

ORIGIN AND OBSERVANCE OF SUNDAY.

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IT is always interesting and instructive to investigate the origin of our institutions, religious, political, social, and otherwise. That is especially so when an institution which, in the beginning, was strictly ecclesiastical has finally been adopted by the political community and thus become, though with certain modifications, a civil institution. Such has been the case with our Sunday. It is without doubt a specific Christian institution. For, it is found exclusively among those nations where Christianity is the ruling religion. At first simply a custom of the Church, the State soon took hold of it and made it a legal holiday. Thus it happens that, with us and the other Christian nations, Sunday is not only observed by the members of the Christian Church, but also by those who are outside its pale.

It is only natural that between these two bodies of people, church-members and non-church-members, a difference of opinion should exist as to the proper way of observing Sunday. Accordingly, we are confronted by the Puritan idea and by the worldly conception of Sunday. The former regards Sunday as a holy day which is to be observed as prescribed by the Old Testament commandment: "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy!" Work and worldly pleasure of any kind on this day constitute a transgression of God's holy commandment. The worldly people, on the other hand, accept Sunday only as a day of rest and recreation. They claim as their right to seek, on this day, first of all, relaxation of a more or less refined kind, just as their spirit prompts them. The result is that these two opposing views sometimes clash. Every one, therefore, who considers that strife and quarrel promote the true interests neither of the Church nor of the general public will feel the more inclined to form an adequate opinion concerning the origin and early observance of the Christian Sunday. The question is whether

no middle ground may be found on which the Church and the world could meet and compromise.

The observance of Sunday, the first day of the week, began undoubtedly in the first century of the Christian era, and moreover, it started within the Christian Church. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans had a week of seven days. The pre-Christian Greeks divided the month into three parts of ten days each. The first French Republic attempted, as we know, to revive this old Greek custom, in order to replace the Christian Sunday. Among the Romans, it was customary that the farmers rested every eighth day from their work in the fields. On that day, they came into the city to sell the produce of their farms and buy what they needed. The day was called *Nundina*. It was furthermore distinguished from other days by inviting guests to dinner and keeping the children home from school. But it didn't bear any special religious character, though it might coincide with some religious festival. Thus, while the Greeks may be said to have had weeks of ten days and the Romans such of eight days, neither had originally the week of seven days.

There were, however, at that time, even within the boundaries of the Roman Empire, races who, from times immemorial, had kept weeks of seven days. The best known among them are the Jews. But also the Egyptians shared that custom. These people retained their weeks of seven days most scrupulously, even when they left their native province and settled in distant parts of the Roman Empire among people of different nationality. They did so for religious reasons, as long as they remained faithful to their inherited religion, because the week of seven days formed an important part of their religion. In this manner, the division of time into weeks of seven days each had become a familiar thing in all parts of the Roman Empire, chiefly through the Jews, about the beginning of the Christian era.

In as far as the week of seven days is concerned, the Christian nations owe their week-system to the Jews. It is not, of course, a specific Jewish institution, but belonged to the Semitic nations in general. It is in all probability closely connected with their worship of the planets.

But the Jews observed the seventh day of the week, the so-called Sabbath-day. It began 6 o'clock Friday night and lasted till 6 o'clock Saturday night. For, as the creation-story tells us, darkness existed before there was light. Hence night, the period of darkness, forms the first half of the Jewish civil day or the time in which the sun apparently completes his course around the earth.

The second half is the natural day or the time from sunrise to sunset. This space of twenty-four hours at the end of each week was set apart by the Jews as their holy day. Their reason for celebrating it was, in later times at least, strictly religious. The Sabbath-commandment closes with the well-known words: "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth and the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it!" The Jews, therefore, kept the last day of the week holy, because God had commanded them to do so; and God had commanded them to do so, because he himself had rested on that day and thereby hallowed it, after he had created the whole world in six days. The Christian Church, however, while retaining the Jewish week, set aside the day hallowed by God. The early Christians selected in its place the first day of the week, about which there existed no commandment of God, and which had not been hallowed by him. They also gave up the Jewish mode of reckoning a civil day from sunset to sunset, and adopted in its stead the Roman way of beginning and ending the day at midnight.

