

The Roman Catholic View of Sunday: A Theological Evaluation

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Abstract

Sunday observance is one of the most controverted issues in Christianity. It has divided Christians into two opposite spectrums with the Roman Catholic Church being the largest denomination observing Sunday. In the context of the claims that the Catholic Church has much to do with the origin of Sunday observance, this paper attempts to understand the teaching of the Church on Sunday and evaluate it based on Seventh-day Adventist perspective. The study reveals that the Catholic Church argues for a replacement theology for the Sabbath on the basis of Christ's resurrection; that the apostles actually made the first change; that the church fathers embraced the change; and that the Church made the change official in various church councils on divine prerogatives and authority vested in the church by God. It is clear that the Church bases its teachings of the subject on different biblical hermeneutics supported by Church Tradition.

Keywords: *sabbath, Sunday, resurrection, Roman Catholic Church, church tradition.*

Introduction

The doctrine of Sunday has become one of the most controverted doctrines facing Christians today. It has caused permanent division within Christianity. On one side are the vast majority of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians who reject the Jewish Sabbath for the Christian Sunday as the day of worship. On the other side of the spectrum, a minority group of Christians continue to hold on to the Sabbath (Saturday) as a day of worship among which the Seventh-day Adventists are the most well-known.

The Roman Catholic Church claims its origins in the first century AD with Jesus as its founder¹ and Peter, the first pope.² Its understanding of the Sabbath and Sunday has a significant impact on the wider Christian community, especially in the face of the claim that it played a major role in the change of the Sabbath to Sunday. This paper is an attempt to clearly understand the teachings of the Catholic Church concerning Sunday observance and evaluate them biblically and theologically.

¹*Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 2nd ed. (NE, Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), par. 763.

²*Ibid*, par. 880-881.

Methodology of the Study

The study is based on literature. It is primarily a critical-theological analysis and evaluation of the understanding and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on Sunday observance. As much as possible, the study uses the official writings of the Catholic Church in order to understand its teachings on the subject. The writings of Catholic theologians are also used to augment the discussion. Furthermore, the study evaluates the Catholic teachings on the subject from a biblical and theological understanding of Seventh-day Adventists.

Discussion

Roman Catholic Teaching on the Doctrine of Sunday

Sunday has a special place in Catholic theology. The various terms for Sunday particularly the Lord's Day and the reasons for Sunday primacy are discussed here.

Various Terms for Sunday

Some Church Fathers employed the Greco-Roman term "dies solis" (Day of the Sun) from which Sunday, an Anglo-Saxon name is derived.³ Justin Martyr wrote that Jesus "was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the sun . . . appeared to His apostles and disciples."⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea also claimed that on Sunday, "the Sun of Justice arose on our souls."⁵ The Catholic Church does not shy away from using the term "Day of the Sun," to identify Sunday. It quotes the words of Jerome who wrote, "If it is called the day of the sun by the pagans, we willingly accept this name, for on this day arose the Light of the world; on this day shone forth the Sun of Justice in whose rays is health."⁶ Thus, the Church recognizes the fact that pagan Roman practices largely contributed to the weekly celebration of the rest on the Lord's Day (Sunday) but does not consider it an issue.⁷ There are some Catholic scholars though, who do not accept that Sunday as a pagan institution was Christianized.⁸

The other term for Sunday is the "eighth day." Catholics believe that Christian writers began to call Sunday as the eighth day as early as the first half of the second century AD.⁹ The day is recognized as a new day that has dawned upon Christians—the day of Christ's resurrection. Much support for the use of this term for Sunday is derived from the Church Fathers. The writings of Pseudo-Barnabas states: "The present Sabbaths are not acceptable to me, only the Sabbath which I have made, in which, after giving rest

³W. J. Sherzer, "Sunday," *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

⁴Justin Martyr *1 Apology* 67.7 (ANF, 1:496, edited by Philip Schaff).

⁵Sherzer, "Sunday," *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

⁶Ibid.

⁷R. North, "Sabbath," *NCE*, 12:778-782.

⁸Sean Freyne, "Sunday, the Today of Our Salvation: A Biblical View," in *Why Sunday Mass: New Views for Those Who Go & Those Who Don't*, ed. Karen Hurley (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1973), 62.

⁹Sherzer, "Sunday," *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

to all things, I will make the beginning of the eighth day, that is, the beginning of another world.”¹⁰ Further, the Epistle calls the eighth day as the true Sabbath.¹¹ Origen saw the number eight as “the figure of the future world;”¹² and Ambrose gave a redemptive meaning to the number asserting that it was a “fulfillment of our hope.”¹³ Further, Justin Martyr asserts that the eight souls saved in Noah’s ark were a symbol of the eighth day on which Jesus rose from the dead.¹⁴ The Church also relates about the circumcision of the Jewish male child on the eighth day.¹⁵

The third term used for Sunday is the “day of new creation.” Sherzer states, “Whereas the last day of the week was sacred to the Jews as the day on which creation was completed, the first day is sacred to the Christians as the day of the new creation begun in the Resurrection of the Lord.”¹⁶ It was on Sunday that God also began both the first-fruits of the creation of the world and the first-fruits of the resurrection.¹⁷ It is superior to the Sabbath.¹⁸ By taking part in the gathering on Sunday and taking part in the Eucharist, a believer is celebrating the “re-creation of men in the New Adam and of the New Testament covenant made in the blood of Jesus.”¹⁹

