able to observe a day of rest, except in those days that were so established by Roman law. Now that the *dominica* had become a day of rest, it was only natural that both church and state begin legislating on such rest, and connecting it with the Sabbath commandment. This was often joined with theological explanations claiming that the *dominica* had taken the place of the Sabbath, just as the church had taken the place of the synagogue. Such claims, which were not made in the ancient church, became quite commonplace during the Middle Ages. But then, if the Sabbath commandment is to be a guideline for the day devoted to the worship of God, should not this commandment be followed also in observing the seventh day of the week, rather than the first? Such was the argument of the Seventh-Day Sabbatarians whom we have met in the last chapter, and to whom we shall return in the next. The response of most theologians—Catholic and Protestant—to such claims in favor of the seventh day was based on the long-established distinction—which we have already seen, for instance, in Thomas

Aquinas—between moral and ceremonial commandments, the latter having pointed to the Messiah and therefore no longer being binding, and the former universally valid. According to most sixteenth-century theologians the commandment to rest—the third by one reckoning, and the fourth by another—is partly moral and partly ceremonial. As a ceremonial commandment, it ordered the keeping of the seventh day, and therefore this item in the commandment is no longer in force. As a moral commandment, it orders a universal day of rest, both as a matter of justice and as setting aside a time for divine things.

Among the reformers, however, there was not a universal agreement as to the manner in which the commandment was to be followed and employed. In general, Luther and his followers feared that an excessive emphasis on its application might lead back to justification by works. This was the reason why Luther objected even to Karlstadt's suggestion, that the work of the day of rest was to do nothing, for Luther feared that such "doing nothing" could easily become a new, although more subtle, form of justification earned by merit. In contrast, Reformed theologians tended to apply the law not only to the life of Christians and of the church but also to society at large. This is why, in varying degrees, Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger, and Calvin all sought to have the civil government intervene by legislating the rest that was due on the Lord's day. And then there were the early Seventh-Day Sabbatarians, mostly among the Anabaptists, who insisted that the entire commandment was moral, and therefore must be kept in its entirety—including setting aside, not the first day, but the seventh.

Early British Sabbatarianism

As we move to the British Isles we see an important development taking place.¹ The earlier stages of the development of the Anglican Church sought to reform the church only in that which was clearly incompatible with Scripture, and keep the rest. In this the prevailing policy was akin to what Luther was propos-

ing on the Continent. But then, during the reign of Mary Tudor, many of those who fled her persecution settled in Geneva, the Netherlands, and other centers where the prevailing theology was not Lutheran but Reformed. When Mary died and Elizabeth succeeded her, these exiles returned, bringing with them a theological outlook that was heavily Calvinistic rather than Lutheran. Something similar happened in Scotland, whose reformer John Knox had also fled and taken refuge on the Continent, where he went to Geneva and met Calvin.

Many of these leaders returning from exile were not content with the moderate changes that had been introduced in the Church of England. They were convinced that the church must be purified of all accretions that had been added to its practices through the centuries—vestments, liturgical signs, organ music, powerful bishops in the service of the Crown, and so on. For this reason they were dubbed “Puritans.” Being Calvinists, they were convinced that not just the church but all of civil society must conform to the law of God as set forth in Scripture. During Elizabeth’s reign, they were generally held at bay, and often suppressed. But the movement persisted, and also gained ground in Scotland. Eventually, it resulted in the downfall of Mary Stuart, who fled to England, eventually to be executed by order of her cousin Elizabeth. But the unrest was not confined to Scotland. In England it led to the Puritan revolution and the beheading of King Charles I in 1649.

Although there were many disagreements among them, Puritans were committed to reforming the church and the civil society in every respect, in obedience to the law of God. This included the faithful and forceful observance of the “Sabbath.” By this, however, most of them did not mean the seventh day of the week, commonly known as “Saturday,” but the first, “Sunday.” Thus, while staunch Sabbatarians, they were not Seventh-Day Sabbatarians.

In order to understand this, it is important to take into account the manner in which language had evolved, and the meaning of the word “Sabbath” in English. Throughout the Middle Ages, even though it was often said that Sunday had taken the

place of the Sabbath, Sunday was never called the *sabbatum*. This would have been confusing or even impossible, for *sabbatum* was already the name of the day before Sunday, or *dominica*. The same would be true in most romance languages—and also in Greek—where the seventh day of the week was already called the Sabbath. What would a Spaniard think, were someone to tell him that *domingo* was *sábado*? What happens then to the actual *sábado*? But in English, the name of the seventh day of the week had no connection with the Sabbath. For those who were interested in such matters, it was the day of Saturn, and for the people at large it was simply “Saturday.” It was thus quite easy to begin referring to the first day of the week, traditionally called “Sunday,” as the “Sabbath.” One could well say that this is the final stage of the much earlier claim that the Lord’s day—the *dominica*—had come to take the place of the Jewish Sabbath. Now even its name had been taken over by Sunday!

For this reason, English and Scottish Sabbatarianism did not usually take the shape of Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism, but was rather the insistence on applying to Sunday—now usually called the “Sabbath”—as many as the laws of rest as possible.

The use of the word “Sabbath” to refer to Sunday dates from before the rise of Puritanism. For instance, one of the *Certain Sermons Appointed by the King’s Majesty* published in 1547 and 1548 to be preached in all churches, makes that identification: “Now concerning the place where the people of GOD ought to resort together, and where especially they ought to celebrate and sanctifie the Sabbath day, that is the Sunday, the day of holy rest.”² And John Hooper, in one of his early writings, declares that “this Sunday that we observe is not the commandment of man, as many say . . . but it is by expressed words commanded, that we should observe this one day (the Sunday) for our Sabbath.”³

As to what was to be allowed or not on the Sabbath/Sunday, Hooper himself, who had been exiled in Zürich during the reign of Henry VIII, already held views on the Sabbath that would later be embraced by the Puritans, and that clearly bore the stamp of Reformed theology and its concern for the use of

the law of God as the basis for ordering society. The following is typical of his comments on the Sabbath commandment: "To abuse the rest and ease of the sabbath in sports, games, and passtimes, keeping of markets and fairs upon the sabbath, is to abuse the sabbath."⁴

Hooper's views were not original. Indeed, there had been in England a long history of emphasis on the duties and the importance of Sunday. Many others who worked for reformation during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI held similar views. Such was the case, for instance, of Hugh Latimer. Both Hooper and Latimer were among those condemned to death during the attempts by Mary Tudor to restore Roman Catholicism; but in their condemnation the matter of strict Sabbath keeping was not an issue. Thus, during the first half of the sixteenth century, while most of the leaders of the Reformation held to a Sabbatarianism similar to Hooper's, this was not a matter of great debate, for such views were not considered a great innovation, but simply an insistence on higher standards.

As one reads the many sermons, lectures, and treatises in which Sabbath keeping is promoted, defined, and demanded in those early decades of the Reformation, there are three topics that appear repeatedly. The first is the connection between the Sabbath and creation. This connection, expressly stated in the Decalogue, implies that the Sabbath is not a temporary ceremonial law, but part of the very order of creation, and therefore a moral precept that all must obey. Second, most agree that, while the Sabbath is a universally valid commandment, this does not apply to the particular day of the week in which Jews celebrate it. It was the apostles, by divine inspiration, who changed the day for Sabbath observance from the seventh day of the week to the first. While some writers connect Sunday observance with the resurrection of Jesus, as the early church had done, this is not a dominant theme in their discussions. Third, and most notably, the proper keeping of the Sabbath on the Lord's day (Sunday) needs to be the object of detailed and exacting legislation.

In all of this, these early British Sabbatarians would have agreed with later Puritan Sabbatarianism—indeed, many have

said that those early Sabbatarians were forerunners of full-fledged Puritanism.

Increasing Debates

It was toward the end of the sixteenth century that the matter of the Sabbath—that is to say, of Sunday—became the object of bitter debate, and was soon embroiled in political controversies. The last decades of the century were marked in England by increased fears of Presbyterianism. From Queen Elizabeth's point of view, all one had to do was to look next door, to Scotland, to see the chaos and disruption following from Presbyterian ideas—and resulting in the downfall and exile of Mary Stuart. A church ruled by bishops, who were practically officers of the state, was seen as a buttress for the monarchy, while one ruled by presbyteries might easily become subversive and destructive of political order. The return of British exiles at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign had brought with it ideas learned from Reformed theologians such as Zwingli and Calvin. In neighboring Scotland those ideas developed into Presbyterianism and led to political unrest and revolution. But in England itself the Anglican Church, while espousing much of Reformed theology, remained staunchly episcopal in its polity. This was reinforced by punitive action against Presbyterians, to the point that by 1607 a defender of the episcopacy and of monarchical power could boast that it had been eradicated from England—a point on which ensuing decades would prove him to be utterly mistaken!

