

Q & A #12

Question: I became aware recently that Rome played a major role in the Sunday/Sabbath history. What admissions, if any, does the Church of Rome make about this? I'm curious, how could anyone pull off a change in Christian worship practice beyond what Jesus and the apostles gave example for?

Answers: It must first be said that Sunday gatherings of followers of Jesus did not begin during the time of the disciples and apostles. Noted historian Augustus Neander is very direct about this point:

The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals was always only a human ordinance, and it was far from the intentions of the apostles to establish a Divine command in this respect, far from them, and form the early apostolic Church, to transfer the laws of the Sabbath to Sunday. . . . (Augustus Neander, *The History of the Christian Religion and Church*, Sanford and Swords, New York, 1843, Rose's translation, p. 186)

The first historical clue that Christians in Rome had transferred to a Sunday assembly is from a formal letter written by Justin Martyr in mid-second century to then Emperor Antonius Pius. Pagan Roman emperors found it difficult to differentiate between the beliefs and practices of Jews and Christians.

As both observed the Sabbath, Christians often received the same disdain and persecution as Rome dealt to the Jews. To distance themselves, Christians in Rome (the heart of the empire) began to worship on Sunday—the day that was already of honor to pagan sun devotees.

Justin Martyr's case to the emperor was skillfully built by the connecting of light and the sun with the resurrection of Jesus, a point of reasoning that a pagan Roman emperor would appreciate and an explanation that would quiet misunderstood opposition to a Jewish institution—the seventh-day Sabbath, from which Christians at Rome were now distancing themselves:

“ . . . Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness in matter, made the world: and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He 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, having appeared to His apostles and disciples. . . ” (Apology to Emperor Antonius Pius, chap. 67, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, pp. 185, 186)

Over 150 years later during the reign of Emperor Constantine, Rome's bishop Eusebius (who was also Constantine's adviser in church affairs) stated the Church of Rome's transition to Sunday observance:

. . . all things whatsoever that it was duty to do on the sabbath, these we [the church] have transferred them to the Lord's day, as being more authoritative and more highly regarded and first

in rank, and more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath. (Eusebius, Bishop of Rome [310-311], *Commentary on the Psalms*, on Psalm 91 [92]: 2,3, in J. -P. Migne, *The Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 23, col. 1172. Greek.)

Those who visit Rome today may see evidence of these early origins. Anyone entering St. Peter's basilica is sure to notice the statue of Constantine gallantly poised on his horse. The ten story high altar at the heart of the basilica is held up by four massive serpentine-shaped pillars. At the top is a huge golden replica of the sun. It is a reminder of Rome's ancient pagan religion which embraced the sun, thinking it had god-like qualities, and from which the first day of the week received its name—Sun-day.

Rome's system of authority

How is it possible for a Christian church system to make doctrinal and teaching decisions apart from or in opposition to the Bible? For instance, the change of the biblical day of rest and worship—the seventh-day (which had already been prescribed by God Himself in Scripture)—to the first day of the week, which the Bible does not sanctify?

Sylvester, head leader of the Church of Rome in the early 4th century, was the first bishop to be thought of as the pope. Through the course of time, this system of leadership in the Catholic church became known as the “papacy.” (Neither “pope” nor “papacy” are biblical terms.) Papal leadership came to be understood as the supreme expositor of church doctrine and

teaching. Through the medieval centuries of Europe, the papacy also was the primary political arbiter of kings and kingdoms.

Catholic apologists maintain that the Church of Rome has a “living teacher” and that the Church receives continuing authoritative direction in practice and doctrine beyond Scripture through the magisterium—“the pope and the bishops in communion with him.” This is the basis upon which the Catholic Church claims authority to replace the Sabbath with Sunday.

“The Pope can modify divine law, since his power is not of man but of God, and he acts as vicegerent of God upon earth with most ample power of binding and loosing his sheep. . . .” (Roman Catholic Lucius Ferraris, article 2 “Papa,” *Prompta Bibliotheca*, Paris, 1858, vol.5, col. 1832. Latin)

How vital is Sunday observance for the 21st century Catholic believer?

