

## Chapter 10

### The Theology of the Christian Sunday

IN the next three chapters we must seek to gather into order the various insights into the theology of the Christian Sunday which have appeared under one heading or another, and to see the picture as a whole. This will inevitably mean some repetition of what has already been said, but we have attempted to trace the practice, and we must now try to see what lay behind the practice. We shall expect to find that Sunday has the Jewish festival atmosphere and is a corporate observance, but it may be easiest to follow the theology along the lines of the names given to the day.

#### I. THE FIRST DAY

This is the earliest name given to Sunday. It was the normal designation of the day in the Jewish week. All four Gospels emphasise very strongly that the Resurrection took place on 'the first day of the week', even when they could have said 'the next day', seeming to show that the title was important to them. It immediately distinguished the Christian Sunday from the Jewish Sabbath, the seventh day. And just as in Jewish minds the seventh day was intimately connected with the account of creation in the first two chapters of Genesis, so the first day was, in the eyes of the Christians, connected with the same sequence of events in the creation narrative.

##### (i) *The New Creation*

The Christian saw in the first day of the week a new 'beginning', *archē*. Just as on the first day in the creation there had been a beginning, so now there was a new beginning, brought about by Christ's resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

This comes out especially clearly in the conception of a new creation, an idea which is present in the New Testament. In 2 Cor. 5 : 17 the work of Christ is represented as a new 'creation' (*kainē ktisis*), and in Eph. 2 : 10 again this work is described as a 'being created' (*ktisthentes*). This is connected in 2 : 5, 6 with the resurrection, *synexōpōiōsen tō Christō . . . kai synēgeiren*. Again, in 4 : 24 the 'new man' is said to be

'created' (*ktisthenta*). The equivalent passage in Col. 3 : 10, if we are to accept the reading, speaks of Christ as the one who 'created' (*ktisantos*) him. In Gal. 6 : 15 St. Paul speaks of a 'new creation' (*kainē ktisis*). This would connect up with the whole conception of the newness of the 'New Covenant', *kainē diathēkē*, and the 'new man', *kainos anthrōpos* (Heb. 8; Eph. 4 : 24), and we may compare with this Mark 2 : 21, 22, 'new cloth' and 'new wine'.

Ignatius (*Mag.* 9.1) connects Sunday with this 'new' outlook. He says, 'If those who had walked in ancient practices attained unto the newness of hope (*kainotēta*), not sabbatising, but living according to the Lord's Day . . .'. This is then connected with the Resurrection.

In Clement of Alexandria there is a description of the effects of the coming of Christ. He says, 'For in us, buried in darkness . . . light has gone forth from heaven . . . that light is eternal life . . . Night fears the light and hiding itself in terror gives place to the day of the Lord (*tē hēmera kyriou*). This was the end (objective) of the new creation. For the Sun of Righteousness drives his chariot over all . . . He hath changed sunset into sunrise (*anatolēn*) and through the cross brought death to life' (*Protrepticus* 11; *PG* viii. 232).

Tertullian says, 'If there is a new creation in Christ, our solemnities will be bound to be new' (*De jejun.* 14). *Sollemnitatis* is the word used of a Christian observance, and while Sunday is not mentioned by name it would clearly be in mind. The new creation and the new observance go together, just as the old creation and the old observance do.

The same thought of a new restoration connected with the Resurrection and Sunday appears in Ephrem Syrus (*Nisibene Hymns* 3.6; *NPNF* 13, p. 171): 'The day of thy deliverance is king of all days. The sabbath overthrew thy walls . . . the day of the resurrection of the Son raised again thy ruins; the day of resurrection raised thee according to its name. It glorified its title.'

Gregory of Nazianzus says, 'That, was the bond of the grave, and the Resurrection, this, clearly the second creation, in order that as the first creation began from a Lord's Day, . . . so also the second again began from it, being the first of those things that come after and the eighth from those things that come before. . . .' (*Orat.* 44.5; *PG* xxxvi. 612c).

