



**FROM SABBATH  
to  
SUNDAY**

**A Historical Investigation  
of the Rise of Sunday Observance  
in Early Christianity**

**Samuele Bacchiocchi**

**THE PONTIFICAL GREGORIAN UNIVERSITY PRESS  
ROME, ITALY 1977**

**Vidimus et approbamus ad normam Statutorum Universitatis Romae, ex Pontificia  
Universitate Gregoriana die 25 iunii 1974**

**R. P. Vincenzo Monachino, S. I.  
R. P. Luis Martinez-Fazio, S. I.**

**IMPRIMATUR**

**Romae, die 16 Iunii 1975**

Bacchiocchi, S. (1999). *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Vol. 1). Rome; Berrien Springs, MI: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press; Biblical Perspectives.

Exported from Logos Bible Software, 01:46 PM 15 October, 2016.

Con approvazione del Vicariato di Roma in data 17 giugno 1975

© Copyright 1999

by

Samuele Bacchiocchi

Phone (616) 471-2915

Fax (616) 471-4013

E-mail: [sbacchiocchi@qtm.net](mailto:sbacchiocchi@qtm.net),

or [samuele@andrews.edu](mailto:samuele@andrews.edu)

Web site: [www.biblicalperspectives.com](http://www.biblicalperspectives.com)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Preface

#### 1. Introduction

#### 2. Christ and the Lord's Day

The Sabbath's Typology and its Messianic Fulfillment

The Attitude of Christ to the Sabbath

The Sabbath in the Letter to the Hebrews

Ad Admonition of Christ Regarding the Sabbath

#### 3. The Resurrection-Appearances and the Origin of Sunday

The Resurrection

The Appearances of the Risen Christ

#### 4. Three New Testament Texts and the Origin of Sunday

1 Corinthians 16:1-3

Acts 20:7-12

Revelation 1:10

#### 5. Jerusalem and the Origin of Sunday

Bacchiocchi, S. (1999). *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Vol. 1). Rome; Berrien Springs, MI: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press; Biblical Perspectives.

Exported from Logos Bible Software, 01:46 PM 15 October, 2016.

The Jerusalem Church in the New Testament  
The Jerusalem Church after A.D. 70

## **6. Rome and the Origin of Sunday**

Predominance of Gentile Converts  
Early Differentiation Between Jews and Christians  
Anti-Judaic Feelings and Measures  
The Church of Rome and the Sabbath  
Rome and the Easter-Controversy  
The Primacy of the Church of Rome

## **7. Anti-Judaism in the Fathers and the Origin of Sunday**

Ignatius  
Barnabas  
Justin Martyr

## **8. Sun-Worship and the Origin of Sunday**

Sun-Worship and the Planetary Week Prior to A.D. 150  
Reflexes of Sun-Worship on Christianity  
The Day of the Sun and the Origin of Sunday

## **9. The Theology of Sunday**

Resurrection  
Creation  
The Eighth Day

## **10. Retrospect and Prospect**

### **Appendix: Paul and the Sabbath**

The Traditional Interpretation of Colossians 2:16–17  
The Colossian Heresy  
What Was Nailed to the Cross?  
Paul's Attitude Toward the Sabbath

## Rome and the Easter-Controversy

**The Origin of Easter-Sunday.** The historian Eusebius (ca. A.D. 260–340) provides a valuable dossier of documents regarding the controversy which flared up in the second century over the date for the celebration of the Passover.<sup>97</sup> There were of course two protagonists of the controversy. On the one side, Bishop Victor of Rome (A.D. 189–199) championed the Easter-Sunday custom (i.e., the celebration of the feast on the Sunday usually following the date of the Jewish Passover) and threatened to excommunicate the recalcitrant Christian communities of the province of Asia which refused to follow his instruction.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>97</sup>Eusebius' account of the Easter controversy is found in his *HE* 5, 23–24.