“The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist [Mass] is at the heart of the Church's life.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Doubleday, New York, 1994, p. 582)

The Protestant reformation of the 16th century rejected the Catholic formula for defining Christian doctrine and teaching. The Reformers referenced the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, as the expressed will of God and the only safe and genuine guide for

Christian belief and practice. This was at the foundation of Protestant reforms. Since the Reformation, Protestants profess to continue this biblical inspiration formula.

**What do Catholics have to say?
And do Sunday-observing
Protestants have something to
think about?**

(The following Catholic sources openly challenge the 21st century Bible student. They are recorded here to provide discovery, thought, direction and mission in the personal walk with Jesus for every person who looks to the Bible for guidance.

The Catholic Record, September 1, 1923,
vol. XLV, no. 2342, 4)

The Bible still teaches that the Sabbath or Saturday should be kept holy. There is no authority in the New Testament for the substitution of Sunday for Saturday. Surely it is an important matter. It stands there in the Bible as one of the Ten Commandments of God. There is no authority in the Bible for abrogating this commandment, or for transferring its observance to another day of the week. . . The Church [that is, Rome] is above the Bible; and this transference of the Sabbath observance to Sunday is proof of that fact.

The Catholic Mirror, Sept. 23, 1893

The Catholic Church for over one thousand years before the existence of a Protestant, by

virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday. . . .The Christian Sabbath [Sunday] is therefore to this day, the acknowledged offspring of the Catholic Church. . .without a word of remonstrance from the Protestant world.

The Catholic Record, September 17, 1893

Sunday is founded, not on Scripture, but on tradition, and is distinctly a Catholic institution. As there is no Scripture for the transfer of the day of rest from the last to the first day of the week, Protestants ought to keep their Sabbath on Saturday, and thus leave Catholics in full possession of Sunday.

The Papal Controversy, D. B. Ray, p. 179, 1892

From this same Catholic Church you have accepted your Sunday, and that Sunday, as the Lord's day, she had handed down as a tradition; and the entire Protestant world has accepted it as tradition, for you have not an iota of Scripture to establish it. Therefore that which you have accepted as your rule of faith, inadequate as it of course is, as well as your Sunday, you accepted on the *authority* of the Roman Catholic Church.

T. Enright, C.S.S.R., in a lecture at Hartford, Kansas, February 18, 1884.

I have repeatedly offered \$1000 to anyone who can prove to me from the Bible alone that I am bound to keep Sunday holy. There is no such law in the Bible. It is a law of the holy Catholic

Church alone. The Bible says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." THE CATHOLIC CHURCH says: "No, by my divine power I abolish the Sabbath day and command you to keep holy the first day of the week." And lo! The entire civilized world bows down in reverent obedience to the command of the holy Catholic Church.

Catholic Virginian, October 3, 1947

Nowhere in the Bible do we find that Christ or the disciples ordered that the Sabbath be changed from Saturday to Sunday. We have the commandment of God given to Moses to keep holy the Sabbath Day, that is the 7th Day of the week, Saturday. Today most Christians keep Sunday because it has been revealed to us by the [Catholic] church outside the Bible.

Catholic Press, Sydney, Australia, August 25, 1900

Sunday is a Catholic institution, and its claim to observance can be defended only on Catholic principles. . . . From beginning to end of Scripture there is not a single passage that warrants the transfer of weekly public worship from the last day of the week to the first.

Ecclesiastical Review, February, 1914, pp. 236, 239

Father Walter Drum: "They [the Protestants] deem it their duty to keep the Sunday holy, Why? Because the Catholic Church tells them to do so. They have no other reason. . . . The observance of Sunday thus comes to be an ecclesiastical law entirely distinct from the law of Sabbath observance. . . .

The author of the Sunday law is the only one who has the right to interpret that law; and that author is the Catholic Church.”

