

The Catholic Record.

"Christianus mihi nomen est Catholicus vero Cognomen."—(Christian is my Name, but Catholic my Surname)—St. Paolan, 4th Century

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"SABBATH OBSERVANCE"

A short time ago this staid city of London experienced a tempest in a teapot over Sabbath observance. It was proposed to allow the children to use the municipal swimming pool during the sweltering weather we were then having. Immediately there was a ministerial chorus of protest. One reverend Boanerges valiantly declared that they would not rest until they had routed "the hosts of hell." Presumably he saw in apocalyptic vision the infernal armies lined up behind His Worship the Mayor and others in their impious assault on the sanctity of "the Sabbath."

Imagine the consternation in the ministerial association and the jubilation amongst the hosts of hell when they read in the London Free Press of this dastardly flank attack on their citadel of sabbatarianism:

"That Sabbath observance in the strict sense of the law of Israel, whether on the traditional or any seventh day, is no concern of the Christian, was the assertion of Rev. J. Marion Smith, of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Toronto, in his evening sermon yesterday at the Talbot Street Baptist Church."

And this under a two-column heading: "Sabbath Observance Not Any Part of Man's Duty as a Christian!" True, Mr. Smith was speaking to the "interrogative subject," "Can a Saved Man Be Lost?" That is quite a big subject in itself; but we shall take first his pronouncement on the Sabbath, which evidently struck the reporter and the city editor as the more sensational if not the more important part of the sermon. The report of the Free Press continues:

"Quoting St. Paul, he declares that making any point of the old Mosaic law a test of righteousness is to accept the full burden of the rules, rituals and customs enjoined by Moses.

" 'In Toronto, for instance', he said, 'there are many who make a great point of Sabbath observance. I do not consider it any part of my duty as a Christian to observe the Sabbath. When Christ came the old law was fulfilled and done away with. Christ was the only being, as a human, who could and did observe the whole law. Of course, as a Christian I observe certain rules of conduct and habit. But that is the matter of personal purity.' "

It will be noted that the last paragraph purports to quote the very words of the preacher.

To the Toronto Star the Rev. Mr. Smith gave an explanatory interview which, though it may tend to allay Sabbatarian indignation, does not claim that he was misrepresented; indeed he further emphasizes the fact that the Jewish Sabbath and Christian Sunday are quite distinct and separate institutions.

We quote from The Star:

"The Jewish Sabbath is not Sunday, the Lord's Day. Christians are all wrong in speaking of the Sabbath as Sunday." said Mr. Smith. "The Sabbath is not binding upon a Christian as a means of justification from sin," he went on. "The keeping of Sunday, the Lord's day, is quite a different matter, and springs not from any obligation to the Jewish Law, but is the ready response from the heart

of the Christian who observes Sunday as a day set aside for worship and rest. This observance is one of the highest privileges of mankind, and it is only reasonable that one-seventh of a man's time should be devoted to special worship and spiritual refreshment."

And further to mollify the critics he added in conclusion:

"One of the greatest blessings of Canada had been due to the strict observance of the Lord's Day. To throw Sunday wide open would be to paralyze much good that is now accomplished and to throw unlimited temptation before the young life of our boys and girls."

The ministers of London who criticize Mr. Smith's sermon left the real crux of the question untouched. And that is not surprising, for on Protestant principles there is no possible explanation of the substitution of the Christian Sunday for the Jewish Sabbath; for this plain abrogation of the express commandment of God as recorded in the Bible.

Protestants reject Divine Tradition, the Unwritten Word, which Catholics accept as of equal authority with the Written Word, the Bible. The Divine authority given by Christ to the Church to teach in His name, to bind and loose, Protestants deny. For them - and it is their boast - the Bible and the Bible alone has Divine authority.

Now in the matter of Sabbath observance the Protestant rule of Faith is utterly unable to explain the substitution of the Christian Sunday for the Jewish Saturday. It has been changed. 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.

