

# SECOND CENTURY WITNESSES TO THE SABBATH AND LORD'S DAY DEBATE

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*In the second century, Sunday gatherings are the almost universally established pattern of corporate worship, indicating the very early roots of the practice. The theological grounding for this is more varied, but themes of resurrection and creation/new creation play an important role.*

Why do we worship on Sunday? Does the sabbath command not mean that we should worship on Saturday? The early church had to wrestle with these questions and in doing so has left the church with valuable resources to inform our discussion.

The purpose of this paper is to survey the works of several influential second century documents that relate to sabbath and Lord's Day issues in order to: (1) demonstrate that while the theological underpinnings for Lord's Day worship were still being formed during the period, a clear pattern and priority for weekly Sunday worship can be clearly seen; (2) to highlight some of the early theological responses given in defence of Lord's Day worship; and (3) to draw some conclusions about the discussion of sabbath and Lord's Day in the works of the early church Fathers. Generally following chronological order, it interprets the primary sources within their own cultural, polemical, pastoral, and/or theological contexts and then assesses their significance.

## **Contextual influences**

Of particular influence on the early church was the religion of the Jews, both because of their shared heritage, and because of the large number of Jewish converts. The Graeco-Roman context also impacted their polemics. In addition, an inherited eschatological hermeneutic and gnostic tendencies also left an indelible impression on the sabbath theology of the Fathers.

## **Jewish Influence**

Jewish worship patterns, particularly the devotion of the sabbath to the Lord, were readily received in the early church.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> While Jewish Sabbath customs seem to be somewhat standardised, some disagreement on the significance of the Sabbath does appear exist in Jewish thought. For example, Lanfranchi explains that, 'For some Jewish groups...the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant...On the other side, Philo and Josephus insist on the universal significance of the Sabbath and on its validity for mankind,' (Pierluigi Lanfranchi,

*Kiddush* (or *Qiddush*). The Kiddush is a traditional Jewish rite by which the sabbath and feast days are consecrated to God. Variations on the rite exist, but traditionally the Kiddush contains three blessings: first over the wine, the second praising God for the sabbath, and the third over the bread. Most relevant to this study is the second blessing:

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe. By your commandments you sanctified us, took great delight in us, and gave us the holy Sabbath as an inheritance, doing so out of love and kindness to be a memorial of the works of your creation. Wherefore this is a day of holy convocations, a memorial of the exodus out of Egypt. You chose and sanctified us above all peoples, and in love and goodness you gave us the holy Sabbath as an inheritance. Blessed are you, O Lord, for making holy the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup>

The exact extent of this kinship between Jewish customs and early Christian practices will be discussed in more detail below. For now, seeing the pattern for devout and standardised sabbath observance in Jewish practice is enough to sense how early Christians, particularly Jewish converts, could feel the need to consecrate one day a week to the Lord.

### Greco-Roman Context

Related to the Jewish background of many Christians, the Greco-Roman animosity toward the Jews was also important in the shaping of early church practices.<sup>3</sup> Because Christians were linked with Jews, the

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<sup>1</sup>Attitudes to the Sabbath in Three Apostolic Fathers: Didache, Ignatius, and Barnabas,' in *Jesus, Paul, and Early Christianity* (ed. Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, Harm W. Hollander and Johannes Tromp; Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 245). See also Harold Weiss, *A Day of Gladness: The Sabbath Among Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence J. Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (4 vols.; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2009), 1: p. 3. For a more in-depth treatment, see: Paul Cotton, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Study in Early Christianity* (Bethlehem, Pa.: Times Publishing Company, 1933), p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Odom succinctly explains: 'The second century opened with intense antipathy manifested throughout the Roman Empire by pagan Gentiles toward Jews as a result of Jewish uprisings against the Roman government in Palestine, Egypt, Cyprus, and Cyrene during the reign of Trajan (98–117). It reached its climax during the Jewish revolt led by Bar Cocheba in Judea during 132–135. Emperor Hadrian (117–138) crushed the long and bloody revolt with terrible severity, razed Jerusalem, and established a heathen community there, and made it a capital crime for a Jew to set foot on its soil. Judaism was outlawed by harsh decrees of the emperor, and all of its religious practices—especially Sabbath observance, Passover celebration, and circumcision—were prohibited under penalty of death. Although the Hadrianic decrees were softened somewhat by Antoninus Pius (138–161),

early followers of Christ were also persecuted. For many early Christians, the sabbath/Lord's Day debate was not a mere academic exercise but could easily become a matter of life and death.