In the short sermon attributed to Athanasius (*De Sabb. et Circum.*),<sup>2</sup> the passage runs, 'For the sabbath was the end of the former creation, but the Lord's Day is the beginning of the second, in which he renewed the old and made it afresh, and so, as he commanded them before to keep the sabbath day, the memorial of former things, so we

honour (*timōmen*) the Lord's Day, being the memorial of the second creation. For he did not create another, but renewed the old and completed what he had begun to make. . . . For the work was incomplete, if when Adam sinned mankind had died. But it was made complete when he came alive; having renewed the creation which was made in six days he appoints a day for the re-creation, of which the Spirit had spoken before through the Psalm, "This is the day the Lord hath made. . . ." (Ps. 117 (118) 24). For instead of the sun, God arises, lighting the soul of each. For this reason in the passion of the Saviour the sun did not give light, showing an end of the former creation, but a beginning of another, the rising of the Saviour. And as the Lord's Day is the beginning of the new creation, the sabbath too ceases. . . . For each is completed on the eighth day, both the beginning of the new creation and the new birth of man, and so the eighth day abolished the sabbath and not the sabbath the eighth day.'

This sermon is, it would seem, a fourth-century product. It connects closely the abolition of circumcision and the sabbath and in each case the reason given is the beginning of a new creation, a renewal. The two are connected together in the idea of the 'Eighth Day'. We shall go into this more fully later on. The connection of thought is that the resurrection of Christ was the beginning of the new creation on the first day, Sunday; this re-creation is general for the world, but also individual in the renewal connected with baptism. The rising of Christ is the rising of the sun, the darkness is past and Sunday is the mark of this, being the first day. The sabbath, the mark of the old creation, ceases.<sup>3</sup>

There is an interesting passage in a sermon, attributed to Eusebius of Alexandria.<sup>4</sup> He says, 'On this he gave the firstfruits of the creation of the world and on this day the firstfruits of the Resurrection. On this day he ordered the holy mysteries to be completed. This is why this is the "beginning" (*archē*, principle?) of all doing good; the beginning of the creation of the world and the beginning of the Resurrection and the beginning of the week. These three "beginnings" which this day has shows the principle of the Holy Trinity.'<sup>5</sup> Here too the idea of the first day and the Resurrection as the new creation are implicit.

#### (ii) *The giving of light*

Another aspect of the first day is the idea of Sunday as the day of light. This is of course closely connected with the idea of the new creation,

as the first step in the Genesis account of creation was 'Let there be light', on the first day. Remember also the Jewish conception of the sabbath as the day of light, discussed in the opening chapters.

There is a very full theology of light in both Old and New Testaments. God is the Creator of light (Gen. 1 : 2). His presence is light (Isa. 60 : 1-3, 19). Light is associated with the joy and the blessing that God gives (Ps. 97 : 11; Ps 36 : 9). Righteousness, the way of God, is a way of light (Prov. 4 : 18). Darkness is associated with sin and its judgment; and with ignorance of God (Isa. 60 : 2; 8 : 22). The coming of the Messiah will bring light (Isa. 9 : 2), and the Servant of the Lord is to be the light of the Gentiles (Isa. 49 : 6). The sun of righteousness will arise bringing healing (Mal. 4 : 2).<sup>6</sup>

When we turn to the New Testament, this is developed very fully, particularly in the Fourth Gospel. The Word is the source of light (John 1 : 4). The Word was the true light in his coming into the world.<sup>7</sup> The judgment of the world is that light has come and men loved darkness because their deeds were evil (John 3 : 19). Christ claims to be the light of the world (John 8 : 12; 9 : 5; 12 : 46). In the first Epistle of John, God himself is light (1 John 1 : 5), and Christ himself, the true light, is shining (1 John 2 : 8). The coming of Christ is light to the Gentiles (Luke 2 : 32).

Christ's followers become themselves sources of light (Matt. 5 : 14; Phil. 2 : 15). Moral righteousness and attractive conduct become light (Matt. 5 : 16). To turn to Christ is to leave the darkness and find the light (Acts 26 : 18; Eph. 5 : 8). As God is in the light, so the Christian must walk in the light (1 John 1 : 7). Christ, as the light of the world, is specially demonstrated in the Resurrection (Acts 26 : 23). And perhaps it is for this reason that the writers of the Gospels seem to emphasise that the Resurrection took place at dawn when it was becoming light (Matt. 28 : 1; Mark 16 : 2; Luke 24 : 1; John 20 : 1).

The knowledge of Christ, the preaching of the gospel, brings light (2 Cor. 4 : 4-6, quoting Gen. 1 : 2). Those who have received the message of the gospel have been enlightened (Heb. 6 : 4; Eph. 1 : 18).

