

Analysis of Common Quotations from The Church "Fathers" Concerning the Lord's Day

by Bob Pickle

Introduction

The quotations under discussion in this paper can be found posted on a number of web sites. They represent an attempt to show that:

- "Christians always worshipped on the first day (Sunday)"
- "While Sabbatarians will quote 20th century authors who guess about what happened 1900 years earlier, we quote Christians whose writings are 1900 years old and spoke what they saw!"
- "The record of history, from the Resurrection of Christ, Christians have always worshipped on the first day of the week (Sunday) and never on the Sabbath (7th day)."

Yet an objective analysis of the very quotations cited leads one to several conclusions:

1. Those making such claims have probably never bothered to read these quotations in the original sources.
2. Whoever compiled the original list of quotations may have intentionally been attempting to deceive.
3. The various web sites posting these quotations, because they incorporate identically erroneous material, have likely "plagiarized" from some other source, without giving proper credit.

That the last conclusion is even a possibility is extremely odd, given the fact that a few of these web sites specialize in making allegations of "plagiarism" against a particular sabbatarian of old. Certainly a site accusing someone else of plagiarizing would not engage in plagiarism!

Five Quotes from the "Didache"

The best way to demonstrate the necessity of the above conclusions is to start with the five quotations from the Didache. Yes, five quotations are given from "90AD Didache," but the fact is that out of the five, only the first one is really from the Didache! The other four actually come from the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a compilation of material written perhaps from 250 AD to 350 AD. That multiple web sites all mistakenly label a 250 AD-350 AD document as "90AD Didache" is strong evidence of plagiarism. After publication of this web page, one may expect that these various web sites will undergo revision. Indeed, one already has. But a search for "90AD Didache" or "90 AD Didache" may yet turn up some sites that have the old erroneous quotations.

"Didache" #2

We would next like to present the second quote said to be from the Didache, complete with typos, along with what the original actually says:

As Quoted on Web Site	From the Original
90AD DIDACHE: ...every Lord's day, hold your solemn assemblies, and rejoice: for he will be guilty of sin who fasts on the Lord's day, being the day of the resurrection... (Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 7, pg. 449)	[c. 250-300 AD <i>Apostolic Constitutions</i> :] We enjoin you to fast every fourth day of the week, and every day of the preparation, and the surplusage of your fast bestow upon the needy; every Sabbath-day excepting one, and every Lord's day, hold your solemn assemblies, and rejoice: for he will be guilty of sin who fasts on the Lord's day, being the day of the resurrection, or during the time of Pentecost, or, in general, who is sad on a festival day to the Lord. For on them we ought to rejoice, and not to mourn.—bk. 5, sec. 3, xx.

The reader will be quick to see that the initial ellipsis represents the omission of "every Sabbath-day . . . and." In other words, the very quote intended to prove that "Christians have always worshipped on the first day of the week (Sunday) and never on the Sabbath (7th day)" actually proves the contrary: Christians of the late third century were still keeping the Sabbath. But the apparently deceitful omission of the words in question prevents the reader from discerning this fact.

If Sunday is really sacred, if it is the Christian day for worship, if that is really what the Bible teaches, then just let the facts speak for themselves. Truth needs no fraud for support.

Some may wonder what "every Sabbath-day excepting one" means. This is in reference to fasting. As the centuries passed, Rome made the Sabbath a day for fasting while Sunday was a day for rejoicing. This made Sunday seem more preferable than the Sabbath in the minds of many. However, the church of the east resisted the idea of making the Sabbath a day of fasting. For them the Sabbath of the Decalogue was too special to make a day of gloom and fasting. As the above quotation puts it, they were never to fast on the Sabbath except one Sabbath a year: that one being the one that commemorated Christ's burial in the tomb (see bk. 2, sec. 3, xv).

Thus the *Apostolic Constitutions* reveals an incredible amount of respect for the Sabbath. Not only are Christians admonished to assemble every Sabbath, but they are also commanded to make every Sabbath a day of rejoicing, except one.