In 1595 Nicholas Bound, a priest in a town near Cambridge of known Presbyterian inclinations, published a treatise in the form of an epistle “to the godlie and Christian readers” under the title of *The Doctrine of the Sabbath Plainly Layde Forth*. John Whitgift, the archbishop of Canterbury, tried to prevent its publication and in 1597 succeeded in preventing a new edition. While the reasons for Whitgift's actions are not clear, it is likely that Bound's Presbyterian inclinations played a role in

the conflict. At any rate, it was at that point that Sabbatarianism became a matter of bitter controversy. Thomas Rogers, a priest of strong anti-Presbyterian convictions, preached a sermon in which he tried to connect Sabbatarianism with Presbyterianism. Bound responded with a more extensive work in 1606, and Rogers counterattacked the following year with an extensive treatise that grounded his opposition to both Presbyterianism and Sabbatarianism on the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England.⁵

The main point of contention between Bound and Rogers was not whether the Sabbath should be kept on Sunday, on which they agreed, but rather the reason why Sunday should be observed. Bound and many other British Sabbatarians held that the change from the seventh day to the first had been made by divine inspiration through the apostles, or even that it was Christ himself who in his resurrection had made that change. Rogers claimed that this had been done by the authority of the church. (It may be worth remembering that this question had already arisen in Protestant-Catholic polemics at the time of the Reformation, Catholics generally claiming that the establishment of Sunday was an action of the church, and that this proved the authority of the church to interpret Scripture and determine how it is to be applied.)

What was at stake here, at least as Rogers saw matters, was nothing less than the authority of the church; and therefore, of bishop; and therefore, of the Crown. He was convinced that Sabbatarians were nothing but Presbyterians in disguise who “build not presbyteries expressly . . . but they set up a new idol, their Saint Sabbath.”⁶

The controversy grew increasingly bitter, leading a later historian, Thomas Fuller, to quip that “the sabbath itself had no rest.”⁷ This had dire consequences. The attempt to counteract Presbyterianism by linking it with Sabbatarianism backfired, for the net result was a growing sympathy for Presbyterianism among Anglican Sabbatarians. Eventually, in spite of what Archbishop Whitgift had said earlier, Presbyterianism was able to overthrow not only the episcopacy but also the monarchy itself.

John Primus has stated it succinctly: “Sabbatarianism was not a radical movement with a hidden revolutionary agenda spawned by frustrated Presbyterians. . . . Anti-Sabbatarianism, on the other hand, was an unnecessary response to this moderate movement. . . . The anti-Sabbatarianism drove Sabbatarianism completely into the Puritan camp and was equally responsible for the increasing polarization of English Protestantism in the seventeenth century.”⁸

Thus one may conclude that Rogers’s mistake was in linking Sabbatarianism to Presbyterianism. Sabbatarianism—in the sense of keeping Sunday sacred by means of observances and regulations—was part of the very fiber of the English Reformation. As we have seen, Sabbatarian ideas appeared in early leaders such as Hopper and Latimer, as well as in the official homilies of the church. By linking Sabbatarianism to Presbyterianism, and anti-Sabbatarianism to loyal Anglicanism, the stage was set for the convulsions of the seventeenth century.

The Sabbath: A Revolution Orders Rest

As is well known, the seventeenth century in England was marked by a revolution inspired by Puritanism, and leading to the execution of King Charles I. As they gained in power, Puritans sought to safeguard the sanctity of the Lord’s day by means of legislation. In 1644 the Long Parliament issued a law in response to “divers ungodly Books [that] have been published by the Prelatical Faction [meaning those supported by bishops and other prelates] against the morality of that day, and to countenance the prophanation of the same, to the manifest endangering of souls, prejudice of the true Religion, great dishonour of Almighty God, and provocation of his just wrath and indignation against this Land.”⁹

These words show the seriousness with which Puritans regarded the holy keeping of the Lord’s day. Since the fourth commandment is a moral precept, and is therefore applicable to the entire human race, disobeying it places one’s soul in peril. And

even more, the lack of dutiful subjection to it places the entire nation under the wrath of God! Therefore it is not just a matter of concern for the church, but also for civil government. Taking the traditional Reformed emphasis to its extreme, the third use of the law now means that civil legislation must force all of society to obey the law as set forth in the Decalogue, and most particularly this fourth commandment that to the eyes of the Puritans had been so neglected. As is often the case, such theological reasoning is connected with a political agenda to undermine the “Prelatical Faction,” and thereby also the monarchy itself.

Back to the law of Parliament itself, it orders

that no person or persons whatsoever, shall publicly cry, shew forth, or expose for sale, and Wares, Merchandises, Fruit, Herbs, Goods or Chattels whatsoever, upon the Lord’s day. . . . And that no person or persons whatsoever, shall, without reasonable cause for the same, travel, carry burthens, or do any worldly labours, or work whatsoever, upon that day. . . . That no person or persons shall hereafter upon the Lord’s day, use, exercise, keep, maintain, or be present at any Wrastlings, Shooting, Bowling, Ringing of Bells for Pleasure or Pastime, Masque, Wake, otherwise called Feasts, Church-Ale, Dancing, Games, Sport or pastime whatsoever.¹⁰

For each of these possible infractions, and for many others, this decree sets a particular penalty, mostly consisting in fines or loss of property or merchandise. If a child does anything to break the sanctity of the Lord’s day, those in charge of their care will be responsible, and suffer a penalty. And, in what seems to be a concession to need, Parliament then allows

the dressing of meat in private Families, or the dressing and sale of Victuals in a moderate way in Inns and Victualling-houses, for the use of such as cannot otherwise be provided for; or to the crying and selling Milk before Nine of the Clock, or after four of the Clock in the Afternoon, from the Tenth of September till the Tenth of March; or before Eight of the

Clock in the Morning, or after five of the Clock in the Afternoon, from the Tenth of March till the Tenth of September.¹¹

From that point on, throughout its tenure, the Long Parliament issued very similar laws, with stiffer penalties and ever-increasing detail. For instance, the prohibition to travel in the above-quoted law twelve years later was spelled out as “using or employing any Boat, Wherry, Lighter, Barge, Horse, Coach or Sedan, or traveling or laboring with any of them upon the day aforesaid.”¹²

These laws forbidding certain activities on the Lord’s day were accompanied by a “Directory” regarding worship and devotion, both public and private, also issued by Parliament in 1644, and which merits quoting at length:

The Lord’s day ought to be so remembered beforehand, as that all worldly business of our ordinary callings may be so ordered, and so timely and seasonably laid aside, as they may not be impediments to the due sanctifying of the day when it comes.

The whole day is to be celebrated as holy to the Lord, both in public and in private, as being the Christian Sabbath, to which ends it is requisite that there be a holy cessation or resting all the day, from all unnecessary labour, and an abstaining not only from all sports and pastimes, but also from all worldly words and thoughts.

That the diet of the day be so ordered as that neither servants be unnecessarily detained from the public worship of God, nor any other persons hindered from sanctifying that day.

That there be private preparation of every person and family by prayer for themselves, for God’s assistance of the minister, and for a blessing upon the ministry, and by such other holy exercises as may further dispose them to a more comfortable communion with God in the public ordinances.

That all the people meet so timely for public worship that the whole congregation may be present at the beginning, and

with one heart solemnly join together in all parts of the public worship, and not depart till after the blessing.

That what time is vacant, between or after the solemn meetings of the congregation in public, be spent in reading, meditation, repetition of services (especially by calling their families to an account of what they have heard and catechising them), holy conferences, prayer for a blessing upon public ordinances, singing of Psalms, visiting the sick, relieving the poor, and such like duties of piety, charity, and mercy, accounting the Sabbath a delight.¹³

The Westminster Confession

The Puritan view of the Sunday/Sabbath was instituted as church doctrine by the assembly of Westminster in 1647, which declared that devoting a time for the worship of the divine is part of natural law, and that devoting to that worship this particular day, the Sabbath, is part of God's revealed law, and therefore binding on all.

