

(From a paper, Sunday "How Came it into the Christian Church?" by F. L. Sharp)

WHO FIRST MADE A LAW FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF SUNDAY?

Tertullian: "From the commencement [o]f the apostolic era, Christians were accustomed to assemble for worship on the first day of the week but they did not regard that day as a Sabbath. [...] As to the mode in which the Lord's day was observed in the first century, the sources of information are somewhat scanty, but they are sufficient. They show clearly that the Christians assembled before dawn on the first day of the week to celebrate the eucharist, and afterwards proceeded to their ordinary daily labours and occupations." And this also is confirmed by other writers and historians.

Dictionary of Chronology (Art. "Sunday"), page 813: "The early Christians met on the morning of that day [Sunday] for prayer and the singing of hymns in commemoration of Christ's resurrection, and then went about their usual duties."

Jeremy Taylor: "The primitive Christians did all manner of works upon the Lord's day, even in times of persecution, when they were the strictest observers of all divine commandments; but in this they knew there was none." — Duct. Dubi, Book 2, chap. 2, sec. 59.

The Encyclopedia Britannica: "There is 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, Vol. XXVI, page 94, Art, Sunday.

The early Christian church being founded upon principles of eternal truth, its members knew only too well that they positively had no right or power to make any change in respect of the Sabbath of Jehovah.

The Scripture says: I know that whatsoever God doeth it shall be forever; nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it; and God doeth it that men should fear before Him.: Ecclesiastes 3:14. And God Himself has declared: "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that has gone out of My lips." Psalms 89:34.

No the early church did not change the day, nor did Christ nor His apostles. But the standard encyclopedias tell us who did.

HOW SUNDAY CREPT IN

Encyclopedia Britannica "It was Constantine the Great who first made a law for the proper observance of Sunday: who appointed it should be regularly celebrated throughout the Roman empire." — Art. "Sunday."

And this law was not enacted until the year 321 A.D., approximately three hundred years after Christ's ascension.

Chambers Encyclopedia: "Unquestionably the first law, either ecclesiastical or civil, by which the Sabbatical observance of Sunday is known to have been ordained, is the Sabbatical edict of Constantine, in a.d. 321." — Art. Sunday.

Constantine was a Roman emperor and was originally a pagan — a sun worshipper. But about the time of his issuing his Sunday law he professed conversion to Christianity. It was only a profession, however, it was not a genuine conversion. And [n]ot only did he connect himself with the church, but "Wharey's Church History" (page 56) informs us that he "placed himself at the head of the church, usurped

supreme power over it and claimed the right of modeling and controlling it in such a manner as would best sub-serve the public good. And so delighted were the bishops at the idea of having the emperor at the head of the church. . . . that there was not found one disposed to question his right to exercise this most unscriptural usurpation.”

Mosheim also states that the time of his professed conversion Constantine. “became Bishop of the Catholic Church.” Thus in his dual capacity as “Bishop of the Catholic Church” and emperor, Constantine issued “the first law” ever known, “either ecclesiastical or civil,” for the observance of Sunday, the first day of the week. The following is his decree:—

“On the venerable day of the sun let the magistrates and all the people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country, however, persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits; because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain growing or for vine planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations, the bounty of heaven should be lost. (Given the 7th day of March, Crispus and Constantine being consuls each of them for the second time).” — Schaff’s “History of the Christian Church,” Vol. III, chap. 75.

Concerning this decree, Dr. Schaff says: “He enjoined the observance, or rather forbade the public desecration of Sunday, not under the name of Sabbatum (the Sabbath), or Dies Domini (Day of the Lord), but under its old astrological and heathen title, Dies Solis (Day of the Sun), familiar to all his subjects, so the law was as applicable to the worshippers of Hercules, Apollo, and Mithras, as to the Christians.” — “History of the Christian Church,” Vol. VIII, chap. 75, par. 5.

Following close upon this, in the year 325 A.D., Pope Sylvester authoritatively bestowed upon the first day of the week the title, “Lord’s Day.” Then on 338 A.D., Eusebius, the court bishop of Constantine, wrote: “All things whatsoever that it was the duty to do on the Sabbath [the seventh day of the week] we [Constantine and other bishops] have transferred to the Lord’s day [the first day of the week] as more appropriately belonging to it.” — Commentary on the Psalms.

Later, in 364 A.D., the council of Laodicea issued another very definite decree that “Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on the Sabbath [the seventh day], but shall work on that day; but the Lord’s day [the first day] they shall specially honour, and as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they shall be found Judaizing, they shall be accursed from Christ.” The reason for this decree is stated by the Rev. William James, when addressing the University at Oxford. He said:—

“When the practice of keeping Saturday Sabbaths, which had become so general at the close of this (the third) century, was evidently gaining ground in the Eastern church, a decree was passed in the council held at Laodicea (A.D.364) ‘that members of the church should not rest from work on the Sabbath, like Jews, but should labour on that day, and preferring in honour the Lord’s day, then if it be in their power should rest from work as Christians,’” — “Sermons on the Sacraments and the Sabbath,” pages 122, 123

Then about the year 458 or 459 A.D., Pope Leo the Great issued the following decree:—

“We ordain, according to the true meaning of the Holy Christ, and of the apostles as thereby directed, that on the sacred day [Sunday] wherein our own integrity was restored, all do rest and cease from labour.” — Cited by Dr. Justin Edwards in “Sabbath Manual,” page 123.

Such then is the evidence which answers the question, “How came Sunday to be observed in the Christian church?” It was not by any divine command, but it came in gradually through a series of human ordinances of which Constantine’s was the first.