

“Mingling Darkness with Light.”

The Easter Festival

“Catholic Christian Instructed,” an authorised

Catholic Catechism, says

The Roman Church has always charged Protestants with inconsistency in choosing to follow some of the traditions of the Catholic Church whilst rejecting others. Thus, in asserting that Rome's authority alone has established the Sunday in preference to the Sabbath.

Therefore those who pretend to be so religious observers of the Sunday, whilst they take no notice of other festivals ordained by the same church authority; show that they act by humour, and not by reason and religion; since Sundays and holy days all stand upon the same foundation, viz., the ordinance of the Church.

But the Romanists have reason for their expressions of hopefulness in the attitude of a large portion of the Protestant world at the present time. Every year there is more attention paid to these other festivals, and the Easter festival, specially, has become a high day amongst Protestants. Pagan influence in the church at a very early period is shown by this festival, since it was in the second century that the celebrated controversy concerning it occurred

The name Easter is derived from the heathen goddess Eostre, to whom our forefathers, and those of other Northern nations, sacrificed in the month of April. This season of the year has always been signalled by a festival among all the peoples of the earth, in all ages. The Persians, Egyptians, Chaldeans were all sun worshippers, and in April celebrated the entrance of the sun into that division of the Zodiac known as Aries, and sacred to the Eastern goddess Astarte.

It is not the continuation of the Jewish Passover, and has no manner of connection with that feast. In Acts 12:4, the translators of our common version have given us the word Easter instead of Passover, but it is correctly rendered in the Revised Version. The word Easter is not found in the Bible. The controversy concerning this festival was on this wise

In the East we find the churches in the second century keeping a festival which corresponded in point of time to the Jewish Passover. It is supposed that this was in memory of the death of Christ, although there was never any instruction given to the church to celebrate the death of Christ in any such way. The festival was doubtless simply a concession to the prejudices of the Jews, who were more numerous in Asia, just as where the pagans were more numerous; the church adopted pagan festivals, in order to conciliate the heathen, and to make them more willing to profess Christianity.

. But unity of practice was greatly desired in all the churches, and Rome's arrogance had already gone to such a length that one assumed the right to fix the standard of unity. She was the chief city and capital of the world, and why should she not set the fashion in matters of religion as well as in other things? PTUK April 22, 1897, page 245.12

Now the Roman church was mostly composed of pagans, and heathen influences surrounded it.

Consequently it had no care to conciliate the Jews. But found it expedient to lean towards paganism; and the pagans had a festival which they celebrated in honour of the return of spring, about the time of the vernal equinox. This was adopted by the church of Rome

and the churches which it influenced. The Bishop of Rome commanded the Eastern churches to celebrate their spring festival at the same time that he did. They refused. But Jewish influence could not prevail against the great body of pagans, and at the Council of Nice, A.D. 325, the Roman custom was made universal. Easter was henceforth celebrated by all the churches. The time was fixed, as now, to the first Sunday after the full moon which followed the twenty-first of March.

Dr. Schaff is very free to note the adoption of heathen festivals by the church because he does not think that the practice is to be condemned. He says (“Church History”):

The English Easter, Anglo-Saxon Oster. German Ostern, is at all events connected with East and sunrise, and is akin to eos oriens, aurora. The comparison of sunrise and the natural spring with the new moral creation in the resurrection of Christ, and the transfer of the celebration of Ostara, the old German divinity of the rising health-bringing light, to the Christian Easter festival, was the easier, because all nature is a symbol of spirit, and the heathen myths are dim presentiments and carnal anticipations of Christian truths.

All we care for in the above is the admission that Easter is only a relic of nature-worship. We do not accept the suggestion of the identity of Christianity and pagan nature-worship; but we note with sorrow that the pagan-worship of the creature rather than the Creator very early corrupted the Christian church.

The reader will not fail to note that it was sun-worship, and that alone, that fixed the time of the Easter festival, and that in this concession to heathenism there was a long step taken toward the exaltation of “the venerable day of the sun,”-the weekly sun-festival, Sunday.

The word Easter, from Eostre or Ostara, is by some traced to Ishtar, or Astarte, the Assyrian counterpart of Baal, the sun-god, corresponding to the Latin Venus. Sacred eggs were connected with her worship. But whether Easter may or may not be traced to Astarte, with her licentious worship, it is certain that it is nothing but a relic of sun-worship.

HISTORY OF THE SABBATH (Continued.)