For Catholics it is not the slightest difficulty. "All power is given Me in heaven and on earth; as the Father sent Me so I also send you," said our Divine Lord in giving His tremendous commission to His Apostles. "He that heareth you heareth Me." We have in the authoritative voice of the Church the voice of Christ Himself. **The Church is above the Bible; and this transference of Sabbath observance from Saturday to Sunday is proof positive of that fact.** Deny the authority of the Church and you have no adequate or reasonable explanation or justification for the substitution of Sunday for Saturday in the Third - Protestant Fourth - Commandment of God. As the Rev. Mr. Smith rightly points out: "The Jewish Sabbath is not Sunday, the Lord's Day. Christians are all wrong in speaking of the Sabbath as Sunday." The Christians who so speak are "Bible Christians," those who make the Bible the sole rule of Faith; and the Bible is silent on Sunday observance, it speaks only of Sabbath observance. The Lord's Day - Dies Dominica - is the term used always in the Missal and the Breviary. It occurs in the Bible once (Apoc. 1.10;) in Acts xx. 7 and 1 Cor. xvi., 2 there is a reference to "the first day of the week;" but in none of these is there the remotest intimation that henceforth the first day is to take the place of the seventh. That is the crux of the whole question, what authority does the Bible give for the change? And that difficulty Mr. Smith and his critics, though pious and effusive and vaguely eloquent about many things, have each and all sedulously evaded.

If affects very materially and very intimately the question of the proper observance of the Lord's Day.

In the first centuries the obligation of rest from work remained somewhat indefinite. The Council of Laodicea, held at the end of the fourth century, was content to prescribe that on the Lord's Day the faithful were to abstain from work as far as possible. At the beginning of the sixth century St. Cesarius and others showed an inclination - very familiar to us - to apply the law of the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Sunday. But the Council of Orleans in 538 reprobated this tendency as Jewish and non-Christian.

Thus by the same Divine authority, in virtue of which she did away with the Jewish Sabbath and substituted therefor the Christian Sunday, the Catholic Church legislated as to how the Lord's Day should be observed.

Due to the exaggerated importance given the Bible after the Reformation and to the influence of Puritanism, the Lord's Day in England and still more in Scotland began to take on all the rigorism of the Jewish Sabbath. That heritage, though somewhat softened, we still have with us. A game of ball where participants and spectators enjoy health-giving rest and recreation in the open air is "desecration of the Sabbath." The swimming pool controversy is another good example.

We would not be misunderstood. With much of the activity of the Sabbatarians we are in sympathy. Their insistence on a day of rest being given all workers is admirable. But their muddle-headed confusion of the Lord's Day with the Jewish Sabbath - against which the Rev. Mr. Smith so vigorously protests - finds no sympathy amongst the Catholics who receive the Lord's Day itself as well as its mode of observance from the Church and not from the Bible.

It might serve a good purpose if the Sabbatarians would meditate on Mark ii, 23-28.

"And it came to pass again, as the Lord walked through the cornfields on the sabbath, that his disciples began to go forward and pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said to Him: Behold why do they on the sabbath-day that which is not lawful?"

"And He said to them: Have you never read what David did, when he had need, and was hungry himself and they that were with them? How he went into the house of God under Abiathar the high-priest and did eat the loaves of proposition which was not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave to them who were with him?"

"And He said unto them: The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath."

That is the great principle that is forgotten under the damnosa hereditas of Puritanical sabbatarianism.

Our Divine Lord observed the Sabbath; but by word and deed he set Himself against the absurd rigorism that made man the slave of the day.

The train of thought and discussion set in motion by the Rev. Mr. Smith if followed up to its logical conclusion should serve a very good and very practical purpose.

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Even A Pope Said Catholic Doctrine Is Superior To Scripture:

14. ... Catholic doctrine, as authoritatively proposed by the Church, should be held as the supreme law; for, seeing that the same God is the author both of the Sacred Books and of the doctrine committed to the Church, it is clearly impossible that any teaching can by legitimate means be extracted from the former, which shall in any respect be at variance with the latter. Hence it follows that all interpretation is foolish and false which either makes the sacred writers disagree one with another, or is opposed to the doctrine of the Church.

— [*PROVIDENTISSIMUS DEUS*](#), (On the Study of Holy Scripture),
 Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII dated November 18th, 1893.

As we know, the Sacred Scriptures are the written testimony of the divine word, the canonical memorial that testifies to the event of Revelation. **The Word of God therefore precedes and exceeds the Bible.** This is why **our faith is not only centred on a book** but on a history of salvation and above all on a Person, Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh. Precisely because the horizon of the divine word embraces and extends beyond Scripture, to understand it adequately the constant presence of the Holy Spirit is necessary, who will guide you into all the truth (Jn 16:13). **We must put ourselves in line with the great Tradition** which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and of the Magisterium, recognized the canonical writings as a word which God addressed to his People and never ceased to meditate on them and to discover their inexhaustible riches.

It follows that the exegete must be attentive to perceiving the word of God present in the biblical texts, fitting them into the Church's faith itself. **The interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures cannot only be an individual scientific effort. Rather, it must always be confronted, inserted and authenticated by the living Tradition of the Church.** — [Pope Francis to the Pontifical Biblical Commission, April 12, 2013.](#)