VII. As it is of the law of nature that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding on all men in all ages, he hath perpetually appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him; which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

VIII. This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts, about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of

his worship, and in the duties of necessity and piety. (Westminster Confession 21.7–8)

The Westminster assembly also provided the means to inculcate this understanding in the people at large. The Shorter Catechism says,

Ques. 59. Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly Sabbath?

Ans. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly Sabbath; and the first day of the week, ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian Sabbath.

Ques. 60. How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?

Ans. The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercise of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy.

Ques. 61. What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?

Ans. The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required, and the profaning of the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works about our worldly employments and recreations.

A Continuing Legacy

As is well known, the Puritan revolution eventually resulted in further religious fragmentation, political chaos, civil war, the restoration of the monarchy, and the return to dominance by the Church of England—or, as Puritans called them, the “Prelatic

Faction.” But even after the draconian legislation on the Sabbath was abrogated, the notion of the Sabbath that the Puritans had inherited from earlier Anglican divines, and then exaggerated, did not disappear. On the contrary, as we shall see, it was quite common in Britain, as well as in the British colonies that had been founded in America. And in some ways it continues to this day.

But before we deal with the continued Puritan influence we must turn to another view of Sunday, that which was proposed by Seventh-Day Sabbatarians.

Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism

First or Seventh?

Although, as stated at the very beginning of this book, my interest is not to focus on the debates as to whether Christians should keep the seventh day of the week or the first, but rather on the history of Sunday itself, since Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism has also promoted a certain view of Sunday, it is necessary to take at least a brief look at it, its origins, and what it had to say about Sunday.

As we have seen, the early church did not reject the Sabbath, nor did it claim that the Lord's day—the *dominica*, now called Sunday—had taken the place of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a day of rest that Jewish Christians as well as others sought to keep insofar as the circumstances allowed them to do so. The Lord's day was when Christians gathered for worship, particularly for the breaking of bread. It was after Constantine, when Sunday became a day of rest, that this first day of the week began taking on the characteristics of the Sabbath, particularly through frequent legislation prohibiting various activities on that holy day. But the Sabbath did not disappear, as may be seen in the survival of its name in romance languages as well as in Greek. At the same time, and ever more frequently as the Middle Ages advanced, anti-Jewish propaganda and sentiments fostered the claim that Sunday had now taken the place of the Sabbath. This view became prevalent in Britain, particularly since in English the name

of the seventh day, Saturday, had nothing to do with the Sabbath, but rather with Saturn. This was the foundation of the Puritan Sabbatarianism we have discussed in the previous chapter.

But once one begins calling Sunday the “Sabbath,” the immediate question that arises is: In the Bible, is the Sabbath not the seventh day? By what authority has this been changed? As we have also seen, this had already been discussed at the time of the Reformation, with Catholics such as John Eck arguing that since it was the church that had made this change that very fact contradicted the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. In England similar arguments were used by the “Prelatists” against Puritans, and the latter responded by claiming that it was Jesus himself, through his resurrection, who had moved the Sabbath to the first day of the week.

Within that context, it was inevitable that some would conclude that declaring Sunday to be the Sabbath was contrary to Scripture, and that therefore Sunday should be abandoned as a day of worship and the Sabbath should be restored to the seventh day of the week, as the fourth commandment ordered.

From John Traske to the Seventh-Day Adventists

While such views had already appeared on the Continent in figures such as Oswald Glait and Andreas Fischer, it was in Britain that they won a considerable number of followers, for it was also in Puritan Britain that the identification of Sunday with the Sabbath was most pronounced. Even before the triumph of Puritanism, John Traske (1585–1636), who had been ordained as an Anglican, was punished for holding, among other things, that the proper day for religious observance was the seventh day of the week. Although he eventually recanted, his wife, whom he had converted to his views, remained faithful to them, as did small groups of followers in various parts of England. Unfortunately, nothing he wrote has survived, and we know of him mostly through adversaries who do not agree among themselves, and some of whose accusations seem outlandish. At a very mini-

mum, he certainly insisted on the observance of the seventh day, and on obedience to the dietary laws of ancient Israel. He is also said to have opposed infant baptism, to have held—as the early quartodecimans did—that Easter should be celebrated on the Jewish Passover, to have declared himself infallible, and much more.

Theophilus Bradbourne (1590–1662) is much better known. In 1628 he published a treatise, which he reissued with considerable additions four years later, this time with a title that summarizes his views:

A Defence of that most Ancient and Sacred ordinance of God: the Sabbath Day. Consequently, and together with it: 2. A defence of the iijth Commandment. 3. A Defence of the integrity and perfection of the Decalogue, Moral Law, or X Commandments. 4. A defence also of the whole and intire worship of God, in all the partes thereof, as it is described in the first Table of the Decalogue. 5. A Discovery of the superstition, impurity and corruption of Gods worship, yea, and idolatry, committed by multitudes, in sanctifying the Lord's Day, for a Sabbath Day, by the iijth Commandment.

And then the subtitle makes its purpose clear:

Against all Anti-Sabbatarians, both of Protestants, Papists, Antinomians, and Anabaptisms, and by name and especially against these X ministers. . . .

Then follow the names of the ministers who had attacked the 1628 edition of his book.

Bradbourne himself was tried for heresy and ordered to recant, although whether he actually recanted, or how far he did, is not altogether clear. In any case, his ideas did not die out. In 1661, while he was still alive, these ideas merged with the growing Baptist movement, resulting in the birth of the Seventh-Day Baptists. From that point on, Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism continued existing, taking many forms, but usually employing

arguments similar to those proposed by Bradbourne. The best known of these is the Seventh-Day Adventists, whose origins date from 1863, when Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism was adopted by the former followers of William Miller (1782–1849). Born in Massachusetts, Miller became a Baptist preacher and, after serious struggles with his faith, had a profound experience of conversion. He then devoted himself to the study of Bible prophecy, and came to the conviction that the Lord's second advent would take place in 1843 or even earlier. After the "Great Disappointment"—when this did not happen—many of his former followers recalculated his prophecy, but retained similar ideas. Some of them became the fairly small Advent Christian Church, which still exists, while others joined his ideas with Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism and thus gave birth to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, which presently has almost twenty million members throughout the world, and is the largest representative of Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism.

The Puritan Solution

Returning then to the matter of Sunday and its history, it is possible to see Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism as the final development of a process that began at the time of Constantine. Until that time, the Lord's day—the *dominica*, celebrated on the first day of the week—was not generally seen as replacing the Sabbath, much less as a day of rest. While Christians gathered on the first day of the week to break bread and to celebrate baptisms, many of them—certainly Jewish Christians, but probably most others—continued viewing the seventh day with great reverence, probably seeking to rest as much as the social order to which they were subjected allowed. However, when Constantine decreed that the first day of the week—the day of the Sun—would be a day of rest, a process began whereby Sunday came to be seen as taking the place of the Sabbath. This led to ever-increasing legislation as to what work was allowed on the Lord's day. Such legislation reached its high point among the Puritans in England, with de-

tailed and ever more stringent laws regarding the observance of the “Sabbath”—by which was meant Sunday—and basing it on the fourth commandment.

In this entire debate, earlier Christian understandings of the first day of the week were generally forgotten or at least forced to the background. For Seventh-Day Sabbatarians, Sunday was an aberration, something invented by Constantine or, as some would say with even less historical accuracy, by the popes. For Puritan Sabbatarians, Sunday was simply the Christian Sabbath, the day to follow the instructions of the fourth commandment. Little was said about the first day of the week as the day of Christ’s resurrection, except to claim that by rising on that day Christ had put an end to the old seventh-day Sabbath and established a first-day Sabbath. And even less was said about the first day of the week being the first day of the first creation, and the resurrection being the first day of the new, or about Sunday, as the eighth day of the week, being also an announcement and a foretaste of the final day. Sunday had now become a day of obligation and self-discipline, to be devoted to churchgoing, prayer, and works of charity. Communion, which had so long been the center of Sunday worship, had become an infrequent celebration, no longer focusing on the joy of the Lord’s resurrection, but rather on the sorrow of one’s sinfulness and the cross to which it led.

The Continuation of Puritan Sabbatarianism

Sabbatarianism in Great Britain

Even though the Puritan revolution did not last, and monarchy was restored in 1660, Puritan Sabbatarianism did not disappear. On the contrary, once the fear of a Presbyterian conspiracy against the established church waned, Puritan Sabbatarianism continued flourishing in the Church of England as well as in others. From there it spread to the British colonies, and eventually even beyond. Since this continuation of Sabbatarianism added little to the Puritan views outlined two chapters back, it is not necessary here to follow its theological development, but simply to offer some examples of the survival of Sabbatarianism in Great Britain and beyond.