One other point can be made: At first some Christians kept one Sunday a year. Later, many were worshipping on both the Sabbath and Sunday. Sometime in the last half of the second century AD, Sunday began to be called the Lord's day. The above quote from the *Apostolic Constitutions* does not contradict these historical observations. While many Christians were still worshipping on the Sabbath in 300 AD, they were also worshipping

on Sunday. And they had begun to call Sunday the Lord's day, even though the Bible nowhere explicitly calls it thus.

"Didache" #3

As Quoted on Web Site	From the Original
<p>90AD DIDACHE: And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent Him to us, and condescended to let Him suffer, and raised Him from the dead. Otherwise what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day to hear the saving word concerning the resurrection...? (Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 7, pg. 423)</p>	<p>[c. 250-300 AD <i>Apostolic Constitutions</i>:] . . . but assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord's house: in the morning saying the sixty-second Psalm, and in the evening the hundred and fortieth, but principally on the Sabbath-day. And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent Him to us, and condescended to let Him suffer, and raised Him from the dead. Otherwise what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day to hear the saving word concerning the resurrection . . . ?—bk. 2, sec. 7, lix.</p>

True, many Christians by 300 AD were worshipping on Sunday too, but this very quote intended to prove that Christians "never [worshipped] on the Sabbath" actually says they assembled for worship "principally on the Sabbath-day." Why was that part of the quotation left out on the various web sites citing this passage?

"Didache" #4

This next citation mentions comes from the seventh book (sec. 2, xxx) of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and is felt to be of a later date than the first six books. It mentions only Sunday, not the Sabbath, but contains no material in dispute by sabbatarian scholars. We therefore provide instead some selections from the *Apostolic Constitutions* that command the keeping of the Sabbath for comparison:

As Quoted on Web Site	Other Passages on the Sabbath
<p>90AD DIDACHE: On the day of the resurrection of the Lord, that is, the Lord's day, assemble yourselves together, without fail, giving thanks to God, and praising Him for those mercies God has</p>	<p>[c. 250-300 AD <i>Apostolic Constitutions</i>:] Thou shalt observe the Sabbath, on account of Him who ceased from His work of creation, but ceased not from His work of</p>

<p>has delivered you from ignorance, error, and bondage, that your sacrifice may be unspotted, and acceptable to God, who has said concerning His universal Church: "In every place shall incense and a pure sacrifice be offered unto me; for I am a great King, saith the Lord Almighty, and my name is wonderful among the heathen, [Malachi 1:11, 14] (Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 7, pg. 471)</p>	<p>providence—bk. 2, sec. 7, lix.</p> <p>But keep the Sabbath, and the Lord's day festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection. But there is one only Sabbath to be observed by you in the whole year, which is that of our Lord's burial, on which men ought to keep a fast, but not a festival.—bk. 7, sec. 2, xxiii.</p>
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"Didache" #5

The fifth quote allegedly from the Didache says nothing about when the Christians met for worship. We shall therefore include a few more quotations from the same document regarding keeping the Sabbath for comparison.

As Quoted on Web Site	Other Passages on the Sabbath
<p>90AD DIDACHE: And how can he be other than an adversary to God, who takes pains about temporary things night and day, but takes no care of things eternal? Who takes care of washings and temporary food every day, but does not take care of those that endure forever? How can such a one even now avoid hearing that word of the Lord, "The Gentiles are justified more than you" as He says, by way of reproach, to Jerusalem, "Sodom is justified rather than thou." For if the Gentiles every day, when they arise from sleep, run to their idols to worship them, and before all their work and all their labors do first of all pray to them, and in their feasts and in their solemnities do not keep away, but attend upon them; and not only those upon the place, but those living far distant do the same; and in their public shows all come together, as into a synagogue: in the same manner those which are vainly called Jews, when they have worked six days, on the seventh day rest, and come together in their synagogue, never leaving</p>	<p>[c. 300-350 AD <i>Apostolic Constitutions</i>:] Let your judicatures be held on the second day of the week, that if any controversy arise about your sentence, having an interval till the Sabbath, you may be able to set the controversy right, and to reduce those to peace who have the contests one with another against the Lord's day.—bk. 2, sec. 6, xlvi.</p> <p>Not that the Sabbath-day is a day of fasting, being the rest from the creation—bk. 5, sec. 3, xv.</p> <p>O Lord Almighty Thou hast created the world by Christ, and hast appointed the Sabbath in memory thereof, because that on that day Thou hast made us rest from our works, for the meditation upon Thy laws.—bk. 7, sec. 2, xxxvi.</p>