Sunday as the Lord’s Day

The name *dies solis* (Day of the Sun) for Sunday was eventually replaced by the name *dies dominica* (Day of the Lord) as the legal name for the day. This title summarizes the theology of Sunday. It refers to Christ the Lord, the Conqueror and Master through His resurrection. Thus, the title “represents for Christians the marvelous intervention of God whereby he redeemed them in Christ, initiated His kingdom with them as Christ’s Body, and prepared them for ultimate glory in heaven.”²⁰ The words of Jerome reflect the teachings of the Catholic Church. He wrote, “The Lord’s day, the day of Resurrection, the day of Christians, is our day. It is called the Lord’s day because on it the Lord rose victorious to the Father.”²¹

In the entire Bible, Revelation 1:10²² is the only place where the phrase “the Lord’s day,” is found. Some Catholics argue that if John was referring to the Sabbath (Saturday), he would have simply said “the Sabbath” instead of using the phrase.²³ However, he did

¹⁰Barnabas *The Epistle of Barnabas* (ANF, 1:395, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson).

¹¹Dom Jean Hild, “The Mystical Meaning of the Sunday,” in *Restore the Sunday: The Christian Concept of the Sunday and Practical Suggestions for the Sanctification in Lay Life*, ed. W. O’ Brien (Loveland, OH: Grailville, 1949), 54.

¹²Sherzer, “Sunday,” *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Hild, “The Mystical Meaning of the Sunday,” 53.

¹⁵Sherzer, “Sunday,” *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Sherzer, “Sunday,” *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

²¹*CCC*, par. 1166.

²²“On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.”

²³“The Sabbath or the Lord’s Day,” *Catholic News Agency*, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/apologetics/catholic-doctrines-and-practices/the-sabbath-or-the-lords-day/> (accessed January 3, 2012).

not because he was clearly referring to Sunday and not the Sabbath. It is also pointed out that the terminology John used was already accepted by the church during his time to identify Sunday.²⁴ Thus, the commandment “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” is often changed to “Remember the Lord’s Day to keep it holy.”²⁵ However, there are some Catholic scholars who prefer to use the word “probability,” rather than “certainty,” in the usage of the term “the Lord’s Day,” to identify Sunday.²⁶ They agree that there is no certainty in the usage of the term by John to identify Sunday but that there is a probability that he meant Sunday.

The Resurrection of Jesus—the Overarching Factor

For Catholics, Christ’s resurrection on Sunday is the reason that makes the day special.²⁷ In fact, the various terms associated with it relate to the resurrection theme. For instance, Sunday is called the “first day,” because as “the day of Christ’s Resurrection,” it recalls the first creation. It is called the “eighth day,” after the Sabbath, because it is a symbol of the “new creation” brought in by the Resurrection of Christ.²⁸

In his *Apologetics*, Justin Martyr wrote, “We all gather on the day of the sun, for it is the first day [after the Jewish Sabbath, but also the first day] . . . and on this same day Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead.”²⁹ Thus, for Christians, Sunday is the first day of all the days, the “first of all the feasts.”³⁰ Additionally, the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the Creation of God are two other reasons for Sunday holiness that the early church leaders embraced.³¹

Sunday Celebration, Eucharist, and Baptism

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* describes the celebration on Sunday as a joyous occasion both during the time of the early church and in the present time. All forms of sorrow and penance such as kneeling and fasting are to be set aside.³² It is even considered sinful to do penance on Sunday.³³

Two of the sacraments associated with Sunday are the Eucharist and Baptism. According to Catholic view, baptism was a Sunday event that characterized the early Christians. It is considered as an appropriate day for baptism because it indicates the

²⁴Hild, “The Mystical Meaning of the Sunday,” 47.

²⁵Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, *The Catholic Faith Catechism: Final Draft Submitted to the Bishops* (Makati, Manila: Word & Life, 1994), 193.

²⁶Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Sacra Pagina Series: Revelation*, vol. 16 ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 50.

²⁷*Compendium Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCCC)* (NE, Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana), ques. 452.

²⁸CCC, par. 2174.

²⁹Justin Martyr, *I Apologetics*, 67.

³⁰CCC, par. 2174.

³¹Joseph Quinn, “Sunday,” *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia (MCE)*, ed. Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1944), 1: 841.

³²Sherzer, “Sunday,” *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

³³*Ibid.*

burial of man to sin and the resurrection to newness of life in Christ.³⁴ The celebration of the Lord's Day on Sunday and the Eucharist lies at the very "heart of the Church's life."³⁵ The faithful are to assemble together in one place, listen to God's word, and participate in the Eucharist. By this, they are reminded of the death and resurrection of Christ.³⁶

The Eucharist is considered as the "chief characteristic of a Christian's observance of Sunday,"³⁷ due to which the first day is the "foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church."³⁸ Participation in the Eucharist is the "foundation and confirmation of" the Christian practice.³⁹ When one is absent for the Eucharist on Sunday without any valid reason, one risks the tie that binds the members of Christ's body and also deprive oneself of the spiritual nourishment.⁴⁰ One can be absent for the Mass only due to serious reasons such as illness, the care of infants, or by the dispensation of the local priest. If one deliberately fails to attend the Mass, he or she is considered to have committed a "grave sin."⁴¹

