

THE ORIGIN OF THE LORD'S DAY

SELBY VERNON McCASLAND
 GOUCHER COLLEGE, BALTIMORE

The obscurity surrounding the origin of a weekly celebration of Sunday as the chief day of worship in the early church will probably never be fully removed, due to the meagreness of our information on the point, but the history of early Christianity will not be complete so long as there is uncertainty on this question. We face the problem at once as soon as we note the lack of agreement in the various traditions of the early church as to the origin of the Lord's Day. All of the Gospels relate that the resurrection of Jesus took place on the first day of the week and at least from the time of Ignatius¹ Christian writers were fairly consistent in saying the day was kept for that reason, although Barnabas places the resurrection, appearances and ascension all on this day,² and Justin, in addition to the resurrection of Jesus, says the day is observed because God created the earth on that day³ and also at another time connects it with circumcision on the eighth day.⁴

But while the Gospels agree in placing the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week, they preserve traces of traditions which do not agree with that view. (1) There is evidence in Matthew (27 52-53) of a tradition that the resurrection occurred on the same

¹ *Mag.* 9, 1.

² 15, 9.

³ *Apol.* 67.

⁴ *Dialogue* 41.

day as the crucifixion, in the statement about the saints who were raised when Jesus died but apparently had to wait about the tombs until his resurrection that they might go with him into the city, which seems to be a clear case of a conflict between a one-day and a three-day tradition; this one-day tradition is reflected in the Gospel of Peter in a reference to the ascension from the cross (3 19) and in the second century Quartodeciman controversy in which the churches of the East celebrated both the death and resurrection on the same day at Passover.⁵ (2) A tradition that the resurrection was after three days and three nights is shown by Matthew's reference to Jonah (12 40) and also in the effort of the Syriac Didascalia to show that this tradition was really correct in a figurative sense.⁶ (3) There was also a tradition that the resurrection occurred after the feast of unleavened bread, i. e., about ten days after the crucifixion, in a second statement of the Gospel of Peter to the effect that the disciples were returning homeward in sorrow after the feast, their sorrow clearly indicating that they still believed that Jesus was dead, and the fragment breaks off apparently just before describing a vision of the risen Jesus. (4) The Gospels themselves report moreover that Jesus predicted his resurrection in three days, on the third day, after three days and after three days and three nights. Now it is clear that only one of these traditions, i. e., on the third day, agrees with the narratives of all the Gospels which place the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week. This confusion in the early traditions raises two questions: first, how did the several traditions originate, and second, how did "on the third day" become supreme? And this latter question is inextricably entangled with the problem of the origin of the Lord's Day in the early church, for the Lord's Day was the third day from the crucifixion and its celebration has thus become an ineffaceable monument to the victory of "on the third day" over the other traditions.

⁵ Eusebius, H. E., V, xxiii, 1--2.

⁶ *Texte und Untersuchungen*, NF. 10, Heft 2, pp. 1--368. Cf. p. 105.

I

The first evidence on the question of Lord's Day observance in the first century is Paul's statement: "On the first of every week each of you is to put aside and store up whatever he gains" (1 Cor. 16 2. Goodspeed). Another statement of equal importance is Acts 20 7: "On the first day of the week, when we had met for the breaking of bread, Paul addressed them, as he was going away the next morning, and he prolonged his address until midnight." And still another, from near the end of the century, is Rev. 1 19: "On the Lord's Day I fell into a trance, and I heard a loud voice like a trumpet behind me." We cannot be quite certain, with no more evidence than these brief statements, to what extent Sunday had been adopted in the church during the first century, though it appears that from around the middle of the century at least, as reflected in Paul's letter, Sunday assumed considerable importance; and this impression is greatly strengthened by the evidence of the Gospels on the question, which say expressly that Jesus rose from the dead on that day. And the Gospel of John states not only that Jesus rose on the day after the Sabbath but also that he appeared to the disciples again after another week, which would have been on the next Sunday, thus showing observance of two Sundays in succession. This is strong evidence that by the time the Fourth Gospel was written Sunday had been adopted by the church as its day of worship. But the Gospel of Mark, twenty-five years earlier, bears remarkably strong testimony to the same effect, for, as Bacon has shown,⁷ the chronological data of this gospel show that its arrangement conforms to the western method of observing Passover, which was to begin the celebration on Nisan fourteenth and complete it only on the Sunday following, as against the eastern custom of devoting only the one day, Nisan fourteenth, to both the crucifixion and resurrection (Eus. H. E., V. 23). This shows that for the western churches even as early as the writing of Mark Sunday had assumed enough importance to control the Passover celebration, that soon after the middle of the first century Sunday had come to have an important place in the church.

