

# Origin of Sunday Observance in the Christian Church

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A reply to Dudley Canright and others who affirm that the origin of Sunday observance is not Pagan or Roman Catholic but came from Jesus Christ and the apostles.

HISTORY teaches that the Sunday festival, originally pagan, was for reasons of sentiment and expediency adopted by that section of the Christian church which was beginning to apostatize by following the ways of the world, even in Paul's day. This falling away finally headed up in what is now known as the Roman Catholic, or papal, Church. (See 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8.)

Within recent years an effort has been made in the interests of the "Christian Sabbath," or "Lord's day," to break the force of this charge. To this end it is denied that Sunday was especially honored by the pagans, and it is asserted that the change from Sabbath keeping to Sunday observance was made in the Greek, or Eastern, Church, beginning with the apostles, long before there was any Roman Catholic Church or any Papacy.

This view was championed, if not originated, by the late D. M. Canright, in one of his books on the Sabbath question, and has been given wide currency by a large publishing house. It is important, therefore, that all men know how to meet this new phase of first-day propaganda.

Were it not that honest souls are being deceived by this Greek Church argument, the deceptive theory to which we have referred might be dismissed as unworthy of notice; for when examined, it is found to be as empty as a barrel with both heads out; but inasmuch as many to whom Mr. Canright's book comes have not at hand facilities for thorough investigation, we will present the truth of the matter here as briefly as possible.

## What Is Involved

Those who take the position that the Sunday Sabbath is neither pagan nor papal ignore or deny several vital facts. In the first place, the Bible itself tells of a great apostasy among the professed followers of Christ in the early centuries of the church, and as stated by Dr. Adam Clarke in his General Observations on 2 Thessalonians 2: 17, "The general run of Protestant writers understand the whole [of this scripture] as referring to the popes and Church of Rome."

He who denies this must therefore in the end repudiate the consensus of Protestant opinion, and line up with the Roman Catholic interpretation of prophecy.

And not only so, but one taking such a position must ignore, falsify, and deny history as well as challenge Protestant exegesis. In his defense of Sunday observance as a Christian institution, Mr. Canright closed his eyes to two very important facts: (1) That there is a wide difference between a voluntary observance of Sunday for reasons of sentiment or expediency, and a divine command for its celebration; and (2) that

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Sunday as a sacred day came not from the paganism of Greece and Rome, which originally had no week and no weekly festival, but from the Mithraism of the East, which invaded the Roman Empire nearly a century in advance of Christianity, and which did have the week and a weekly festival Sunday.

In the eleventh edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica (1911), article "Mithras," the fact of "the sanctification of Sunday and of the 25th of December "by Mithraism is strongly emphasized; but it is ignored by the advocates of the apostolic origin of the Sunday Sabbath.

This statement from the Britannica relative to Sunday is supported by the following letter from one of the authorities by whom Mr. Canright sought to disprove the pagan origin of Sunday observance:

**SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM, WASHINGTON, DC**

November 21, 1923.

Office of Administrative Assistant to the Secretary in Charge U. S. National Museum.

Mr. C. P. Bollman,

Managing Editor, The Liberty Magazine, Washington, D. C.

DEAR SIR:

Receipt is acknowledged of your letter of November 19, and in response to your several inquiries Dr. L. M. Casanowicz, Assistant Curator of Old World Archaeology, makes the following statement concerning Mithraism:

"The devotees of Mithra held Sunday sacred because Mithra was identified with the "Invincible Sun," but we have not knowledge how they observed that day. Mithra was an old Aryan deity, and his worship is a special mystery cult developed with the decay of Zoroastrianism. Mithraism came to Rome from Asia Minor in 67 BC, but we do not know when it was organized into a cult. It became the religion especially of the Roman army, and besides Italy it spread especially along the frontiers where the garrisons were stationed. It did not supplant paganism, but existed alongside the old paganism, and other so-called mystery cults, as those of Isis, Cybele, and Attis."

Very truly yours,

W. DEC RAVENEL,

Administrative Assistant to the Secretary.

In his book, "The Mysteries of Mithra," Dr. Franz Cumont, with all the information before him available to anybody, says of the worship of Mithraism:

"Each day of the week, the planet to which the day was sacred was invoked in a fixed spot in the crypt; and Sunday, over which the sun presided, was especially holy." Page 167.

Writing as recently as 1921, Professor L. Patterson, Trinity College, Cambridge, vice-principal of Chichester Theological College, speaks of Dr. Cumont's book from which we quote, styling it a "masterly and comprehensive work." (See Patterson's book, "Mithraism and Christianity," Preface, p. viii.)

The letter from the Smithsonian Institution disposes very effectually of the confident assertion of the Canright book that "there was no special reverence for Sunday in pagan times." Both the British Museum and the Smithsonian Institution are quoted by Mr. Canright in support of his misleading statement. The fact is that the questions which he put to the historians of both institutions were unfair and misleading; the archaeologists in both Washington and London were asked, not if there were pagans in Asia and Europe who in the early centuries of the Christian era held Sunday as a sacred day, but, "Did the pagan Romans and Greeks ever have a regular weekly day of rest from secular work?"