Sunday and Rest

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that just as God rested on the seventh day from his work of creation, man also has "a rhythm of work and rest."⁴² Any work or activity that hinders the worship of God is to be avoided on Sunday. This includes any activity that prevents one to perform acts of mercy, and relaxation of both mind and body,⁴³ any "servile work, from judicial proceedings, and, unless legitimate custom or special indults make exceptions, from public markets, fairs, and other public buying and selling."⁴⁴ Pope John XXIII wrote, "Man has the right and the need to periodic rest . . . to renew bodily strength, enjoy a decent measure of recreation, and to promote family unity by making possible more frequent and harmonious contacts among family members. Thus religion, morality and hygiene, all unite in proclaiming the law of periodic rest."⁴⁵

The Catholic Church exempts those who are unable to fully observe Sunday such as those who work in sports, restaurants, and public services. Now, although they may not be able to observe the day in its entirety, they are also asked to observe some part of it.⁴⁶ The Church also encourages its members to "seek recognition of Sundays and the Church's holy days as legal holidays . . . and give everyone a public example of prayer, respect, and joy and defend their traditions as a precious contribution to the spiritual life

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵CCC, par. 2177.

³⁶Episcopal Commission, *The Catholic Faith Catechism*, 195.

³⁷Sherzer, "Sunday," *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

³⁸CCC, par. 2177.

³⁹Ibid, par. 2181.

⁴⁰Sherzer, "Sunday," *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

⁴¹CCC, par. 2181, 2183.

⁴²Ibid, par. 2184.

⁴³Ibid, par. 2185.

⁴⁴Herron, "Sunday and Holyday Observance," *NCE*, 13: 799-802.

⁴⁵Episcopal Commission, *The Catholic Faith Catechism*, 195.

⁴⁶CCC, par. 2187.

of society.”⁴⁷ In countries where Sunday is not legally recognized, members are nevertheless encouraged to observe the day as best as possible.⁴⁸

The Change of the Sabbath

The change of the Sabbath to Sunday, the theological basis for the change, the agents that brought the change, support from the Scripture and tradition, and views of Catholic individuals are discussed in this section.

Sunday Replaced the Sabbath

In Catholic theology, Sunday has replaced the Sabbath.⁴⁹ The honor and preeminence of the Sabbath has been accorded to Sunday. It controls the Christian week and has its own sanctifying power.⁵⁰ The Church believes in the words of Ignatius of Antioch who wrote: “Those who lived according to the old order of things have come to a new hope, no longer keeping the Sabbath, but the Lord’s Day, in which our life is blessed by him and by his death.”⁵¹ Just “as baptism replaced circumcision (Col 2:11-12) for Christians, so does Sunday replace Saturday.”⁵²

Now, the replacement position does not mean that Sunday is a continuation of the Sabbath but a direct replacement. One must disassociate Sunday from the Sabbath commandment as a day that developed uniquely and separately from the Sabbath.⁵³ Bacchiocchi and others have consistently confirmed this fact.⁵⁴

Although the Jewish Sabbath was abrogated, natural law demands that one worship God on a regular basis so that it may not be hindered by daily business. Pope John XXIII wrote, “God has a right to demand of man that he dedicate one day of the week to the proper and fitting worship of the eternal Godhead . . . freed from material preoccupations.”⁵⁵ The abrogation of the Sabbath left a void that Christians were to fill in due time with another day.⁵⁶ Sunday observance serves as “an outward, visible, public,

⁴⁷CCC, par. 2188.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹CCC, par. 2175; Hahn, *CBD*, 785.

⁵⁰Hild, “The Mystical Meaning of the Sunday,” 46.

⁵¹CCC, par. 2175.

⁵²“The Sabbath or the Lord’s Day,” *Catholic News Agency*.

⁵³Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2008), 165-212; General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines (SDA Believe)*, 2nd ed. (Silver Springs, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), 292, 293.

⁵⁴Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 165-212; *SDA Believe*, 292, 293; Eugene Laverdiere, “The Origin of Sunday in the New Testament,” in *Sunday Morning: A Time for Worship*, ed. Mark Searle (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press), 14.

⁵⁵Episcopal Commission, *The Catholic Faith Catechism*, 195.

⁵⁶Herron, “Sunday and Holyday Observance,” *NCE*, 13: 799-802.

and regular worship.”⁵⁷ It “fulfills the moral command of the Old Covenant, taking up its rhythm and spirit in the weekly celebration of the Creator and Redeemer of his people.”⁵⁸

The Apostles Changed the Sabbath to Sunday

The Catholic Church recognizes the fact that according to the Jewish method of reckoning, Sunday was the first day of the week; and the Sabbath, the seventh day, the day of solemn rest and worship both for the Jews and the Christians alike during the early period of Christianity.⁵⁹ However, it is obvious that much has changed.