<sup>98</sup>It is difficult to accept Eusebius' claim that with the exception of "the dioceses of Asia, ... the churches throughout the rest of the world" celebrated Easter on Sunday (*HE* 5, 23, 1) when we consider the following facts: (1) Pope Victor (ca. A.D. 189–199) demanded the convocation of councils in various provinces to codify the Roman Easter (Eusebius, *HE* 5, 24, 8) obviously because a divergent custom existed. (2) The bishops of Palestine who assembled together to discuss the matter, according to Eusebius, "treated at length the tradition concerning the passover" and then they formulated a conciliar letter which was sent "to every diocese that we [i.e., the bishops] may not be guilty toward those who easily deceive their own souls" (*HE* 5, 25, 1). The lengthy discussion and the formulation of a conciliar letter aimed at persuading and preventing the resistance of the dissidents (possibly Judaco-Christians who had not been invited to the Council) again indicates that in Palestine by the end of the second century there were still Christians who persisted in the observance of the Quartodeciman Passover. (3) The following testimonies of the Fathers indicate a wider observance of the Quartodeciman Passover than conceded by Eusebius: *Epistola Apostolorum* 15; two fragments from two works of Hippolytus (one of them was on the *Holy Easter*) preserved in the *Chronicon Paschale* 6 (PG 92, 79) where he states: "Consider therefore in what the controversy consists ..." This would imply that the controversy was still alive in his time and perhaps possibly in Rome; Athanasius of Alexandria, who mentions the "Syrians, Cilicians, and Mesopotamians" as observant of the Quartodeciman Passover (see his *de Synodis* 1, 5 and *ad Afros Epistola Synodica* 2); Jerome, who paraphrases a statement from Irenaeus' work, *On the Paschal Controversy*, where the latter warns Pope Victor not to break the

Bacchiocchi, S. (1999). *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Vol. 1). Rome; Berrien Springs, MI: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press; Biblical Perspectives.

On the other side, Polycrates, Bishop of Ephesus and representative of the Asian Churches, strongly advocated the traditional Passover date of Nisan 14, commonly called “Quartodeciman Passover.” Polycrates, claiming to possess the genuine apostolic tradition transmitted to him by the Apostles Philip and John, refused to be frightened into submission by the threats of Victor of Rome.

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon (from ⚡ ca. A.D. 176), according to Eusebius, intervened as peacemaker in the controversy. In his letter to Victor, Irenaeus not only displays a magnanimous spirit, but also endeavors to show to the Roman Bishop that the predecessors of Soter, namely, “Anicetus, and Pius, and Hyginus and Telesphorus and Sixtus,” even though “they did not observe it [i.e., the Quartodeciman Passover] ... were none the less at peace with those from the dioceses in which it was observed.”<sup>99</sup> By stating that Soter’s predecessors did not observe the Quartodeciman Passover, Irenaeus implies that they also, like Victor, celebrated Easter on Sunday. By tracing the controversy back to Bishop Sixtus (⚡ ca. A.D. 116–ca. 126), mentioning him as the first non-observant of the Quartodeciman Passover, Irenaeus suggests that Passover began to be celebrated in Rome on Sunday at his time (⚡ ca. A.D. 116–126).

unity with “the many bishops of Asia and the East, who with the Jews celebrated the Passover, on the fourteenth day of the new moon” (see *De Viris Illustribus* 35, *NPNF*, 2nd, III, p. 370); a fragment of Apollinarius, Bishop of Hierapolis (ca. A.D. 170) from his work on *Easter*, preserved in the *Chronicon Paschale* 6 (PG 92, 80–81), where it says: “The 14th Nisan is the true Passover of our Lord, the great Sacrifice; instead of the lamb, we have the Lamb of God”; Severian, Bishop of Gabala (f 1. ca. A.D. 400), who strongly attacks those Christians who still maintained the Jewish Passover ritual (see his *Homilia 5 de Pascha*, ed. J. B. Aucher [Venice: 1827], p. 180; Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis (ca. A.D. 315–403) deals extensively with the Quartodeciman controversy in his *Adversus haereses* 50 and 70. The Bishop suggests in various instances that the Quartodeciman custom, which he calls “heresy,” was widespread. He writes, for instance: “And another heresy, namely the Quartodeciman, arose—rose up again) in the world—*anekupse palim to kosmo*” (*Adversus haereses* 50, 1, PG 41, 883). On the basis of these testimonies we would concur with Jean Juster’s comment that Eusebius is guilty of “wilful obscurity” when minimizing and limiting the observance of the Quartodeciman Passover only to the dioceses of Asia (*Les Juifs dans l’empire romain*, 1965, p. 309, fn. 3).

