

Chapter 4

The Continuity between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day

WE are now in a position to formulate the case for regarding the Lord's Day as a Christian sabbath. That there are differences as well as similarities between the new festival and the old was seen on p. 26f. The features of the sabbath introduced in the time of Moses—its special sacrifices, its detailed laws about permissible and impermissible acts, and its involvement in at least the abstract possibility of justification by works—are not continued in the Lord's Day. This is only what one would expect, if it is a creation ordinance, now being restored to its original form, so as to fit it for the gospel age, the age of spiritual sacrifices, Christian liberty and justification by faith. In addition, the day is moved from the seventh day of the week to the first, and a new act of God, Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week, becomes the primary event which it commemorates. Whether this development is any greater obstacle to regarding the Lord's Day as a Christian sabbath has been discussed in a somewhat desultory way in the course of the preceding two chapters: the threads of the argument will be drawn together in what follows, especially in paragraph (vi). A final difference between the new festival and the old is that of nomenclature. Though the title 'the Lord's Day' may be modelled on titles for the sabbath (see below), the title 'the sabbath' is not applied to Sunday in the New Testament, and is only rarely applied to it in the literature of the first three centuries. This may be due to the concern of early Christians to avoid confusion with the Jewish sabbath and the Jewish manner of observing it (which ceased to be a serious problem only after the conversion of the Roman Empire). In any case, the main issue is not whether the festivals are alike in name, but whether they are alike in their essential character.

To turn now from differences to likenesses, the Lord's Day corresponds to the sabbath in the following thirteen respects.

(i) Like the sabbath, the Lord's Day is a memorial. Just as the sabbath commemorated the creation and the deliverance from Egypt (see

pp. 2, 13f.), so the Lord's Day commemorates Christ's resurrection (see p. 35f.). This is the reason for the change of day.

(ii) Like the sabbath, the Lord's Day is the regular day of corporate worship (see pp. 5, 10, 16f., 20f., 36-9).

(iii) Like the sabbath, the Lord's Day is a day of rest (see pp. 2f., 8-11, 15f., 19f., 39-42).

(iv) Like the sabbath, but unlike almost any other festival in the ancient world (certainly any Jewish festival), the Lord's Day is celebrated at intervals of seven days, being geared to the Jewish week (see pp. 2f., 27f., 32).

(v) This is emphasised by the fact that the resurrection could equally well have been commemorated once a year, as in later times at Easter. Instead, it was from the outset commemorated every week (see p. 35f.). Hence, the Jewish festival on which the Lord's Day was modelled was not the annual Passover but the weekly sabbath.

(vi) The change of day from the seventh day of the week to the first does not abolish the older meanings of the sabbath, as a memorial of the creation and of the redemption from Egypt. Rather, it transforms these meanings by linking them with Christ's resurrection. For through his death and resurrection, Christ has inaugurated a *new* creation and achieved a *greater* redemption, from the slavery not of Egypt but of sin (see p. 40). Thus, the reference to the first creation and redemption is only indirect, through the new creation and redemption; but such a reference should not be thought of as excluded, for both the first creation and the first redemption continue to have relevance for Christians, who are taught by the New Testament that the world was created through Christ (John 1:3, 10; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; Rev. 3:14), and that the nucleus of the Christian Church are the faithful remnant of the people of the Exodus, the Jews, into whose fellowship and privileges Gentile Christians have now been grafted (Rom. 9:27; 11:5, 13-24; and consider the presuppositions of the circumcision controversy).¹

(vii) The sabbath is a creation ordinance, which, like marriage, took a parenthetical form under the Law, but which we should now likewise expect to find restored to its original state (see p. 6f.). No other day qualifies to be this restored sabbath except the Lord's Day. The change from the seventh to the first day of the week is, in view of the preceding paragraph, no difficulty; the change is merely ceremonial—one which does not destroy the earlier meanings of the festival, but rather enriches those meanings by relating the festival to Christ. The

New Testament similarly enriches the significance of marriage by relating it to Christ (John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7, 9; 21:2, 9; 22:17).

(viii) The sabbath commandment is included in the Decalogue, and consequently has permanent validity (see p. 14f.). Though it requires some measure of reinterpretation under the Gospel, like other of the Ten Commandments, notably as regards the change from the seventh to the first day, it must not be re-interpreted in a way contrary to the needs of human and animal nature. These include not only nightly rest but a periodical change from daily toil, which it is unmerciful to withhold (see note 5 on p. 146). The New Testament teaches that deeds of mercy are appropriate both to the sabbath and to the Lord's Day (see pp. 23f., 41); and the Lord's Day, being a day of rest, still in force after the seventh-day sabbath has been annulled, is the Christian's opportunity of giving this merciful rest from toil to others, and of taking it himself.

(ix) Like the sabbath, the Lord's Day looks forward as well as back. In rabbinical thinking, the sabbath looked forward to the rest which the righteous will enjoy in the age to come. The New Testament, building on the teaching of Hellenistic Judaism, links this rest with God's rest ever since the creation, and teaches that to share this rest with God is the privilege of those who believe in Christ, and that a foretaste of it can be enjoyed here and now (see pp. 10-12, 28f., 40f.). In harmony with such teaching about the sabbath, one of the implications of the title 'the Lord's Day' in the book of Revelation is probably that the day is an anticipation of Christ's second coming (see p. 35), by which the expectation of the final rest will be fully realised. The Lord's Day, being a day of rest, itself emphasises the link between Christ's second coming and the final rest. Also relevant is the fact that the Lord's Day is a memorial of Christ's resurrection, and of the new creation and new redemption which it effected (see paragraphs i and vi above). For Christ's resurrection is the first fruits of our own future resurrection (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:20-23, 45-49; 2 Cor. 4:14; Col. 1:18; 1 Thess. 4:14; Rev. 1:5); the new creation, which was inaugurated through Christ's death and resurrection, will be completed only at his return (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:18-25; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1, 5); and the same is true of the new redemption (Luke 21:28; Rom. 7:24f.; 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30).