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It is not contended by Seventh-day Adventists, or by any one else, so far as we know, nor was it ever held by anybody of ordinary intelligence, that any pagans of any sort ever had a “weekly day of rest from secular work.” It is not even claimed, and never was, that the Sunday of the Mithraists was a counterpart of the Sabbath of the Jews. Evidently it was not, though they did hold Sunday sacred to the sun; but the day seems to have been observed originally as a festival after the order of the 25th of December, and not after the order of the Sabbath of the Bible, of which the pagans of Europe knew nothing except as they came into contact first with the Jews, and later with Sabbath-keeping Christians.

Constantine’s Sunday law of AD 321 shows two things very plainly; namely, (1) that Sunday was a well-known day generally held in reverence, “venerable” from the standpoint of Mithraists; and (2) that previous to Constantine’s edict, it was not observed by general abstinence “from secular work.”

It is a fact, however, as stated by Cyril Bailey, M. A., fellow and tutor of Balliol College, Oxford, in his book, “The Religion of Ancient Rome,” that the pagan Romans did have *ferice*, or feast days, “set apart for the worship of the gods,” on which “therefore the citizen ought to do no manner of work.” Mr. Bailey says:

“The state observed this condition fully in the closing of law courts and the absence of legislative assemblies, and in theory too the private citizen must refrain from any act which was not concerned with the worship of the gods, or rendered absolutely necessary. But it is characteristic of Rome that the state did not seek for offense, but only punished it if accidentally seen.” - Pages 93, 94.

This shows us how naturally and easily Constantine’s Sunday law of AD 321 could come in. All Mithraists held the day sacred to Mithra. Many Christians, while still observing the ancient Sabbath by abstinence from labor, paid certain honors to the early hours of Sunday as the time of the resurrection of their Lord. It would be easy, therefore, for all worshipers of the gods of Rome, devotees of Mithra, and Gentile Christians to accept Constantine’s law without protest.

Incidentally the Smithsonian letter throws a flood of light upon Constantine’s phrase, “Venerable day of the sun.” Nearly four centuries before that emperor’s time, Mithraism had become the religion of the Roman army. It is unthinkable that the emperor, himself a soldier, would or could have described Sunday, the sacred day of the Mithraists, as “venerable” from any other standpoint than that of the devout couriers of the Mithraic cult, the invincible legions of Rome.

Mr. Canright did not ask the scholars of the British Museum and of the Smithsonian Institution if the Mithraists had a weekly festival in honor of the sun, but if the pagans of Greece and Rome knew of or observed such a day. Of course the answer was No. The pagans of Europe knew nothing of the week of seven days, nor of a weekly festival, until they learned it from the Egyptians, the Jews, and the worshipers of Mithra.

But Mithraism, the paganism by which the Christian church was corrupted, especially in the second and third centuries, did have the week and a weekly festival, and as we have seen, that festival was Sunday. The reason and the results of the amalgamation of these two systems of worship, apostatizing Christianity and Mithraism, are thus briefly stated by Gibbon:

“The most respectable bishops had persuaded themselves that the ignorant rustics would more cheerfully renounce the superstitions of paganism if they found some resemblance, some compensation, in the bosom of Christianity. The religion of Constantine achieved, in less than a century, the final conquest of the Roman Empire; but the victors themselves were insensibly subdued by the arts of their vanquished rivals.” — “Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,” chap. 28, last paragraph.

Though Mithra was not worshiped primarily as the sun, Mithraism was, as Dr. Casanowicz states, a form of sun worship. Of Anaitis, the Persian goddess of “springs and streams and of all fertility,” “of generation and all sexual life,” the Britannica, article “Persia,” says:

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“At her side stands the sun god Mithras, who is represented as a young and victorious hero. Both deities occupy the very first rank in the popular creed; while to the theologian they are the most potent of the good powers - Mithras being the herald and propagator of the service of Light and the mediator betwixt man and Ahuramazda [the original chief god of the Persians], who now fades more into the background.”

The introduction of Mithraism into the Roman Empire antedates the Christian era, as we have shown, by nearly a century, which enables us to understand how and why it was possible for that particular brand of paganism to become, as we are told it did become, “the greatest antagonist of Christianity.”

This was not the paganism of Greece and Rome, but was the neo paganism of the early centuries of the Christian era, which, coming from the East, not only sought to supplant the paganism of the West, but hotly contested every inch of ground with Christianity itself, corrupting and debasing, though unable to supersede, the religion of Jesus.

In his book, “Mithraism,” W. J. Phythian-Adams not only traces the cult, in its Western migrations, into Cilicia and other parts of Asia Minor, but shows that the capital of the empire itself, and its environs, “teemed with Mithraic devotees.” All over Germany, far up the Danube and along the whole course of the Rhine, and as far west as Britain, “its course,” says Mr. Adams, “can be tracked by monuments and inscriptions.” (See “Mithraism,” pages 22, 23.)