or neglecting either rest from labor or assembling together... **If, therefore, those who are not saved frequently assemble together** for such purposes as do not profit them, what apology wilt thou make to the Lord God who forsakes his Church, not imitating so much as the heathen, but by such, thy absence grows slothful, or turns apostate. or acts wickedness? To whom the Lord says to Jeremiah, "Ye have not kept My ordinances; nay, you have not walked according to the ordinance of the heathen and you have in a manner exceeded them... How, therefore, will any one make his apology who has despised or absented himself from the church of God? (Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, 100's AD? [date uncertain], Ante-Nicene Fathers , Vol. 7, page 423)

every Sabbath to rest, that so no one might be willing to send one word out of his mouth in anger on the day of the Sabbath. For the Sabbath is the ceasing of the creation, the completion of the world, the inquiry after laws, and the grateful praise to God for the blessings He has bestowed upon men. All which the Lord's day excels—bk. 7, sec. 2, xxxvi.

Let the slaves work five days; but **on the Sabbath-day** and the Lord's day **let them have leisure to go to church** for instruction in piety. We have said that the Sabbath is on account of the creation, and the Lord's day of the resurrection.—bk. 8, sec. 4, xxxiii.

64. If any one of the clergy be found to fast on the Lord's day, or on the Sabbath-day, excepting one only, **let him be deprived**; but if he be one of the laity, **let him be suspended**.—bk. 8, Eccl. Canons.

It is quite plain that the writers responsible for this document believed that:

1. The Sabbath originated at Creation, not Sinai.
2. The Sabbath is for all men, not just Jews.
3. The Sabbath was not abolished by Christ.
4. The Sabbath is still to be observed by Christians.
5. Christians who would dare dishonor the Sabbath by fasting upon it (with one exception) must be punished.

Yet it is also equally clear that apostasy had progressed to a considerable degree by 350 AD. One of the contributors to this document wrote above that Sunday "excels" the Ten Commandment, Creation Sabbath, although 1) Scripture says absolutely nothing about Sunday being sacred, and 2) this contributor offered no Bible evidence in support of his assertion.

Didache #1

Now that we have analyzed the four quotes that weren't really from the Didache, we will go back to the one that really was from the Didache.

As Quoted on Web Site	From the Original
<p>90AD DIDACHE: But every Lord's day, do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord... [Matt. 5:23-24] (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, , Chap. 14:1, Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 7, page 381)</p>	<p>Where's ἡμέρα, the Greek word for "day"?</p> <p>Κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου συναχθέντες κλάσατε ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσατε, προεξομολογησάμενοι τὰ παραπτώματα ὑμῶν (Didache 14:1)</p>

The use of this quotation proves nothing, even if it does date from 90 AD, a date that is by no means certain. Two points can be made:

1. The Greek word for "day" does not even appear in the passage. It has been added by the translators.
2. Even if the addition of the word "day" is correct, the passage does not specifically say which day is meant by the Lord's day. It could just as well refer to the Sabbath, since that is the only day the Bible says belongs to the Lord.

Regarding point 2, all will likely agree that it is Jesus who is talking in Isaiah 63:1-6, since Revelation 19:13 and 15 use the same language in reference to Christ. It must then follow that Christ is the "Lord" who is described in Isaiah 59:16, since the wording is so similar to Isaiah 63:5. Therefore, it is probably Christ who is the "Lord" in Isaiah 58:13, who declares that the Sabbath is "My holy day." These and other Scriptures indicate that the Sabbath is the special day that belongs to Jesus, and there are no Bible verses that say otherwise.