The Church believes that the change of the Sabbath to Sunday began with the Apostles,⁶⁰ beginning with Paul.⁶¹ The first Christians were Sabbath-keeping Jews. However, they began to worship after the sunset on Saturday and at dawn on Sunday to pray, eat agape meal and partake of the Lord’s Supper.⁶² The *Catholic Encyclopedia* also states that “believers in Christ have from the first come together on Sunday to anticipate the second coming of the Lord, to encounter the risen Christ in the Eucharist, and to gratefully recall to mind the death and Resurrection of Jesus.”⁶³ During the course of the writing of the Gospels, Sunday had become sacred to the Christians.⁶⁴

The Church duly recognizes the numerous occasions when Paul attended the services of the synagogues on the Sabbath. However, it holds the position that it was Paul’s custom to attend the Sabbath services, not because of obligation but for evangelistic purpose. In other words, Paul attended the Sabbath services in the synagogues so that he may convert the Jews to Christianity.⁶⁵

Cited Biblical References for Support

There are some biblical references, often cited in support of the validity of the observance of Sunday as a day of worship. Some of these texts include Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Colossians 2:16-17, Revelation 1:10. Sean Freyne points out that the three references to the first day of the week in the NT apply to Gentile Christians indicating that probably, Sunday as a distinct Christian day of worship developed among the Gentile Christians, “away from the influence of the Jewish Sabbath observance.”⁶⁶

Acts 20:7. “And on the first day of the week, when we had met for the breaking of the bread, Paul addressed them.” This event is said to have taken place on the evening of the first day (Sunday) and ended on the morning of the second day (Monday). The same

⁵⁷CCC, par. 2176.

⁵⁸Ibid. See also Robert C. Broderick, “Sunday,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (Nashville, NY: Thomas Nelson, 1976), 565.

⁵⁹Sherzer, “Sunday,” *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

⁶⁰“Sunday,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=11155> (accessed December 27, 2012).

⁶¹Broderick, “Sabbath,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 533.

⁶²Reynolds R. Ekstrom, “Sabbath/Sunday,” *The New Concise Catholic Dictionary (NCCD)* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third, 1995), 223.

⁶³Sherzer, “Sunday,” *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

⁶⁴Herron, “Sunday and Holyday Observance,” *NCE*, 13: 799-802.

⁶⁵Hahn, *CBD*, s.v. “Sabbath.”

⁶⁶Freyne, “Sunday, the Today of our Salvation,” 61.

time frame is given for the breaking of the bread at Emmaus and the assembly in Jerusalem.⁶⁷ The Catholic Church does not claim that this verse decidedly, without a doubt points to the weekly gathering for worship on Sunday but that it indicates the probability of such a practice.⁶⁸ A Catholic theologian comments that if Sunday had pagan origin, Paul would have been against the meeting and breaking of bread on Sunday. His silence meant that he approved of the meeting on that day.⁶⁹

1 Corinthians 16:2. “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” This verse is interpreted to mean that Christians were to gather for worship every Sunday during which they were to collect special offerings.⁷⁰

Colossians 2:16-17. “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” This text is interpreted by Catholics to mean that the Jewish diet, festivals, and Sabbaths (including the weekly Sabbath) are no longer to be observed by Christians. They were only shadows of the real things in Christ. Now, Jesus is the focus.⁷¹

Support from the Church Tradition

Tradition is defined as “the living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church. The oral preaching of the Apostles, and the written message of salvation under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Bible), are conserved and handed on as the deposit of faith through the apostolic succession in the Church.”⁷² Tradition of the Church plays a very important and crucial role in the theology of the Catholic Church.⁷³

According to the *Didache*, Christians are to come together and break bread.⁷⁴ Ignatius in his *Epistle to the Magnesians* writes of the Christians of his time as “no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day, on which also Our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death.”⁷⁵ Further, it is written in *Epistle of Barnabas* that Christians observe “the eighth day (i.e. the first of the week) . . . on which Jesus rose again from the dead.”⁷⁶ Justin Martyr was the first Christian writer to call the first day of the week as Sunday.⁷⁷ Tertullian was the first writer to make mention of the rest on Sunday.⁷⁸

A reading of the Church Fathers reveals that many of them had a replacement view of the Sabbath on account of the resurrection of Christ and that the early church was

⁶⁷Laverdiere, “The Origin of Sunday,” 19.

⁶⁸Herron, “Sunday and Holyday Observance,” *NCE*, 13: 799-802.

⁶⁹“The Sabbath or the Lord’s Day,” *Catholic News Agency*.

⁷⁰Herron, “Sunday and Holyday Observance,” *NCE*, 13: 799-802.

⁷¹“The Sabbath or the Lord’s Day,” *Catholic News Agency*; Hahn, *CBD*, s.v. “Sabbath.”

⁷²Glossary, *CCC*, p. 901.

⁷³The Catechism states that “both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.” *CCC*, par. 82.

⁷⁴“Sunday,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

⁷⁵Ignatius *Epistle to the Magnesians*, IX:174.

⁷⁶Barnabas *Epistle of Barnabas*, XV: 394.

⁷⁷Justin Martyr *Apologetics I*, 67:496.

⁷⁸Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, I: 256.

responsible for that change. They identify the Sabbath as a Jewish institution and Sunday, as a Christian institution.⁷⁹ Philip Schaff wrote, “The fathers did not regard the Christian Sunday as a continuation of, but as a substitute for, the Jewish Sabbath, and based it not so much on the fourth commandment, and the primitive rest of God in creation, to which the commandment expressly refers, as upon the resurrection of Christ and the apostolic tradition.”⁸⁰ Most of the Fathers also identified the term “Lord’s Day,” with Sunday.⁸¹

According to St. Caesarius of Arles in the sixth century, the “holy Doctors of the Church had decreed that the whole glory of the Jewish Sabbath had been transferred to the Sunday, and that Christians must keep the Sunday holy in the same way as the Jews had been commanded to keep holy the Sabbath Day.”⁸² However, this tendency of applying the regulations of the Sabbath to Sunday was rejected by the *Council at Orleans* in 538 as Jewish and non-Christian.⁸³ So, the Catholic understanding of Sunday is that it is a replacement and not a continuation of the Jewish Sabbath.