By the second century, the Roman calendar week had special significance attached to each day. Each day was given 'one of the seven known planets as its patron and ruler.'<sup>4</sup> Particularly of note for this study, 'The second day of the planetary week was devoted to the sun.'<sup>5</sup> The exact extent and nature of Roman sun-god worship is debated; however, several examples of historical evidence can be given to support the thesis that sun-god worship was prevalent by the beginning of the second century.<sup>6</sup>

The exact extent of Roman sun-god worship and its impact on early Christianity is beyond our current study.<sup>7</sup> Related to the weekly pattern of sun-god devotion was the Roman worship of the emperor. Jungmann explains that, 'Since the end of the first century, *kyrios*, *dominus*, was applied more and more as a distinctive name to the Roman emperor, making of him a divine being.'<sup>8</sup> Beginning with Nero, the first to use this

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widespread animosity toward Judaism and everything that seemed to smack of it smoldered long afterward.' Robert Leo Odom, *Sabbath and Sunday in Early Christianity* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Association, 1977), p. 297.

<sup>4</sup> Rordorf, 'Sunday: The Fullness of Christian Liturgical Time,' in *Early Christianity and Judaism* (ed. Everett Ferguson; New York: Garland, 1993), p. 300.

<sup>5</sup> Rordorf, 'Sunday: The Fullness of Christian Liturgical Time,' p. 300. See also, Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 24-38; Cotton, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 129.

<sup>6</sup> For example, after his conquest of Egypt in 31BC, Augustus had two obelisks sent to the Circus Maximus and the Mars Field in Rome. These were both, 'dedicated to the Sun—*Soli donum dedit*.' Tertullian's *De spectaculis* records that 'the huge obelisk' was still standing in the circus, and that the circus was 'chiefly consecrated to the Sun.' Furthermore, Tacitus, a Roman senator and historian, reports that the circus contained an old temple dedicated to the Sun. For a thorough examination of the evidence, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), p. 238. See also, Gaston H. Halsberghe's *The Cult of Sol Invictus*, mentioned in Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 238n6.

<sup>7</sup> Some proposed influences include the theme of Christ as the 'Sun of Righteousness' in early Christianity, the adoption of an eastward orientation for prayer (the direction in which the sun rises), and the date of Christmas (Christian adoption of pagan Saturnalia, celebrating the birth of the sun-god). For more on these influences, Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 252.

<sup>8</sup> J.A. Jungmann, *Early Liturgy, to the Time of Gregory the Great* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), p. 21, emphasis original. Bauckham demonstrates that the word group appears 'not in common secular use *except* with reference to the emperor' ('The Lord's Day,' in Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), p. 222), emphasis added.

title, then Domitian, who called himself ‘Lord and god,’ the use of *kyrios* became increasingly related with the throne. This ‘imperial’ appropriation of the term *kyriakos* had implications for the newly-born church. The terms ‘Lord’s Supper’ and ‘Lord’s Day’ became dangerous confessions. Explaining the takeover of the terminology, Jungman summarises, ‘So *kyriake hemera* is the day of our Kyrios, our king, the day on which our ‘Lord’ celebrated His triumph, His resurrection. ‘The Lord’s day’ is therefore a proud, imposing name, and a profession of faith.’<sup>9</sup> To claim to be meeting on *the* Lord’s Day was a potentially treasonous statement.

Roman persecution of the Jews, the Roman calendar structure, and the Roman custom of divinising and worshipping the emperor were all part of the atmosphere in which the early church Fathers lived. The relative impact of these factors is hard to determine, but they are all crucial for a proper interpretation of the early church’s view of the sabbath.

### The ‘Eighth Day’ and the Eschatological Sabbath

Several early Christian writers, borrowing from Jewish eschatological interpretive tendencies, adopted the notion of the day after the sabbath as the symbolic ‘eighth day’ which, ‘held an eschatological meaning: that which lay beyond the seven days or ages of the world’s history.’<sup>10</sup> The eighth day represented an idea ‘outside the ordinary week and beyond it. If the week stood for ‘time’, then the eighth day would speak of something beyond and outside time.’<sup>11</sup> This day came to be a ‘sign of salvation and the new creation.’<sup>12</sup> The Old Testament practice of circumcision on the eighth day was interpreted as ‘a type of the true circumcision by which [Christians] are circumcised from error and wickedness through our Lord Jesus Christ who arose from the dead on the first day of the week. For the first day of the week, which it remains the first of all days, yet is called the eighth, according to the number of all the days of the cycle and still it remains the first.’<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Jungmann, *Early Liturgy*, p. 21, emphasis original.

<sup>10</sup> Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *This Is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday in Its Jewish and Early Church Setting* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1978), p. 118.