⁷ *The American Journal of Theology*, XV (1911), pp. 272—403. Cf. p. 375.

Statements in the *Didaché* (xiv) and the letter of Pliny (19 96) are evidence from the beginning of the second century, and from that time on the evidence of Sunday observance is abundant.

Along with this emergence of Sunday, however, the Sabbath continued to be almost universally observed, for, although Jesus and the early disciples advocated a more liberal interpretation of Sabbath regulations, there is no reason to doubt that they were faithful in observing the day, and even Paul, in spite of his controversy with the legalists, was not so very irregular in this respect. But the very fact that Paul had to make his fight against a legalistic observance of the Sabbath⁸ indicates the hold which the Sabbath retained at the time, and the same conclusion is to be drawn from Ignatius⁹ and Barnabas¹⁰, early in the second century. For, as a matter of fact, as late as the third century, after the Lord's Day was firmly rooted in the church, the Apostolic Constitutions found it necessary to regulate Sabbath observance,¹¹ but the Lord's Day continued to increase in importance until at last in 321 A. D. Constantine made it a national holiday.

Relative to the time and place and persons involved in the rise of Sunday observance, all of the data from the first century, as indicated above, come from the Greek speaking churches of Asia Minor and the West, and the earliest specific mention of Sunday observance points to the region of Paul's missionary labors where he had made his struggle against the Judaisers, in which the membership was predominantly Gentile and had come out of Gentile religions. So in our study of the genesis of the Christian day of worship these data from Paul's churches may be expected to throw light on our problem. Modern research has shown that most questions of Christian origins lead back to both Jewish and Gentile sources, and that may be the case in regard to the Lord's Day; but, at the same time, it is not inconceivable that the roots of certain Christian practices and institutions were neither Jewish

⁸ Gal. 4 10; Col. 2 16.

⁹ *Mag.* ix.

¹⁰ XV, 8—9.

¹¹ II, 59; VII, 23; VIII, 33.

nor Gentile, but were entirely new creations of the Christian movement itself, so we must first interrogate the church for its own account of the origin of the Lord's Day.

II

There is no statement from Christians in the first century as to why they observed Sunday for worship, but certainly from the time of Ignatius (Mag. ix), about 112 A. D., with slight exceptions, the day was observed because on that day "our life sprang up through him and his death," i. e., because Jesus had risen on that day. But this explanation is not entirely satisfying for two reasons: first, as indicated at the outset, the first day of the week agrees only with "on the third day" whereas there were other divergent traditions in the early church as to the length of time that Jesus lay in the grave, and these traditions must in some way be accounted for; and, in the second place, to say that Sunday is observed because Jesus rose on that day is really a *petitio principii*, for such a celebration might just as well be monthly or annually and still be an observance of that particular day. It is yet possible, nevertheless, that the day on which the first vision occurred had some influence in determining the day of the week on which the resurrection was believed to have taken place. Mark's statement that the three women who found the empty grave fled in terror and told no one of what had happened, and his references to Galilee in this connection (16 7; 14 28), together with Paul's statement (1 Cor. 15 1-8), show that the belief that Jesus had risen from the dead was due, not to the discovery of an empty grave, but to visions of the risen Jesus, and that these visions occurred in Galilee. Such evidence makes it improbable that the first vision occurred on the first Sunday after the crucifixion, for a Sabbath had intervened and the disciples had scarcely had time to get back to Galilee; so the vision may have been as much as ten days later, after the feast of unleavened bread, as indicated by the closing fragment of the Gospel of Peter. But if the vision at this late date was on Sunday it would be scarcely possible to account for the observance of Sunday in such an accidental way. These phenomena, while of

course not certainly disproving the Christian statement as to the origin of Sunday observance, present so many problems that we are driven to look into the Jewish and Gentile sources for further light on the question.