Roman Catholics on the Change of the Sabbath

Many Catholics agree that the Catholic Church made the change from the Jewish Sabbath to Sunday. Cardinal Casper del Fosso, archbishop of Reggio, on January 18, 1562, during the seventeenth session of the Council of Trent asserted the authority of the Catholic Church as established in the changing of the Sabbath to Sunday.⁸⁴ Henry Tuberville stated that “the Church hath power to command feasts and holydays . . . by the very act of changing the Sabbath into Sunday, which Protestants allow of.”⁸⁵ Stephen Keenan also wrote that “the Church has power to institute festivals of precept . . . substituted the observance of Sunday the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday the seventh day, a change for which there is no Scriptural authority.”⁸⁶

In *The Convert’s Catechism of Catholic Doctrine*, Peter Geiermann points out that Christians observe Sunday instead of Saturday “because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday . . . that the Church made the change by the divine authority given by Christ.”⁸⁷ In his official organ, *The Catholic Mirror* Cardinal Gibbons commented that “The Catholic Church, . . . by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday.”⁸⁸

⁷⁹Koberson Langhu, “Church Fathers on the Sabbath and Sunday,” (A Term Paper for the course CHIS 885 Seminar in Heresies in the History of the Early Church, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, AIIAS, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, October 2012), 40-41.

⁸⁰Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. II, Ante-Nicene Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 202.

⁸¹Langhu, “Church Fathers on the Sabbath and Sunday,” 42.

⁸²“Sunday,” *Catholic Encyclopedia: Catholic Online*.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴George R. Knight, ed. *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine (QOD)*, Annotated Edition (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 148.

⁸⁵Ibid., 154-155.

⁸⁶Ibid., 155.

⁸⁷Robert K. Sanders, “The Pope Nor the Roman Catholic Church Changed Sabbath to Sunday,” *Truth or Fables*, http://www.truthorfables.com/Pope_Did_Not_Change_Sabbath_Sunday.htm#theconverts (accessed January 15, 2013).

⁸⁸*Alpha & Omega Almightywind Ruach Ha Kodesh Wildfire Last Chance Ministry*, <http://www.almightywind.com/wolves/sabbathchanged.htm> (accessed January 15, 2013).

Finally, the Church has consistently made the point that the change of the Sabbath to Sunday occurred well before the reign of Emperor Constantine—during the time of the Apostles.⁸⁹ What is being said here is that the Sunday decrees issued by Constantine and the Council of Laodicea only legalized the changes already made by the apostles in the first century. This seems to be the official position of the Catholic Church.

Evaluation of Catholic Doctrine of Sunday

This section evaluates the Catholic doctrine of Sunday from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective. The focus of this evaluation is on the identity of the Lord's Day and the origin and reasons for Sunday observance. For the other terms (day of the sun, the eighth day, and the day of new creation), it will suffice to point out that they are nowhere found in the Bible. These are terminologies developed by the Roman Catholic Church based on extra-biblical sources.

Sunday as the Lord's Day

Catholics identify the "Lord's Day," in Rev 1:10 as Sunday. They claim that by the time John wrote the book of Revelation, Sunday was known as the "Lord's Day." However, the context of the text does not provide any clue about the identity of the day. Even John's contemporaries provide no information because "there is no unequivocal use of the phrase in any authentic document for nearly a century after John."⁹⁰

Although most Bible commentators identify the "Lord's Day" with Sunday, the main issue is whether it was so in the late first century and whether it is Sunday John meant in Revelation. The first church father to identify the "Lord's Day" with Sunday was Clement of Alexandria somewhere about AD 190. Bishop Irenaeus in AD 180 or 185 mentioned about the Lord's Day but he was probably referring to Easter Sunday rather than the weekly Sunday.⁹¹ Barnabas of Alexandria (c. AD 130) and Justin Martyr (c. AD 150) did not use the term "Lord's Day" to refer to the first day of the week.⁹² Three early documents of the Didache, Ignatius, and Pliny, the Younger did not use the term.⁹³

Adventists accept the fact that some church fathers called Sunday as the "Lord's Day." However, they point out the fact that such identification did not take place until the latter part of the second century. For example, the Apocryphal *Gospel According to Peter* calls Sunday as the "Lord's Day." Since it was written over 70 years after John had written the book of Revelation, one cannot say for sure that the "Lord's Day" in John's time refers to Sunday.⁹⁴

⁸⁹"The Sabbath or the Lord's Day," *Catholic News Agency*.

⁹⁰Walter F. Specht, "Sunday in the New Testament," in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review And Herald, 1982), 126.

⁹¹Kenneth A. Strand, "The 'Lord's Day' in the Second Century," Appendix F, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, edited by Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 346.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 347.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 350.

⁹⁴"Lord's Day," [Rev. 1:10], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976-1980), 7:735; Kenneth A. Strand, "The Sabbath," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 12 vols. of Commentary Reference Series, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 507.