And wherever the cult went, there went the weekly celebration of Sunday and the annual celebration of the 25th of December, both in honor of the sun.

This explains how Sunday and the 25th of December both come to us bearing German and Scandinavian as well as Latin names.

Throughout the Roman Empire in all its ramifications, the avant-couriers of Mithraism were, as Mr. Adams puts it, men of the army and civil service drawn by the government from “those provinces of eastern Asia Minor and north Syria, in which the cult of Mithras had grown to maturity.” – “Mithraism,” page 31.

Of the success of these Mithraic missionaries, Mr. Adams says:

“We know now that, at one period in his history, Mithras was worshiped in every corner of the Latin world, from Spain to Anatolia, from the ‘Wall’ in Britain to Alexandria and Memphis; and more than this, that he was invoked, not merely by the humblest classes in the empire, but by the commanders of legions, by the governors of provinces, by the emperors themselves.” - Id., page 3.

## Beginning of the Great Apostasy

Everything must have a beginning. The great apostasy, which later crystallized into the Roman Catholic, or papal, Church, had its origin in the East, and that as far back as the time of the apostle Paul. The gospel was first preached in the East, and there the first churches were organized. From a very early date unconverted people were brought into the church, as for example Ananias and Sapphira, at Jerusalem (Acts 5:1-11); Simon Magus, in Samaria (Acts 8:9-23); and Diotrephes, who loved “to have the preeminence,” and to this end cast some “out of the church” (3 John 9, 10).

The case of Diotrephes especially was a manifestation of the papal spirit. That this spirit crystallized into the finished papal system in Rome rather than in Constantinople was due largely to the superior organizing ability of the Latins over the Greeks. Political conditions also favored the West in this respect. Just how, we shall have occasion to explain later.

The apostle Paul was constantly on guard against worldliness and apostasy, holding ever before believers the rewards to be given at the second appearing of our Lord. In writing to the Thessalonians, Paul had used the phrase, “We which are alive and remain!”

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This had been construed to mean that the apostle himself expected to live to witness the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. To correct that misunderstanding, the apostle wrote a second letter, in which he said, in part:

“Now we beseech you, brethren. . . . that ye be not soon shaken in mind. . . . that the day of Christ is at hand. . . . That day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who . . . sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God . . . . For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now lets [or hinders] will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.” 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8.

### **The Consensus of Protestant Opinion**

In his general observations, to which reference has already been made, Dr. Clarke says:

“There appears little room to doubt of the genuine sense and meaning of the passage. This apostasy all the concurrent marks and characters will justify us in charging upon the Church of Rome. It follows of consequence that the man of sin is the pope; not meaning any pope in particular, but the pope in general, as the chief head and supporter of this apostasy.

“The foundations of popery were laid in the apostle’s days, but the superstructure was raised by degrees; and several ages passed before the building was completed, and the man of sin revealed in full perfection.”

Then after stating that his views accord with forecasts by such old writers as “Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Lactantius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, Hilary, Jerome, Augustine, and Chrysostom” touching “the whole passage,” Clarke sites Dr. Macknight and Bishop Newton, more modern exegesis, as entertaining the same opinion as himself.

### **The Part Enacted by the Greek Church**

And now, what part was enacted by the Greek Church in this work of apostasy? It is true, as stated by some, that the change from Sabbath to Sunday, from the seventh to the first day of the week, was effected largely in the East, that it was adopted and promoted rather than originated by the Western, or Roman, Church. But that does not make it any more Biblical than if it had been purely a Western innovation. It was a product of the papal principle.

There was long an unholy rivalry between the East and the West for spiritual and ecclesiastical supremacy. After some years the prize was captured by Rome. This was, in fact, what brought about the final schism between the church of the East and that of the West.

It was in the early centuries of the Christian era that many questionable practices were admitted into the church, as measures of expediency. And it is largely in these that we find the several points of similarity between Christianity and the new paganism, or Mithraism. Sunday observance was one of the earliest of these.

### **Sunday Bears Pagan Earmarks**

Even in its earliest introduction into the Christian church, Sunday observance bears the earmarks of its pagan origin. Until after the Sabbath edict of Constantine, only those bishops who were seeking the aid of the civil power to bolster up the waning influence of the church ever thought of Sunday as a day of rest. It was a neo pagan festival dedicated to the sun, but was not a Sabbath, such an institution being unknown to the heathen.

They had, as we have already stated, no Sabbath, and Sunday was not a day of rest. The first day of the week was observed by them by greeting the sun by prayers, sacrifices, and rejoicing at the hour of his rising on Sunday, after which every person was at full liberty (until the Sunday edict of AD 321) to spend the

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remainder of the day as he saw fit. And this custom of Sunday morning worship was adopted by many of the early Christians, only instead of early morning worship in honor of the sun, the great luminary, these Christians paid their devotions to the Son, the Savior of men. And this custom still survives in the Sunday morning mass made so prominent in both the Greek and Roman Catholic Churches.