Bernard Conway, *Question Box*, p. 179

If the Bible is the only guide for the Christian, then the Seventh Day Adventist is right in keeping the Saturday with the Jew. But Catholics learn what to believe and do from the divine, infallible authority established by Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church.

The Converts Catechism of Catholic Doctrine, Peter Geiermann, 1910, p. 50

Q. Which is the Sabbath day?

A. Saturday is the Sabbath day.

Q. Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

A. We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic church, in the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 336), transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.

A Doctrinal Catechism, Rev. Stephan Keenan, New York, 1846, p.174

Q. Have you any other way of proving that the Church has power to institute festivals of precept?

A. Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her;—she could not have 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.

The Faith of our Fathers, James Cardinal
Gibbons, Baltimore, 1876, 1920, p. 89.

. . . is not every Christian obligated to
sanctify Sunday and to abstain on that day
from unnecessary servile work? Is not the
observance of this law among the most
prominent of our sacred duties? But you
may read the Bible from Genesis to
Revelation, and you will not find a single
line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday.
The Scriptures enforce the religious
observance of Saturday, a day which we
never sanctify. . . . We must, therefore,
conclude that the Scriptures *alone* cannot
be a sufficient guide and rule of faith.”

John A. O'Brien, *The Faith of Millions*,
Our Sunday Visitor, 1974, pp.400, 401.

But since Saturday, not Sunday, is specified
in the Bible, isn't it curious that non-Catholics
who profess to take their religion directly
from the Bible and not the Church, observe
Sunday instead of Saturday? Yes, of course,
it is inconsistent; but this change was made
about fifteen centuries before
Protestantism was born, and by that time
the custom was universally observed. They
have continued the custom [of Sunday
observance], even though it 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.

James Cardinal Gibbons—Letter Reply

Of course the Catholic Church claims that the change [of the Sabbath] was her act. It could not have been otherwise, as none in those days would have dreamed of doing anything in matters spiritual and ecclesiastical and religious without her. And the act is *a mark of her ecclesiastical power and authority in religious matters*. (In a letter to J. F. Snyder of Bloomington, Illinois from C. F. Thomas, Chancellor for James Cardinal Gibbons, November 11, 1895, emphasis supplied)

What did Moses have to say about the status of God's Law?

The book of Deuteronomy records the final words of Moses before the host of the children of Israel would cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. These words would set the course for Israel's future:

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.” Deuteronomy 4:2; see also Proverbs 30:5, 6.

What did Jesus Christ have to

say about the Law's permanent status?

In His address to the nation of Israel, Jesus Christ stated a reality that no human should ever ignore:

“ Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law [which includes the fourth commandment] until all is accomplished' “
Matthew 5:18 (NASB)

The commandments are cosmic moral high ground—they embody the point of reference for the conscience of every person on earth. The Ten Commandment law is a revealing of the very essence of God's nature. To alter this divine description of the righteous God would be to change the very nature of His righteous being.

Who is it that rightfully has dominion over every aspect on planet Earth?

Upon leaving the earth to return to heaven, Jesus Christ stated His place of position over this ransomed planet. These are his parting words:

“ All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father

and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' ”

Matthew 28:18-20 (NASB)

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Editors Note to the reader:

Thank you for your interest in reading the Q & A #12 and other items in this website. Your interest is very much appreciated. With the information presented in this Q &A, you are invited to give thought to the following:

With this information in mind from this Q & A, we must ask: *Should you be content with a Christian church declaring itself above Scripture?*

And is it not true that Protestants in the twenty-first century, by their continuing Sunday observance, are yet showing allegiance to Rome's declared authority? Or is the Protestant Reformation unfinished and will yet advance to fully embrace the principle of *sola scriptura*?

Ultimately, whether Catholic or Protestant or simply a believer in Christ, who will we allow to have the “right to impose obligation on the conscience”?

Answer prepared by Daniel Knauft, author of *Sacred Time unRemembered—How the Original Sabbath Was Lost and Why It Matters*, (2014). This Q & A was edited by Kevin L. Morgan. (10/3/19)

Other Q & A can be found at the website:

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