

Ecclesiastica; legislation on its part maintained that slaves must have sufficient free time to attend divine worship and receive religious instruction in church. Attendance at this was regarded as the duty of all grown Christians. For the rest, the prohibition of work on Sunday was not always regarded in antiquity as of general obligation. Thus, for example, the Council of Laodicea forbade Christians on the one hand to celebrate Saturday in the Jewish manner and, on the other, enjoined rest from labor only “in so far as it was possible”.

That the establishment of rest from labor had special reference to slaves is shown by the so-called Apostolic Constitutions. In them we have (8, 33) the days on which slaves were to be free from labor once more enumerated in detail, and the limits of the earlier legislation considerably extended.

Days of rest for slaves were to be: Saturday and Sunday, Holy Week and Easter Week, the Ascension, Whitsunday, Christmas, Epiphany, all festivals of Apostles, St. Stephen’s Day, and the feasts of certain martyrs. Naturally the object of this ordinance was not to make all these days festivals in the strict sense of the word.

In his anxiety to do honor to the holy days of the Church, the first Christian Emperor went still further. He desired to make Friday, the day of Christ’s death, a day of devotion and rest as well. We have no information as to how far this regulation took practical effect during his life. No trace of such a custom exists at a later date except among Nestorians. How earnest he was in securing the execution of these decrees is shown by the fact that he commanded the prefects of the provinces not only to observe Sundays, but also to celebrate the commemorations of the martyrs, within their jurisdictions.

It has been already observed that Saturday as well as Sunday had its liturgical observance.

In certain Eastern countries it attained a position almost equal to that of Sunday. For the Apostolic Constitutions, it is laid down that the faithful shall attend divine service on this day also, and abstain from servile work, although the rank of Sunday was acknowledged to be higher. The Council of Laodicea forbade indeed, as we have observed above, the abandonment of work on Saturday, but it enjoined the reading of the Gospel as on Sunday (Can. 16). Traces of this pre-eminence of Saturday among the week-days exists at the present time in Churches of the East.

In conclusion, it is to be noticed that in the Middle Ages, the rest from labor commenced, contrary to our present custom, with Vespers on Saturday. Pope Alexander III, however, decreed that local custom should retain its prescriptive right, and so it came to pass that the practice of reckoning the feast day from midnight to midnight became general.

Excerpt from: Heortology: A History of the Christian Festivals from their Origin to the present Day, Dr. K.A. Heinrich Kellner, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1908, pp 6-13.

The Evangelization Station

P.O. Box 267

Angels Camp, California, 95222, USA

Telephone: 209-728-5598

E-mail: evangelization@earthlink.net

www.evangelizationstation.com

Pamphlet 313

Sunday and its Observance as a Day of Rest

The Sabbath and the week of seven days, by their appointment in the ancient Law, formed already a necessary element of the ecclesiastical year and maintained their position in the Church. The division of the year into weeks is not specifically Jewish, but rather Semitic, since we find it in existence in ancient Babylon, though there a new week began with the first day of every month, and the first, seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of the month were always days of rest. This system of dividing time into weeks received a religious consecration among the Jews, inasmuch as the Sabbath rest was enjoined by the Law under the severest sanctions. All servile work of whatsoever kind must be laid aside on the Sabbath, according to the Jewish Law. It was not even permitted to light a fire or prepare food. Important as was the place given to rest, it was, however, only one part. And that a subordinate part of the Sabbath festival. The most important part was the performance of the acts of divine worship God enjoined upon the people, that is to say the sacrifice of a holocaust, consisting of two yearling lambs, along with “flour tempered with oil and the libations” (Num. 28:9-10; Ezek. 96:3-4).

There is no evidence of the Sabbath having been abrogated by Christ or the Apostles, but St. Paul declared its observance was not binding of Gentile converts, who soon formed the majority of those converted to the faith; and in Col. 2:16, he classes it along with the feasts of the new moon. Accordingly, the observance of the Sabbath fell more and more into the background, yet not without leaving some traces behind. It appears at first to have rather existed side by side with Sunday (Heb. 4:9; Acts 13:27; 18:4).