The pagan nature, origin, and character of Sunday observance is impliedly confessed by Dr. Hesse in these words:

Others have looked at the transaction in a totally different light, and refused to discover in the document, or to suppose in the mind of the enactor, any recognition of the Lord's day as a matter of divine obligation. They remark, and very truly, that Constantine designates it by its astrological or heathen title, *Dies Solis*, and insist that the epithet *venerabilis* with which it is introduced, has reference to the rites performed on that day in honor of Hercules, Apollo, and Mithras." - Hesse's *Bampton Lectures*, page 60.

Touching the acceptability of the Sunday institution to the heathen, especially to the devotees of Mithraism, Dean Milman says:

"The transcript commanding the celebration of the Christian Sabbath, bears no allusion to its peculiar sanctity as a Christian institution. It is the day of the sun which is to be observed by the general veneration; the courts were to be closed, and the noise and tumult of public business and legal litigation were no longer to violate the repose of the sacred day. But the believer in the new paganism, of which the solar worship was the characteristic, might acquiesce without scruple in the sanctity of the first day of the week." - "History of Christianity," book 3, chapter 1.

"In fact, as we have before observed, the day of the sun would be willingly hallowed by almost all the pagan world, especially that part which had admitted any tendency toward the Oriental theology [Mithraism]." - *Id.*, chapter 4.

Over almost all of Continental Europe the order of Sunday observance is early morning worship followed by pleasure or business for the rest of the day. This is what is characterized as "the European Sunday," by strict first-day observers, as contrasted with the first-day, or Sunday, "Sabbath" of the Scotch Presbyterians and the "American Sabbath" of the Sunday law advocates' in this country. In very truth, however, this "European Sunday" is the great Mithraic festival gradually adopted by the early Christians for reasons of sentiment and expediency, and later indorsed and given the sanctions of ecclesiastical law by church dignitaries and councils.

Jerome, writing as late as the beginning of the fifth century, of a certain lady eminent for her piety in his day, says this:

"Paula, with the women, as soon as they returned home on the Lord's day, they sat down severally to their work, and made clothes for themselves and others." - "Dialogues on the Lord's Day," page 234.

In an apology for the Christians by Justin Martyr (who suffered death for his faith, under Marcus Aurelius, AD 165), we find an account of the services held by Christians on Sunday morning. Not only does Justin describe the service, but in so doing he incidentally reveals the fact that as early as the second century the Lord's Supper had been corrupted. He says, in part:

"Upon the day called Sunday, all that live either in city or country meet together at the same place, where the writings of the apostles and prophets are read as much as time will give leave; when the reader has done, the bishop makes a sermon, wherein he instructs the people, and animates them to the practice of such lovely precepts: at the conclusion of this discourse, we all rise up together, and pray; and prayers being over, as I now said, there is bread and wine and water offered, and the bishop, as before, sends up prayers and thanksgivings, with all the fervency he is able, and the people conclude all with the joyful acclamation of Amen. Then the consecrated elements are distributed to, and partaken of by, all that are present, and sent to the absent by the hands of the deacons." - Justin Martyr's "First Apology," translated by William Reeves, page 127, sections 87-89.

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Justin gives the first day no sacred title, but uses its pagan name, Sunday. The communion, or Lord's Supper, had become corrupted in two respects; namely, (1) instead of using, bread and wine as did Christ at the institution of the Supper, in the second century they used bread, wine, and water; (2) "the consecrated elements" were not only "partaken of" by all that were "present," but were "sent to the absent by the hands of the deacons." This practice led shortly to the worship of "the consecrated elements." This sending "to the absent" survives today in principle, as does also the idolatry of "the host," in both the Roman and Greek Churches.

The introduction of water in the celebration of the Supper was unquestionably due to the influence of Mithraism, as in the mysteries of that cult "a loaf of bread and a goblet of water," says Dr. Cumont, "were placed before the mystic, over which the priest pronounced the sacred formula." – "The Mysteries of Mithra," page 158.

W. J. Phythian-Adams testifies that "a stoop or urn of water" was an essential to the mysteries of Mithra. "Great importance," he says, "was attached to the presence of the element." Mithraism, page 46.

There is a significance that should not be overlooked in the fact that both the Mithraists and also the Christians as early as the second and third centuries had mysteries, and that these were uniformly celebrated in a crypt or cave. And even today, visit almost any great Catholic church, and you will be shown sacred crypts or caves, one of which commemorates the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. And here we find another point of resemblance between apostate Christianity and Mithraism: the former teaches that Christ was born of a virgin in a cave used as a stable; while the latter teaches that Mithra was born of a rock in a cave or crypt.

## Sunday Observance One of Many Errors

Nor are those already mentioned the only errors which have come down to us through both the Roman and Greek Churches.

The confessional is a feature of both. Trine immersion is the form of baptism insisted upon by the Greek Church, and sprinkling by the Roman, both forms unscriptural; while in the Eastern Church we find the mass substantially as celebrated in the Western, or Roman, Church.