All this certainly tends to show that Sunday, both as holy day and as holiday, is neither of Roman, Greek, or Jewish-Semitic origin. It has to be considered as a genuine Christian institution.

But, though Sunday must have originated among the early Christians, it is quite sure that it has not been ordained by the founder of the Christian religion. Jesus of Nazareth was born, lived, and died a Jew and stayed all his life in Palestine. He restricted his activity carefully to members of his own nation. When the Canaanitish woman implored him to help her daughter, he at first refused his aid. The reason, given by himself for this behavior, is: "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." In accordance with this principle, he instructed his disciples when they set out on their first missionary expedition: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and enter not into a city of the Samaritans; but go rather unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Jesus always claimed to be, in the first instance, a pious, law-abiding Israelite. He defines this attitude of his very clearly and distinctly in the following words, contained in the Sermon on the Mount: "Think not that I came to destroy the law and the prophets. I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you: Till heaven and earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished. Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall

teach and do them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." These and similar passages must be genuine words of Christ. For they do not agree with the later policy of the Church, which abandoned the Mosaic law and, under the brilliant leadership of St. Paul, entered upon its triumphant career among the Gentiles. If the least doubt as to their authenticity had prevailed among the early Christians when they collected the sayings of the Lord, those words would surely have been excluded from the Gospels. We may rest assured that Jesus kept the Sabbath, as a pious, godfearing Jew was expected to keep it, even if it were not expressly and repeatedly mentioned that he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day to take part in the services. Jesus cannot, therefore, be regarded for a single moment as the author of the Christian Sunday.

This is further confirmed when we look upon the practice of the primitive Church which was gathered by the twelve apostles from among the Jews. It is not necessary to enter upon a detailed account of the facts in this case. The epistles of St. Paul refer to them on almost every page. In the first place, it is a historical fact that St. Peter and his colleagues remained faithful to their original call. They continued, as appears from the Epistle to the Galatians, to go to "the circumcision." They kept aloof from intercourse with Gentiles, even if they were fellow-Christians. They observed the Mosaic law, including the Sabbath-commandment. Their more zealous and more narrow-minded followers opposed St. Paul with exceeding bitterness. They denied his right to work as apostle of Christ, and attempted to induce his converts to accept, in order to become true Christians, the law of Moses in addition to their belief in Jesus Christ. This conflict between Paulinism and primitive Christianity lasted for quite a time. Not only the letters of St. Paul, but also the writings of the Apostolic Fathers redound with it. Church history informs us that the Christians of Jewish descent in Palestine upheld their separate church-organization till the seventh century. They believed in Jesus Christ like all Christians, but they never forsook the Jewish law. They practised circumcision, and kept the Sabbath. By that time, Palestine had become settled by a predominating population of Gentile Christians. They no longer understood that they were face to face with the original, primitive Church. They could not see why any followers of Christ should differ in their customs and usages from the universal Church, and, consequently, despised those Judaizing Christians as Nazarean and Ebionite heretics. That proves that neither Jesus nor his twelve apostles had anything to do with the origin of our Sunday.

Still, the celebration of Sunday belongs to the New Testament Apostolic Age. For (Acts xx. 7) we read: "Upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them." The first day of the week is of course Sunday; and the breaking of the bread and the discourse of the apostle constitute the regular Sunday services of the congregations at Troas. In 1 Cor. xvi. 1f. we possess another passage showing that Sunday had a special significance for the congregations which St. Paul had founded. He writes there: "Concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." It is a well-known fact that this mode of making collections for ecclesiastical and charitable purposes in the churches on Sunday prevails up to the present time. As early as in the Apostolic Age, Sunday was also called the Lord's day, as follows from Rev. i. 10. And it is not without significance that the congregations to which the Apocalypse is addressed are in the territory where St. Paul was the first to preach the Gospel.