Here then in the New Testament, on an Old Testament foundation, is a theology of light connected with the coming of Christ and especially with the Resurrection. In this realm of thought the idea of the light coming, the sun rising and shining, is connected with the giving of light to the world and the enlightenment of the individual who comes out of darkness into light. He becomes light (Matt. 5 : 14), and walks as a child of light (Eph. 5 : 8). It is interesting to note that the

conception of fellowship is in 1 John 1:7 connected with the light, 'If we walk in the light . . . we have fellowship one with another.'

It will be noticed in these passages that light is used both for the truth, and for the moral life which corresponds to it; an understanding of the truth and the life which it should produce. We shall examine the former conception more fully in its relation to Sunday later on.<sup>8</sup>

Passing to post-New Testament times, Justin Martyr says, '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 and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on that day rose from the dead. For he was crucified on the day before that of Saturn, and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the sun, having appeared to his apostles and disciples, he taught them these things which we have submitted to you' (*Apol.* 1.67). Here two reasons are given for the observance of Sunday; it is the first day (with clear reference to Gen. 1:2f.) and it is the day of the Resurrection. Perhaps the thought in Justin's mind is that the 'appearing' of Christ and his teaching of the apostles is the equivalent of the giving of light on the first day. If Christ was the light of the world, then his 'arising' would be the giving of light. The 'teaching' would be continued as Sunday by Sunday the whole congregation (*pantes*) met together and he was in the midst, appearing in this way through the Scriptures and opening them up.

Clement of Alexandria, in the passage which we have already examined (*Strom.* 6.16), claims that 'on the primal day, our true rest, which is the first creation of light; from this day the first wisdom and knowledge illuminate us. . . . For the light of truth causing no shadow is the Spirit of God.'

In the *Paschal Canon* of Anatolius (11), he says, 'The festival of the Lord's resurrection is one of light and there is no fellowship between light and darkness.' And again, 'For on the Lord's Day was it that light was shown to us in the beginning and now also in the end, the comfort of all present and the token of all future blessings.' Anatolius wrote<sup>9</sup> probably c. AD 270. Primarily he is dealing with Easter day and the right date on which to keep it, but it is clear that the reference just given includes all Sundays as a general pattern, of which Easter (*pascha*) was the most outstanding. The 'light' refers to the resurrection of Christ.

In his *Commentary on Psalm 91* (92), Eusebius of Caesarea says 'And so refusing these (the false sabbaths), the Word through the New

Covenant changed (*metēgoge*) and transformed (*metatetheike*) the feast of the sabbath to the rising (*anatolē*) of the light and handed to us the image of a true rest, the Lord's Day that saves, the first day of light, on which the Saviour of the world after all his works . . . and having brought back victory over death crossed the heavenly gates and completed his work of six days. . . . On that day which is the day of light and the first and of the true Sun, we also ourselves coming together, celebrating holy sabbaths and spiritual, we who have been redeemed from all nations throughout the world through him, we fulfil, according to a spiritual law, the things which the law had decreed that the priests should do on the sabbath. We are offering spiritual sacrifices. . . .' A little further on he says, 'In the morning facing eastward we proclaim the light, the mercy of God', the idea being probably the welcoming of the Sun of Righteousness as he arises from the dead.<sup>10</sup>

In these passages Eusebius states that 'the Word', Christ it would seem, in the setting up of the New Covenant transferred the feast of the sabbath to the rising of the light (*tēn tou phōtos anatolēn*), and that this was the first day of light. Christ is the true Sun who has risen, in the Resurrection. Sunday has become the sabbath of the priests, a day full of service to God and not the day of the ordinary Israelite, emptied of all (*argein*). The same thoughts occur later where Eusebius speaks of the creating of light and of 'the Sun of Righteousness arising on our souls'. The turning to the east in the morning service he connects with the conception of the coming of light in the Resurrection.<sup>11</sup>

#### *The giving of light in the opening of the Scriptures*

Eusebius goes on to connect the day with the preaching of the Word of God. He says, 'Going on and becoming better, we are commanded too to announce them to others and to teach those who are near us the mercies of God'. Perhaps there is in his mind the connection of the preaching of the Word and the coming of light. For further down he continues, 'The proclamation of God's mercy in the morning and his faithfulness every night (I am trying to fulfil). For then is shown especially the truth of the godly soul, when in darkness and meeting darkness it shows sincerity and purity of conscience as in the brightest light and clearest day' (*PG* xxiii. 1184a).