<sup>99</sup> Eusebius, *HE* 5, 24, 14.

To conclude this from this passing reference of Irenaeus may be rightly deemed hazardous. There are however complementary indications which tend to favor this possibility. Bishop Sixtus († ca. A.D. 116–ca. 126), for instance, administered the Church of Rome right at the time of Emperor Hadrian († A.D. 117–138) who, as we noted earlier, adopted a policy of radical repression of Jewish rites and customs.<sup>100</sup> These repressive measures would encourage Christians to substitute for customs regarded as Jewish, new ones. In Jerusalem, we noticed, the Judaeo-Christian members and leaders were at that time expelled from the city together with the Jews, and were replaced by a new Gentile group. It was also at that historical moment that, according to Epiphanius, the Easter-controversy arose. The Bishop of Cyprus writes, “the controversy arose after the time of the exodus († ca. A.D. 135) of the bishops of the circumcision and it has continued until our time.”<sup>101</sup>

If, as Epiphanius implies, the controversy was provoked by the introduction † after A.D. 135 of the new Easter-Sunday celebration which a significant number of Quartodeciman Christians rejected, then Sixtus could very well have been the initiator of the new custom, since he was Bishop of Rome only a few years before. Some time must be allowed before a new custom becomes sufficiently widespread to provoke a controversy. The references of Irenaeus and Epiphanius appear then to complement one another. The former suggests that Easter-Sunday originated in Rome under Sixtus and the latter that the new custom was introduced in Jerusalem by the new Greek bishops, thus provoking a controversy. Both events occurred at approximately the same time.

Marcel Richard endeavors to show that the new day was introduced at this time not by the Church of Rome but by the Greek bishops who settled in Jerusalem. Owing to Hadrian’s prohibition of Jewish festivals, they would have pioneered the new Easter-Sunday date to avoid appearing “Judaizing” to the Roman authorities.<sup>102</sup> While we

<sup>100</sup> Hadrian’s repressive policy toward the Jews is discussed above pp. 159–62.

<sup>101</sup> Epiphanius, *Adversus haereses* 70, 9 PG 42, 355–356; the passage is examined in my *Anti-Judaism and the Origin of Sunday*, 1975, pp. 45–52; cf. above p. 161.

<sup>102</sup> M. Richard, “La question pascale au lie siècle,” *L’Orient Syrien* 6 (1961):185–188. Richard’s view that Easter-Sunday was first introduced by the Greek bishops of Jerusalem is difficult to accept, not only because these did not enjoy sufficient authority to influence the greater part of Christianity, but also because the necessity of a differentiation from Judaism arose, as we have seen, earlier in Rome than in Palestine. Howev-

accept Richard's conclusion that Easter-Sunday was first introduced in Hadrian's time, we find it hard to believe that it was the new Gentile leadership of the Jerusalem Church that introduced the new custom and to cause a large segment of 'Christianity to accept it especially at a time when the Church in the city had fallen into obscurity.

There is a wide consensus of opinion among scholars that Rome is indeed the birth-place of Easter-Sunday. Some, in fact, rightly label it as "Roman-Easter."<sup>103</sup> This is sug-

er, Richard's conclusion that the Easter-controversy started at the time of Hadrian with the introduction of Easter-Sunday, deserves credibility, since our informer, Epiphanius, a native of Palestine, was interested in the traditions of his country and possessed documents which have since disappeared. He mentions, for instance, the conflict between Alexander of Alexandria and Crescentius on the problem of Passover, which is not reported by others (*Adversus haereses* 70, 9, PG 42, 356B). For a thorough analysis of the thesis of Richard, see Christine Mohrmann, "[Le conflict pascal au lie siècle](#)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 16 (1962): 154-171; see also p. Nautin, *Lettres et écrivains chrétiens des Ie et IIe siècles*, 1961, pp. 65-104.