Further, John's Gospel is usually dated later than the book of Revelation. Yet, in his Gospel, John refers to Sunday simply as "the first day of the week." This is strange if it was known as the Lord's day.⁹⁵ The Bible seems to point to only one day as the Lord's Day—the seventh day Saturday. God blessed and sanctified the seventh day (Gen. 2:3). He declared it to be a memorial for His act of creation and also said "the Seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God" (Ex. 20:10). He called it "My holy day," and "the holy day of the Lord" (Isa. 58:13). All three of the Synoptic Gospels quote Christ Himself declaring, "The Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28; Matt. 12:8; Luke 6:5). It is clear that "there is no biblical precedent to indicate John would apply that term to the first day of the week, or Sunday."⁹⁶

Specht asserts that John had a purpose in identifying the Sabbath as the "Lord's Day." The book of Revelation has as its background the conflict between "Lord Caesar" and the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians including John himself were being persecuted because they refused to recognize Caesar as their Lord. There were special days devoted to the Roman emperor which the Roman citizens and subjects were to honor. Then, "would it not be appropriate under such circumstances to exalt Jesus Christ as 'the ruler of kings on earth' (Rev. 1:5), and to refer to the Sabbath as the real 'Lord's day'?"⁹⁷

Interestingly enough, the apocryphal *Acts of John* identifies the seventh day as the Lord's Day. Thus, the "popular attempt" to identify the "Lord's Day" with Sunday "does not rest on evidence supplied by the Scriptures but upon post-apostolic usage of the phrase, long after John's time."⁹⁸

The Resurrection of Jesus as the Overarching Factor

To a Roman Catholic, the Resurrection of Christ on Sunday is the reason for Sunday observance. All the superlative terminologies attached to the day revolve around the Resurrection theme. Take that away and the day is like any other day of the week.

The importance of the Resurrection of Christ is vividly explained in 1 Corinthians 15. The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes the fact that without the resurrection of Christ, all is lost for a believer in Christ. In fact, it is meaningless to be a Christian.⁹⁹ Philip Schaff's words on the importance of Christ's resurrection reflect Adventists' view: "The resurrection of Christ is emphatically a test question upon which depends the truth or falsehood of the Christian religion. It is either the greatest miracle or the greatest delusion which history records."¹⁰⁰

Now, there is no instruction in the Bible that Christians should observe Sunday in honor of Christ's resurrection. Instead, it has given another ceremony to commemorate that event—Baptism, a "symbol of Christ's death and resurrection."¹⁰¹ When one emerges from the water of baptism, he is symbolically being raised up with Christ in newness of life.¹⁰²

⁹⁵Specht, "Sunday in the New Testament," 126.

⁹⁶*SDA Believe*, 287.

⁹⁷Specht, "Sunday in the New Testament," 126.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 127.

⁹⁹*SDA Believe*, 129, 395, 396.

¹⁰⁰Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vols. I, 173.

¹⁰¹*SDA Believe*, 215.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 215, 216.

The Catholic Church also performs baptism with the same reasons. However, it appears that the Church has placed greater importance to Sunday, a day not sanctioned by God in commemoration of His Resurrection. Sunday celebrations through the Eucharist and baptism may appear to be noble and right. However, the attachment of the services with Sunday as the day of Christ's resurrection is misplaced. The importance of Sunday has been overemphasized with no clear biblical evidences. The Bible does not prescribe the Eucharist or Baptism to be performed exclusively on a specific day nor does it say that one has committed a grave sin if he fails to participate in the Eucharist on Sunday.

Sunday and Rest

The Catholic Church teaches that the Sabbath was given to man as a day of rest. Seventh-day Adventists agree with Catholics on this point. However, according to historical records, Sunday was a working day until the fourth century. The Christians would gather for worship only in the night and early morning hours.¹⁰³ So, Sunday observance as a day of rest was a later development.¹⁰⁴

In the Catholic Church, some people working in certain areas such as sports, restaurants, and public services are exempted from observing the Lord's Day in its entirety as long as they get to observe part of it. According to the biblical instruction for Sabbath-keeping, there is no such exemption. Every single individual, irrespective of his type of job, is to observe the Sabbath holy and wholly.¹⁰⁵

The Apostles and the Change of the Sabbath

The Catholic Church teaches that the apostles made the change of the Sabbath to Sunday in the first century on the basis of several reasons such as the resurrection of Christ (primary reason), the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the creation of God. Several biblical references are cited for this teaching (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2, and Colossians 2:16-17).

A careful study of the cited references does not reveal a clear instruction for Sunday observance. The Bible seems to point to a meeting of the early Christians on Sundays but it does not qualify the type of meeting they had. The word "probably," is often used with these references, that probably it was a regular Sunday meeting. The fact that Sunday theology is built on probability rather than certainty is weak.

Adventists are of the opinion that the apostles, rather than changing the Sabbath to Sunday, observed the Sabbath according to the Ten Commandments.¹⁰⁶ On Friday, *paraskeue* (preparation) or *pro-sabbaton* (fore-sabbath) i.e. the day before the Sabbath, they asked the Roman authority that the body of Jesus be taken down from the cross and be buried as the Deuteronomic law forbade the body of a criminal to be hanged during the Sabbath.¹⁰⁷ They then interrupted their burial preparation for the body of Jesus and returned to keep the Sabbath with plans to continue the unfinished work on "the first day

¹⁰³Sherzer, "Sunday," *NCE*, 13: 797-799.

¹⁰⁴Herron, "Sunday and Holyday Observance," *NCE*, 13: 799-802.