These passages establish the fact that Sunday, as day for the divine services of the Christians, was first observed in Pauline churches, and that St. Paul himself observed the day in that manner. Thus, we cannot escape the conclusion that the great apostle of the Gentiles is the real author and founder of the Christian Sunday. As soon as he had organized congregations whose members were for the greater part of Gentile descent, the question arose, how often and when they should come together for common worship. That happened, as far as we know, first in Asia Minor. The Jewish training of the apostle himself, the practice of the Jewish-Christian Church, as well as the circumstance that many of the Greek converts had been connected before with Jewish synagogues suggested that the new congregation should meet regularly every seventh day. But, for certain reasons, which will be discussed more fully later on, St. Paul did not care to have his disciples assemble on the same day as the Jews. To avoid this, he chose Sunday, the first day of the week, instead of Saturday, the seventh day. He was guided in this selection by the fact that Jesus had arisen from the dead on Sunday.

It goes without saying that only a man of great authority among the early Christians could successfully introduce so great an innovation. The natural tendency of the Gentile Christians as well as of their Jewish-Christian teachers would have been to follow the

precedent of the Jewish-Christian Church and hold their religious meetings like them on Saturday. Such a course would also have avoided the fanatic opposition of the Jewish Christians to the innovation, which caused much trouble for St. Paul and continued for more than a century. Since this opposition was directed primarily and so to speak exclusively against the apostle Paul, he must be held responsible for the introduction of Sunday into the Gentile Church. Moreover, our historical sources from which our knowledge of the early history of the Christian Church is derived mention no other personality strong enough to bring about such a new institution. The only one, therefore, who could do it must be the one who actually did it, the more so, since he happens to be, at the same time, the one whose name is connected with the very first mention of the celebration of Sunday by a Christian congregation. His name is St. Paul of Tarsus.

There is, of course, no direct testimony to that effect. But, that absence of direct testimony does not detract at all from the force of our previous reasoning. Our information concerning the age of Christ and his apostles is meagre indeed. Still, with regard to Sunday, we know certainly that it is a Christian institution, that it does not go back to Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles whom he appointed as his messengers to the twelve tribes of Israel. It can only have originated within the Gentile Church which was founded by St. Paul and received its institutions from him. It has finally been kept, according to the direct testimony of the New Testament, during St. Paul's lifetime by himself and by the congregations he had established. Therefore, Sunday must be considered by us as a Pauline institution.

There is one more proof in favor of this theory. St. Paul opposes strenuously the narrow-minded Jewish Christians who attempted to persuade the Christians of Greek descent, converted by him, to accept the law of Moses and incidentally the Jewish Sabbath. To be enabled to judge with what intense feelings he entered upon that controversy, one must read his epistles, for instance, that to the Galatians. Here, it must suffice to quote his references to the Sabbath, Gal. iv. 9-11 and Gal. ii. 16ff. The first passage reads: "Now that ye have come to know God, or rather to be known of God, how turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire to go in bondage over again? Ye observe days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you in vain." The second passage may serve as a kind of commentary to the first. It says:

"Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day: which are a shadow of the things to come." These things show how decidedly St. Paul had set his face against the keeping of the Sabbath by his disciples. They also prove that it was not an attitude but lately arrived at. St. Paul must from the very beginning of his missionary labors among the Greeks have warned them against keeping the Jewish Sabbath. For there cannot be the least doubt that he instructed not only the Galatians and Colossians, but all his Greek disciples in the same way. That, however, confirms our former conclusion as to the origin of Sunday on the negative side. If the Christians converted by St. Paul never kept the Sabbath, they must have observed Sunday.