<sup>103</sup> The expression "Roman—Easter" as a designation of Easter-Sunday is frequently used by C. S. Mosna, [Storia della domenica](#), pp. 117, 119, 333; cf. also M. Righetti (fn. 78), II, pp. 245-246. This does not mean that in Rome only Easter-Sunday was observed. A statement of Irenaeus suggests otherwise. He says: "The presbyters before thee who did not observe it [i.e., the Quartodeciman Passover], sent the Eucharist to those of other parishes who observed it" (cited by Eusebius, [HE 5, 24, 15](#)). The Eucharist (a small piece of consecrated bread called "*Fermentum*"), was in fact sent by the Bishop of Rome as a symbol of *communio* to the main churches—tituli—inside and outside the city and to not-too-faraway bishops (for a discussion of the problem, see C. S. Mosna, [Storia della domenica](#), p. 333; V. Monachino, *La Cura pastorale a Milano, Cartagine e Roma nel secolo IV*, 1947, p. 281; L. Hertling, *Communio*, 1961, p. 13; cf. Hippolytus, *Traditio Apostolica* 22). The fact that the Eucharist was sent to Quartodeciman Christians living in Rome or in its outlying districts, indicates not only that they were present in Rome, but also that the predecessors of Victor had maintained Christian fellowship with them. C. J. Hefele explains the aversion of Victor against the Quartodeciman Passover as a reaction against a certain Blastus, who according to Tertullian (*De prescriptione* 53) "wanted to introduce Judaism secretly" (*A History of the Christian Councils*, 1883, I, pp. 312-313). Canon 14 of the Council of Laodicea forbade the sending of the Eucharist to other parishes,

gested not only by the role of the Church of Rome in enforcing the new custom and by Irenaeus' remarks,<sup>104</sup> but also by later historical sources. In two related documents, namely the conciliar letter of the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325)<sup>105</sup> and Constantine's

which shows that the custom prevailed till the fourth century.

<sup>104</sup> Eusebius writes that the churches which celebrated Easter on Sunday, leaned on an "apostolic tradition" (*HE* 5, 23, 1). Irenaeus, however, though a supporter of the Roman—Easter, does not refer to the Apostles, but to "earlier times—*kai polu*," mentioning specifically Bishop Sixtus (ca. A.D. 116–125) as the first non-observant of the Quartodeciman Passover. It is possible then that "earlier times" might refer to Sixtus' time. W. Rordorf, "Zum Ursprung des Osterfestes am Sonntag," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 18 (1962): 167–189, argues for the apostolic origin of the Roman Easter. B. J. Van Der Veken, "De primordis liturgiae paschalis," *Sacris Erud.* (1962): 500f., holds, on the contrary, that while the Quartodeciman Passover has an effective apostolicity, less probable is that of the Roman—Easter. Kenneth A. Strand (see *Three Essays on Early Church with Emphasis on the Roman Province of Asia*, 1967, pp. 33–45), advances persuasive arguments in support of the thesis that possibly "Rome and other places where Peter and Paul labored did indeed receive from these apostles a Sunday-Easter tradition, whereas Asia received from John a Quartodeciman observance" (p. 36). Strand's arguments are basically the following: (1) The 364-days fixed solar "priestly" calendar used by various sectarian groups like the Qumranites where the day of *omer* or first fruit was celebrated always on Sunday, could well have been adopted by a segment of Early Christianity. (2) A Roman innovation could not have "so successfully and universally supplanted an apostolic tradition at so early a period, especially at a time when the flow of Christian tradition was still definitely from East to West rather than vice versa" (p. 35). (3) Irenaeus, reared in Asia, a disciple of John and defender of the apostolic tradition, would hardly have yielded to the Quartodeciman tradition for the Easter-Sunday, if the latter had no apostolic authority. (4) The geographical distribution of the two customs given by Eusebius (supposedly only the Asian Christians observed the Quartodeciman Passover) fits with the geographical sphere of influence traditionally attributed to Peter and Paul. While it must be admitted that these arguments have been cogently formulated, it would seem to us that they do not take into account the following facts: (1) Various sources (see above fns. 97 and 102) suggest that the Quartodeciman Passover was far more widespread than Eusebius is willing to admit. In fact, prior to Pope Vic-