(x) The title 'the Lord's Day' may be modelled on Old Testament titles for the sabbath, such as 'the Lord's holy day' (see p. 35). These

provide closer analogies than the monthly *Sebastē*, or 'Emperor's Day' (on which consult Rordorf, op. cit., pp. 206f.).

(xi) The form of service used by Christians on the Lord's Day was probably based, from the outset, upon the synagogue service, and the synagogue service in question was that of the sabbath day (see pp. 20f., 38).

(xii) Both for Hellenistic Judaism and for Palestinian Judaism, the sabbath was the day of light (see pp. 8-10, 19). However, the day on which light was created was not the seventh day but the first (Gen. 1: 3-5). Moreover, the first day was the day on which Christ 'by the resurrection of the dead proclaimed *light* both to the people and to the Gentiles' (Acts 26: 23).

(xiii) In Pharisaic thought, the sabbath and the first day of the week were linked. The *maamads* (see note 8 on p. 151) refrained from fasting not only on the feast of the sabbath itself but on the day before it and on the day after it, because of the relation these days had with it (*M. Taanith* 4.2).² Jewish Christians would probably not have been uninfluenced in their thinking about the Lord's Day by this connection which it had with the sabbath.

Nearly all these thirteen resemblances between the Lord's Day and the sabbath must have existed from the very time that the Lord's Day began to be observed, in the Jewish Christian circles where it originated, since they arise either out of the Old Testament and Jewish background of the festival, or out of an inseparable feature of it like the choice of the first day of the week. The exceptions are point (vi), which cannot be proved to go back behind the teaching of Paul, points (vii) and (ix), which are in some measure dependent on point (vi), and point (x), where the title 'the Lord's Day' cannot be proved to have been applied to the festival much before the time of the Revelation of John. On the other hand, even these four resemblances may very well go back to the beginning. At all events, each of the thirteen resemblances had developed before the end of the New Testament period, as part of the Christian thought of one or more New Testament writers, or as part of the Jewish inheritance which they all shared; and even if it were the case that the measure of correspondence between the Lord's Day and the sabbath which existed from the outset was increased by contributions from the theology of Paul and John, the analogy between the two festivals would not lose its significance or its authority as a result. It would remain true that the sabbath was the model on which the disciples originally framed the Lord's Day, and

that, when viewed in the light of New Testament theology as a whole, the Lord's Day can clearly be seen to be a Christian sabbath—a New Testament fulfilment to which the Old Testament sabbath points forward.

commemorating the Exodus on the first day, since the Exodus was at no time commemorated on the day when it occurred (see p. 27); consequently, the first day is as suitable for this purpose as the seventh. The commemoration of more than one event on the same day, as on the Mosaic sabbath, was freely practised in rabbinic Judaism at the beginning of the Christian era, and could readily have been implemented in the case of the Lord's Day. The Mishnah tells us that as many as five different calamities were commemorated on Ab 9, including both destructions of the temple, and the same number on Tammuz 17 (*Taanith* 4.6). All these were thought of as having taken place on the date in question, though one presumes that historically they did not all do so. A similar case is that of the feast of the Rededication of the Temple by Judas Maccabaeus on Chisleu 25. It appears from 2 Macc. 1 : 18 that this served also as the commemoration of the original dedication of the second temple, which actually happened on Adar 3 (Ezra 6 : 15f.), and may well have been commemorated on that date prior to the time of Judas Maccabaeus. A modern English parallel is Remembrance Day, which was originally the day when the first world war ended, but later, with a slight adjustment of date, was made the commemoration of the conclusions of both world wars.

2. The relevant words do not occur in all texts of the Mishnah, but the Jerusalem Talmud knows them either as Mishnah or as *baraita*—material of similar antiquity (*Jer. Taanith* 4.3f.). Further support for the words in question is found in the Mishnah's account of another similar custom of the *maamads* in *Taanith* 2.7. In the later rabbinical literature, fasting on Sunday is often permitted, and even in the Tosephta Sunday is regarded as a sad day, 'the day of the going out of the sabbath' (*Tos. Taanith* 4.9), but in the time of the *maamads*, before the destruction of the temple, this was evidently not so. The rule of not fasting on Fridays goes back to Judith 8 : 6, and the extension of the rule to Sundays by the *maamads* was the next stage, after which the reaction began.

CHAPTER 4 (pp. 43-7)

1. Since the reference of the Lord's Day to the old creation and the old redemption is only secondary, it is natural that the first day of the week was preferred to the seventh, as being more consonant with the primary reference of the festival, which is to the resurrection. Actually, there is no problem about commemorating the old creation on the first day, when it began, rather than on the seventh day, when it was all over; nothing is lost except the precise reference to God's rest, after the work of creation (though it is through Christ, raised on the first day, that Christians enter into God's rest). Even less is there any problem about