<sup>11</sup> Beckwith and Stott, *This is the Day*, p. 117.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas K Carroll and Thomas Halton, *Liturgical Practice in the Fathers* (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1988), p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> Carroll and Halton, *Liturgical Practice in the Fathers*, p. 37. Rordorf explains, ‘We find the fathers expressing the opinion that the entire saving event of Easter was, in fact, the new meaning of ‘circumcision on the eighth day’...This bold stroke of typology can have come about only because the weekly Sunday in memory of Easter was already the Church’s day of baptism. Because the newly converted were, in fact, baptized on Sunday, the eighth day, and because they thus received spiritual circumcision, so retrospectively the resurrection of Jesus could also be referred to as a circumcision of mankind on the eighth day,’ *Sunday*, p. 277.

The themes of an eschatological sabbath and ‘eighth day’ circumcision can be found in the writings of Justin Martyr, Origen, the *Epistle to Barnabas*, and others.<sup>14</sup> The impact of such symbolism must be considered when looking at early references to the sabbath, especially after the middle of the second century when symbolic interpretation of the sabbath grew in popularity.

### Gnosticism and Sabbath

The early gnostic writers used the idea of ‘rest’ as an important part of their theology and piety. Borrowing from Jewish and Christian ideas, as well as Hellenistic sources, Gnosticism applied the ‘traditional eschatological goal of sabbath rest...to [their] present experience of salvation.’<sup>15</sup> For the gnostic, ‘rest’ is the ‘condition of the man who, illuminated by *gnosis*, is delivered from the material world.’<sup>16</sup> Indeed, for the gnostic, rest is the ‘present experience of a condition that will continue beyond death; ‘he who abides in the Rest shall rest eternally.’ The resting place of the gnostic is the heavenly world, to which even now he has access.’<sup>17</sup>

A full description of the gnostic influences upon early Christian theologies of sabbath, rest, and eschatology is beyond the scope of this paper, but their importance must be borne in mind.<sup>18</sup>

## Second Century Primary Sources

### Pliny the Younger<sup>19</sup>

In a letter written to the Emperor between 111–113 AD, Pliny remarks that his investigation has revealed that the Christians were

<sup>14</sup> See Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 41.4; Origen, *Sel. In ps.* 118; Cyprian, *Ep.* 64.4; and Augustine, *Serm.* 169.2. For more examples of primary sources, as well as a discussion of other Sabbath typologies, see Rordorf, *Sunday*, p. 278n1.

<sup>15</sup> Bauckham, ‘Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,’ in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, p. 253.

<sup>16</sup> Bauckham, ‘Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,’ p. 254. See *Epistle to Rheginos* 43:35–44:3.

<sup>17</sup> Bauckham, ‘Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,’ p. 254.

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the influence, including references to gnostic primary resources, see: Bauckham, ‘Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,’ pp. 255, 276-7. See also: Rordorf, *Sunday*, pp. 96, 136, 284; Odom, *Sabbath and Sunday in Early Christianity*, pp. 93-97; and Beckwith and Stott, *This is the Day*, pp. 118-19.

<sup>19</sup> While not an early church father, Pliny does offer one of the earliest extra-canonical testimonies of Christian worship practices; hence his inclusion in this paper. Pliny the Younger, a Latin author who was appointed a Roman consul by Emperor Trajan in 100 AD, was also later the governor of the provinces of Pontus and Bithynia.

in the habit of meeting on 'fixed stated day.' While this 'fixed' day of meeting is not explicitly named, and therefore cannot be assumed as a reference to the sabbath or the Lord's Day,<sup>20</sup> it does make it clear that the Christians in Bithynia did have a weekly pattern of meeting, presumably for corporate worship.

### Didache

The first verse of chapter 14 begins, 'And on the Lord's Day gather to break bread and to give thanks, after having confessed your offenses so that your sacrifice may be pure.'<sup>21</sup> The phrase often rendered 'on the Lord's Day' is a translation of *kata kyriaken de Kyriou* 'On (or according to) the Lord's of the Lord.'<sup>22</sup> Contrary to the traditional interpretation, Bacchiocchi believes that the author implies the noun *didache*, rather than *hemera*, so that the phrase should read 'according to the sovereign doctrine of the Lord.'<sup>23</sup> Bacchiocchi makes several arguments supporting this interpretation, the most compelling of which include: (1) the context of chapter 14 deals not with time, but with prerequisites to the Lord's table; (2) the quotation from Malachi 1:10 further emphasises not the specific time, but rather the manner of the sacrifice (14:3); (3) the *Didache* contains six other instructions using the 'according to—*kata*' construction (1:5; 2:1; 4:13; 6:1; 11; 13:6); and (4) 14:1 is linked to the previous sentence by an 'and—*de*' conjunction which allows for the omission of the word 'commandment' or 'doctrine'.<sup>24</sup>

However, Bauckham argues, 'It is doubtful whether readers would have been able to supply *didache*, since the only other attested usage of *kyriake* ('Lord's') with a noun implied is with *hemera* ('day') implied.' Further adding doubt to Bacchiocchi's proposal is the interpretation of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which reads the phrase to mean 'Lord's day.'<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the presence of the *Kyriou* is both redundant and

<sup>20</sup> Contra, e.g., Rordorf, who posits regarding this 'fixed day': 'No one seriously argues that the designation 'on a fixed day' (*stato die*) does not refer to the weekly Sunday,' in *Sunday*, pp. 254-5.