William Law (1699–1765), an Anglican priest, was and still remains one of the most influential English writers on Christian devotion. His *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, published in 1728, soon became the most widely read devotional book in England. Its instructions, admonitions, and warnings are often reinforced by depicting fictional characters—all Anglicans, like Law himself—who illustrate his points. On the Sabbath, Calidus is one of those whom one sees “all the week buried in business, unable to think of anything else, and then spending the Sunday in idleness and refreshment, in wandering into the country, in such visits and jovial meetings as make it often the worst day of the week.”¹ Another illustration is Flavia, an apparently very re-

religious woman who is deeply concerned when she sees a pimple on her face, and who goes to church every Sunday.

If you visit Flavia on the Sunday, you will always meet good company, you will know what is doing in the world, you will hear the last lampoon, be told who wrote it and who is meant by every name that is in it. . . . Flavia thinks they are atheists that play cards on the Sunday, but she will tell you the nicety of all the games, what cards she held, how she played them, and the history of all that happened at play as soon as she comes from church. If you would know who is rude and ill natured, who is vain and foppish, who lives too high, and who is in debt . . . you must visit Flavia on the Sunday.²

This quote, and many more like it, illustrate the significance Law attached to Sunday observance, but two other points are worthy of note. The first is that Law takes for granted that Flavia, like so many religious people of her time, is faithful in attendance at church on Sundays. Law is not writing to a society that has set Sunday aside, but rather to one in which attendance at church on Sunday was generally expected. The second is that he is convinced that this church attendance is of little avail to Flavia because she does not observe the rest of the day by devoting it to prayer, pious readings, and works of charity. Although not now obeyed by as many as when it was enforced by law, Puritan Sabbatarianism still survives. Sunday is a day to be devoted to church attendance and works of devotion and of charity.

John Wesley (1703–1791), arguably the most influential religious leader of the next generation, harbored similar ideas. Church attendance on Sundays was so important to him that throughout most of his life he instructed Methodist societies not to meet on Sundays, so that people could attend services and take Communion in the Anglican Church. This was because he believed—with most Christians throughout history—that the high point of Christian worship was Communion. Since this was not offered in the societies, Methodists were encouraged

to partake of it in the Sunday celebration of it at the church. In any case, his views on Sabbath observance were essentially the same as that of the Puritans, and he too, like them, employs the word “Sabbath” to refer to Sunday, to which now the laws of rest are to be applied. But his concern for Sunday was not only about religious service. He also held that the entire day, and how it was to be spent, should be regulated. In a sermon before the Society of the Reformation of Manners, he commended them for having taken measures against “the gross and open profanation of that sacred day, by persons buying and selling, keeping open shop, tipping in alehouses, and standing or sitting in the streets, roads or fields, vending their wares as on common days; especially in Moorfields, which was full of them every Sunday, from one end to the other” (*Sermon* 52.1.1).³

While Wesley was regarded askance by many in the established church, he was an Anglican priest, and on the particular issue of Sabbath—that is, Sunday—observance many among the Anglican leadership agreed with him. In 1780 an important element in earlier Puritan Sabbath legislation was affirmed by Parliament in the Sunday Observance Act, forbidding any amusement requiring an admission fee. Even anti-Sabbatarians such as William Paley promoted Sunday rest—although not on a religious basis, but rather as economically advisable. William Wilberforce (1759–1833), most famous for the abolition of the slave trade, joined the movement, even though he was known to spend Easter Sunday sunbathing! By that time Sabbath laws were rapidly becoming a matter of political expediency. Wilberforce attempted to prohibit publication of Sunday papers, but the bill did not go through. Various legislation made concessions such as allowing river trade and hackney transportation on Sunday, giving bakers leave to cook on that day, and many others.⁴

From that point on, while Sabbatarians were convinced that Sabbath laws were the will of God, most of the political debate, although constantly referring to the fourth commandment, had little to do with it, with members of Parliament voting one way or the other on the basis of other considerations—the power of

Sabbatarians among their constituents, the influence of capital and its interests, a desire to protect laborers, and so forth.

Puritan Sabbatarianism in America

The Puritan persuasion of most of the early British colonists in North America—but not necessarily in the Caribbean—led to laws very similar to those in England at the time—or perhaps even more draconian. While some of the supposed “blue laws” of New England may well be fabrications of overzealous critics, there is no doubt that there were many such laws, and that there was strict legislation and severe punishment. In Plymouth in 1651 a woman was fined ten shillings for doing laundry on the Sabbath. Over a hundred years later, in Wareham, another was fined ten shillings for raking hay. And the list goes on.⁵

Furthermore, there was the office of the tithingman—an office dating back to the tenth century, but now redefined. He was elected as a special guardian to make sure that the Sabbath was properly observed, reprimanding and accusing any violators. But also during Sunday service at the church he would walk about with a staff with a heavy knob with which to prod or strike any who might be nodding or sleeping—although women were spared the knob, and simply prodded. And if that was not enough, at one end of the staff there was a prick with which to stab those who would not waken at a mere poke.⁶

One may surmise that the tithingman was kept quite busy keeping people awake when one takes into account the length of services. People were summoned to church early Sunday morning. Since clocks and watches were scarce and often simply unavailable, the time to come to church was usually announced by bells, horns, or even the sound of shots. Families would then walk to church, usually in a strict hierarchical order: the head of the household and his wife walking ahead, and then the children, various dependents, and servants. In some towns, it was customary to wait for the pastor and his wife to enter the church first. The congregation would then enter, the men to one side,

The Continuation of Puritan Sabbatarianism

the women to the other, and then children, to sit at separate sections assigned for men, women, boys, and girls. The exact place where people were to sit was normally determined by a seating committee. Since such assignments were signs of social status, and were publicly announced by nailing them on the door of the church, the work of the seating committee often proved contentious.

The service consisted mostly of singing, prayers, and a sermon. In most churches Communion was celebrated quite infrequently, and in order to partake one had to be able to present a Communion token received from the deacons as proof of a pure and devoted life. The most common songs were Psalms set to music and—according to some witnesses—sung atrociously. But most of the time was devoted to long prayers, usually led by the pastor, and the sermon. The congregation would stand while the pastor led them in prayer, often for more than an hour, and sometimes even two. The sermon was a long disquisition, sometimes with over twenty-five points, and usually lasting one and a half hours or more. Time was also available for those who wished to make public confession of their sins and ask for the prayers of the congregation.

Then, when the sun was at its highest, there was a noon break for congregants to eat and tend to their horses. There often were “noon-houses” built near the church. There horses were housed in winter, and people went for their noon break. Usually there was no heat in the church, and sometimes the noon-house was particularly attractive because it had a fireplace—or if not, simply because the presence of horses provided some warmth. While adults commented on the sermon, or simply on matters of their daily life, children were kept from devilry by discussing the sermon with them, or by having them present and explain the notes they had taken during the sermon. After this noon break, the congregation would return to the meeting house, there to continue with the same sort of activities as in the morning.

Just in case all of this was not enough religion for the children, “Sabbath schools” began appearing at the beginning of the nineteenth century. (At an earlier time, when some had advo-

cated for such a school, the suggestion was rejected as a desecration of the Sabbath.) Since children were expected to attend worship with their elders, these schools would usually begin quite early in the morning—six-thirty or seven—and continue until a few minutes before the beginning of communal worship.

Another interesting development of Sabbath (Sunday) observance in colonial New England was that some argued that, as in biblical times, the Sabbath should begin at sundown on Saturday, and that the various restrictions on Sabbath activities should begin at that time. Since they do not seem to have considered that the Sabbath would then end at sundown on Sunday, critics quipped that the Sabbath was becoming a day and a half.

No matter how long the Sabbath lasted, it obviously was filled with religious activities and observances. But even so, Puritans felt it necessary to prevent any inappropriate or unseemly behavior during whatever hours were still free. This is the origin of the Sunday laws or “blue laws,” some of which still exist at the time of this writing. Contrary to popular belief, these laws were not called “blue” because they were printed on blue paper. Most likely their name originates from the use of “blue” as referring to sanctimonious austerity, probably with some connection to the “blue stockings” of Cromwell’s supporters in England. While there were laws codifying behavior at any time, those referring to Sunday were particularly strict. As in England, commerce, trade, and nonessential work or travel were forbidden, as were plays, festivities, and other such activities. But on occasion such prohibitions were applied with ridiculous zeal. In Boston, in 1656, a certain Captain Kemble, just returning from a three-year voyage, was met by his wife at the doorstep of his house, and kissed her. But this happened to be Sunday, and the unfortunate sailor was condemned to two hours of humiliation in the public stocks for his public display of lewdness on the Sabbath!