Ignatius

The quote said to be from "107 AD Ignatius" comes from Ignatius' epistle to the Magnesians, which might possibly be genuine in its shorter form, but the longer form is generally felt to be a forgery written long after the time of Ignatius. Indeed, one web site which had dated this quote in 107 AD now dates it in 250 AD, but still claims that Ignatius wrote it. This of course is impossible, since Ignatius died around 107 or 116 AD. Regarding the shorter form, its genuineness is by no means certain, and it is highly possible that what we have today does not represent what was originally written. Is the quote in question from the longer or the shorter form? Surprisingly, it's from both. Both forms got run together as if they were a single quote. In other words, the quote as given on these various web sites does not exist anywhere in reality.

As Quoted on Web Site	From Original, Short Form

107AD IGNATIUS: Be not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables, which are unprofitable. For if we still live according to the Jewish law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace... If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, **no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death** (which some deny), through which mystery we received faith, and on account of which we suffer in order that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ our only teacher, how shall we be able to live apart from him for whom even the prophets were looking as their teacher since they were his disciples in the spirit?... let every friend of Christ keep **the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days of the week**. It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has now come to an end. for where there is Christianity there cannot be Judaism.... These things I address to you, my beloved, not that I

[**Authenticity and date unknown.**] Be not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables, which are unprofitable. For if we still live according to the Jewish law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace. **For the divinest prophets** lived according to Christ Jesus.—ch. 8.

If, therefore, **those who were brought up in the ancient order of things** have come to the possession of a new hope, **no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death** — whom some deny, by which mystery we have obtained faith, and therefore endure, that we may be found the disciples of Jesus Christ our only Master — how shall we be able to live apart from Him, whose disciples **the prophets themselves** in the Spirit did wait for Him as their Teacher? And therefore He whom they rightly waited for, being come, raised them from the dead.—ch. 9.

From Original, Long Form

know any of you to be in such a state; but, as less than any of you, I desire to guard you beforehand, that ye fall not upon the hooks of vain doctrine, but that you may rather attain to a full assurance in Christ... (Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, chp 9. Ante-Nicene Fathers , vol. 1, pg. 62-63.)

[Not by Ignatius, c. 300 AD?] For if we still live according to the Jewish law, and the circumcision of the flesh, we deny that we have received grace.—ch. 8.

But let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law, not in relaxation of the body, admiring the workmanship of God, and not eating things prepared the day before, nor using lukewarm drinks, and walking within a prescribed space, nor finding delight in dancing and plaudits which have no sense in them. And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week].—ch. 9.

It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has now come to an end. For where there is Christianity there cannot be Judaism.—ch. 10.

These things [I address to you], my beloved, not that I know any of you to be in such a state; but, as less than any of you, I desire to guard you beforehand, that ye fall not upon the hooks of vain doctrine, but that you may rather attain to a full assurance in Christ . . .—ch. 11.

Let's examine the longer form first, with which the reader will immediately notice a severe problem. The very quote that is supposed to prove that "Christians . . . never [worshipped] on the Sabbath" actually commands "every" Christian to "keep the Sabbath"! Moreover, since the quote also forbids Judaizing, it follows that the writer of the long form of this epistle believed that Sabbath keeping transcended Judaism. In other words, a Christian could tell people that they needed to keep the Sabbath without being guilty of Judaizing!

The words "and after the observance of the Sabbath" were intentionally deleted from the quote. Another example of fraud?