EXAMINATION OF A FAMOUS FALSEHOOD

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“Hence Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp, who had been the companion of the apostles, A. D. 167, says that the Lord’s day was the Christian Sabbath. His words are, ‘On the Lord’s day every one of us Christians keeps the Sabbath, meditating on the law, and rejoicing in the works of God.’” - Sabbath Manual, p.114. ARSH April 1, 1862, page 137.9

This testimony is highly valued by first-day writers, and is often and prominently set forth in their publications. Sir Wm. Domville, whose elaborate treatise on the Sabbath has been several times quoted, states the following important fact relative to this quotation: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 137.10

“I have carefully searched through all the extant works of Irenaeus, and can with certainty state that no such passage, or any one at all resembling it, is there to be found. The edition I consulted was that by Massuet (Paris, 1710); but to assure myself still further, I have since looked to the editions by Erasmus (Paris, 1536), and Graba (Oxford, 1702), and in neither do I find the passage in question.” -

It is a remarkable fact that those who quote this as the language of Irenaeus, if they give any reference, cite their readers to Dwight's Theology, instead of referring them to the place in the works of Irenaeus where it is to be found. It was Dr. Dwight who first enriched the theological world with this invaluable quotation. On this point Domville remarks

“Where then did Dwight obtain this testimony, which has so many times been given as that of Irenaeus? It is recorded in a biographical memoir, prefixed to his Theology, that by some disease in his eyes he was deprived of his capacity for reading and study from the early age of twenty-three. The knowledge which he gained from books after the period above mentioned was almost exclusively at second hand by the aid of others.”

Domville states another fact which gives us unquestionably the origin of this quotation: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 137.14

“But although not to be found in Irenaeus, there are in the writings ascribed to another father, namely, in the interpolated epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians, and in one of its interpolated passages, expressions so clearly resembling those of Dr. Dwight’s quotation, as to leave no doubt of the source from which he quoted.”

Such, then, is the end of this famous testimony of Irenaeus, who had it from Polycarp, who had it from the apostles! It was furnished the world by a man whose eyesight was impaired; who in consequence of this infirmity took at second hand an interpolated passage from an epistle falsely ascribed to Ignatius, and published it to the world as the genuine testimony of Irenaeus. Loss of eye-sight, as we may charitably believe, led Dr. Dwight into the serious error which he has committed; but by the publication of this spurious testimony, which seemed to come in a direct line from the apostles, he has rendered multitudes as incapable of reading aright the fourth commandment, as he, by loss of natural eyesight, was of reading Irenaeus for himself. This case admirably illustrates tradition as a religious guide; it is the blind leading the blind until both fall into the ditch.

It is a remarkable fact that the first instance upon record in which the bishop of Rome attempted to rule the Christian church was by AN EDICT IN BEHALF OF SUNDAY. It had been the custom of all the churches to celebrate the passover, but with this difference: that while the eastern churches observed it upon the fourteenth day of the first month, the western churches kept it upon the Sunday following that day. Victor, bishop of Rome, in the year 196 1 took upon him to impose the Roman custom upon all the churches; that is, to compel them to observe the passover upon Sunday. "This bold attempt," says Bower, "we may call the first essay of papal usurpation." [History of the Popes, Vol. i, p.18.] And Dowling terms it the "earliest instance of Romish assumption." [History of Romanism, heading of page 32.] The churches of Asia Minor informed Victor that they could not comply with his lordly mandate.

Then says Bower: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 137.17

“Upon the receipt of this letter, Victor, giving the reins to an ungovernable passion, published bitter invectives against all the churches of Asia, declared them cut off from his communion, sent letters of excommunication to their respective bishops; and, at the same time, in order to have them cut off from the communion of the whole church, wrote to the other bishops, exhorting them to follow his example, and forbear communicating with their refractory brethren of Asia.” - Hist. Popes, Vol. i, p.18.
ARSH April 1, 1862, page 137.18.

The historian informs us that “not one followed his example or advice; not one paid any sort of regard to his letters, or showed the least inclination to second him in such a rash and uncharitable attempt.” He further says: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 137.19

“Victor being thus baffled in his attempt, his successors took care not to revive the controversy; so that the Asiatics peaceably followed their ancient practice till the council of Nice, which out of complaisance to Constantine the great, ordered the solemnity of Easter to be kept everywhere on the same day, after the custom of Rome.” - Id., pp.18,19. ARSH April 1, 1862, page 137.20

The victory was not obtained for Sunday in this struggle, as Heylyn testifies, ARSH April 1, 1862, page 137.21