III

From the Jewish side, the celebration of the death or resurrection of Jesus, or both, might conceivably have become connected either with the Passover, the Sabbath, or the day of the firstfruits offering, because, according to Mark, Jesus was crucified on Nisan fifteenth, having eaten the Passover with his disciples the preceding day, while John places the crucifixion on Passover day itself; in both accounts Jesus lay in the grave on the Sabbath; and it was the day following the Sabbath of Passover week that the firstfruits offering was made (Lev. 23 11). Was either of these days connected with the origin of the Lord's Day?

The death of Jesus did come to be connected with the Passover in early Christian thought (1 Cor. 5 7); in the Gospel of John he is presented as the lamb of God and was crucified at the very time the Passover lambs were slaughtered (1 29; 19 31-37); and in the second century the Quartodecimans celebrated both his death and resurrection on Passover day; but this connection with Passover has no light whatever to throw upon the origin of the Lord's Day, save that the Quartodeciman practice indicates a tradition that Jesus had both died and risen on the same day, and this is of no help to us in the solution of the problem of Sunday observance except that negatively it may suggest influences outside of the Christian traditions. The church took over Passover but it had no connection with the Lord's Day.

The day of the firstfruits offering, when the sheaf was "waved before Jahveh," is believed by Professor Bacon (*op. cit.* p. 390) to have suggested the Lord's Day observance to the early church, for the church worshiped their Lord who had been "raised up" on the very day when the firstfruits offering was waved before Jahveh, and Paul refers to Jesus as the "firstfruits of them that sleep" (1 Cor. 15 20). There were two ways of interpreting "the morrow

after the Sabbath" for the firstfruits offering; the orthodox way was to count the first day of the feast, i. e., Nisan fifteenth, a Sabbath, and to make the firstfruits offering the next day but the Boethusion Sadducees and the Samaritans made this phrase refer to the regular Sabbath, so that their offering would always fall on Sunday of Passover week.¹² Assuming that John is correct however in placing the crucifixion on Nisan fourteenth, against the synoptics, in line with the Quartodeciman tradition, in that year both methods would agree and the offering would fall on Sunday according to either method. The difficulty with this conjecture is twofold: in the first place, this firstfruits practice was an annual affair rather than a weekly event as the Lord's Day was and there would seem to be no sufficient reason for a weekly celebration arising out of it; and, in the second place, it seems more natural to interpret Paul's reference to Jesus as the "firstfruits of them that sleep" in a purely symbolical sense; Paul was thinking of the symbol rather than of the time; for him Jesus was the first example of the unnumbered dead to rise and would have been the firstfruits regardless of the day of his resurrection.

The Sabbath, however, has much greater affinity with the Lord's Day for it was a weekly observance, so that we naturally expect influence from this Jewish practice in the rise of the Christian day of Worship. But the resemblance between the two days hardly extended further than the mere fact that they both came once each week, for the methods of observance were radically different. Until near the close of the second century Christians, although worshipping on Sunday in their assemblies, did not refrain from ordinary duties. Tertullian advises Christians to defer their business on that day lest they give place to the devil,¹³ but Origen is rather embarrassed by the fact that the church observes days at all, and his ideal is that all days be observed alike.¹⁴ The Apostolic Constitutions require that slaves be given leisure both on the

¹² Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, I, p. 280; II, p. 598, etc.; ERE. V. 879 b.

¹³ *de oratio*. 23.

¹⁴ *ad Celsum* viii 22—23.