Yielding to the natural taste of Eastern people for bright colors and showy vestments, the Greek Church has "even a more complicated system of ceremonies" than has the church of the West, "with gorgeous display, semi barbaric pomp, and endless changes of sacerdotal dress, crossings, gestures, genuflections, prostrations, washings, processions, which so absorb the attention of the senses, that there is little room left for intellectual and spiritual worship."- Schaff -Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Volume II, article "Greek Church," page 902.

Both the Latin and Greek Churches believe in the real presence, namely, that the body, blood, and divinity of Christ are actually present in the consecrated elements, and that only those are saved who actually and literally partake of those elements.

It was for this reason that the "consecrated elements were sent to the absent by the hands of the deacons," in the second century; and it is for the same reason that in both the Roman and Greek Churches the dying are still prepared for death by the administration of the communion. According to the authority quoted above:

"In Russia especially the veneration for pictures of the Virgin Mary and the saints is carried to the utmost extent, and takes the place of the Protestant veneration for the Bible. The holy picture with the lamp burning before it is found and worshiped in the corner (the sacred place) of every room, in the street, over gateways, in offices, taverns, steamers, railway and telegraph stations, and carried in the knapsack of every soldier, not as a work of art, but as an emblem, a lesson of instruction, an aid to devotion."- Id., page 903.

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It is from such a source that we are asked to accept the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week! But if the counterfeit Sabbath, why not trine immersion, infant communion, baptismal regeneration, auricular confession, the worship of the Virgin Mary, the real presence, and all the other abominations early introduced into the Greek Church and still retained by it?

That the apostasy to which the apostle Paul referred was the result of pagan influences is generally, or we might say universally, recognized by Protestant writers. If anyone doubts this, let him read Hislop's "Two Babylons," which proves the fact. But that which corrupted the church in the early centuries of its history was not so much the crude paganism of the West, as the seemingly more refined Mithraism of the East, a form of paganism in which, as we have seen, the veneration of Sunday was a prominent feature.

Says the New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia: "The great triumphs of Mithraism were not won east of the Aegean. It was in the Roman world where success was to be gained. The story of the transition thither is almost that of romance."- Volume 7, article "Mithra, Mithraism," page 420.

### Primitive Christians Not Sunday Keepers

This explains in part the force and utility of Constantine's use of the term "the venerable day of the sun." By employing that phrase, the emperor would curry favor with the devotees of the new paganism, or Mithraism, which by this time had to quite an extent overshadowed the more crude, but not more wicked, forms of idolatry long practiced in the West; and by showing honor to the day, he would also please those Christians who had come to attach some degree of sacredness to Sunday as the day of our Lord's resurrection, though few, indeed if any, had as yet conceived the idea of claiming for the first day of the week the place given by the fourth commandment to the seventh day. In other words, Sunday had not then come to be regarded by Christians generally as a Sabbath, much less as the Sabbath.

Upon this point, Bishop Taylor, an English prelate and writer, bears this testimony: "The primitive Christians did all manner of works upon the Lord's day, even in the times of persecution, when they are the strictest observers of all the divine commandments; but in this they knew there was none; and therefore, when Constantine the emperor had made an edict against working upon the Lord's day, yet he excepts and still permitted all agriculture or labors of the husbandman whatsoever." - "Ductor Dubitantium," or the Rule of Holy Living, part 1, book 2, chapter 2, rule 6, section 59.

Sir William Domville says: "Centuries of the Christian era passed away before the Sunday was observed by the Christian church as a Sabbath. History does not furnish us with a single proof or indication that it was at any time so observed previous to the Sabbatical edict of Constantine in AD 321." - "The Sabbath, or an Examination of the Six Texts," page 291.

### Pagan Character of Sunday Admitted

Touching the present-day denial of the pagan origin of the Sunday institution, hear what Morer, an English clerical defender, or at least an apologist for the practice of first-day observance, says: "It is not to be denied but we borrow the name of this day from the ancient Greeks and Romans, and we allow that the old Egyptians worshiped the sun, and as a standing memorial of their veneration, dedicated this day to him. And we find by the influence of their examples, other nations, and among them the Jews themselves, doing him homage; yet these abuses did not hinder the Fathers of the Christian church simply to repeal, or altogether lay by, the day or its name, but only to sanctify origin and observance and improve both, as they did also the pagan temples, polluted before with idolatrous services, and other instances wherein those good men were always tender to work any other change than what was evidently necessary, and in such things as were plainly inconsistent with the Christian religion; so that Sunday being the day on which the Gentiles solemnly adored that planet, and called it Sunday, partly from its influence on that day especially, and partly in respect to its divine body (as they conceived it), the Christians thought fit to keep the same day and the same name of it, that they might not appear causelessly peevish, and by that means hinder the conversion of the Gentiles, and bring a greater prejudice than might be otherwise taken against the gospel." - "Dialogues on the Lord's Day," pages 22, 23.