“Till the great council of Nice [A. D. 325], backed by the authority of as great an emperor [Constantine] settled it better than before; none but some scattered schismatics, now and then appearing, that durst oppose the resolution of that great synod.” - Hist. of the Sab., part ii, chap 2, secs. 4,5. ARSH April 1, 1862, page 137.22

Constantine, by whose powerful influence the council of Nice was induced to decide this question in favor of the Roman bishop, that is, to fix the passover upon Sunday, urged the following strong reason for the measure: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 137.23

“Others with a greater show of reason, take us for worshipers of the sun. These send us to the religion of Persia, though we are far from adoring a painted sun, like them who carry about his image everywhere upon their bucklers. This suspicion took its rise from hence, because it was observed that Christians prayed with their faces toward the east. But some of you likewise out of an affectation of adoring some of the celestial bodies, wag your lips toward the rising sun; but if we, like them, celebrate Sunday as a festival and day of rejoicing, it is for a reason vastly distant from that of worshiping the sun; for we solemnize the day after Saturday in contradistinction to those who call this day their Sabbath, and devote it to ease and eating, deviating from the old Jewish customs, which they are now very ignorant of.” - Wm. Reeves’ Translation of the Apologies of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and others, Vol. i, pp.238,239. ARSH April 1, 1862, page

Milman, author of the “History of Christianity,” in his notes on Gibbon, speaks thus of Tertullian: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.1

“It would be wiser for Christianity, retreating upon its genuine records in the New Testament, to disclaim this fierce African, than identify itself with his furious invectives, by unsatisfactory apologies for their unchristian fanaticism.” Dec. and Fall of the Roman Empire, chap 15, remarks appended to note 72. ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.2

The testimony of Tertullian is valuable as an acknowledgment that the Sunday festival was identical with the day on which the ancient Persians worshiped the sun; and also as showing the reason on which he grounded that observance. It was not the command of God, nor the act of Christ in changing the Sabbath, nor the example of the apostles, nor because it was in any respect a Christian institution; but, to use his own statement of reasons, "We solemnize the day after Saturday in contradistinction to those who call this their Sabbath." Opposition to those Christians who kept the Sabbath - for he distinguishes them from the Jews - is the grand reason assigned by Tertullian for observing the ancient festival-day of the heathen. ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.3

Kitto states the important fact that Tertullian is the earliest writer who uses the term Lord's day as a designation for the first day of the week. Thus he says: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.4

“The earliest authentic instance in which the name of the Lord's day is applied, ... is not till A. D. 200, when Tertullian speaks of it as ‘die Dominico resurrexionis’ [De Orat., sec. 23]; again, ‘Dominicum Diem’ [De Idol., 14]; and Dionysius of Corinth (probably somewhat later) as *emeran kuriaken* [Lord's day.]” Cycl. Bib. Lit. art., Lord's day. ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.5

Kitto speaks further of Tertullian and Dionysius as presenting the first traces of resting from labor on Sunday. Thus he says: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.6

“But in these last cited writers we trace the commencement of a more formal observance. Thus the whole passage in Tertullian is: ‘Solo die Dominico resurrectionis non ab isto tantum (genuflexione) sed enim anxietatis habitu et officio cavere

debemus, differentes etiam negotio ne quem diabolo locum demus;’
i.e. on the day of the Lord’s resurrection alone we ought to abstain
not only from kneeling, but from all devotion to care and anxiety,
putting off even business, lest we should give place to the Devil.”

Id., ib. ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.7

It is this language of Tertullian that Neander cites in the margin, to sustain his modest statement already quoted in connection with the language of Mosheim, that ‘perhaps at the end of the second century a false application of this kind [that is, of the Sabbath law to Sunday] had begun to take place: for men appear by that time to have considered laboring on Sunday as a sin.” ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.8

Yet Dr. Heylyn somewhat modifies the shade of sacredness that Tertullian gives the festival of the sun. He says: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.9

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The origin of first-day observance has been the subject of inquiry in this chapter. We have found that Sunday from remote antiquity was a heathen festival in honor of the sun, and that in the first centuries of the Christian era this ancient festival was in general veneration in the heathen world. We have learned that patriotism and expediency, and a tender regard for the conversion of the Gentile world,

caused the leaders of the church to adopt as their religious festival the day observed by the heathen, and to retain the same name which the heathen had given it. We have seen that the earliest instance upon record of the actual observance of Sunday in the Christian church, is found in the church of Rome about A. D. 140. The first great effort in its behalf, A. D. 196, is by a singular coincidence the first act of Papal usurpation. The first instance of a sacred title being applied to this festival, and the earliest trace of abstinence from labor on that day, are found in the writings of Tertullian at the close of the second century, and even he assigns as the grand reason for observing that day a wish to be distinguished from those who kept the ancient Sabbath.