Sabbath and on the Lord's Day, though the rigor of the old Sabbath is not manifest even here.¹⁵ Another radical difference from the Sabbath was that the Christian day of worship was named for the Christian Lord, whereas the Sabbath was named from its character as a day of rest and not from Jahveh. While agreeing in the point that both days were weekly, they were however entirely different in the much more fundamental facts of their names and actual characters. Did Sunday owe its rise to the prior existence of the Sabbath? Was Sunday in the church intended to take the place of the Sabbath? Was it to be the Christian Sabbath? There was opposition to taking over Jewish fast days,¹⁶ but there seems to have been no objection to the regular Jewish festivals, Passover, Pentecost, etc., which were taken into the church with Christian interpretations. If Christians desired a Christian Sabbath, why did they not use the Jewish Sabbath with a Christian interpretation? The opposition to the Sabbath reflected in the Gospels was to the method of keeping the day rather than to the day itself, and there seems to be no intention of discarding it. The Sabbath would have been instrumental in causing Jewish Christians to observe one day weekly, for they had learned hebdomadal practice in their Jewish life; they would be expected to carry over to the new religion the needs for weekly observance that had been acquired in their earlier religious training; but Jewish Christians did not bring over with them already established needs for a day with the character which the Lord's Day possessed.¹⁷

IV

Turning now to the Gentile world in search of data that might throw further light on the problem, we find that the weekly division of time existed in the ancient Orient independently of the

¹⁵ viii 33.

¹⁶ *Didaché* viii.

¹⁷ *Mark.* 2 27; 3 4. In the Rabbinic speculation (*Strack-Billerbeck*, I, 1054) the first day of the week was "crowned with twelve crowns;" it was the first day of creation, for priestly service, tribal chieftains, the coming of the *Shekina*, etc., but this hardly had any connection with Christian Lord's Day observance.

Jewish Sabbath. The weekly reckoning of time is traced back to the Babylonians and Assyrians, and the Sabbath itself may even have been derived from that source.¹⁸ And there is conclusive evidence that by the first century A. D. the Mediterranean world was familiar with a weekly reckoning of time. Josephus boasts, certainly with exaggeration, that there is no nation whatever, "whither our custom of resting on the seventh day has not come,"¹⁹ but there would be no reason for his making the statement unless the week had already attained wide recognition. Many Roman writers of the time are familiar with the Sabbath.²⁰ Suetonius states that the grammarian Diogenes was accustomed to lecture at Rhodes on the Sabbath and that he refused to admit Tiberius to hear him at another time.²¹ Clement of Alexandria claimed that the seventh day was recognized as sacred, not by Hebrews only, but also by the Greeks.²² Dion Cassius writes that the custom of referring the days to the seven stars called planets was instituted by the Egyptians, "but is now found among all mankind, though its adoption has been comparatively recent; at least the ancient Greeks never understood it so far as I am aware."²³ And beginning with Saturday he gives the heavenly bodies as follows: Kronos, Helios, Moon, Ares, Hermes, Zeus and Aphrodite. Further evidence to the effect that the weekly division of time was already widely recognized by the beginning of the Christian era is a picture discovered at Herculaneum, and therefore painted by 79 A. D., with the heads of seven planetary deities in the order of their days: Saturn, Apollo, Dianā, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus.²⁴ There can be no doubt that the weekly division of time was already widely recognized by the beginning of the Christian era. That being the

¹⁸ ERE. "Sabbath;" "Sunday."

¹⁹ Against Apion. ii, 40.

²⁰ Tibullus, I, iii, 18; Ovid, *Ars Amat.* i, 415; Martial, IV, iv, 7; Horace, *Satires*, I, ix, 69; II, iii, 290; Juvenal, *Satires*, xiv, 90—98.

²¹ Tiberius, xxxii.

²² *Strom.*, V, 14.

²³ History of Rome, xxxvii, 17—19.

²⁴ ERE. "Sunday;" Vol. xii, p. 104. Cf. also F. H. Colson, *The Week*, Cambridge 1926, pp. 18 f., 62 f.

case, it would not be necessary to assume that Christians derived their custom of meeting together for weekly celebrations from Sabbath observance in Judaism, for many of the early converts, in fact most of them, had never been Jews and were familiar with religious practices of the Gentile world instead.