¹⁰⁵*SDA Believe*, 282, 283; Exodus 20:8-11.

¹⁰⁶ Strand, "The Sabbath," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 12 vols., 505.

¹⁰⁷Specht, "Sunday in the New Testament," 103.

of the week” (Luke 23:56).¹⁰⁸ After they rested on the Sabbath, they (the women) came to continue the unfinished work of anointing the body of Jesus early in the morning of the first day of the week (Luke 24:1).

Just like Jesus, it was also Paul’s custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath to worship and to preach (Acts 17:1-2). Just as Jesus began His ministry in the synagogues, Paul and the other disciples also did the same.¹⁰⁹ It is to be noted that the Sabbath and synagogue preaching are often linked together in the book of Acts.

It is also recorded that on many occasions Paul attended the synagogues on the Sabbath to preach (Acts 13:14; 18:4). Even the people including Gentiles invited him to preach to them on the Sabbath (Acts 13:42, 44). At Pisidian Antioch, most Jews were angered at the preaching of Paul in the synagogue on the Sabbath. However, the Gentiles were receptive and pleaded with Paul to preach to them again the next Sabbath (Acts 13:42, 44). If the Sabbath had been changed to Sunday, Paul would have told them to turn up the next day i.e. Sunday because it is their new worship day. But the fact is that he did not.¹¹⁰ In places where there were no synagogues, Paul preached to the people on the Sabbath in nature. A good example is the worship on the Sabbath by the river side in Philippi (Acts 16:13).

When Paul preached in the synagogues, there were both Jews and Gentiles. At Corinth, Paul preached in the synagogue every Sabbath persuading both the Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4). In some places, there were more Gentile converts than Jews such as in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:9). It is true that at times Paul had to withdraw from the synagogues due to oppositions. But the withdrawing of the Christians from the synagogues did not take place abruptly but gradually.¹¹¹

The “Sabbaths,” of Colossians 2:16-17 have been identified to include the weekly Sabbath. However, Catholic scholars are not unanimous in this interpretation. It is generally agreed that the term could refer either to the weekly Sabbath or to the Jewish Sabbaths.¹¹² Thus, there is no clear instruction to observe Sunday in these texts. The “historic position” of the Adventist Church on the identity of the Sabbath(s) in Col. 2:16-17 is that they refer to the annual Sabbaths¹¹³ and not the Seventh-day Sabbath.¹¹⁴ The annual Sabbaths (seven in number) all pointed to Christ and His sacrifice. Since Christ already came and completed His sacrifice, these Sabbaths are no more a requirement for man.¹¹⁵ Many commentators have also identified the “Sabbaths” of Colossians with the annual Sabbaths and not the weekly Sabbath.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸SDA Believe, 286.

¹⁰⁹Specht, “Sunday in the New Testament,” 106.

¹¹⁰Mark A. Finley, *The Almost Forgotten Day* (Siloam Springs, AR: The Concerned Group, 1988), 21.

¹¹¹Specht, “Sunday in the New Testament,” 109.

¹¹²Harrington, *Sacra Pagina Series*, 110.

¹¹³These Sabbaths were not weekly and could fall on any day, sometimes coinciding with the weekly Sabbath. Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (SDABD)*, rev. ed. (1979), s.v. “Sabbath.”

¹¹⁴Kenneth H. Wood, “The ‘Sabbath Days’ of Colossians 2:16, 17,” Appendix D, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, edited by Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 338; Knight, *QOD*, 137; “Sabbath days,” [Colossians 2:16-17], *SDABC*, 7:205-206; Strand, *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 506; *SDA Believe*, 286, 287.

¹¹⁵Knight, *QOD*, 137.

¹¹⁶Strand, “Sabbath,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 506.

Circumcision and the Sabbath were two of the most important practices of the Jewish people. In the Apostolic church, a controversy arose among the Christians about the practice of circumcision which had to be settled by the Council of Jerusalem. Now, if there had been a similar controversy concerning the Sabbath, whether Christians still need to observe or not, it is apparent that it would have been mentioned in the Scriptures. Silence on the matter is probably an indication that there was no such controversy.

Catholics Speak

While the Catholic Church claims that the apostles had made the change of the Sabbath to Sunday, several scholars and church leaders within Catholicism testify to the fact that there is no biblical authorization for Sunday observance. Cardinal James Gibbons asserts, “You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scripture enforce the religious observance of Saturday.”¹¹⁷ Stephen Keenan comments, “Protestants have no Scripture for the measure of and substitute Sunday in its place without Scriptural authority—consequently they have for all this only traditional authority.”¹¹⁸

Another compelling thought comes from the *Clifton Tracts*, written by a Catholic to Protestant Christians. One statement reads: “If you look to the Bible as an authority for the observance of the day, you will not find it. It is well to remind the Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and all other Christians outside the pale of the Mother Church, that the Bible does not support them anywhere in the observance of Sunday. The Seventh-day Adventists are the only ones who properly apply the term ‘Sabbath,’ because they do observe the seventh day, and not the first day, as the day of rest.”¹¹⁹

Roman Catholic scholar John A. O’Brien also comments that the observance of Sunday “rests upon the authority of the Catholic Church and not upon an explicit text in the Bible. That observance remains as a reminder of the Mother Church from which the non-Catholic sects broke away—like a boy running away from home but still carrying in his pocket a picture of his mother or a lock of her hair.”¹²⁰

Church Tradition and Sunday Observance

In Catholicism, where there is a lack of certainty in the Bible, it is supplemented by the Church Tradition which plays a major role in the theology of the Church. The theology of Sunday is built both on Scripture and Tradition. As pointed out earlier, there is only probability, not certainty, in the Scriptural instruction for Sunday observance.