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When Mr. Morer wrote, the archaeologists had not yet unscrambled Eastern and Western paganism as they have since done, and so he attributed the origin of sun worship to the “ancient Greeks and Romans” instead of assigning it to the more ancient Syrians, Persians, and Egyptians. But this technicality does not alter the fact of its heathen genesis admitted by him, and of its being adopted by the early Christians that they might not “appear causelessly peevish.”

A number of years ago a writer in the North British Review, indulging in a defense of first-day observance, expressed the same thought in these words: “That very day was the Sunday of their heathen neighbors and respective countrymen; and patriotism gladly united with expediency in making it at once their Lord’s day and their Sabbath. . . . If the authority of the church is to be ignored altogether by Protestants, there is no matter. because opportunity and common expediency are surely argument enough for so ceremonial a change as the mere day of the week for the observance of the rest and holy convocation of the Jewish Sabbath. That primitive church, in fact, was shut up to the adoption of the Sunday, until it became established and supreme, when it was too late to make another alteration; and it was no irreverent nor undelightful thing to adopt it, inasmuch as the first day of the week was their own high day at any rate: so that their compliance and civility were rewarded by the redoubled sanctity of their quiet festival.” - Volume 18, page 409.

Here, then, we have from a defender of first-day observance a confession of its pagan origin. And why not such an admission? Sun worship in some form was a prominent feature of practically all paganism. It was the religion of Egypt, as it was also of the Canaanites, the Syrians, the Persians, and the Babylonians. It was into sun worship that the Israelites fell when they wandered away from God. Their “groves” were sun images, and their “high places” were hills from the tops of which they could catch the first beams of the rising orb of day. As it appeared to the heathen the sun was the source of life. Water standing for only a few days teemed with life. If that life was not from the sun, whence did it come? The question seems unanswerable. In response to his rays the earth brought forth her fruits, and men were filled with good; surely the sun must be god. Such was the logic of the heathen.

The sun was always looked upon as masculine and the earth as feminine. Hence, instead of being the most ennobling form of idolatry, sun worship was the most debasing, involving even female prostitution in the name of religion! In the eighth chapter of Ezekiel, verses 8-16, worship of the sun is set forth as the greatest of all abominations, and so it was, for in very truth it was the deification of sensuality.

In its final analysis most forms of paganism head Lip in sun worship. This was only natural. The sun was the brightest object visible to the human eye. It seemed to be not only the source of light, but of life. It is little wonder, then, that it was worshiped by men everywhere who had lost the knowledge of the true God. True, as in Egypt, there were many gods, but they were all subsidiary to the sun, the one great object of adoration. Each of the lesser deities represented some phase or attribute of the sun. Many of the images worshiped by the heathen were sun images.

The obelisks of Egypt, one of which now stands in Central Park, New York City, were images representing the rays of the sun. The beetles and the sacred bull, the latter attended by nude women, were worshiped because, like the sun, they seemed to have power to give or to transmit life.

In short, paganism was shot full of every kind and every phase of sun worship. The sun was the religious center; all things else were only a part of the circumference of the spiritual world as conceived of by paganism.

The prevalence of sun worship is but little understood by the general public now. Even Rome, quite aside from the followers of Mithra, had its devotees of the sun.

In his “History of Christianity,” book 2, chapter 8, Dean Milman says of one of the Roman emperors: “The pontiff of one of the wild forms of the nature worship of the East appeared in the city of Rome as emperor. The ancient rites of Baalpeor [the sun god], but little changed in the course of ages, intruded themselves into the sanctuary of the Capitoline Jove, and offended at once the religious majesty and the graver decency of Roman manners. Elagabalus [the emperor took that name] derived his name from the Syrian appellative

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of the sun; lie had been educated in the precincts of the temple; and the emperor of Rome was lost and absorbed in the priest of an effeminate superstition.”

Touching the prevalence of sun worship, the Twentieth Century edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica says: “In the earliest forms of religious worship the sun held a prominent position, especially among the tribes who were not nomadic, and whose religions were upon a higher scale than those of the wandering tribes. The worship of fire in all its forms naturally led to a religion of which the sun was the central figure. The old Aryan tribes, the ancient Persians, the Brahmans of India, and the Pueblo Indians of North America, especially Mexico, all held to the belief that the sun and its companion, the moon, were the great rulers of the earth. In Egypt, sun worship was carried to a great extent into the mythology of the nation. In Mexico the Spanish conquerors found a people whose largest temples were dedicated to the sun, and whose very acts were guided by the priests of the sun.” - Volume 29, pages 195, 196.

It does not appear, however, that the Mexicans had the week, and so of course knew nothing of the Sunday, as did many of the heathen peoples of Asia, Africa, and Europe.

We greatly marvel that at this late day any one has the hardihood to deny the plain and universally attested fact of the pagan origin of the Sunday festival. Webster’s Dictionary gives us this definition: “Sunday: so named because this day was anciently dedicated to the sun, or to its worship.”

Worcester’s Dictionary has the same.