This emphasis on Sunday as the day of the opening of the Word, the giving of light to the soul, is widespread in the early church. It comes perhaps from the mentioning, in the Resurrection accounts, of the announcing of the Resurrection by those who saw him, cf. John

20: 18, 25, involving belief and unbelief, 20: 29, described as 'the testimony', 21: 24; cf. also Luke 24: 10, 11; Matt. 28: 8.<sup>12</sup> Of similar significance, very likely, is the opening of the Scriptures to the disciples on the first Easter day (Luke 24: 27, 45), that is, the explanation of what had taken place in the death and resurrection of Jesus in its relationship to the Old Testament Scriptures. So there seem to have been the announcement (*kerygma*) of the Resurrection and the teaching (*didaskalia*), the explanation of the Old Testament, both connected in the minds of the writers with the day of the Resurrection, the first day.

The light, then, would seem to signify the new spirit of hope and joy which the Resurrection brought, and the understanding of divine truth, and coupled with it the integrity of heart resulting from new life.

It would be impossible to go through all the passages which deal with the reading and expounding of the Scriptures,<sup>13</sup> but perhaps we may quote one from Justin Martyr. In *Apol.* 1.67, he says, 'On the day called Sunday all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.' Clement of Alexandria, in *Paed.* 3.11, tells how, 'having paid reverence to the discourse about God, they leave within what they have heard'. At a later date, Chrysostom is especially insistent on the preaching and explaining of the Word.<sup>14</sup> In Origen (*Hom. Exod.* 7.5; *PG* xii. 345) there is the suggestion that on the first day the manna began to be given, whereas there was no manna on the seventh day; in other words, in Christianity, not in Judaism, is the true manna. While the picture is far-fetched, the underlying thought seems to be that there was for the Christian a gathering of what would meet his soul's need on the Sunday: 'No heavenly bread which is the Word of God . . .' 'For even today the Lord on the seventh day is raining manna from heaven. For there are the heavenly oracles which have been read to us and the words have descended from God.'

It would seem, then, that included in the thought of Sunday, as the day of light, was a firm belief in the need for the light of the Word, the explanation and understanding of the Scriptures.

#### *The giving of light and the new creation in baptism*

There is still another aspect of Sunday, as having a connection with light, in the practice of baptism on Sundays. We have already examined

the passage from Justin Martyr which gives the procedure on a Sunday morning (*Apol.* 1.65; *PG* vi. 428). No doubt the word *phōtizō*, which in the passive came to be used of baptism,<sup>15</sup> helped this conception. Those who were coming into the light would naturally do so on the day of light. This would be even more appropriate as baptism was looked upon as a resurrection. And this would naturally take place on the day of the Resurrection. Sunday, being the day when the Christians were gathered together, would in fact be the only suitable day for the receiving of the new converts. But it was not long before another connection was seen. Sunday, the first day, was also the eighth day. The Jewish child was circumcised on the eighth. It would be appropriate then that baptism, the 'sign' of the spiritual circumcision, the initiation into the new covenant, should take place on the eighth day also. Cyprian inveighs against those who would copy the Jews and wait until the literal eighth day in baptising their children, which would result in the baptism being on any day of the week (Cyprian, *Ep.* 58 [Oxford 64]. 2-4; *PL* iii. 1015).

This conception, again, would be connected with the Spirit. As the Spirit moved on the waters in Genesis 1: 2 and began the creation, so in baptism the Spirit, already connected with the new creation, is at work. In Acts 2, on the Sunday of Pentecost, there is the preaching of the Word, the giving of the Spirit and the baptism of three thousand.<sup>16</sup>

If we try to sum up the conceptions which we have examined under the heading of the first day, we find that the day of the Resurrection is thought of as the day when a new creation began. It began like the old creation, with the work of the Holy Spirit. It was a new beginning (*archē*), and from it sprang a new life. The rising of the Sun of Righteousness was the first step in this new creation. It was the giving of light where there had been darkness. This light was conveyed in the proclamation of the risen Christ and in the opening of the Scriptures, and resulted in people being enlightened and coming into the light, the outward sign of this being baptism. All these were connected in thought with Sunday, the first day.