Bacchiocchi, S. (1999). *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Vol. 1). Rome; Berrien Springs, MI: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press; Biblical Perspectives.

personal conciliar letter addressed to all bishops,<sup>106</sup> the Church of Rome is presented as the prime example to emulate on the matter of Easter-Sunday, undoubtedly because of her historical position and role in championing its observance.

tor's time, it seems to have been practiced by some Churches even in Rome (see fn. 102). The fact that Irenaeus refers to "the presbyters before Soter" (Eusebius, *HE* 5, 24, 14), bypassing the latter, as examples of Bishops who allowed the observance of the Quartodeciman Passover, suggests that the change in the Roman policy on the Easter question took place at the time of Soter. L. Duchesne, a renowned Hellenist, notes in this regard that "under Soter, successor of Anicetus, the relations seem to have been more tense" (*Histoire ancienne de l'Église*, 1889, I, p. 289. In Gaul, however, the two divergent Easter celebrations seem to have co-existed, even at the time of Irenaeus, without causing major problems. In fact Irenaeus testifies: "We also live in peace with one another and our disagreement in the fast confirms our agreement in the faith" (*HE* 5, 24, 13). (2) The Easter controversy, as we have noticed (see above pp. 161-2), according to Epiphanius, "arose after the time of the exodus of the bishops of the circumcision" (*PG* 42, 355, 356). This statement seems to imply that prior to that time, Easter-Sunday was unknown in Palestine and probably was practiced only by a few Christians in the rest of the world. If this were so, then Irenaeus' reference to Sixtus (ca. A.D. 115-125) as the first non-observer of the Quartodeciman Passover (*HE* 5, 24, 14) should be regarded not as a passing or casual example, but rather as accurate historical information. (3) It is rather inconceivable that a man like Paul could have been influenced by a sectarian calendar that laid stress on days and that he should have introduced it in the areas where he labored, since, as P. K. Jewett notes, "he is the only New Testament writer who warns his converts against the observance of days (*Col. 2:17; Gal. 4:10; Rom. 14:6*)" (*Lord's Day*, p. 56). Furthermore, it should be noticed that Paul respected the normative Pharisaic-rabbinic calendar as is indicated by the fact that he hastened to be at Jerusalem for Pentecost (*Acts 20:16*; cf., *1 Cor. 16:8*). In fact Paul's free public ministry ended (ca. A.D. 58-60) at the Temple in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost, while undergoing the rite of purification to demonstrate to the Jewish brethren that he also was living "in observance of the law" (*Acts 21:25*; see above pp. 148-51). (4) Concerning Irenaeus, while on the one hand it is true that he had been reared in Asia and that he was a defender of the apostolic succession, on the other hand it should be noted (a) that he always advocated peace and compromise as indicated not only by his letter to Bishop

Bacchiocchi, S. (1999). *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Vol. 1). Rome; Berrien Springs, MI: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press; Biblical Perspectives.

**Easter-Sunday and Weekly Sunday.** What is the relationship, one may ask, between the annual Easter-Sunday and the weekly Sunday? Were the two feasts regarded perhaps as one similar feast that celebrated at different times the same resur-

