

LETTER FROM THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

We all like to receive mail. Here is a letter from the Roman Catholic Church, originally published in America in 1869. The message was written to Protestants and is forceful and to the point, with lots of Scriptural proofs for its position.

I am going to propose a very plain and serious question to those who follow "the Bible and the Bible only" to give their most earnest attention. It is this: Why do you not keep holy the Sabbath Day?

The command of Almighty God stands clearly written in the Bible in these words: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work" (Exodus xx. 8-10). And again, "Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day there shall be unto you an holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord; whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death" (Exodus xxxv. 2, 3).

How strict and precise is God's commandment upon this head! [in this matter!] No work whatever was to be done on the day which He had chosen to set apart for Himself and to make holy. And, accordingly, when the children of Israel "found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day," "the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp" (Numbers xv. 32, 35). **Such being God's command, then I ask again: Why do you not obey it? Why do you not keep holy the Sabbath day?**

You will answer me, perhaps, that you do keep holy the Sabbath day; for that you abstain from all worldly business and diligently go to church, and say your prayers, and read your Bible at home, every Sunday of your lives.

But Sunday is not the Sabbath day. Sunday is the first day of the week; the Sabbath day is the seventh day of the week. Almighty God did not give a commandment that men should keep holy one day in seven; but **He named His own day, and said distinctly: 'Thou shalt keep holy the seventh day,' and He assigned a reason for choosing this day rather than any other—a reason which belongs only to the seventh day of the week, and cannot be applied to the rest.** He says "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" [Exodus xx. 11].

Almighty God ordered that all men should rest from their labor on the seventh day, because He too had rested on that day; He did not rest on Sunday, but on Saturday. On Sunday, which is the first day of the week, He began the work of creation, He did not finish it [then]; it was on Saturday that He "ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made" (Genesis ii. 2). **Nothing can be more plain and easy to understand than all this;** and there is nobody who attempts to deny it; **it is acknowledged by everybody that the day which Almighty God appointed to be kept holy was Saturday, not Sunday. Why do you then keep holy the Sunday, and not Saturday?**

You will tell me that Saturday was the Jewish Sabbath [God gave the Bible Sabbath to mankind 2,000 years before the first Jew, Abraham, existed], but that the Christian Sabbath has been changed to Sunday; **changed! but by whom? Who has authority to change an express commandment of Almighty God? When God has spoken and said, Thou shalt keep holy the seventh day, who shall dare to say, Nay, thou mayest work and do all manner of**

worldly business on the seventh day; but thou shalt keep holy the first day in its stead? This is a most important question, which I know not how you can answer.

You are a Protestant, and you profess to go by the Bible and Bible only; and yet in so important a matter as the observance of one day in seven as a holy day, you go against the plain letter of the Bible, and put another day in the place of that day which the Bible has commanded. The command to keep holy the seventh day is one of the Ten Commandments. You believe that the other nine are still binding; but who gave you authority to tamper with the fourth? If you are consistent with your own principles, if you really follow the Bible and the Bible only, you ought to be able to produce some portion of the New Testament in which this fourth commandment is expressly altered.

Let us see whether any such passages can be found. I will look for them in the writings of your own [Protestant] champions, who have attempted to defend your practice in this matter.

1. The first text which I find quoted upon the subject is this: "Let no man judge you in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days" (Colossians ii. 16). [That refers to the ceremonial—sacrificial—yearly sabbaths of Leviticus 23, which were done away at the cross.] I could understand a Bible Christian imagining from this passage, that we ought to make no difference between Saturday, Sunday, and every other day of the week. But **not one syllable does it say about the obligation of the Sabbath being transferred from one day to another.**

2. Secondly, the words of St. John are quoted, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day (Apocalypse [Revelation] i. 10). Is it possible that anybody can for a moment imagine that here is a safe and clear rule for changing the weekly day of worship from the seventh to the first day? **This passage is utterly silent upon such a subject;** it only give Scriptural authority for calling some one day in particular (it does not even say which day) "the Lord's day."