But why did St. Paul give up that ancient, sacred custom of his own nation and put something entirely new in its stead? The reasons are obvious enough and will render it still clearer that St. Paul himself must have selected Sunday, in preference to the Jewish Sabbath, as the day on which the believers in Christ were to hold their regular meetings. In the first place, the Jews, since they became scattered over the whole Roman Empire, had constantly endeavored to win over their new neighbors to their religion. They even had sent out regular missionaries for that purpose. For, in one of his exclamations of woe over the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus says: "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves." This missionary zeal of the Jews had its source in their Messianic hope. Their Messiah was to be the king of the whole world.

The success of the Jewish missionaries, though not overwhelmingly great, enabled St. Paul to reach the Gentiles better than it otherwise would have been possible. Besides, their want of a decisive success had also made it evident that the Jewish religion was in no way adapted to become a universal religion. There were too many strange national customs and prejudices which invited scorn and resentment rather than respect even on the part of those who, otherwise, would have been ready to admire the excellent moral features of Judaism. St. Paul had grown up in a Greek community. He perfectly understood the Greek mind; he saw clearly that he could gain a victory for Jesus Christ only if he discarded the Jewish law altogether and preached nothing but Christ. Thus it happened that St. Paul from the start taught his disciples not to keep the Sabbath, the keeping of the Sabbath being one of the chief objec-

tions the Gentiles raised against the Jews. Correspondingly, the apostle must have arranged, from the first, in the congregations founded by him, Sunday services.

It would be a great mistake though to assume that St. Paul, in abolishing the Jewish law, including the Sabbath, was guided chiefly, if at all, by considerations of expediency. It was with him, in the first place, a matter of principle, of real religious conviction. He is the leading representative of that wing in the primitive Christian Church that saw with Stephen that Jesus of Nazareth had done away with the temple and changed the customs which Moses had delivered unto the Jews. In other words, he perceived clearly and distinctly the fundamental difference between Christ's religion and the religion of the Jews, "the new wine and the old bottles." He had become convinced that, of the two, only the one or the other could be the true religion. As long as he clung to his paternal faith, he felt therefore in duty bound to persecute the Christians. But as soon as he was converted, he was determined to preach Christ's religion in all its simplicity and purity, dropping entirely the Jewish shell out of which it had grown.

St. Paul explains his position repeatedly. The most concise expression of it is found in that well-known sentiment occurring in the Epistle to the Romans: "We reckon that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." "Faith" here is, of course, belief in Jesus Christ. "The works of the law," on the other hand, are not, as has been wrongly assumed, "good works in general," but "the works of the Law of Moses," including, among other things, circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, abstaining from eating pork, etc., etc. The term "good works," meaning good works in general, does not belong to the Apostolic Age, but to a much later period of the history of the Christian Church. It belongs especially to the age of the Reformation. Faith in Jesus Christ, however, is, with St. Paul and his followers, not a kind of magic formula, but comprises, among other things, as a matter of course, acceptance of the ethical law taught by Jesus Christ. That the early Gentile Christians were well aware of this fact follows not alone from the ethical warnings and admonitions which occupy so great a space in the writings of the apostle Paul. His disciples speak directly of the ethical teachings of Jesus as the "New Law" in distinction from the Law of Moses. Thus we read, Justin, *Dial. c. Tryph.*, "The new law desires you to keep Sabbath constantly; and you think to be pious, if you are idle for one day."

St. Paul was aware that the principal part of any religion is

its ethical system. For, it is by that part alone that it becomes palpable, that it can be compared with other religions, that it can be judged. The apostle of the Gentiles saw that the new law of Jesus Christ represented pure ethics, freed from the alloy of foreign matter which overlay and almost concealed the ethical precepts of Judaism. Accordingly, he deliberately ceased to preach Judaism, and preached nothing but Christ; and, in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding, he advised his adherents to hold their religious meetings not on Saturday, but on Sunday.