Verstegan gives us this in his book “Antiquities”: “The most ancient Germans being pagans, and having appropriated their first day of the week to the peculiar adoration of the sun, whereof, that day doth yet in our English tongue retain the name of Sunday, and appropriated the next day unto it, unto the special adoration of the moon, whereof it yet retains with us the name of Monday; they ordained the next day to these most heavenly planets to the particular adoration of their great reputed god, Tuisco, whereof we do yet retain in our language the name of Tuesday.” - Page 10.

Writing as recently as 1921, Mr. H. G. Wells makes this statement: “Much of the history of the Christians in the first two centuries of the Christian era is very obscure. But whatever their local differences, everywhere, they seem to have carried much of the spirit of Jesus; and though everywhere they aroused bitter enmity and active counterpropaganda, the very charges made against them witness to the general goodness of their lives. During this indefinite time a considerable amount of a sort of theocrasia seems to have gone on between the Christian cult and the almost equally popular and widely diffused Mithraic cult, and the cult of Serapis-Isis-Horus. From the former it would seem the Christians adopted Sunday as their chief day of worship instead of the Jewish Sabbath.” – “Outline of History,” Volume 1, page 590, MacMillan edition of 1921.

Were all these men deceived? Or did they deliberately falsify in their zeal to condemn their own practice? For not one of them was an observer of the seventh day. Impossible! Is it not much more reasonable to believe that zeal for the Sunday Sabbath is now leading its partisans technically to deny in its interests facts of history that show it was originated by pagans and was baptized, so to speak, into the Christian system by apostate or at least apostatizing Christians?

## **Apostasy Well Developed Before East and West Separated**

The line of demarcation which now exists between the East and the West, between what is known as the Eastern, or Greek, Church, and the Western, or Roman, Church, was first made possible, as the Catholic Encyclopedia remarks, by “an accident of political development.” Continuing, the same authority says:

“The root of this division is, roughly and broadly speaking, the division of the Roman Empire made first by Diocletian (284-305), and again by the sons of Theodosius I (Areadius in the East, 395-408; and Honorius

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in the West, 395-423), then finally made permanent by the establishment of a rival empire in the West (Charles the Great, 800)." - Volume 5, article "Eastern Churches." page 230.

A factor overlooked by the Catholic Encyclopedia, but an important one, nevertheless, is the removal of the seat of empire from Rome to Constantinople by Constantine, AD 330, the political fact already referred to, but not dwelt upon. This gave to the Bishop of Rome an opportunity for political growth and aggrandizement such as never came, nor ever could come, to any Eastern bishop.

And this opportunity the Bishop of Rome was not slow to seize. From being simply a spiritual and ecclesiastical ruler, the Bishop having his seat on the Tiber, as the Patriarch of Constantinople had his on the Bosphorus, found himself almost at once the most influential functionary in all the West, whether in ecclesiastical or in civil affairs. And it was largely at his behest that Justinian sent his armies to crush the Vandals in Africa and the Goths in Italy. Nothing of this kind could possibly have come to any Eastern bishop, for the reason that the emperor himself held court and bore rule over the East from Constantinople.

All the older forms of false doctrine found today in the Eastern and Western churches, in the Greek Orthodox Church and in the Church of Rome, were fully developed before the division of the church into East and West, and one of these false doctrines was Sunday sacredness. As recorded in Acts 20:29-31, Paul said to the elders of the church at Ephesus, when\*they met him at Miletus:

"I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

Such a widespread and grievous apostasy was anticipated, as we have seen, by some of the ante-Nicene fathers.

### **East and West Practically One for Eight Centuries**

The reader will understand from the facts stated that for more than eight centuries, or until the time of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, and Nicholas II, Pope of Rome, the East and the West were practically one church. The bishops of both the East and the West attended the seven ecumenical councils, namely, Niewa (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chaleedon (451), the second of Constantinople (553), the third of Constantinople (680), and the second of Nicsea (787).

The bishops of both sections accepted practically the same creed. Until Nicholas II and Photius excommunicated each other, each acknowledged the other as belonging to the church. In all essentials the East and the West were one. The East was as deeply steeped in error as was the West. In fact, in some respects the East led in departure from the teachings of Christ and the apostles, as, for example, in infant baptism, infant communion, and trine immersion. Unquestionably the mystery of iniquity, which Paul said was already working in his day, had its first manifestation in connection with the Christian faith, not in the West, but in the East, for there the gospel was first preached, and the first congregations were organized. It was there that Diotrephes, striving for the pre-eminence, refused to recognize the apostle John or to receive the brethren sent from him, casting some out of the church. When this evil trait of fallen human nature finally headed up in the Bishop, or Pope, of Rome, it merely developed a geographical scat, it did not change its apostate character. The pagan spirit and the system of human headship for the church was the same, whether appearing in the East or the West. The system was anti-Christian, whether the human head was a patriarch east or a pope west of the Adriatic. It was "the mystery of iniquity," "that man of sin," "the son of perdition."