<sup>21</sup> *Didache* 14.1, translated from *La Doctrine des Douze Apôtres: Didache*, (ed. and trans. W. Rordorf and A. Tuilier; *Sources chrétiennes* 248; Paris: 1978), pp. 129-135. See also, Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1: p. 40. For a full discussion of the *Didache* 14.1 textual variants, see: Francis N. Lee, *The Covenantal Sabbath* (London: The Lord's Day Observance Society, 1974), p. 298.

<sup>22</sup> Michael W. Holmes translates the disputed phrase as, 'on the Lord's own day,' in his *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 365.

<sup>23</sup> Bacchiocchi, *Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 114n73.

<sup>24</sup> Bacchiocchi, *Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 114n73.

<sup>25</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions*, 7:30:1, as noted in Bauckham, 'The Lord's Day,' p. 228. Interestingly, Bacchiocchi himself points this out in *Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 120.

unexplained by this proposal. Other, less convincing proposals have also been made.<sup>26</sup>

A more plausible interpretation is that the context of the *kyriake*, ‘Strongly suggests the regular weekly worship of the church.’<sup>27</sup> In light of the context of the passage, as well as the usage of *kyriake* in other works of the time period,<sup>28</sup> this interpretation of weekly corporate worship held on Sunday can be reasonably assumed.

This reference to the Lord’s Day worship in the *Didache* gives evidence of very early second century convictions regarding the day of worship. Significantly, the (presumably) Jewish Christian author is advising a gentile believer to worship on the Lord’s Day. Unlike Paul’s and Ignatius’ judaising opponents, who would presumably advocate keeping a weekly sabbath, the Jewish-Christian author of the *Didache* neither speaks of following Jewish law, nor of the fourth commandment, nor of God’s rest after creation, nor of the exodus. Sadly, the theological reasoning is not given for this Lord’s Day observance; however, the presence of such a command does demonstrate a very early pattern of weekly Lord’s Day worship found in the early church, even in the thought of a (presumably) Jewish-Christian author.

### Ignatius of Antioch

*Epistle to the Magnesians* 9:1. ‘If, then, those who had lived according to the ancient practices came to the newness of hope, no longer keeping the sabbath but living in accordance with the Lord’s day [*meketi sabbatizontes alla kata kyriaken zontes*], on which our life also arose through him and his death...’<sup>29</sup> Similar to the *Didache* translation issues, Ignatius’ *Letter to the Magnesians* has seen its share of controversy over the translation of *kyriake*. Unlike the *Didache*, however, the use of *kyriake* in this letter has a referent: *zontes*.<sup>30</sup> Most scholars translate the

<sup>26</sup> Bauckham lists and judges several other proposals in ‘The Lord’s Day,’ p. 228. For example, Rordorf argues that this neoplasm emphasises the solemnity of the day. Dugmore proposes that *Kyriou* designates Easter Sunday; however this proposal is ‘Self-defeating in the context of his argument for a reference to Easter in Revelation 1:10, because it too requires that *kyriake* alone already meant Sunday in common usage.’ Audet interprets the text as having *kyriake* as an ‘explanatory marginal gloss’ that eventually replaced *hemera* in the text (Audet, *La didache: Instructions des Apotres*, p. 210n4, cited in Bauckham, ‘The Lord’s Day’). However, Bauckham shows that this interpretation is doubtful because elsewhere *hemera Kyriou* ‘always means the eschatological Day of the Lord, never a day of worship.’

<sup>27</sup> Bauckham, ‘The Lord’s Day,’ p. 228.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., Ignatius’ *Epistle to the Magnesians*, discussed below.

<sup>29</sup> Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 208.