Victor but also by his embassy to Bishop Eleutherus, Victor's predecessor, on behalf of the Montanists (see Eusebius, *HE* 5, 4, 1; 5, 3, 4); (b) that he had studied in Rome and was serving the Church in the West (Bishop of Lyons from ca. A.D. 177); (c) that he greatly respected and supported the Church of Rome founded "by the two most glorious apostles Peter and Paul" and with which "every church should agree, on account of its preeminent authority" (*Adversus haereses* 3, 2, ANF I, 415). (5) The authority that the Bishop of Rome exerted by the end of the second century should not be underestimated. It is worth noting that even though Polycrates disagreed with Victor on the observance of the Passover, he complied with the Bishop's order to summon a council. In fact he states: "I could mention the bishops who are present whom you required me to summon and I did so" (Eusebius, *HE* 5, 24, 8). Similarly Irenaeus did not challenge Victor's right to excommunicate the Asian Christians, but only advised a more magnanimous attitude (see below pp. 207f.). (6) The conflict and tension between Judaism and the Empire, which became particularly acute under Hadrian, may well have induced Bishop Sixtus to take steps to substitute those distinctive Jewish festivities as the Passover and the Sabbath with new dates and theological motivations, in order to avoid any semblance of Judaism. The anti-Judaic motivations for both the Paschal and weekly Sabbath fast would seem to provide additional support to this hypothesis (see above, pp. 193f.). All these indications seem to challenge and discredit the hypothesis of an apostolic origin of the Roman—Easter tradition.

<sup>105</sup> The conciliar decree of the Council of Nicaea specifically enjoined: "All the brethren in the East who formerly celebrated Easter with the Jews, will henceforth keep it at the same time as the Romans, with us and with all those who from ancient times have celebrated the feast at the same time with us" (Ortiz De Urbina, *Nicée et Constantinople*, 1963, I, p. 259; cf. Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1, 9).

<sup>106</sup> Constantine, after having deplored the disagreements existing concerning such a renowned feast, exhorts all the bishops to embrace "the practice which is observed at once in the city of Rome, and in Africa; throughout Italy, and in Egypt" (Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3, 19, NPNF 2nd, I, p. 525); cf. *Chronicon Paschale*, PG 92, 83 where it is reported that Constantine urged all Christians to follow the custom of "the ancient

rection event, or were they considered as two different feasts which fulfilled different objectives? If the two were treated as one similar feast, it would seem plausible to suppose that the birthplace of Easter-Sunday could well be also the place of origin of the weekly Sunday observance, since possibly the same factors acted in the same place to cause the contemporaneous origin of both.

In numerous patristic testimonies the weekly and annual Easter-Sunday are treated as basically the same feast commemorating the same event of the resurrection. In a document attributed to Irenaeus it is specifically enjoined not to kneel down on Sunday nor on Pentecost, that is, the seven weeks of the Easter period, “because it is of equal significance with the Lord’s day.”<sup>107</sup> The reason given is that both feasts are a symbol of the resurrection.” Tertullian confirms that custom but adds the prohibition of fasting as well: “On Sunday it is unlawful to fast or to kneel while worshipping. We enjoy the same liberty from Easter to Pentecost.”<sup>108</sup> F. A. Regan comments on the text, saying: “In the season extending from Easter to Pentecost, the same custom was followed, thus showing the relation between the annual and weekly feasts.”<sup>109</sup>

Origen explicitly unites the weekly with the yearly commemoration of the resurrection: “The resurrection of the Lord is celebrated not only once a year but constantly every eight days.”<sup>110</sup> Eusebius similarly states: “While the Jews faithful to Moses, sacrificed the Passover lamb once a year ... we men of the New Covenant celebrate every Sunday our Passover.”<sup>111</sup> Pope Innocent I, in a letter to Bishop Decentius of Gubbio, confirms the unity existing between the two feasts: “We celebrate Sunday because of the venerable resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, not only at Easter but in actuality by the single weekly cycle [i.e. every Sunday].”<sup>112</sup>

church of Rome and Alexandria.”

<sup>107</sup> *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus* 7, ANF I, pp. 569–570.

<sup>108</sup> Tertullian, *De Corona* 3, 4, CCL 2, 1043; in the treatise *On Idolatry* 14, Tertullian, referring to the pagans, similarly writes: “Not the Lord’s day, not Pentecost, even if they had known them, would they have shared with us; for they would fear lest they should seem to be Christians” (ANF III, p. 70).

<sup>109</sup> F. A. Regan, *Dies Dominica*, p. 97.

<sup>110</sup> Origen, *Homilia in Isaiarn* 5, 2, GCS 8, 265, 1.

<sup>111</sup> Eusebius, *De solemnitate paschali* 7, 12, PG 24, 701A; cf. also 706C.