This amalgamation of Scripture-Tradition authority is acceptable as long as its teachings are not in contradiction to the Scripture. The Seventh-day Adventist Church accepts the role of tradition in the church. However, unlike the Catholic Church where

¹¹⁷James Gibbon, *The Faith of Our Fathers*, 47th ed. (Baltimore, MD: John Murphy & Co., 1895), 111, 112.

¹¹⁸Stephen Keenan, *Doctrinal Catechism*, 354 as quoted in Finley, *The Almost Forgotten Day*, 104.

¹¹⁹Brotherhood of St. Vincent of Paul, *The Clifton Tracts*, vol. IV (Barclay Street, NY: P. J. Kenedy Excelsior Catholic Publishing House, 1856), 15. The Tracts can be accessed from <http://biblelight.net/clifton.htm> (accessed January 22, 2013).

¹²⁰John A. O’Brien, *The Faith of Millions* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1974), 50.

Tradition and Scripture are on equal footing, the Adventist Church accepts the Scripture as the supreme authority for faith and doctrine. All extra-biblical authorities must be tested by the Scripture, including tradition.¹²¹

The Sunday Laws and the Catholic Church

The first Sunday Law of March 7, 321 AD issued by Constantine¹²² is important. However, its importance does not go beyond its prohibition for work on Sunday. The Law stated: “On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country, however, persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits; because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain-sowing or for vine-planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost.”¹²³

As can be seen here, Constantine’s Sunday Law had not much Christian orientation. It was civil in nature and not related to the Sabbath commandment or even the Resurrection of Christ. Rather, the title “venerable Day of the Sun,” indicates its pagan roots. Also, farming was not prohibited which is directly in contradiction with the Sabbath Commandment. It is agreed by scholars that Constantine had a political agenda in issuing the Sunday Law—to unite the Christians and the pagan Romans for the consolidation of his political power.¹²⁴

The law that is of more significance and implications is the one issued by the regional council of the Catholic Church called the Council of Laodicea in ca. 364 AD.¹²⁵ The Council of Laodicea became the first council to issue a written ecclesiastical law decreeing Sunday as a religious rest day. Canon 29 of the Council decreed: “Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday but shall work on that day; but the Lord’s day they shall especially honour, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ.”¹²⁶ Samuele Bacchiocchi, in his dissertation findings, points out that the authority and power of the Church in Rome in the third century was undoubtedly powerful enough to make liturgical changes which it did.¹²⁷

Now, the law stipulated that on Sunday “the faithful were to abstain from work as far as possible.”¹²⁸ The phrase “as far as possible,” certainly indicates that the believers could still do some works. What is more important, however, is that the Law prohibited the believers from resting on the Sabbath in direct contradiction to the commandment which forbids any form of labor.

In 538 AD, the *Third Council of Orleans* (of the Catholic Church) issued a Sunday law which was more severe than that of Constantine or the Council of Laodicea. Canon

¹²¹*SDA Believe*, 18-20.

¹²²“Sunday,” *Micropaedia Britannica* (Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2002), 11: 392.

¹²³*Codex Justinianus* 3.12, trans. In Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 5th Ed. (New York, 1902), 3:380.

¹²⁴*SDA Believe*, 293.

¹²⁵“Synod of Laodicea (4th Century),” *New Advent*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3806.htm> (accessed January 15, 2013).

¹²⁶Charles J. Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church* 2 (Edinburgh, 1876), 316.

¹²⁷Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 211.

¹²⁸Herron, “Sunday and Holyday Observance,” *NCE*, 13: 799-802.

28 of the council prohibited all forms of labor including agricultural so that people could attend church services on Sunday.¹²⁹ The bottom line is—the Roman Catholic Church is responsible for the change of the Sabbath to Sunday and not the apostles of Christ. The change occurred not in Jerusalem but in Rome, the seat of the papacy.

Conclusion

In Roman Catholic theology, various terms have been associated with Sunday, terms which are nowhere found in the Bible. This indicates the scarcity of biblical foundation for the observance of Sunday. Further, the Catholic Church, based on Church Tradition and church fathers, identifies “the Lord’s Day,” of Revelation 1:10 as Sunday contrary to the Scripture which clearly identifies Saturday as the Lord’s Day.

In Roman Catholic understanding, a change from the observation of the seventh day Sabbath to Sunday was first made by the apostles on the basis of the resurrection of Christ. There is no agreement among Christians that such a change was made by the apostles. It seems a matter of a difference in biblical hermeneutics. Besides, several scholars and leaders within Catholicism have consistently asserted that no commands or instructions for such a change are found in the Bible. So, here, one finds contradictions and an apparent lack of unanimity within Catholicism. It must be concluded that although the Roman Catholic Church looks to the Scripture for its observance of Sunday observance, in reality, much is depended on the authority of the Tradition of the Church, the teachings of the church fathers, and distinct biblical hermeneutics.

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¹²⁹Giovanni Domenico Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, vol. 9, col. 919, as cited in *SDA Believe*, 293.

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