<sup>30</sup> Three manuscripts have only *kyriake* (the Latin translation of the middle recension, the Greek manuscripts of the long recension, and the Armenian version of the middle recension). One manuscript changes *zontes* to *zoe* (Codex Parisiensis-

disputed phrase following the 'Latin text (*secundum dominicam* [literally, 'according to Sunday']), omitting *zoe* and translating 'living according to the Lord's Day.'<sup>31</sup>

Some scholars advocate translating the phrase as 'living according to the Lord's life.'<sup>32</sup> However, this proposal renders the following clause, at best, confusing: 'no longer keeping the sabbath but living in accordance with the Lord's life, on which our life also arose...' Others argue that the phrase is a possible reference to Christians rising with Christ in their baptism on Sunday.<sup>33</sup> Proponents of this minority interpretation might cite the verb *aneteilen*, a verb which 'refers to the rising of heavenly bodies rather than naturally to rising of the dead, may indicate that Ignatius has in mind the pagan name for Sunday, 'the day of the sun'... and therefore compares Christ's resurrection on Sunday with the rising of the sun.'<sup>34</sup>

The most plausible interpretation seems to be that Ignatius intends to highlight the contrast 'not between days as such but between ways of life, between 'sabbatizing' (i.e. living according to Jewish legalism) and living according to the resurrection life of Christ.'<sup>35</sup> The sabbath becomes a very natural representation of Judaism as a whole, which is 'radically incompatible with Christianity.'<sup>36</sup> Read within this context, Ignatius is teaching the Magnesians that, 'Observing the Lord's day means acknowledging that salvation is by the real death and resurrection of Jesus [;] 'sabbatizing,' the practice of the judaizers, Ignatius associates with their docetic denial of the Lord's death.'<sup>37</sup>

One final interpretive note needs to be added about the day that Ignatius references. Some scholars interpret Ignatius to be writing about Easter, instead of Sunday.<sup>38</sup> However, given the context of this passage,

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Colbertinus). Because the bulk of the manuscripts contain *kyriaken zontes*, that is the text that will be interpreted here. See Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 208.

<sup>31</sup> Bauckham, 'The Lord's Day,' p. 228.

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g.: K.A. Strand, 'Another Look at the 'Lord's Day' in the Early Church and in Rev. i. 10,' *New Testament Studies* 13 (1967): pp. 1978-79; F. Guy, 'The Lord's Day' in the letter of Ignatius to the Magnesians,' *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 2 (1964): pp. 13-14; R.A. Kraft, 'Some notes on Sabbath observance in early Christianity,' *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 3 (1965): pp. 27-28; R.B. Lewis, 'Ignatius and the 'Lord's Day,' *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 6 (1968): pp. 46-59; Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, pp. 214-15.

<sup>33</sup> See J. Liebaert, *Les Enseignements Moraux des Pères Apostoliques* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), p. 51. Cf. Bauckham, 'The Lord's Day,' p. 247n31.

<sup>34</sup> Bauckham, 'The Lord's Day,' p. 228.

<sup>35</sup> Bauckham, 'The Lord's Day,' p. 229.

<sup>36</sup> Bauckham, 'Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,' p. 260.

<sup>37</sup> Bauckham, 'Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,' p. 260.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. C.W. Dugmore, 'The Lord's Day and Easter' in *Neotestamentica et Patristica in Honorem Sexagenarii O. Cullmann, SuppNovt* 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1962): p. 279. Cf. Bauckham, 'The Lord's Day,' p. 247n36.

in which Ignatius writes emphasising ways of life, 'reference to a weekly Lord's Day would seem more natural.'<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Rordorf insists that, 'This almost necessitates the translation 'Sunday'.<sup>40</sup> A first significance found in Ignatius' arguments is the 'sharp contrast he draws between 'sabbatizing' and 'living according to the Lord's Day.' This is the first time in recorded Christian literature that the matter had been put in such a way.<sup>41</sup> Ignatius is not arguing, as Paul often does, with concern for Gentile freedom from the law. Rather, his words betray a 'more thorough-going distinction between Judaism and Christianity.' Furthermore, the Sabbath, for Ignatius, is the badge of a false attitude to Jesus Christ, while Eucharistic worship on the Lord's Day defines Christianity as salvation by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is an early witness to the dissociation of Christianity from Judaism which characterises the second century, and to the wholly negative attitude to Sabbath observance that was the corollary of that.<sup>42</sup>

Ignatius demonstrates the growing tendency for Christians to separate themselves from Jewish customs and advocates a distinctively Christian practice of Lord's Day gathering. A second significance is the clear foundation that Ignatius gives for Lord's Day observance: the resurrection. The church father, less than a generation removed from the Apostles, shows the beginnings of a Lord's Day theology that will begin to blossom over the coming centuries. A final significance is what was left unsaid by Ignatius: he neither grounds the Lord's Day in any creation language nor with the eschatological language of 'eighth day.' Unlike some theologians who come after him, Ignatius does not insinuate that the weekly observance of the Lord's Day is an explicit pattern set in place as a creation ordinance. Furthermore, nowhere does Ignatius tie the Lord's Day observance in with the eschatological 'eighth day.' For Ignatius, the Lord's Day is a weekly declaration of the resurrection of the Lord, particularly seen in the performance of the ordinances of baptism and the Eucharist.