Secularization and Renewal

Further Expansion of Sunday Rest

As we shall see, as Puritanism began losing its stronghold on the North American British colonies, and particularly after those thirteen colonies declared independence, Sunday laws also began a slow decline. But at the same time, due at first to British colonial expansion, then to British and American missionary work, and finally to the development of a global economy, the practice of setting aside Sunday as a day of rest was expanding geographically. Hence the anomaly that, even in countries where Christians are a small minority, Sunday continues to be a day of rest: China, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, most of Africa, Pakistan, Turkey, Thailand, and many others. Quite often this Sunday rest is part of a two-day weekend, including both Saturday and Sunday.

The Secularization of Sunday

Such global expansion of Sunday as a day of rest, however, was paralleled by a process of secularization of the meaning of that day. In many of the countries named above, Sunday was a day of rest not so much because of any religious significance as because it was the day when banks, markets, and governments were closed in the former lands of Christendom, and the emerging

global economy made it convenient for other lands to have similar closings on the same day.

Even in the lands where the observance of Sunday as a Sabbath had deep religious roots, such roots were rapidly lost. As the eighteenth century advanced in the British colonies in North America, and the population became less homogeneous, those of strong Puritan convictions bemoaned the desacralization of the Sabbath. Preachers would complain repeatedly that Sunday evening, rather than the time of quiet meditation and works of charity it was supposed to be, had become a time of noisy merriment. In some cases, as a way to allow for some entertainment without profaning the Sabbath, people would gather in “singing schools” in order to learn and practice new songs, as well as singing old favorites—usually hymns or other religious songs.

In the early years of the new republic, many states passed laws prohibiting a number of activities on Sunday. Such laws were repeatedly challenged in state courts, with varying results. In 1961 the Supreme Court ruled that Sunday laws that had a purely religious purpose were unconstitutional, but that those laws that served a secular purpose did not violate the Constitution, even though they had arisen from religious sentiments. From that point on, when Sunday laws were challenged in court, even those who supported them for religious reasons were forced to argue on the basis of their effect on society at large. Thus the secularization of Sunday was not limited to countries such as China, where Sunday was simply a convenient time to set aside for rest in conjunction with the rest of the world, but also in the United States, where the legal status of Sunday laws was to be determined by their secular impact.

In spite of their decline, well into the twenty-first century Sabbath laws still held much appeal for vast numbers of conservative Christians who were convinced that, as in the times of Puritan power, civil government had the obligation to make certain that the law of God was obeyed not only by faithful believers but also by society at large—what is often called the “third use of the law.”

However, as one looks at the wider picture of the entire

history of Sunday, it would seem that what was begun by Constantine in that famous edict in 321 has come full circle. Until that time, Christians observed the first day of the week, the day of the Lord, as a day of worship, with no particular thought of resting on that day, and scant connection with the Sabbath. They lived in a society that granted them no special privileges, and in the midst of that society and the various obligations it imposed on them they had to find ways to celebrate their Lord's resurrection on that particular day. Constantine made this day also a day of rest, and thus began a process that would eventually lead, first, to the conviction that Sunday rest was to be patterned after the Sabbath, then—particularly in English-speaking lands, where the seventh day of the week was not named after the Sabbath, but after Saturn—to making the word *Sabbath* a synonym for Sunday, and, finally, to stringent Sunday laws that were reminiscent of the most strict Jewish Sabbath laws. But now, seventeen centuries after Constantine, Christians find themselves once again in the midst of a society that is indifferent and sometimes even hostile to their values and beliefs, and have to find ways to live those values, proclaim those beliefs, and worship their God with diminishing social support. For all but them, Sunday is just another day—a day of leisure, and football, and trips to the beach.

But despite their nostalgic yearning for a bygone time of legal and social support, many Christians have responded to the secularization of Sunday in society at large with a renewed and deeper understanding of Sunday and its meaning.

Liturgical Renewal

While all this was happening, a quieter development was taking place: Christians were looking anew at their worship practices and how these were understood. By the middle of the nineteenth century, there was some unease, mostly among Anglicans and Roman Catholics, about the worship practices of their churches. Among Anglicans, this gave rise to the Oxford Movement, which

among other things sought to return to older forms of worship. Among Roman Catholics, there was renewed interest in the worship of the Middle Ages, which many among them considered the high point in the history of the church. But soon, as patristic studies were also developing, it became apparent that there was a time even before the Middle Ages that was worthy of note. In 1883 Greek Orthodox bishop and scholar Philotheos Bryennios published a manuscript he had found eight years earlier in the library of the Hospital of the Holy Sepulcher in Constantinople, and which he identified as the *Didache*, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, to which several ancient authors referred. This soon drew attention to other versions and fragments of the same book in Coptic, Arabic, Georgian, and Latin. The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, of which an ancient Ethiopic version had already been published, but was now also known in several other ancient languages, drew the attention of historians of worship. A scholarly consensus developed that this was indeed the work of that ancient Christian writer, and that therefore what it said about worship reflected much of what was done in the early church. On the basis of these two documents, historians were able to evaluate and to interpret much of what was said in other ancient documents, and thus to come to a general consensus on practices of worship in pre-Constantinian times. The same documents led many Protestants to reform their worship, bringing back into it forms that were in continued use by Catholics and Anglicans, but that more radical Protestants had rejected as being “popish” and now had to accept as actually quite ancient. Thus Methodists and Presbyterians are no longer surprised at the exchange, which appears as early as the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (*Apostolic Tradition* 4):

The Lord be with you.
 And with your spirit.
 Lift up your hearts.
 We lift them to the Lord
 Let us give thanks to the Lord our God
 It is right to give our thanks and praise.¹

Thus the earlier movement of renewal in worship, which had focused mostly on medieval worship, began looking at an earlier time, the time when worship had to stand on its own meaning and on the faith behind it, but not on social approval or legal support, and a time when worship was more participatory.

Already in 1903, shortly after his election, Pope Pius X issued a call for more active participation of the community of faith in the liturgy. A few years later, Pius XI issued a similar call, although hoping to promote more active participation in Gregorian chant! In *Tra le sollecitudine*, he declared: "So that the faithful may participate more actively in divine worship, let Gregorian chant be restored in those parts belonging to the people. It is most necessary that the faithful attend sacred ceremonies . . . not as alien and mute spectators, but that their voices alternate with those of the priest or of the *schola*."²

From that point, the calls for liturgical renewal were ever more insistent. In 1947 Pius XII issued the encyclical *Mediator Dei*, in which he acknowledged the need for liturgy to adapt to new circumstances, and even that there was a place in it for the use of the vernacular.³ A few years earlier, his predecessor Pius XI had authorized Masses in which Latin was accompanied by Croatian or in other cases by Slavonic; and in 1941 Rome began issuing a series of instructions for the preparation of bilingual rituals in places such as China, Japan, and India. In 1951 Pius XII approved the restoration of the Paschal Vigil—the ancient service on Easter Eve, which had been substituted by a service on Saturday morning—on an experimental basis, and four years later he issued instructions for the reformation of the entire celebration of Holy Week, including the restoration of the Paschal Vigil.