Among the Christians, the first day of the Jewish week, the *prima sabbati*, the present Sunday, was held in honor as the day of our Lord's resurrection and was called the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10; 1 Cor. 16:2). This name took the place of the name *dies solis*, formerly in use among the Greeks and Romans. The different days of the week were named after the heavenly bodies, which in turn took their names from the chief divinities of heathen mythology. Thus the names *dies solis*, *lunæ*, *Martis*, etc., were very general and widespread in antiquity. The Christians did not employ these titles for liturgical purposes, but called the week-days simply *feriæ*, and distinguished them merely by numbers. In the romance languages the ecclesiastical name for Sunday, *dies dominica*, has quite taken the place of all others.

These names were already in use in the Apostolic period, and Sunday was the day on which the eucharistic worship of God was performed (Acts 20:7f; 1 Cor. 16:2). Christian worship in the earliest times consisted of two parts. Already, in the letters of Pliny, we find mention of a nocturnal service of preparation at which psalms were sung, prayers recited, and passages read from Holy Scripture. The eucharistic part of the service followed at dawn. These two parts appear sharply distinguished, especially in the diary of Silvia (or Etheria). The vigil service developed out of the first part. The second part in Silvia's diary usually bears the name of *Oblatio*, while the term *missa* denotes merely the dismissal of the faithful and the respective divisions of the psalmody. There also seems to have been a general confession of sins at the commencement of the service, which explains the exhortation of the "Teaching of the Apostles," that the faithful should confess their sins on Sunday. At any rate, Eusebius plainly refers to the practice, and adds, "We, the adherents of the New Covenant, are constantly

nourished by the Body of Christ; we continually partake of the Blood of the Lamb, and celebrate every week on Sunday the mysteries of the true Lamb, by Whom we have been redeemed" (Eusebius, Commentary on the Psalms). Upon the cessation of persecution, the present arrangement of divine service soon became established—that is to say, Mass and sermon at nine am, with Vespers and Compline as popular devotions in the afternoon.

Besides Sunday, in Tertullian's time, the liturgy was performed on Wednesday and Friday, the so-called Station Days. In the East, on the other hand, it was performed only on Saturdays, at least in many places. To put on one's best clothes for attendance at worship was a custom of the heathen, which the Christians retained, and which has survived to the present day.

As to the grounds for celebrating Sunday, the Fathers are unanimous from the earliest times—it was kept as a festival because Christ rose again on the first day of the week. A clear indication of this is given by the practice observed in Jerusalem in the fourth century of reading at the psalmody on each of the Sundays in Quinquagesimal, the Gospel of the resurrection of Jesus.

The first Christian Emperor did his best to promote the observance of Sunday and to show it all respect as a day of prayer. He gave leave to the Christian soldiers of his army to be absent from duty in order that they might attend divine service. The heathen soldiers, however, had to assemble in camp without their arms, and offer up a prayer for the Emperor and his family. Eusebius, in his "Life of Constantine," mentions in detail; these pious endeavors of the Emperor, yet his information must have been incomplete, since Sozomen (*Hist. Eccl.*, 1. 18) informs us that Constantine also forbade the law-courts to sit on Sunday. It has been attempted to throw

doubt on the veracity of this information because of the silence of Eusebius; but Sozomen was an advocate, and must have been better up in the existing legislation than Eusebius, and moreover, a clear grasp of the point at issue along with a lucid representation of all the facts concerned is not one of the excellences of Eusebius. The information given by Sozomen is further supported by the fact that a law of Constantine's directed to the same end is in existence.

The prohibition of the transaction of legal business on Sunday was frequently renewed by his successors, and extended so as to suspend the courts of arbitration, and to prohibit summonses of debt.

A law of Valentinian II, in AD 425, forbade games in the Circus, and all theatrical representations on Sunday. To the honor of the Emperors it must be said that they suppressed these representations more than once. The Emperor Leo also renewed the law concerning the Sunday rest, and went so far as to forbid music on Sundays, but his law is not included in the general collection of statutes, having been repealed after a short time.

As regards working on Sunday, the Church very carefully avoided the adoption of a pharisaical observance of the day; but from the beginning, there was a consensus of Christian opinion against the continuance of all work which rendered the attendance of the faithful at divine worship impossible—as, for instance, the labors of slaves or the work of servants. In course of time this was extended so as to exclude all kinds of work out of keeping with the dignity of the day. As to details, different views prevailed to a great extent in different places and times. The first Christian Emperor had already, according to Eusebius, made a law prescribing throughout his empire rest on Sundays and even on Fridays as well.