### Justin Martyr

Justin's *Apology* was a defence of the Christian faith against persecution. It was addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius, Verus, and Lucius.<sup>43</sup> This *Apology*, along with the *Second Apology*, have been

<sup>39</sup> Bauckham, 'The Lord's Day,' p. 229.

<sup>40</sup> Rordorf, *Sunday*, p. 212. Cf. W. Stott who writes: 'It is most unlikely that there is a comparison of a weekly observance with a yearly one,' in 'A note on the word KYPIAKH in Rev. i. 10,' *New Testament Studies* 12 (1965–6): p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> Rordorf, *Sunday*, p. 261.

<sup>42</sup> Bauckham, 'Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,' p. 261.

<sup>43</sup> Justin Martyr, Denis Minns, and Paul Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford Early Christian Texts; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 34.

seen as some of the earliest examples of Christian apologetics. Indeed, some historians have given Justin credit for creating the genre of Christian apology.<sup>44</sup>

The second work to be examined is Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*. More than twice as long as the two *Apologies*, the *Dialogue* is a defence of Christianity against the most common objections of the Jews.

*Apology* 1.67. 'And on the day that is called Sunday all who live in the Cities or in Rural areas gather together in one place, and memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows.' Justin goes on to state for the Emperor the reasons for this worship: 'But Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly since this day is the first day on which God, changing darkness and matter, created the world; it was on this very day that Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead.'<sup>45</sup>

Unlike Ignatius who wrote to a body of believers, Justin is writing to the Emperor in order to explain and defend Christian beliefs and practices. The first half of the quote simply explains the Christian practice of gathering on Sundays.<sup>46</sup> He also gives a brief description of what believers did at the gathering. Justin knew that the Emperor had probably heard reports about questionable Christian practices, and this seemingly simple account would hopefully serve to quell some of the Emperor's suspicions.

The latter half of the quote shows Justin trying to give justification(s) for this weekly pattern: creation and resurrection. Justin's references to the Lord's Day in his *Apology* are significant for several reasons. First, his *Apology* is one of the first defences of the faith given by the church. Notably, the weekly gathering pattern is part of that defence. By explaining exactly what the Christian gatherings entailed, Justin would be able to correct any rumours that the Emperor had heard about Christian immorality.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Justin would be able both to explain Christian practices

<sup>44</sup> Paul Parvis, 'Justin Martyr,' *The Expository Times* 120, no. 2 (November, 2008): p. 59. See also: Sara Parvis, 'Justin Martyr and the Apologetic Tradition', in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), pp. 115–27.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, p. 68.

<sup>46</sup> Regarding the gathering of believers, Minns and Parvis argue that, 'It is highly improbable that large numbers of Christians gathered, even in the one city, for the Sunday eucharist, and even more unlikely that they travelled from rural areas to attend a eucharist with city-dwelling Christians,' in Justin, Minns, and Parvis, *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr*, p. 259n3. The physical location of the gatherings is not of primary interest in this paper; instead, the weekly pattern of gathering is of concern.

<sup>47</sup> E.g., Christians were charged with cannibalism because of language about eating Christ's 'flesh' and drinking his 'blood.' See: Andrew McGowan, 'Eating People: Accusations of Cannibalism Against Christians in the Second Century,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 4 (1994): pp. 413–42. Justin also mentions this slanderous charge in *Dialogue with Trypho* 10.

and to defend these practices over and against the Roman pagan practices and Jewish traditions of the day. Justin defends Christian practices by showing that no moral impropriety occurs, and yet shows discontinuity with surrounding customs because of the motivation for their gatherings.

This motivation for gathering on the Lord's Day is also significant. Justin gives weekly Lord's Day worship a theological foundation: God's work of creation and re-creation. For Justin, it is proper for the church to worship on Sunday, rather than Saturday, because this commemorates both God's creative work in the first week and God's resurrecting work done on Easter Sunday. The latter reason is in alignment with Ignatius' theological reasoning for Lord's Day worship. However, by making the creation week an additional reason for on-going weekly worship gathering, Justin has broadened the theological foundation for Lord's Day worship.

Interestingly, unlike those who argue for a perpetually binding sabbath creation ordinance, Justin does not ground Lord's Day worship in God's rest. Rather, he grounds weekly worship in God's activity, specifically the first day. This is significant for two reasons: (1) he can keep the creation week as a prescription for weekly worship while simultaneously (2) distancing himself from the Jewish custom of weekly sabbath worship, which was also based on the creation week. By grounding weekly Lord's Day worship within both creation and re-creation, Justin has successfully shown continuity with other Fathers (e.g., Ignatius) while also demonstrating to the Emperor that Christians do not carry the same traditions of the Jews.