3. Next we are reminded that St. Paul bade his Corinthian converts, "upon the first day of the week, lay by them in store, that there might be no gatherings" when he himself came (1 Corinthians xvi. 2). **How is this supposed to affect the law of the Sabbath?** It commands a certain act of almsgiving [doing one's finances at home] to be done on the first day of the week. **It says absolutely nothing about not doing certain other acts of prayer and public worship on the seventh day.**

4. But, you will say, it was "on the first day of the week" when the disciples were assembled within closed doors for fear of the Jews, and Jesus stood in the midst of them" (John xx. 19). **What is there in these facts to do away with the obligation of keeping holy the seventh day?** Our Lord rose from the dead on the first day of the week, and on the same day at evening He appears to many of His disciples. Let Protestants, if they will [in obedience to Catholic tradition], keep holy the first day of the week in grateful commemoration of that stupendous mystery, the Resurrection of Christ, and of the evidences which He vouchsafed to give of it to His doubting disciples; **but this is no scriptural authority for ceasing to keep holy another day of the week which God had expressly commanded to be kept holy for another and altogether different reason.**

5. But lastly, we have the example of the Apostles themselves. "Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow, and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts xx. 7). Here we have clear proof that the disciples heard a sermon on a Sunday. **But is that not proof they had done the same on the Saturdays also?** [Acts xiii. 14, 42-44; xvi. 12-13; xvii. 1-2; xviii. 1-4, 11]. [After the night meeting on the first day in Troas (Acts xx. 7), Paul held a meeting on Tuesday in Miletus (Acts xx. 17-38). But no one considers that meeting sacred.]

You will say, is it not expressly written concerning those early Christians, that they "continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house?" (Acts ii. 46). As a matter of fact, do we not know from other sources that, in many parts of the church, **the ancient Christians were in the habit of meeting together for public worship, and to perform the other [religious] offices, on Saturdays?** Again then, I say, [in obedience to our command] let Protestants keep holy, if they will their first day of the week; **but let them remember that this cannot possible release them from the obligation of keeping holy another day which Almighty God has ordered to be kept holy, because on that day He "rested from all His work."** [The Troas meeting was held on Sunday in Acts 20: 7, just prior to a Miletus meeting on Tuesday in Acts 20: 17-38, although no one today keeps Tuesday sacred because of that meeting].

I do not know of any other passages of holy Scripture which Protestants are in the habit of quoting to defend their practice of keeping holy the first day of the week instead of the seventh; yet, surely those which I have quoted are not such as should satisfy any reasonable man, who looks upon the written word of God as they [the Protestants] profess to look upon it, namely, as the only appointed means of learning God's will, and who really desires to learn and to obey that will in all things with humbleness and simplicity of heart. For in spite of all that anyone might say to the contrary, **it is fully and absolutely impossible that a reasonable and thoughtful person should be satisfied, by the texts that I have quoted, that Almighty God intended the obligation of Saturday to be transferred to Sunday.** And yet Protestants do so transfer it, and never seem to have the slightest misgivings lest, in doing so, they should be guilty of breaking one of God's commandments.

Why is this? Because, **although they talk so largely about following the Bible and Bible only, they are really guided in this matter by the voice of [Roman Catholic] tradition. Yes, much as they may hate and denounce the word [tradition], they have in fact no other authority to allege for this most important change.**

The present generation of Protestants keep Sunday holy instead of Saturday, because they received it as part of the Christian religion from the last generation, and that generation received it from the generation before, and so on backwards from one generation to another, by a continual succession, until we come to the time of the so-called "Reformation," when it so happened that those who conducted the change of religion [from Catholicism to Protestantism] left this particular portion of Catholic faith and practice untouched.