CHAPTER 10 (pp. 104-111)

1. Clement Alex., *Strom.* 6.16 (PG ix. 364); see also Origen, *Hom. Exod.* 7.5 (PG xii.345); and Ambrose, *Ennar. in Pr.* 43.6 (PL xiv. 1090)
2. PG xxviii. 133. Hoss considered that it was a genuine work of Athanasius; see Quasten, *Patrology* 3 (Sermons), p. 50.
3. Ps.-Athanasius, *De Semente* (PG xxviii. 144), has the striking phrase, 'The Sun has arisen; the lamp ceases', of the relationship of Sunday and the sabbath. Zahn (*Skizzen*) inclines to a fourth-century date for this work; Dumaine ('Dimanche', p. 929, note 1) suggests Antioch as its origin.
4. PG lxxxvi. 416. Bright (*DCB*) suggests the fourth or fifth century as the date of the sermon. Here first, so far as I can find, the word *phylassein* is used of Sunday. Its use with 'the holy day' suggests the fourth commandment. Rordorf (quoting H. Hüber) would place this work in the sixth century (op. cit., p. 168, note 2).
5. This connection of the Holy Spirit with Sunday we shall examine later on.
6. It was because of this verse that the early church was willing to accept the pagan title 'Day of the Sun'.
7. This is the better translation.
8. The conception of 'sons of light' was of course pre-Christian. In the Qumran texts the *War Scroll* is concerned with the opposition of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, and the same ideas occur in *Enoch* 61:12 and 108:11 (cf. Charles, *Enoch*, pp. 122, 271), where it speaks of a spirit of light. No doubt the ideas stem originally from the Psalms and Isaiah and possibly Zoroastrian influence.
9. PG x. 218. However, this treatise is usually assigned to the sixth century, only the part quoted by Eusebius being reckoned the genuine work of Anatolius.
10. PG xxiii. 1169a. The translation is mine.
11. See also the following passages: Eusebius of Caes., *Demonst. Evang.* 4.16 (PG xxii. 312); Ps.-Athanasius, *De Sabb. et Circum.* 5 (PG xxviii. 133); Juvenius, *Lib. Evang.* 4, line 728 (PL xix. 339); Basil, *Hexameron* 2.8 (PG xxix. 52); Gregory of Nyssa, *In Pss.* 5 (PG xliv. 504); Ambrose, *En Pss.* 43.6 (PL xiv. 1090); Augustine, *Pss.* 47 (PL xxxvi. 532); Jerome, *In die dom. Pasch.*; G. Morin, *Anecdota Maredsolana* 3.2, 1897 (418); Theodoret, *In Pss.* 117.24 (PG lxxxii. 584). The Mandaeen Prayer Book, while obviously very late, probably has early connections, and links Sunday and light; see Drower, *Prayer Book*, pp. 110, 116. It is also connected with the oblation.
12. The last verses of Mark 16 emphasise the same thing: 16:10, 11, 13, the 'telling' (*apēngēilen*) and the 'unbelief': see also 16:20 (*ekēryxan*).
13. We have already seen several passages which refer to the dullness of the hearers after the Word has been preached. See also Tertullian, *Apol.* 39

(PL i. 468); Acts of Peter 30 (M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford, 1924, p. 330), which describes Peter preaching on the Lord's Day. I have collected more than thirty references in the first four centuries.

14. See Justin, *PG* vi. 429; Clement Alex, *PG* viii. 657; Chrysostom, *Com. Matt. Hom.* 5.1 (*PG* lvii. 55); *Adv. Iud.* 1 (*PG* xlvi. 844).
15. Heb. 6 : 4 and 10 : 32 may have this meaning. Moffatt (*ICC*) and Wickham (*Westminster Comm.*) both feel that it had not yet acquired this meaning. Spicq (*Hébreux*) and Montefiore (*Hebrews*, p. 108) seem to feel that this meaning lies behind the words. See also Maclean, *ERE*.
16. Augustine, *De Sermones in Monte* 1.4.12 (PL xxxiv. 1235); see Daniélou, *Bible and Liturgy*, pp. 37, 266. There is also the connection of eight person in the Flood story with baptism and the eighth day (cp. 1 Pet. 3 : 20f.). That the Sadducean Pentecost in the year of Christ's passion, like the later Christian Pentecost, was a Sunday, see note 12 on p. 152.