*Dialogue with Trypho the Jew.* Writing specifically to defend Christianity as the proper interpretation of the Old Testament and to show that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, Justin naturally has to deal with issues regarding the Jewish law. Specifically, the question of sabbath observance is addressed multiple times. For Justin, the issue of the sabbath is tied to a proper understanding of the fulfilment of Old Covenant law and to the proper interpretation of New Covenant law. While a full treatment of Justin's theology of the law is worthy of further treatment elsewhere, it will be sufficient here to make a few observations that specifically relate to our study: (1) For Justin, Jews never properly understood Old Covenant law and do not understand how the New Law relates to it; (2) the sabbath was not a perpetually binding obligation for Old Testament believers, therefore it is not inconceivable for the command to be removed in the New Covenant; (3) in the New Law, obedience to the sabbath command is perpetual, not weekly; and (4) circumcision, along with the rest of the Old Covenant law, pointed to and has been fulfilled in Christ. This fulfilment, along with Christ's resurrection, combines to give typological resolution to Old Testament patterns and gives the foundation for New Covenant worship on Sundays, the eighth day.

First, Justin claims that the Jews understand neither the Old Covenant law nor the New Covenant. After explaining that the Mosaic Law is old and belongs only to the Jews, Justin argues that a new law has been placed and has ‘abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes after in like manner has put an end to the previous one.’ Furthermore, this new law is an ‘eternal and final law—namely, Christ—[which] has been given to us.’<sup>48</sup> Christ himself is the new law, and he has personally fulfilled and abrogated the Old Covenant commands, including the sabbaths.

Second, regarding the perpetual nature of the sabbath command, Justin argues that the Jews have wrongly understood the universality of the command. Consider Justin’s observation in chapter XIX:

Moreover, all those righteous men already mentioned [Adam, Abel, Enoch, Lot, Noah, Melchizedek, and Abraham], *though they kept no Sabbaths*, were pleasing to God; and after them Abraham with all his descendants until Moses...And you [fleshly Jews] were commanded to keep Sabbaths, that you might retain the memorial of God. For His word makes this announcement, saying, ‘That you may know that I am God who redeemed you.’<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, ‘if there was no need of circumcision before Abraham, or of the observance of Sabbaths...before Moses; no more need is there of them now.’<sup>50</sup> According to Justin, because the sabbath command was not observed before the Mosaic Law was given, it is proper to conclude that the sabbath was neither an eternal command nor was universal in its application. Rather, for Justin, the sabbath commands were given to a specific people, the Jews, for a specific purpose: ‘God enjoined you to keep the Sabbath...on account of your unrighteousness, and that of your fathers.’<sup>51</sup>

Third, regarding the Jewish observance of the law, in chapter 12 Justin accuses the Jews of having an improper understanding of what it meant to obey the sabbath commands:

This same law [New Covenant Law, or Christ] you have despised, and His new holy covenant you have slighted; and now you neither receive it, nor repent of your evil deeds. ‘For your ears are closed, your eyes are blinded, and your heart is hardened,’ Jeremiah has cried; yet not even

<sup>48</sup> Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 10, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325* (eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 1: p. 200. All subsequent citations to the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* will be indicated as ANF.

<sup>49</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho* 19, ANF, 1: p. 205, emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho* 23, ANF, 1: p. 206.

<sup>51</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho* 21, ANF, 1: p. 204.

then do you listen... You have now need of a second circumcision, though you glory greatly in the flesh. The new law requires you to keep perpetual sabbath, and you, because you are idle for one day, suppose you are pious, not discerning why this has been commanded you... The Lord our God does not take pleasure in such observances: if there is any perjured person or a thief among you, let him cease to do so; if any adulterer, let him repent; then he has kept the sweet and true sabbaths of God.<sup>52</sup>

The New Law brings with it the command to observe a perpetual sabbath. In other words, New Covenant believers should be constantly 'resting' in Christ. This 'rest' is only attained by repenting from and avoiding sin.