One fact of deep interest will conclude this chapter. The first great effort made to put down the Sabbath was the act of the church of Rome in turning it into a fast while Sunday was made a joyful festival. While the Eastern churches retained the Sabbath, a portion of the Western churches, with the church of Rome at their head, turned it into a fast. As a part of the Western churches refused to comply with this ordinance, a long struggle ensued, the result of which is thus stated by Heylyn: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.12

“In this difference it stood a long time together, till in the end the Roman church obtained the cause, and Saturday became a fast almost through all parts of the Western world. I say the Western world, and of that alone: the Eastern churches being so far from altering their ancient custom that in the sixth council of Constantinople, A. D. 691, they did admonish those of Rome to forbear fasting on that day on pain of censure.” Hist. of the Sab., part 2, chap. 2, sec. 3. ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.13

Wm. James, in a sermon before the University of Oxford, thus states the time when this fast originated: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.14

“The Western church began to fast on Saturday at the beginning of the third century.” Serm. on the Sac. and Sab., p.166. ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.15

Thus it is seen that this struggle began with the third century, that is, immediately after the year 200. It is probable therefore that Tertullian’s reference to Sabbath-keepers as eating on that day, was occasioned by the fact that the adversaries of the Sabbath had turned it into a fast. Neander thus states the motive of the Roman church: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.16

“In the Western churches, particularly the Roman, where opposition to Judaism was the prevailing tendency, this very opposition produced the custom of celebrating the Saturday in particular as a fast-day.” Neander, p.186. ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.17

By Judaism, Neander meant the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath. Dr. Charles Hase, of Germany, states the object of the Roman church in very explicit language: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.18

“The Roman church regarded Saturday as a fast-day in direct opposition to those who regarded it as a Sabbath. Sunday remained a joyful festival in which all fasting and worldly business was avoided as much as possible, but the original commandment of the decalogue respecting the Sabbath was not then applied to that day.” Ancient Church History, part 1, div. 2, A. D. 100-312, sec. 69.

ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.19

Lord King attests this fact in the following words: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.20

“Some of the Western churches, that they might not seem to judaize, fasted on Saturday, as Victorinus writes: We used to fast on the seventh day. And it is our custom then to fast, that we may not seem, with the Jews, to observe the Sabbath.” Inquiry into the Constitution of the Primitive Church, chap 7, sec. 11. ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.21

Thus the Sabbath of the Lord was turned into a fast in order to render it despicable before men. Such was the first great effort of the Roman church toward the suppression of the ancient Sabbath of the Bible.
ARSH April 1, 1862, page 138.22

J. N. A.

“ “When Did It Begin?” The Present Truth 11, 52.

E. J. Waggoner

A friend has sent the following inquiry, which we have replied to by letter; but which we insert here together with a more full answer, for the benefit of many others who may wish every information upon the same subject:— PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.4

Would you kindly inform me at what date the first day of the week was observed instead of the seventh, and by whom it was authorised? PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.5

It may at first thought seem strange to some when we say that this is a question that cannot be answered, except by saying, We do not know. Yet if they will but reflect that Sunday observance is a thing for which there is no Scriptural authority, and upon which the Bible is absolutely silent, their cause for wonder that no one can give the date of its introduction will be gone. PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.6

We need not at this time repeat the statements that have often appeared in these columns from first-day observers, to the effect that for Sunday observance there is no Divine command whatever. Let our readers take their Bibles and demonstrate the fact for themselves. But the fact that there is no such command is sufficient to show us that it would be impossible that there should ever have been any well-defined beginning for the custom. As the commentator Thomas Scott says:— PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.7

The change from the seventh day to the first appears to have been gradually and silently introduced, by example rather than by express precept. PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.8

Since it is a custom that finds no warrant in the Scriptures, and which is in direct opposition to the fourth commandment, it is evident that it is a part of the apostasy or “falling away” of which the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Now apostasy is always gradual. It was beginning to work in the church when Paul wrote (see verses 6-8), but did not attain any great proportions until after his death. PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.9

In his address to the elders of Ephesus, Paul said, “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.”