In the matter of the name Lord's Day we shall have to go beyond the limits of Judaism which had no custom whatever to correspond to that of naming Sunday in honor of the Lord, i. e., the Lord's Day. As indicated in the statement of Dion Cassius above this practice came from the Egyptians; and the same testimony is borne by Herodotus in the fifth century B. C.: "These other things were invented by the Egyptians. Each month and day is assigned to some particular god; and according to the day on which each person is born, they determine what will befall him, how he will die, and what kind of person he will be."²⁵ Whether it is entirely correct to say that this custom was invented by the Egyptians is an incidental matter; it is of importance only to note that the practice was not Jewish and that it was already old in the ancient world when the Christian church arose. For a custom which might have influenced Christians to designate *Κυριακή* in honor of their *Κύριος* we shall therefore have to go outside the bounds of Judaism, for Christians have followed a pagan way of designating days which was already old when they began to speak of the Lord's Day.²⁶ The only significant point of agreement between the Lord's Day and Jewish practices of the time is the hebdomadal agreement with the Sabbath; on the other hand, however, there was no hebdomadal Sunday observance in Judaism, the character of the Sabbath was different from that of the Lord's Day, and the name *κυριακή* has its parallel in pagan rather than in Jewish life.²⁷

²⁵ III, 82.

²⁶ The terms *κύριος* and *κυριακός* occur frequently earlier than the New Testament. Cf. Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the N. T.* etc.

²⁷ *κυριακή* occurs only twice in the N. T. (I Cor. 11 20; Rev. 1 10); in both places as an adj.; but in Rev. 1 10 the expression *κυριακή ἡμέρα* occurs; after the time of Didaché, 14, 1, *κυριακή* is frequent as a substantive; and *κυριακόν*, church building, parallel to *βακχείον*, *μυθραῖον*, etc.

V

Cumulative evidence leads us to look, therefore, for a day in the non-Jewish religious life of the Hellenistic world which may have made some contribution to Lord's Day observance in the church. Deissmann has called attention to evidence that the Imperial cult in Asia Minor and Egypt consecrated one day of each month, apparently the first, to the worship of the emperor, and called it *σεβαστή*, and he believes that this day with its name may have had something to do with the naming of *κυριακή*.²⁸ The case is without doubt an exact linguistic parallel; it is also a religious parallel, in that both *κυριακή* and *σεβαστή* are named for the divinities to whom they are devoted; but in the matter of weekly observance the similarity breaks down.

A more exact parallel at the point where *σεβαστή* breaks down is Saturday, named for Kronos (Saturn), and called *κρονική*. It is called *ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κρόνου* just as Sunday is called *ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ ἡλίου*. Plutarch writes of *ἡ κρονική ἑορτή* and *αἱ κροναίδες ἡμέραι*.²⁹ But most remarkable is the example of Justin where he refers to Saturday as *ἡ κρονική*, an exact parallel to *ἡ κυριακή*, and the example occurs in a passage where he twice refers to Sunday as *ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ ἡλίου*, which shows that his way of designating Saturday is not patterned from *κυριακή* but is recognized usage of his time.³⁰ In this case we have not only the designation of Saturday for a deity, but also the fact that this day, just as the Christian *κυριακή*, comes once a week. The parallel however is more superficial than it at first appears, for there is no evidence of a religious observance of *κρονική* which at all resembles that which characterized the Lord's Day, so as far as the real character of the two days was concerned there was no significant parallel between them.

At this point mention may be made of the large place of Sunday celebration among the Mandeans, communities of whom were found in recent times in the lower valleys of the Tigris and Euphra-

²⁸ *Licht vom Osten* (1923), pp. 298ff., cf. Colson, op. cit., p. 125.

²⁹ *Vita Pom.* 34; *Vita Cic.* 18.

³⁰ *Apology*, 67, 7, 2.

tes still tracing their ancestry back to John the Baptist. Their practices have come to light with the publication of an authentic translation of their sacred literature by Mark Lidzbarski.³¹ In this Literature Sunday is frequently mentioned and is observed as a most sacred day; it is even personified and prayed to and will serve as a witness for the soul, etc.³² If their claim to John the Baptist as their founder could be accepted without question and we knew that Sunday observance had characterized them from the beginning, we might feel with certainty that we had found the origin of Christian Sunday, but this is not the case. The great importance of John the Baptist, of Palestine, of Jerusalem, of baptism in the Jordan, of hatred of the Jews, as well as a bitter polemic against Jesus as a false Messiah, all lend themselves nicely to their theory of their origin; and the Gnostic speculation which fills this literature is closely akin to the Johannine writings of the New Testament; but the fact that nothing whatever is known of these people before the rise of Islam may well make us skeptical of their claim to such an early origin.³³ Moreover, even Lidzbarski, who would accept the view that they come from John the Baptist, admits that the passages in which Sunday has so much importance are of a very late date, so that they cannot be of any significance for the problem of the origin of the Christian Sunday. On the whole, those scholars who see in the Mandeans the influence of a late Christian Gnostic sect, although they may in some way go back to John, are probably correct in their interpretation.