But, had it happened otherwise,—had some one or other of the "Reformers" taken it into his head to denounce the observance of Sunday as a Popish corruption and superstition, and to insist upon it that Saturday was the day which God had appointed to be kept holy, and that He had never authorized the observance of any other,—all Protestants would have been obliged, in obedience to their professed principle of following "the Bible and the Bible only," either to acknowledge this teaching as true, and to return to the observance of the ancient Sabbath, or else to deny that there is any Sabbath at all. And so, in like manner, any one at the present day who should set about, honestly and without prejudice, to draw up for himself a form of religious belief and practice out of the written Word of God, must needs come to the same conclusion: He must either believe that the seventh-day Sabbath is still binding upon men's consciences, because of the Divine command, 'Thou shalt keep holy the seventh day,' or he must believe that no Sabbath at all is binding upon them. [Paul would have no right to abolish any of the Ten Commandments.] Either one of these conclusions he might come to;—but **he would know nothing whatever of a "Christian Sabbath" distinct from the Biblical Sabbath, [that is] celebrated on a different day, and observed in a different manner,—simply because Holy Scripture itself nowhere speaks of such a thing.**

Now, mind, in all this you would greatly misunderstand me if you supposed I was quarrelling with you for acting in this matter on a true and right principle,—in other words, a Catholic principle (viz., the acceptance, without hesitation, of that which has been handed down to you by an unbroken tradition). I would not tear from you a single one of those shreds and fragments of Divine truth [Catholic truth] which you have retained. God forbid! They are the most precious things you possess, and by God's blessing may serve as clues to bring you out of that labyrinth of [Protestant] error in which you find yourselves involved, far more by the fault of your forefathers three centuries ago [when they left Rome during the sixteenth-century Reformation] than by your own.

What I do quarrel with you for, is not your inconsistency in occasionally acting on a true principle [such as Roman Catholic Sundaykeeping], but your adoption, as a general rule of a false one [your Protestant refusal to accept the rest of Roman traditional teachings; such as the Mass and the veneration of saints]. You keep the Sunday, and not the Saturday; and you do so rightly, for this was the practice of all Christians when Protestantism began [Catholic leaders erroneously say there were no Protestants prior to the sixteenth century]; but you have abandoned other Catholic observances which were equally universal at that day, preferring the novelties introduced by the men who invented Protestantism, to the unvarying tradition of above 1500 years [of Catholic teaching]. We blame you not for making Sunday your weekly holyday instead of Saturday, **but for rejecting tradition [the sayings of the popes and councils of Rome], which is the only safe and clear rule by which this observance [of Sunday] can be justified.**

In outward act we do the same as yourselves in this matter; we too no longer observe the Sabbath, but Sunday in its stead; **but there is this important difference between us, that we do not pretend—as you do—to derive our authority for so doing from a book [the Bible], but we [Catholics] derive it from a living teacher, and that teacher is the [Roman Catholic] Church.** Moreover, we believe that not everything which God would have us to know and to do is written in the Bible, but that there is also an unwritten word of God [the sayings of popes and councils and canonized saints], which we are bound to believe and to obey

We Catholics, then, have precisely the same authority for keeping Sunday holy instead of Saturday as we have for every other article of our creed, namely, the authority of "the Church of the living God, and ground of truth" (1 Timothy iii. 15); whereas you who are Protestants have really no authority for it [Sunday sacredness] whatever; for there is no authority for it in the Bible, and you will not allow that there can be authority for it anywhere else. Both you and we do, in fact, follow [Catholic] tradition in this matter; but we follow it, believing it to be a part of God's word, and the [Catholic] Church to be its divinely appointed guardian and interpreter. You follow it [Catholicism], denouncing it all the time as a fallible and treacherous guide which often "makes the commandment of God of none effect" (Matthew xv. 6).

—"Why Don't You Keep Holy the Sabbath Day?" pages 3-15, in The Clifton Tracts, Vol. 4, published by the Roman Catholic Church. Originally released in North America in 1869 through the T. W. Strong Publishing Company of New York City, so that those outside the papal fold might return to the not partial, but full, authority of the Mother Church of the Vatican.