Acts 20:29, 30. PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.10

Even so they did. Mosheim, writing of the second century after Christ, says:— PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.11

There is good reason to suppose that the Christian bishops purposely multiplied sacred rites for the sake of rendering the Jews and the pagans more friendly to them. PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.12

After relating a number of particulars, he adds:— PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.13

A large part therefore of the Christian observances and institutions, even in this century, had the aspect of pagan mysteries. PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.14

The spirit that actuated the leading bishops being one of compliance, we need not be surprised at any heathen custom that we find in the church. The whole story of the first three centuries of apostasy is thus summed up by Dr. Killen, an Irish

Presbyterian theologian and teacher of Church history, in the preface to his book, "The Ancient Church":— PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.15 In the interval between the days of the apostles and the conversion of Constantine, the Christian commonwealth changed its aspect. The Bishop of Rome—a personage unknown to the writers of the New Testament—meanwhile rose into prominence, and at length took precedence of all other Churchmen. Rites and ceremonies of which neither Paul nor Peter ever heard, crept silently into use, and then claimed the rank of divine institutions. PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.16

Of course so prominent a heathen festival as the day of the sun could not fail to be gradually absorbed into the church that was so anxious to make friends with the heathen. The first time that Sunday came prominently to the front was in the year 396 A.D., when Victor, Bishop of Rome, undertook to force all the churches to conform to the Roman custom of celebrating Easter on Sunday. The churches in Asia were in the habit of celebrating it on the day corresponding to the ancient Passover, on whatsoever day of the week it might happen to be, and they refused to be led by Victor. Accordingly he anathematised and excommunicated them, but they nevertheless continued their old practice until the time of Constantine's Nicene Council in 325 A.D.,

when all were ordered to observe Easter on the same day that the Church of Rome did. It is worthy of note that Constantine's reason for the change was that they might "have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd." PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.17

But the Easter controversy was only an incident in the elevation of Sunday. Although professed Christians more and more adopted the heathen Sunday festival, it was not as a Sabbath, nor as a substitute for the Sabbath, which all recognised to be the seventh day of the week. Heathen customs were adopted as an addition to real, Christian observances, as “Leo the Great speaks of Christians in Rome, who first worshipped the rising sun, doing homage to the pagan Apollo before repairing to the Basilica of St. Peter.”—Schaff, volume 2, section 74. PTUK December 26, 1895, page

819.18

Bear this in mind while we note the first Sunday law ever issued. It was Constantine's decree, A.D. 321, which Canon Eyton says "was the first public step in establishing the first day of the week as a day on which there should be secular rest." Now that law ran thus:— PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.20

Let all the judges and townspeople, and all artisans rest on the venerable day of the sun. But let those who are situated in the country freely and at full liberty attend to the cultivation of their fields. PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.21

Mosheim says that in consequence of this law Sunday was “observed more sacred than before.” It is evident, therefore, that previous to A.D. 321, Sunday had not at all been observed as a day of rest. There is no doubt but that religious services had to some extent been held upon it before that date; but when we consider the decree itself, together with what is told of Gregory Thaumaturgus, whose practice probably was much the same as that of other bishops, we are shut up to the conclusion that the observance of Sunday in those days corresponded very closely to that of a Bank Holiday in these days. PTUK December 26, 1895, page 819.22

The so-called “conversion” of Constantine gave the worldly, time-serving bishops the ascendancy, not only in the Church, but in the empire, so that from that time apostasy swiftly passed to the full development of “that lawless one” of whom Paul wrote. The Council of Laodicea, about fifty years later, enacted a canon to the effect that Christians must not Judaize and be

idle on Saturday, but that they should especially honour Sunday, and, if possible, do no work on that day. Those who persisted in resting on the Sabbath were to be “shut out from Christ.”

Constantine’s sentiment, “Let us have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd,” doubtless contributed much to this result. PTUK December 26, 1895, page 820.1

Four years after the commencement of the struggle just narrated, bring us to the testimony of Tertullian, the oldest of the Latin fathers, who wrote about A. D. 200. He excuses the Christians of his time for their Sunday observance, affirming that they were not worshipers of the sun, however strongly their observance of Sunday might indicate it. His language clearly shows that there were in his time Sabbath-keepers in the Christian church, of whom, however, he speaks most contemptuously. He says: ARSH April 1, 1862, page 137.26

Here we have in brief the history and the cause of the introduction of Sunday into the Church. It insinuated itself so gradually that no one can tell when it first began. There is no date upon which we can put our finger and say, Here Sunday-keeping began. And even after the Sunday was established by law it was not regarded as a Sabbath day. It was not until after the Reformation, in 1595, that the idea was first broached that Sunday was the Sabbath. This was done by Dr. Nicholas Bound, for the purpose of concealing the fact that Protestants were following a purely Roman Catholic custom.

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