The Second Vatican Council

The great change, however, came with the Second Vatican Council. Shortly after calling for the council, Pope John XXIII gave primary importance to liturgical renewal: "The Council does not

have to talk much about matters of dogma or of morality. . . . As long as the people do not think with the Church, and live with the Church the mysteries of Christ through the riches of the sacraments, in the great feasts of the Paschal cycle, and on Sundays, and as long as the people do not pray with the Church, nothing will be achieved.”⁴

The bishops gathered at the council were convinced that the liturgy of the church needed a thorough renewal and reformation. Thus, after ample discussion and a thorough rewriting of the text presented by the preparatory commission on the liturgy, the first document that the council approved was its *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, usually known by its first words in Latin: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. While this document included vast directives for the formation of priests as leaders in liturgy, what is most notable in it is its effort to renew the worship of the church in such a way that it would be more relevant to the faithful, and that there would be greater participation on the part of the laity. On this last subject, the council stated that the duty of pastors is “to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 11).⁵

To this end, the council gave authority to national and regional conferences of bishops to adapt the liturgy—always with the approval of the Holy See—determining what use is to be made of the vernacular. Yet this was not to be a mere translation of the Latin Mass, but rather an adaptation to the particular traditions and gifts of various cultures, for

even in the liturgy the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters that do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather does she respect and foster the qualities and talents of the various races and nations. Anything in these people’s [*sic*] way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy, and, if possible, preserves intact. She sometimes even admits such things into the liturgy itself, provided they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit. (SC 37)⁶

Among these “qualities and talents of various races,” the council highlighted music and singing. Thus, after some paragraphs reminding the faithful that “the musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of great value, greater than that of any other art” (SC 112),⁷ the council went on to encourage the fostering of “popular religious song” (SC 118),⁸ acknowledging that “there are people who have their own musical tradition, and this plays a great part in their religious and social life. For this reason their music should be held in proper esteem and a suitable place is to be given to it, not only in forming their religious sense but also in adapting worship to their native genius” (SC 119).⁹

A second, and equally significant, manner in which the council encouraged the active and intelligent participation of the faithful in worship was preaching. For centuries, preaching had been neglected, and even reduced to a series of announcements on parish life, or at best a moral exhortation. Now the council declared, “By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of Christian life are expounded from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year. The homily, therefore, is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself. In fact, at those Masses which are celebrated on Sundays and holidays of obligation, with the people assisting, it should not be omitted except for a serious reason” (SC 52).¹⁰

In brief, the council emphasized the renewal of worship—particularly Sunday worship—by encouraging the participation of the laity. This was to be done, first, by the use of the vernacular; second, by giving the laity an active role in worship; third, by providing a homily which would connect the biblical text with the sacrament itself; fourth, by encouraging the use of music and other cultural elements that are expressive of the idiosyncrasies and experiences of the people; and, finally, by recalling that Sunday is a feast day, and that therefore the Mass, rather than a lugubrious remembrance of the death of Christ, is a celebration of his victorious resurrection.

New Masses

Almost immediately, the directives of the council took flesh in a host of “popular Masses” written in the vernacular, with joyous native music, and often expressing the pains and hopes of the people. One such Mass among many is the *Misa popular salvadoreña*—Popular Salvadoran Mass—whose entrance song, “Vamos todos al banquete,” sets the tone for the entire celebration:

Refrain:

Let us now go to the banquet,
to the feast of the universe.
The table’s set and a place is waiting;
come, ev’ryone, with your gifts to share.

I will rise in the early morning;
the community is waiting for me.
With a spring in my step I’m walking
with my friends and my family. Refrain

We are coming from Soyapango,
San Antonio, and from Zacamil,
Mexicanos, Ciudad Delgado,
Santa Tecla and La Bernal. Refrain

God invites all the poor and hungry
to the banquet of justice and good
where the harvest will not be hoarded
so that no one will lack for food. Refrain

May we build such a place among us
where all people are equal in love.
God has called us to work together
and to share everything we have. Refrain.¹¹

Songs such as this, sung with guitars and maracas, and expressing both the joy of communion and the injustices and pains that

people suffer, have resulted in a surprising renewal in Sunday worship. Masses that used to be attended by a few pious souls have become a significant part in the life of many a town. There is a vast difference between the more traditional obligation to *oír misa*—"hear Mass"—and the notion that one is partaking of a meal that is a paradigm of the banquet of creation, of what that banquet should and will be.

In all of this, one notes the resurgence of the ancient three dimensions of the meaning of Sunday. This is a celebration of the victory of Jesus through his cross and resurrection. But it also points to his relation to creation as a whole. And it certainly includes a sense of eschatological hope.

An Ecumenical Renewal

The very fact that the entrance hymn quoted above has been taken from a Lutheran hymnal serves as an indication of the manner in which liturgical renewal has not been limited to Roman Catholicism. Many of the scholars who studied ancient Christian worship on the basis of the documents mentioned above—the *Didache*, the *Apostolic Tradition*, and many others—were Protestant. Some were Eastern Orthodox. On the basis of their interest in a common history, they spoke with one another across denominational lines. Protestant studies on the *Apostolic Tradition* were read by Catholic patristic scholars and liturgists. When the council ordered them to preach, many Catholic priests and schools of theology turned to Protestant experts in homiletics. Likewise, the Catholic liturgical renewal was closely followed by Protestant scholars and liturgists. Thus what took place at the Second Vatican Council had some Protestant roots, and what was proposed by that council found eager ears among Protestant liturgists and pastors.

This has resulted in a Protestant liturgical renewal that, like the Catholic renewal, once again emphasizes the joyful and festive elements in worship, particularly in Communion.

Examples of this tendency to restore the festive dimension

of communion abound. As part of the Reformation emphasis on actually partaking of Communion, the sixteenth-century Anglican Book of Common Prayer included a call that, while inviting all who were ready to partake, also set a somber mood for the rite itself:

Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways: Draw near with faith, and make your humble confession to Almighty God, devoutly kneeling.

This invitation was then taken, almost word for word, by other Protestant denominations, notably those derived from British Puritanism¹² or from the Wesleyan movement, thus setting the tone for Communion in those churches.¹³

While this invitation still appears in the Book of Common Prayer, this book has added an alternative order for the celebration of Communion that does not include it. Most other major Protestant denominations have either deleted it or offered more celebratory invitations. Such are, for instance, hymns such as “This Is the Feast of the Victory of Our God” or Scripture quotes such as “They will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29).

Most significantly, however, is the matter of the frequency of Communion, and the place it takes in Sunday observances. While the Lutheran and Anglican traditions, as well as Roman Catholicism, have continued the practice of celebrating Communion every Sunday, and even though Calvin would have liked to do likewise in Geneva, the Reformed tradition, particularly after the rise of Puritanism, tended to make Communion less frequent, partly for fear it would lose its awesome significance. In seventeenth-century Scottish Presbyterianism, the common practice was a biannual celebration. This was still the practice of the Evangelical and Reformed Church well into the second half of the twentieth century, although there was an awareness that

this was not ideal: “The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper shall be administered in every congregation at least twice a year, and preferably more often.”¹⁴ The case is similar in the Presbyterian church in the United States, whose directories for worship in the nineteenth century established that Communion should be celebrated quarterly, or more often if the pastor and the elders felt that it was advisable. For various reasons, the same was true of several major Protestant traditions and denominations, such as the Baptists and the Methodists.

However, by the middle of the twentieth century, as part of the liturgical renewal and well before the Second Vatican Council, Presbyterians and others were increasingly convinced that more frequent Communion—possible every Sunday—should be the norm. In 1961 the United Presbyterian Church (USA) issued a revised edition of the Book of Common Worship. An analysis of this document, its history, and reception has led to the accurate interpretation that “the normative model was the full service of preaching and the Lord’s Supper, but presented with sufficient ambiguity to achieve acceptance by a church that was not prepared to implement it.”¹⁵ The Directory for Worship of the Presbyterian Church, US (the Southern Church), was more conservative, still proposing the by then traditional practice of quarterly Communion, although with the possibility of more frequent celebrations. After the two churches merged, their Directory for Worship was a compromise between these two directions:

It is appropriate to celebrate the Lord’s Supper as often as each Lord’s Day. It is to be celebrated regularly and frequently enough to be recognized as integral to the Lord’s Day. . . .

The session . . . shall insure regular and frequent celebration of the Sacrament, in no case less that quarterly.¹⁶

Anecdotal evidence, as well as some limited studies, would seem to indicate that even though Presbyterian and Methodist churches that celebrate Communion weekly are a small minority, their number is growing, and monthly Communion is

rapidly becoming the standard among major denominations that have traditionally celebrated Communion less frequently.

Thus Protestants as well as Catholics seem to be moving toward the initial intent of reformers such as Luther and Calvin, that Communion be celebrated every Sunday, in a language that the people can understand, with fuller participation of the people, and always accompanied by preaching. Catholics now celebrate the Mass in the vernacular, with people participating actively and partaking of the elements, and preaching as a central part of the Mass. Protestants, while retaining the practice of preaching at Sunday services, are making Communion a more frequent and integral part of it. And all are agreed that Communion, far from being a mournful occasion, is the feast of the people of God, celebrating Christ's resurrection.