VI

Another non-Jewish source, however, which may throw real light on the origin of Christian Lord's Day is Oriental Sun worship,

³¹ *Das Johannisebuch der Mandaer* (1915); *Die Mandäische Liturgien* (1920); *Das Ginza* (1925).

³² Cf. *Johannisebuch*, pp. 68, 82, 83, 96, 101, 110—111, etc.; *Ginza*, pp. 283, 285, etc.; *Liturgien*, pp. 34, 147, etc.

³³ Cf. Brandt, ERE. viii, "Mandeans;" Lidzbarski's introductions; Reitzenstein, ZNTW. (1927), xxvi, 1; Bultmann, ZNTW. (1925), xxiv, 1—2; Schaefer, Bibliothek Warburg (1926), pp. 203—350; Petersen, ZNTW. (1925), xxiv, 3—4; S. A. Pallis, *Mandaean Studies*, Toronto (1926).

which had existed in various forms from time immemorial and was known best in the Occident as it was found in Mithraism. The name Sunday, *dies solis*, ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ ἡλίου, indicates the connection which this day had with the worship of the Sun. It is well known that long before his identification with Sol in the Occident, Mithra had been the god of light in his Oriental home, but after he came into the Roman world he was often referred to under such titles as *Helios*, *Sol*, *Sol invictus*, *Sol invictus Mithra*, *Dominus Mithra*, *Sol invictus Dominus Mithra*, etc.³⁴ For the purpose of our present inquiry two questions relative to Mithraism are of supreme importance: was Sunday celebration characteristic of this cult; and did Mithraism enter the Mediterranean world early enough to have influenced the church in its adoption of Sunday as its Lord's Day? We cannot answer either of these questions with finality, due to our lack of information about the earlier forms and provenance of Mithraism, but, nevertheless, sufficient data are available, we feel, to justify tentatively at least an affirmative answer to both questions. The authoritative worker in this field is Cumont and his testimony is of greatest value on the two questions here propounded. According to this authority the number seven had a special value in the rites of the Mithraic cult, there were seven degrees of initiation, and the system of naming the seven days of the week for the seven planets which had originated earlier in Babylonia came into the Roman world at the very time that Mithraism made its entrance there and was probably brought by Mithraism. "There is no doubt that the diffusion of the Iranian mysteries had a considerable part in the adoption by the pagans of the week with Sunday as a feast day."³⁵ From a passage of Celsus preserved by Origen,³⁶ which by means of a ladder of seven portals presents an allegory of the passage of souls through the spheres of the seven planets, in which the last portal is that of the Sun made of gold,

³⁴ Franz Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*. 2 vols. Bruxelles (1896—99). Cf. Vol. II, Index of titles of Mithra, p. 532.

³⁵ *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 119.

³⁶ *ad Celsum*, VI, 21.

Cumont sees evidence that the week with Sunday at its head was important in Mithraism; the same conclusion is drawn from the seven arched portals designed at the foot of the figures of the planets in the pavement of a Mithreum at Ostia; and there is also a relief which has a series of busts commencing with that of the Sun, not, as is ordinarily the case with that of Saturn.³⁷ "The *dies solis* was evidently the most sacred day of the week for the devotees of Mithra, and just as the Christians, they were obliged to keep Sunday holy and not the Sabbath."³⁸ Again Cumont observes: "Each day of the week the planet to which it had been consecrated was invoked at a certain place in the crypt, and Sunday, over which the Sun presided, was especially sacred."³⁹ "The rites which they practiced offered numerous analogies; the devotees of the Persian god, just as the Christians, were purified by a baptism; they received the power to combat evil demons by a confirmation; and they attained health of soul and body by a communion. And as these also they sanctified Sunday and celebrated the birth of the Sun on Dec. 25."⁴⁰ In justice to Cumont himself however it should be stated that he did not derive the Christian Lord's Day from the Mithraic Sunday.⁴¹ In the matter of parallels between Christianity and Mithraism there always remains the question of the date of the rites involved, but in regard to Sunday it is not necessary to show that Mithraism with its most elaborate forms existed prior to the rise of the church, and the original character of Mithra as Sun God⁴² makes it probable that the special observance of Sunday was one of its oldest practices. That is indicated by Cumont's conclusion that the week was brought into the Mediterranean world by this cult.