<sup>112</sup> Innocent I, see fn. 90; cf. Athanasius, *Epistolae paschales*, PG 26, 1389.

In the light of these representative statements, it would appear that when the weekly and yearly Easter-Sunday gained acceptance, they were regarded by many as one feast that commemorated at different times the same event of the resurrection. Though the resurrection is not presented in earlier sources as the dominant motivation for Sunday observance, there seems to be no question as to the basic unity of the two festivities.

At this point it is important to ascertain what in Rome caused the abandonment of the Quartodeciman Passover and the introduction of Easter-Sunday. We would presume that the same causes motivated also the repudiation of the Sabbath and the introduction of Sunday-keeping, since the latter was regarded by many Christians as an extension of the annual Easter. (Today Italians still refer to Sunday as “*pasquetta*”—which means little Easter.)

Scholars usually recognize in the Roman custom of celebrating Easter on Sunday instead of the 14th of Nisan, to use J. Jeremias’ words, “the inclination to break away from Judaism.”<sup>113</sup> J. B. Lightfoot holds, for instance, that Rome and Alexandria adopted Easter-Sunday to avoid “even the semblance of Judaism.”<sup>114</sup> M. Righetti, a renowned liturgist, points out also that Rome and Alexandria, after “having eliminated the Judaizing Quartodeciman tradition, repudiated even the Jewish computations, making their own time calculations, since such a dependence on the Jews must have appeared humiliating.”<sup>115</sup>

The Nicene conciliar letter of Constantine explicitly reveals a marked anti-Judaic motivation for the repudiation of the Quartodeciman Passover. The Emperor, in fact, desiring to establish a religion completely free from any Jewish influences, wrote: “It appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul *Let us then have noth-*

<sup>113</sup> J. Jeremias, “*Pascha*” *TDNT V*. p. 903, fn. 64.

<sup>114</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 1885, II, part I, p. 88. The full statement reads: “In the Paschal controversy of the second century the bishops of Jerusalem, Caesarea, Tyre and Ptolemais ranged themselves not with Asia Minor, which regulated the Easter festival by Jewish passover, but with Rome and Alexandria, thus avoiding even the semblance of Judaism.”

<sup>115</sup> M. Righetti (fn. 77), II, p. 246.

*ing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd: for we have received from our Saviour a different way ... Strive and pray continually that the purity of your souls may not seem in anything to be sullied by fellowship with the customs of these most wicked men ... All should unite in desiring that which sound reason appears to demand, and in avoiding all participation in the perjured conduct of the Jew”<sup>116</sup>*

The anti-Judaic motivation for the repudiation of the Jewish reckoning of Passover could not have been expressed more explicitly and forcefully than in the letter of Constantine. Nicaea represents the culmination of a controversy initiated two centuries earlier and motivated by strong anti-Judaic feelings and one which had Rome as its epicenter. The close nexus existing between Easter-Sunday and weekly Sunday presupposes that the same anti-Judaic motivation was also primarily responsible for the substitution of Sabbath-keeping by Sunday worship.

Several indications have already emerged in the course of our study supporting this conclusion. We noticed, for instance, that some Fathers reinterpreted the Sabbath as the trademark of Jewish unfaithfulness. Specific anti-Sabbath measures were taken particularly by the Church of Rome. The ‘Sabbath was made a day of fasting to show, among other things, contempt for the Jews. Similarly, to avoid appearing to observe the day with the Jews, the eucharistic celebration and religious assemblies were forbidden on the Sabbath. Additional evidence on the role played by anti-Judaism in the abandonment of Sabbath observance will be submitted in chapters [seven](#) and [nine](#).

<sup>116</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3, 18–19, NPNF 2nd, I, pp. 524–525 (emphasis supplied). The letter is found also in Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1, 9; Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1, 10. The anti-Judaic motivation for the adoption of a new Easter date is explicitly expressed also in an earlier document, Pseudo-Cyprian, *De Pascha computus*, trans. G. Ogg, 1955, where paragraph I says: “we desire to show ... that Christians need at no time ... to walk in blindness and stupidity behind the Jews as though they did not know what was the day of Passover ...” (written ca. A.D. 243).