### **No Scriptural Authority for Sunday Observance**

It is a notorious fact that the Sunday Sabbath is without even a scintilla of Scriptural authority, resting wholly upon the practice of a church that was beginning to apostatize even in Paul's day, and which finally separated over the question of which section should have the pre-eminence. Both sections were wedded to the man-made Sunday institution which the Western, or Roman, division especially adopted as the badge of

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its authority to command men under penalty of sin. Both Catholics and well-read Protestants know that the Sunday institution is without divine warrant, resting wholly upon the usurped authority of the church. "There is," says the Encyclopedia Britannica, "no evidence that in the earliest years of Christianity there was any formal observance of Sunday as a day of rest or any general cessation of work." Eleventh edition, Volume 26, page 94, article "Sunday."

After citing all the texts appealed to in support of Sunday sacredness, Dr. William Smith, author of the well-known Bible Dictionary bearing his name, under the article "Lord's Day," says: "Taken separately, perhaps, and even all together, these passages seem scarcely adequate to prove that the dedication of the first day of the week to the purposes above mentioned [that is, to worship] was a matter of apostolic institution, or even of apostolic practice."

Dr. Augustus Neander, in his "History of the Christian Religion and Church," translated into English by Henry John Rose, and printed in Philadelphia in 1843, said this: "The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals, was always only a human ordinance, and it was far from the intentions of the apostles to establish a divine command in this respect, far from them, and from the early apostolic church, to transfer the laws of the Sabbath to Sunday. Perhaps, at the end of the second century a false application of this kind had begun to take place; for men appear by that time to have considered laboring on Sunday as a sin." - Page 186.

There is an attempt to weaken the force of this testimony by saying that this statement did not appear in any but the first edition of Dr. Neander's work. The fact is, we understand, that so damaging was this statement to the cause of Sunday sacredness, that yielding to the threat of a boycott of his history, the author consented to delete the objectionable statement, but he said nothing to the contrary, and today his statement stands as an expression of the exact truth.

Nor was Neander alone in giving such testimony. In his book, "The Voice from Sinai," Archdeacon F. W. Farrar makes a similar statement, in these words:

"The Christian church made no formal, but a gradual and almost unconscious transference of the one day to the other." - Page 152.

Similarly, William B. Dana, of New York, a first day advocate, says in "A Day for Rest and Worship," page 174, published by the Fleming H. Revell Company: "Bear in mind that the substitution [of the first for the seventh day] was not a coerced happening; it could not be a sudden, but only a very slow development, probably never anticipated, never even designed or put into shape by those chiefly interested, but creeping almost unconsciously into being."

### The First Sunday Observance Among Christians

The fact is that at first, and even for a long time, the only Sunday observance known among Christians was an early morning meeting upon the first day of the week, after which the worshipers engaged in their accustomed employments. It was a wholly voluntary tribute they paid to their Lord, and could in no sense be regarded as a change of the Sabbath. That came later, and we get some clue as to when it was brought about from this statement by Eusebius, the father of church history and flatterer of Constantine: "All things whatsoever that it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's day." - Cox's "Literature of the Sabbath Question," Volume 1, page 361.

Long before this time (the fourth century) the apostles, who were all Jews, had passed away, and Gentile influences were predominant in the church. The prevailing feeling, as expressed by the emperor Constantine himself in the Council of Nicaea, was: "Let us, then, have nothing in common with the most hostile rabble of the Jews." - Boyle's "Historical View of the Council of Nicaea," page 52, edition 1842.

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## **When and by Whom the Change Was Officially Made**

The law of Constantine, AD 321, prohibiting all ordinary employments, excepting agriculture, “on the venerable day of the sun,” contributed much to the change. A large majority of the Christian converts were found in the cities. Numbers of them could ill afford to give two days out of each week to the offices of religion, though down until AD 364 many observed both Saturday and Sunday. In that year the council, or synod, of Laodicea adopted a canon reading in part as follows:

“Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday [the Sabbath, in the original], but shall work on that day; but the Lord’s

day they shall especially honor, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day, If, however, they are found Judaizing [observing the Bible Sabbath], they shall be shut out from Christ.” – “A History of the Councils of the Church,” Reverend C. J. Hefele, Volume 2, page 316.

## **The Conclusion Stated**

In the light of the authorities quoted, we may say with all confidence, as we have long said, that so far as legislative action is concerned, it was the Council of Laodicea which officially and authoritatively made the change from Sabbath to Sunday. The time was practically 364 AD, though as to the exact year authorities differ. That, however, is unimportant. The great fact is that in observing Sunday instead of keeping the Sabbath, men are following, not the example and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles, but an ordinance of the great apostasy now known as the Roman Catholic Church. In this sense it was Rome that officially and authoritatively made the change from Sabbath to Sunday. And it is for this reason that the rival Sabbath, the heathen Sunday, the “wild solar holiday of all pagan times,” first foisted upon the church by the influence of Mithraism, and actively promoted by the “mystery of iniquity,” has become the badge of papal authority the mark of the first beast of the thirteenth chapter of the book of Revelation.

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