The one major Protestant group that does not seem to be moving rapidly toward more frequent Communion is Pentecostalism, where Communion services are relatively infrequent, and in some cases nonexistent. But there is another dimension in which Pentecostalism is making a significant contribution to the liturgical renewal of the twenty-first century. This is the emphasis on the joy of worship. Those looking at Pentecostalism from the outside may claim that its worship is disorganized, that it is noisy, or that it lacks theological depth. But they cannot claim that it is not joyful! There certainly is recognition of sin, and one of the central elements of some Pentecostal worship is in sharing and acknowledging the hardships of life. But above all there is the celebration of God's power above all hardship, and of God's grace above all sin.

Thus, while Christians gather all around the world to celebrate Sunday, and they do this in myriad different ways, and even while some bemoan the demise of Sunday laws reminiscent of the Constantinian era, there is no doubt that there is a renewal of Sunday—of Sunday as the day of resurrection, of Sunday as the beginning of a new creation, and of Sunday as the foretaste of the final consummation.

As we come to the end of this rapid survey from the time of the Reformation to the twenty-first century, there are a few

points that should be emphasized amid the wealth and confusion of different views and practices that have prevailed since the sixteenth century.

The first is that, while from the sixteenth century Catholics and Protestants diverged on the forms of Sunday worship, in the twentieth century a new convergence began to develop. The Roman Catholic Church, which in the sixteenth century had insisted on worship in Latin and with rigorous uniformity, in the twentieth moved to the various vernacular languages and promoted adaptation to different cultures. A church in which all that was expected of the laity was regular attendance at Mass now insists on active participation and partaking in the elements of Communion, and on the need to preach at Mass, partly so that people may understand what it is they are doing. Meanwhile, many Protestant churches that had relegated Communion to a rare event, to be celebrated once or at best four times a year, have been moving toward more frequent Communion. Phrases, gestures, and other practices that had been rejected as “popish” have now been proved to be quite ancient, and are being restored to various Protestant liturgies. The insistence of reformers such as Luther and Calvin on the indissoluble connection between word and sacrament has now become commonplace both among Roman Catholics and among many Protestants.

Second, the trend, begun at the time of Constantine, to legislate Sunday rest continued and even increased among Protestants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but then began waning, to the distress of many conservative Protestants who believed that Sunday was being desecrated. At the same time that, partly due to Western colonialism and economic power, Sunday became a day of rest in many countries with relatively limited Christian presence, Christians in the lands previously known as Christendom were bemoaning the secularization of Sunday.

Third, although there had long been a tendency to connect Sunday with the fourth commandment, it was mostly after the Reformation, and particularly in the English-speaking world, that the word “Sabbath” came to mean Sunday. This was not

possible in romance languages, where various derivatives from “Sabbath” were still the name of the seventh day of the week. Thus it was mostly in English-speaking countries that Sabbatarianism developed, in the sense of calling Sunday the Sabbath. For the same reason, it was also there that Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism first became prominent.

Finally, liturgical renewal has also led to a rediscovery of the ancient meanings of Sunday, and therefore to granting more significance to Sunday, no longer as a sort of Christian Sabbath, but rather as the day of the resurrection of Christ, marking the beginning of a new creation and the promise of a final consummation. This has made Sunday worship more celebratory.

Epilogue

Historians are often tempted to turn history into prophecy. When, looking at the entire history I have just recounted, I try to discern what the future may bring, I would be inclined to say that, at the same time that in society at large Sunday will be ever more secularized, within the church itself it will regain its significance. At a time when most Christians live in the bonds of poverty and oppression, Sunday will serve as a reminder that the one who rose on this day is also the one by whom all things were made, and the one who is working a new creation. And therefore Sunday, ever more neglected by society at large, will become ever more cherished by those who believe.

Should this prophecy fail, however, of one thing I am certain: Even though the coming decades may contradict all our predictions, there is one future we cannot deny. This is the future that Sunday itself promises, the eighth day of creation when, as Augustine put it, “we shall rest and see; see and love; love and praise.”

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Notes

Notes to Chapter 2

1 Unless indicated otherwise, translations of the patristic and the medieval sources are the author's.

2 The origin of the French *samedi* is not as obvious as the others. Apparently *sabbatum* became *sambati*, and by the twelfth century was *samedi*.

3 Isidore does not say what he means by speaking "as the church does." But since immediately after this passage he turns to the meaning of the word *feria*, one may conclude that he would prefer a system such as eventually prevailed in Portuguese.

Notes to Chapter 3

1 ANF 1:62-63.

2 ANF 7:341-42.

Notes to Chapter 4

1 Quoted in Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1878), 2:67.

2 Full unanimity was difficult, for not all calendars in the Greco-Roman world coincided. For a time the calculation was left to the church of Alexandria, which then communicated the results to Rome, to be circulated throughout the Western church. In the sixth century, thanks to the work of Dionysius Exiguus—meaning "the short"—a more detailed common calendar was developed. Still, in the eighth century there was a dispute in

Notes to pages 29–50

Ireland, for the Irish calendar did not coincide with that of the rest of Europe. Finally, even theoretical unanimity was lost in the sixteenth century, when Pope Gregory XIII reformed the calendar. Since the Eastern churches did not accept this new Gregorian calendar, but continued using the older Julian calendar, to this day the dates for Easter seldom coincide—although it is always celebrated on a Sunday.

3 Scholars often point to the Book of Enoch 91.12–13: “Then after that there shall occur the eighth sabbath—the Sabbath of righteousness. . . . A house shall be built for the Great King in glory evermore.” Translation taken from James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 73.

Notes to Chapter 5

1 What Tertullian literally says is “in days of station”—*stationum diebus*—but most scholars agree that this means days set aside for fasting.

2 Translated by Burton Scott Easton, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (repr.; Ann Arbor: Cushing-Malloy, 1962), 54–56.

3 According to a document of doubtful authenticity, Irenaeus—a few decades earlier than Tertullian—affirmed that the practice of not kneeling on the Lord’s day went back to the apostles.

4 Easton, *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, 50.

5 I have described the catechumenate in some detail in *A History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 9–14.

6 Easton, *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, 48.

Notes to Chapter 6

1 Translated in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1894), 1:487.

2 These are discussed more fully in William K. Boyd, *The Ecclesiastical Edicts of the Theodosian Code* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1905).

Notes to Chapter 7

1 Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945), 141.

2 See, for instance, Eusebius’s description of the basilica that Constan-

tine ordered to be built at the site of the Holy Sepulcher. *Life of Constantine* 3.29-40.

3 Philip Jaffe, ed., *Regesta pontificum romanorum* (Leipzig, 1885), 369.

4 See a summary of some of these in L. Duchesne, *Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution* (London: SPCK, 1927), 379-98.

Notes to Chapter 8

1 Quoted in Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), 316.

2 P. R. Coleman-Norton, *Roman State and Christian Church: A Collection of Legal Documents to A.D. 535* (London: SPCK, 1966), 1:309-10. This legislation was repeated by the same emperors in 392.

3 Coleman-Norton, *Roman State and Christian Church*, 1:359.

4 Coleman-Norton, *Roman State and Christian Church*, 2:423. In quoting this legislation two and a half centuries later, the Code of Justinian explains, immediately after the reference to the days of the Sun, that "this is the day that from ancient times was properly known as the Lord's Day."

Notes to Chapter 9

1 *NPNF2* 2:132.

2 *NPNF2* 2:390.

3 *NPNF2* 14:148.

4 Translated by Joseph P. Smith, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (New York: Newman, 1952), 106.

Notes to Chapter 10

1 I have explored and explained these contrasts more fully in *Christian Thought Revisited: Three Types of Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989); 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999).

2 Henrici Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (Rome: Herder, 1957), 430.

3 Haymo of Halberstadt (or perhaps Haymo of Auxerre), *De corpore et sanguine domini*, in PL 118:815-16.

4 Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, 355.

5 PL 92:593-97.

6 See Alcuin, *Epistola* 90, PL 100:289; Radbert, *De corpore et sanguine*

Notes to Pages 81-100

domini 20, PL 120:1331-32; Rhabanus Maurus, *De clericorum institutione* 1.31, PL 107:318-19.

7 Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (repr.; Paris: Welter, 1901-1927), 24:405.

8 Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, 437.

Notes to Chapter 11

1 P. R. Coleman-Norton, *Roman State and Christian Church: A Collection of Legal Documents to A.D. 535* (London: SPCK, 1966), 3:877.

2 Quoted in Eileen Power, *Medieval People* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 27-28.

3 In José Vives, ed., *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos* (Barcelona: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1963), 147.