As to the date at which Mithraism entered the Mediterranean world the evidence is fragmentary but at least one monument

³⁷ *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 114. The marble of Bologna.

³⁸ *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 119.

³⁹ *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 325.

⁴⁰ *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 339.

⁴¹ *ibid.* Note 5.

⁴² Strabo, *Geog.*, XV, ii, 13. But cf. Colson, *op. cit.*, p. 74 f.

comes from the first century B. C. Antiochus I. of Commagene (69–38 B. C.) erected a monument at Nimrud Dagh on which Mithra was identified with Apollo, Helios and Hermes, relative to which R. Pettazoni remarks: "The inscription of Antiochus I. is then the first Anatolian document of that Hellenization of Mithraism, which was the primary condition necessary for its ulterior expansion in the Occident."⁴³ The cult of Mithra made its way into Rome in the first century B. C., whither it was carried by Cilician pirates captured by Pompey in 67 B. C.⁴⁴ That was almost a hundred years before Christian missionaries founded the church in Rome. Just how soon it actually gained a footing there we do not know but we have a Mithraic inscription from Rome set up by a freedman of the Flavian dynasty, i. e., 70–96 A. D.⁴⁵ Nero himself seems to have been initiated into the cult.⁴⁶ The Roman poet Statius, who lived from 61 to 96 A. D., shows familiarity with the cult in his allusion to "Mithra as beneath the rocks of the Persian cave he presses back the horns that resist his control."⁴⁷ The next oldest Mithraic monument from Rome which we possess was set up by a slave about 102 A. D.⁴⁸ The mysteries of Mithra were popular with soldiers and they were established at Carnuntum on the Danube by the fifteenth legion about the beginning of the reign of Vespasian.⁴⁹ Regardless of the condition of Mithraism in other parts of the empire, it is clear, therefore, that it had found its way into Rome with sufficient success to leave monumental remains before the end of the first century A. D.; and according to Plutarch it had been carried there in 67 B. C. But in Asia Minor and northern Syria the cult had been popular for at least two centuries B. C. Evidence of that is the fact that the famous group of Mithra the bull-slayer, which adorned every Mithraic shrine, was

⁴³ *I Misteri*, Bologna (1923), p. 238ff.

⁴⁴ Plutarch, *Vita Pom.* 24.

⁴⁵ Cumont, op. cit. Vol. II, p. 105, Ins. 66.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* I, p. 239; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxx, 6.

⁴⁷ *Thebaid*, I, 717.

⁴⁸ Cumont, op. cit. Vol. II, p. 106, Ins. 69.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* I, p. 245.

created by the Pergamene school of art.⁵⁰ This work of art proves beyond a doubt that the cult of Mithra had already attained its position in Asia Minor when the Pergamene school was flourishing.

Further light on the early diffusion of Mithraism has been attained recently from a Greek papyrus discovered in the Fayûm in Egypt which dates from the third century B. C.⁵¹ This papyrus contains a list of sheep and lambs for sacrifices in the *Μιθραϊον* located there and of the persons who brought the sacrifices. This Mithreum in the Fayûm in the third century B. C. was probably due to Persian soldiers who were sent there during the Persian period; and it is probable that Mithraism was brought by Persian garrisons to Asia Minor at the same time, where it became popular enough to appear in Pergamene art in the second century B. C.⁵² It is of especial significance for the present study that Mithraism had such a firm hold in Asia Minor, long before the rise of Christianity in that same region under the missionary work of Paul, where its emphasis on Sun worship had accustomed its devotees to a reverence for that day of the week which was dedicated to the Sun. It was in this very region that Paul had fought against those who would bind the Sabbath on his churches;⁵³ and it was in these churches that we found the earliest accounts of observance of the Lord's Day. May it not well be that Paul was led to take his stand relative to the Sabbath, not only by his own reaction against legalism, but also because of influences in his environment which had caused Sunday already to have a place of honor among the days of the week? May not Mithraism with its veneration of Sunday have prepared the way for the Lord's Day? The various considerations of this study suggest such an hypothesis.