Fourth, and most important to our study, Justin explains that the sabbath observance as a day of rest and worship has been replaced by the eighth day. *Dialogue with Trypho* 24 explains regarding the nature of the eighth day:

It is possible for us to show how the eighth day possessed a certain mysterious import, which the seventh day did not possess, and which was promulgated by God through these rites. But lest I appear now to diverge to other subjects, understand what I say: the blood of that circumcision is obsolete, and we trust in the blood of salvation; there is now another covenant, and another law has gone forth from Zion.<sup>53</sup>

Additionally, in Chapter 41, Justin writes:

Furthermore, the command to circumcise, requiring that children are always to be circumcised on the eighth day, was a type of the true circumcision by which we are circumcised from error and iniquity through our Lord Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead on the first day after the Sabbath. This day, the day that is the first day of the week, is called the eighth day according to the cycle of all the days of the week, and yet it remains the first day.<sup>54</sup>

For Justin, the sabbath and circumcision commands of the Old Covenant served as typological forerunners that have been fulfilled by Christ. The eighth-day circumcision of Jewish boys has been replaced by the circumcision of Christ on the cross.<sup>55</sup> Eighth-day (i.e., Sunday)

<sup>52</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho* 12, ANF, 1: p. 200.

<sup>53</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho* 24, ANF, 1: p. 206.

<sup>54</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho* 41, in Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1: p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> Justin also sees the eighth day signified by the eight people saved on Noah's ark: 'For righteous Noah, along with the other mortals at the deluge, i.e., with his own wife, his three sons and their wives, being eight in number, were a symbol of the

corporate worship gathering now stands as a weekly reminder of Christ's resurrection on that sacred eighth day.

Justin shows continuity with Ignatius on several points. First, he defends Lord's Day worship and condemns weekly sabbath day observance. Also like Ignatius, Justin argues that the sabbath commands of the Old Testament were for the Jews, not for everyone.

However, Justin shows discontinuity with previous authors regarding his theological foundation for Lord's Day worship. Justin grounds his Lord's Day observance upon typological promise and fulfilment themes. Christ as the true circumcision and the New Law is the reason why believers meet on Sundays.

It is worth noting that Justin does argue that Lord's Day worship is grounded in creation (*First Apology* 67), but that the sabbath command is not (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 19), contra Exodus 20. This disparity could be explained by the different audiences of the two works (Gentiles and Jews, respectively), or perhaps an evolution in his theological framework. Either way, Justin does see some sort of creation week based theological underpinning for New Covenant Lord's Day worship.

## Observations and Conclusions

Several concluding observations can be made from this brief sketch of some early Christian authors and their views of the sabbath and Lord's Day. First, Sunday worship is clearly the established pattern of corporate worship by the middle of the second century. All of the authors cited argue for Sunday rather than Saturday worship. Bauckham summarises this evidence nicely: 'From the later second century onwards it is clear that Sunday was the regular day of Christian worship everywhere, and there is no record of any controversy over whether worship should take place on Sunday. The very universality of the custom argues its very early origin.'<sup>56</sup>

Second, the geographically widespread observance of the Lord's Day gives further evidence that the institution of the practice was before the second century, perhaps even all the way back to the New Testament. Contrary to arguments made by some, the successful substitution of Sunday for the sabbath in the second century cannot be explained by the primacy of the Church of Rome.<sup>57</sup> The *Didache* was probably Palestinian,

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eighth day, wherein Christ appeared when He rose from the dead, for ever the first in power,' *Dialogue with Trypho* 138, ANF, 1: p. 268.

<sup>56</sup> Bauckham, 'The Lord's Day,' p. 231.

<sup>57</sup> For arguments in favour of the Roman church's primacy, see Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, pp. 207ff, and Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Tesar Printing Company, 1980), pp. 237ff. For a thorough

or even North African, in origin;<sup>58</sup> Ignatius' *Letter to the Magnesians* was addressed to a church in Asia Minor; and Justin wrote from Rome.<sup>59</sup> The seemingly universal observance of Sunday worship among the early church Fathers, though separated geographically, further points toward an early (pre-second century) dating of its institution.

Third, although by this time in church history there appears to be nearly universal observance of the Lord's Day, the Fathers did have a variety of different opinions about the meaning, significance, and observance of that day. Some used the sabbath/Lord's day debate as a point of separation from the Jews. Some argued that the sabbath was the typological climax of Old Covenant circumcision, and therefore was to be observed daily by refraining from sin. Some authors tied the Lord's Day specifically to the creation week, some did not. The early church was almost completely unified in its Lord's Day observance, even if its theological foundations for Sunday gathering were not identical.

Knowing the roots of our Christian liturgical practices gives modern believers the chance to connect with the believers of previous generations. Christians today can be encouraged knowing that when they gather with the saints on the Lord's Day, they take part in a weekly tradition that stretches back almost two millennia, if not back to creation.

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evaluation of Bacchiocchi's arguments, see: Bauckham, 'Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,' pp. 270-75.

<sup>58</sup> Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 338.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Parvis, 'Justin Martyr,' p. 53.