In the Epistle of Barnabas, the attempt is made to prove that the Jewish observance of Sabbath rests on a misunderstanding of the Old Testament. One day in the creation-story means a period of one thousand years. The seventh day which is hallowed by God is therefore not the seventh day of the week, but the seventh period of one thousand years, that is, the millennium, the coming Messianic kingdom. "Therefore," the argument closes, "we celebrate the eighth day with good cheer, because on it Jesus both rose from the dead and showed himself and ascended into heaven." The term "eighth day" reminds us of the Roman *Nundina*. The author wants to show that the Christians had emancipated themselves from the Old Testament religion.

Since it has been ascertained, when and by whom our Sunday has been ordained, the question now arises, of how the early Gentile Christians observed Sunday. Sunday, as we have seen, is the counterpart and opposite of the Jewish Sabbath. The latter was kept holy by refraining from all kinds of bodily labor. No food could be prepared during the twenty-four hours from Friday night till the first stars appeared in the sky on Saturday night. No fire could be lit, no housework be done. The Jews were not even permitted to hire persons of foreign descent to work for them on Sabbath. For, the commandment expressly refers not only to the manservant and maidservant, but also to "the stranger that is within thy gates." Moreover, work on Sabbath is a crime punishable by death. The law reads: "Six days shall work be done. But, on the seventh day, there shall be to you a holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord. Whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death." According to the Old Testament, a man who had, on a Sabbath day, picked up wood, in order to make a fire and warm himself, was actually stoned to death by the Jewish congregation. Under the rule of the Romans, this punishment could, of course, no longer be enforced. The keeping of the Sabbath then became a voluntary obligation.

Sabbath, therefore, was kept holy by abstaining from work; and, for that very reason, the Greeks and Romans were so strongly opposed to the Jewish Sabbath. Consequently, St. Paul, in choosing Sunday, must have intended to express thereby in an emphatic manner the truth that Christians were not bound by the Sabbath commandment. They had a perfect right to work, if they had to, or saw fit to, on the Sabbath of the Jews as well as on any other weekday, including Sunday. The selection of Sunday proclaims a new conception of the dignity of labor. Labor in the Old Testament is a curse. As long as he lived in the garden of Eden, man did not have to work. Not before Paradise was lost, God said to Adam: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake. In toil thou shalt eat of it all the days of thy life. In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread, till thou return unto the ground." From that viewpoint, rest, idleness, is the greatest bliss; and it is but proper to keep the holy day of the week in perfect idleness. But the conception of labor in the New Testament is diametrically opposed to that of the Old Testament. Work is no longer considered a curse, but a blessing. It is indeed true service and worship of God. Under these circumstances, labor may rightly and properly be performed at any time. For no day is too holy to be employed in the service of the heavenly father.

The choice of the day being of the highest significance in itself, and his disciples knowing anyhow, how the apostle looked upon work, there was no need for him to state in detail and directly that Christians did not have to rest on Sunday. Still, there are passages in his writings which show his position clearly enough. We read, for instance, Rom. xiv. 5: "One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike." These words deal undoubtedly with the Sabbath and Sunday question. Those who esteem one day above another are Christians of Jewish descent who keep the Sabbath. Those who esteem every day—the word "alike" has unnecessarily been added in the Revised Version—are Christians of Gentile descent who did not esteem any one day as holier than the other days. That implies that what was right and good, in their opinion, on one day was right and good on every day. Justin Martyr uses a very happy expression, which has been quoted before, to the same effect. The Christians were constantly keeping Sabbath, whereas the Jews thought they were pious when they were idle for one day. The Christians understood under the term "keeping Sabbath" something quite different. With the Jews it was a day spent in idleness, with the Christians it was spending all their days in doing something useful in the service of God and their fellow-men.