It is not impossible that the rather enigmatical phrase in the *Didaché* *κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου* would be cleared up by such

⁵⁰ ERE. "Mithraism." Vol. viii, p. 754.

⁵¹ J. Gilbert Smyly, Royal Irish Academy, *Cunningham Memoirs*, No. xii, *Papyri from Gurob*, pp. 36—38 (1921).

⁵² F. Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, Chicago (1910), p. 11.

⁵³ Gal. 4 10; Col. 2 16.

an hypothesis.⁵⁴ The phrase might then reflect the fact that a *κυριακή* other than that of the Lord existed, for why else was it necessary to write Lord's Day *of the Lord*?

Sunday in Mithraism agreed with the Lord's Day in that it was consecrated to a divinity and, so far as we can recover, in its general character, i. e., the deity to whom it was consecrated was worshiped on that day but work and ordinary occupations were prohibited. And it agreed moreover in being the same day of the week. Its affinities with the Lord's Day appear thus to have been much closer than was the case of the Jewish Sabbath. To construct such an hypothesis does not mean that early Christians deliberately borrowed Sunday from Mithraism but assumes only the general psychological principle which underlies all syncretism. In conversion from one religion to another, converts, although intending to break completely with their old life and habits, in reality, yielding to the innate conservatism of human beings, actually make only those readjustments which are necessary to fit into their new situation. For that reason no transplanted religion is ever what it was in its original home; that applies both to the inner interpretations and to the outward rites. We do not know how many converts Paul made from Mithraism but we do know that he made many converts in regions where the environment had long been subject to the influence of Mithraic practices, and with that knowledge our hypothesis may be of value. Moreover the existence of Sun worship from time immemorial around the Mediterranean, in conjunction with the early acceptance of the planetary week in the Hellenistic world, provided a still much wider basis than Mithraism for pagan reverence for the day of the Sun.

On the basis of this hypothesis, the divergences in the early traditions relative to the day on which Jesus rose from the dead would also be accounted for. The traditions regarding the day of the resurrection would be accounted for as reflections of scriptures which were thought to refer to the resurrection, the day on which the first vision occurred, or of beliefs as to the length of time the spirit lingered about the body before its departure. The Lord's

⁵⁴ Didaché, xiv.

Day arose independently of those traditions on the basis indicated in this study—a conjunction of hebdomadal practice in Judaism with that in Sun worship—but was then consecrated to the Lord who was worshiped on that day. The next step was to adopt that version of the three days motif—on the third day—which synchronized with their Lord's Day observance; and finally to validate the practice with scripture.⁵⁵

Examples quite similar to the case indicated in this study are the Hebrew and Mohammedan Sabbaths. We do not certainly know the origin of the Hebrew Sabbath, although it probably dates back to their Semitic ancestors, but it is accounted for in their own literature, as the day on which God rested from creation,⁵⁶ as a memorial of the deliverance from Egypt,⁵⁷ and as a sign of Jahveh's covenant.⁵⁸ The Sabbath in Islam is Friday, which is said to have been a day of assembly of some kind long before the time of Mohammed; but his followers observe it because "On this day Adam was created; on this day Adam was taken into Paradise, and turned out from it also on this day; and the day of the resurrection will not be on any day but Friday."⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Justin, *Apol.* 67; *Dialogue* 41. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, IV, xliii; *Against the Jews*, 13.

⁵⁶ Gen. 2 3; Ex. 20 11.

⁵⁷ Deut. 5 15.

⁵⁸ Ezekiel, 20 12.

⁵⁹ ERE. "Sabbath." Vol. X, p. 894.