4 Quoted in Fernand Nicolay, *Historia de las creencias, supersticiones, usos y costumbres* (Barcelona: Montaner y Simón, 1904), 2:95.

5 In Julio Campos Ruiz and Ismael Roca Meliá, *Santos padres españoles* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1971), 2:107.

6 Edward K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903), 1:161-62.

7 The Greek text is available in Aurelio de Santos Otero, ed., *Los evangelios apócrifos* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1966), 715-25.

Note to Chapter 12

1 *NPNF*² 9:95-96.

Notes to Chapter 13

1 Henrici Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (Rome: Herder, 1957), 712.

2 See John Eck von Ingolstadt, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces against Luther and Other Enemies of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 101-2.

3 Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (repr.; Paris: Welter, 1901-1927), 33:529-30. Even as late as the twenty-first century, this argument is used by some very conservative Catholic apologists who argue that, if Protestants are to be biblical, they must abandon the practice of Sunday worship, which was established by the authority of the church (an argument that has been taken up also by Seventh-day Sabbatarians).

- 4 Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, 946. However, the ancient Mozarabic, Gallican, and Milanese liturgies (also in Latin) were permitted.
- 5 LW 40:141.
- 6 LW 40:141.
- 7 In B. J. Kidd, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911), 193.
- 8 Kidd, *Documents*, 193.
- 9 LW 51:388.
- 10 “On the Sabbath,” in *The Essential Caristadt: Fifteen Tracts*, trans. and ed. E. J. Furcha (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1995).
- 11 LW 40:93–94.
- 12 LW 47:67.
- 13 LW 47:92.
- 14 Ulrich Gäbler, *Huldrych Zwingli: His Life and Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 108.
- 15 See the extensive article by Gerhard F. Hasel, “Sabbatarian Anabaptists in the Sixteenth Century,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 5, no. 2 (July 1967): 101–21; 6, no. 1 (January 1968): 19–28.
- 16 Daniel Liechty, *Sabbatarianism in the Sixteenth Century: A Page in the History of the Radical Reformation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993), 31–33.
- 17 There is some question as to how much Glait influenced Fischer’s views, and how much he followed them. See Daniel Liechty, *Amireas Fischer and the Sabbatarian Anabaptists: An Early Reformation Episode in East Central Europe* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1988), 59–62.
- 18 See Liechty, *Sabbatarianism*, 78–84.
- 19 On July 31, 1537, Fabri felt compelled to write to the pastors in Geneva explaining his attitude, and to deny any agreement with Colinaeus. This letter may be read in A.-L. Herminiard, *Correspondance des reformateurs dans les pays de langue française* (repr.; Nieukoop: De Graaf, 1965), 4:270–72.
- 20 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. Charles William Bingham (repr.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2:437.
- 21 Quoted in “Sabbath Days,” *Anglican Rose* (blog), November 27, 2012. <https://anglicanrose.wordpress.com/2012/11/27/sabbath-days/>.

Notes to Chapter 14

- 1 In this section, I have been greatly aided by John H. Primus, *Holy Time: Moderate Puritanism and the Sabbath* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989).

Notes to Pages 118-142

- 2 “Homily on the Place and Time of Prayer,” *University of Toronto English Library*, 1997, <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/ret/homilies/bk2hom8.html>.
- 3 Samuel Carr, ed., *Early Writings of John Hooper* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1843), 342.
- 4 Carr, *Early Writings of John Hopper*, 346-47.
- 5 Thomas Rogers, *The Faith, Doctrine and Religion, Professed, and Protected in the Realm of England and Dominions of the Same, Expressed in 39 Articles* (repr.; Cambridge: Parker Society, 1854).
- 6 Quoted in Primus, *Holy Time*, 88.
- 7 Quoted in Primus, *Holy Time*, 1.
- 8 Primus, *Holy Time*, 98.
- 9 Quoted in A. H. Lewis, *A Critical History of Sunday Legislation from 321 to 1888 A.D.* (New York: Appleton, 1888), 115.
- 10 From Lewis, *A Critical History*, 116.
- 11 From Lewis, *A Critical History*, 119.
- 12 From Lewis, *A Critical History*, 128.
- 13 From Lewis, *A Critical History*, 141-42.

Notes to Chapter 16

- 1 William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life: The Spirit of Love*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 81.
- 2 Law, *Serious Call*, 107.
- 3 In Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 6:151.
- 4 See John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 26-32.
- 5 See Alice Morse Early, *The Sabbath in Puritan New England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 244-58.
- 6 Early, *Sabbath in Puritan New England*, 66-76.

Notes to Chapter 17

- 1 Although this translation is taken from the Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship*, Calvin would have found it unsatisfactory, for on the basis of the Latin *habemus ad Dominum* he understood the response to “Lift up your hearts” not in the sense that we are lifting our hearts, but rather in the sense that our hearts are already with the Lord, for this is precisely what happens in Communion: that by the power (“virtue”) of the Holy Spirit we

are taken to the presence of Christ in heaven—what is usually called Calvin’s “virtualism.”

2 Text in Annibale Bugnini, *Documenta pontificia ad instaurationem liturgicam spectantia (1903–1953)* (Rome: Ed. Liturgiche, 1959), 1:13.

3 Bugnini, *Documenta pontificia*, 1:90–93.

4 Quoted in Ignacio Oñatibia, “Historia de la constitución sobre la Sagrada Liturgia,” Casimiro Morcillo González, *Concilio Vaticano II* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1965), 98.

5 Trans. and ed. Austin P. Flannery, *Documents of Vatican II* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 1:7. Hereafter quoted as *SC*.

6 Flannery, *Documents*, 13.

7 Flannery, 31.

8 Flannery’s translation, “religious singing by the faithful” (33), does not convey the popular nature of this music in the Latin text: *cantus popularis religiosus*.

9 Flannery, *Documents*, 33.

10 Flannery, *Documents*, 18.

11 Original composition by Guillermo Cuéllar. English translation by Bret Hesla and William Dexheimer-Pharris. In the Lutheran *Libro de liturgia y cántico* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), no. 410.

12 The Presbyterian form, as it appears in various editions of the Book of Common Worship, deleted the reference to kneeling. The reason for this was that the Puritans had an aversion to kneeling in church, which might seem like kneeling before the celebrant. This led to the ditty “Presby, Presby, he’ll not bend; he just sits on man’s chief end.”

13 The Methodist version did keep the reference to kneeling, but most people would remain seated or standing until they would go forward to partake of the elements.

14 *The Hymnal* (Saint Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1961), 21.

15 Stanley Robertson Hall, *The American Presbyterian “Directory for Worship”: History of a Liturgical Strategy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 361.

16 Quoted in Hall, *Directory for Worship*, 490.

For Further Reading

Sunday observances are so crucial to most Christians that the literature on the subject is overwhelmingly abundant. A valuable general treatment of the subject, which deals briefly with earlier history and then focuses on British and North American Christianity, is Stephen Miller, *The Peculiar Life of Sundays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Much of the discussion on Sunday is focused on the question of the relationship between Sunday and the Sabbath in the early church—a debate that is still going on, and which I have sought not to make the central issue in the present study. Although much has been written on the subject in recent years, there are two books that collect practically all the evidence for one side or another of the debate. These are, on the side of Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism, Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977); and, on the opposing side, Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968). On the impact of Constantine on Sunday observances, see Paul A. Hartog, “Constantine, Sabbath-Keeping, and Sunday Observance,” in *Rethinking Constantine: History, Theology, and Legacy*, ed. Edward L. Smither (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 105–29.

On the subject of early Christian worship as the context for Sunday observances, and the meaning of the Lord’s day for early

FOR FURTHER READING

Christians, there are a number of readily accessible yet scholarly books. Some of them are: Paul F. Bradshaw, *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), and Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). On early Easter observances, there is much valuable information in Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York: Pueblo, 1986).

On the history of Puritan Sabbatarianism in England, see Kenneth L. Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). On Sabbath/Sunday observances in the origins of the United States, see Winton U. Solberg, *Redeem the Time: The Puritan Sabbath in Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977). These may be supplemented with the account of Sabbath laws in the United States—and their defense—by R. C. Wylie, *Sabbath Laws in the United States* (Pittsburgh: National Reform Association, 1905).

One possible approach to continue studying the issues raised in the present book is to begin by reading more on the history of Christian worship in general. An excellent summary of the history is James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993). One may also find much useful material, clearly presented and discussed, in Catherine Gunsalus González, *Resources in the Ancient Church for Today's Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014).

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