There is one more important argument in favor of this theory. The Greeks and Romans had no days on which it was a sin to engage in ordinary labor. They had, of course, times and seasons of relaxation which coincided with their great religious festivals. They had also the *dies nefasti*. But there was nothing like the Jewish Sabbath. Their chief objection to the latter was not that the Jews held their religious services on that day, but that, for religious reasons, they refused to do any kind of work on it. The majority of the first converts of St. Paul were men of very humble station. There were not many wise, noble, mighty after the flesh among them. God had chosen the foolish, the weak, the base, and the despised. That means in everyday language that quite a number of Christians were poor artisans and slaves. These men, however, could not, all at once, go before their masters and tell them: I have become a Christian and can henceforth no longer work on Sunday; my religion and my conscience forbid me to do so. As slaves, they had to obey their masters and work on any day it suited them. Neither would their masters permit them to suddenly change their religion, if thereby inconvenience and trouble was caused in their households. Since nothing is known in this respect about the early Christians, we must conclude that there never were any such differences between heathen masters and their Christian slaves, because the latter performed their work on Sunday as well as on other days.

A final argument may be derived from the first Sunday law of which we know. The Roman emperor Constantine, who adopted the Christian religion as the official religion of the Empire, issued in 321 an edict for the observance of the Sunday. No legal proceedings, no military exercises were to take place on that day. But agricultural work was allowed, and no positive prohibition was as yet imposed on other kinds of work and business. He made Sunday a *dies nefastus*, a holiday for the officials of the state, which however, did not interfere with the business and work of the citizens. The edict of Constantine very probably conformed to the practice of the Christians at his time. That in turn corresponded to the tradition of the Church, handed down from the age of St. Paul. Making Sunday a holiday for his civil and military officers does not imply that the Church insisted upon that measure. It was done simply in exchange for the abolished heathen *dies nefasti* on which his officers had enjoyed the same privilege. According to Mommsen, the Roman year contained 48 *dies nefasti*, on which no legal or political business could be transacted. But, since the state officials were relieved from work on Sunday, the tendency arose to make

Sunday more and more a day of rest for as many people as possible. But, in the beginning, the Church, while favoring the idea that people should be freed from work on Sunday, was careful to condemn the Judaical observance of the day. That happened, for instance, at the Council of Laodicea about 372 A. D.

The Roman Catholic Church as well as the Lutheran Church have always held on to this Pauline conception of the Sunday. Luther, in his catechism, deliberately changed the Old Testament Sabbath commandment into: "Thou shalt keep holy the holiday." These words he himself explains: "We shall fear and love God, so as not to despise the preaching of his word, but hallow, gladly hear, and learn the same." Zwingli and Calvin, on the other hand, together with their successors up to the present day, lacked the true historical instinct in spite of their mental keenness. They confounded from the beginning the Old and the New Testament religion, the Christian Sunday and the Jewish Sabbath. They based the observance of Sunday directly upon the Old Testament Sabbath commandment. Logically, they ought to have returned to the Jewish practice of observing the seventh day of the week. For, if one thing is clear and self-evident, it is that the Sabbath commandment applies exclusively to the seventh day of the week and not any other day. The Seventh-day Adventists have actually drawn that conclusion, and they are perfectly right, provided one admits that the Sabbath commandment is still in force.

However, it does not, after all, make much difference how the different Christians observe the Sunday, as long as each is fully assured in his own mind, and as long as they do not judge one another on account of their different observance of Sunday. But it is a bad sign if Christian Churches favor the attempt to compel the large mass of those who do not belong to churches and do not care for them, to observe Sunday, at least outwardly, as the members of those churches think it ought to be observed. A great number of the citizens of a state in which this is the case, naturally resent bitterly such an attempt as an attack upon their personal liberty. It does not count for very much that those churches will find themselves sorely handicapped in their endeavor to reach the great mass of the people with their message of Christ. The discouraging aspect of the question, from a religious standpoint, is that they have clearly lost faith in themselves, faith in the all-powerful strength of truth. As long as the Christian faith was a true and living faith, it despised, on principle, the use of external force; it relied on the convincing strength of its message; its only weapon was gentle persuasion.

Thereby alone it triumphed over all its enemies. In ages of degeneracy and decadence, the Church has undertaken to uphold its doctrines and teachings by means of carnal weapons. But, in every instance of that kind, history has proved the Church to have been in the wrong, to the great detriment of religious progress.