Now let's look at the shorter form. Notice how Ignatius, if this was indeed written by Ignatius, appears to be talking about the ancient prophets, not about Christians. It would thus appear that this quote must be talking about something other than breaking the Sabbath, since the ancient prophets most certainly did keep the Sabbath. More importantly, please note that as in Didache #1, the Greek word for "day" appears nowhere in the text:

As Quoted on Web Site	From the Original
<p>... no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death (Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, chp 9. Ante-Nicene Fathers , vol. 1, pg. 62-63.)</p>	<p>Where's ἡμέρα, the Greek word for "day"?</p> <p>... μηκέτι σαββατίζοντες, ἀλλὰ κατὰ κυριακὴν ζῶντες, ἐν ἣ καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἡμῶν ἀνέτειλεν δέ αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ (Ignatius to the Magnesians 9:1)</p>

The translation should have said something about the Lord's life, not the Lord's day, for that is how the Greek reads. Thus, even if this quote was written in 107 AD, the writer didn't call Sunday the Lord's day. Rather than speaking about the Lord's day, he is speaking about living the Lord's life, living a life like Jesus.

Is this some brand new discovery that the authors of these web pages have not had opportunity to hear about yet? Not at all. John Andrews put it in print in his book, *History of the Sabbath*, back in 1873!

Barnabas

As Quoted on Web Site	From the Original
<p>74 AD The Letter of Barnabas "We keep the eighth day [Sunday] with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead" (Letter of Barnabas 15:6-8).</p>	<p>The Sabbath is mentioned at the beginning of the creation . . . Therefore, my children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished. "And He rested on the seventh day." This meaneth: when His Son, coming [again], . . . then shall He truly rest on the seventh day. Moreover, He says, "Thou shalt sanctify it with pure hands and a pure heart." If, therefore, any one can now sanctify the day which God hath sanctified, except he is pure in heart in all things, we are deceived. Behold,</p>

	resting sanctifies it, when we ourselves, having received the promise, wickedness no longer existing, and all things having been made new by the Lord, shall be able to work righteousness. Then we shall be able to sanctify it, having been first sanctified ourselves. . . . Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead. And when He had manifested Himself, He ascended into the heavens.
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So according to pseudo-Barnabas, we are too wicked at present to keep the Sabbath, and will not be able to keep it until we are sanctified when Christ returns. Because we are too wicked to keep the Sabbath now, we must keep Sunday instead. What good does this reasoning do for the cause of Sunday sacredness?

We say pseudo-Barnabas, because all admit that Barnabas, companion of Paul, never wrote this strange epistle. And the date of 74 AD is highly questionable. Says the introduction in Roberts and Donaldson's edition of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*:

Roberts and Donaldson's Introduction
The date, object, and intended readers of the Epistle can only be doubtfully inferred from some statements which it contains. It was clearly written after the destruction of Jerusalem, since reference is made to that event (chap. 16.), but how long after is matter of much dispute. The general opinion is, that its date is not later than the middle of the second century, and that it cannot be placed earlier than some twenty or thirty years before.

That puts the date around 120 to 150 AD. Now if that's the general opinion, why do these various web pages say "74 AD"?

Other resources say that the date of composition falls between 70 AD and 135 AD, between the destruction of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the city by Hadrian. Glenn Davis says, "Within these limits it is not possible to be more precise." That being so, it seems less than straightforward to date this quote in "74 AD."

Pliny

As Quoted on Web Site
110AD Pliny: they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light , when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to (do) any wicked deeds, never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of good food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.

Yes, it's true. This really is one of the quotes on various web sites used to prove that "Christians have always worshipped on the first day of the week (Sunday) and never on the Sabbath (7th day)." Strange thing is that Pliny never said what day he was talking about.

That lack on these various web sites is supplied by a rather lengthy quotation from Frances Nigel Lee. We quote most of it below:

As Quoted on Web Site

In this remarkable [*sic*] it is explicitly stated that **these early Christians observed the substance of most of the Ten Commandments**, and it is implied that they observed all ten as far as they were able to do so. As far as they were able, for as most of the early Christians were of slave stock or from other lower classes'-, and those who had heathen masters or employers—the vast majority—**would be forced to work on their day of rest**, which was unfortunately an official working day throughout the empires' until Constantine's "Sabbath" Edict in 321 A.D. gave them some measure of public protection. Hence one reads that after meeting "on a certain fixed day before it was light", the first century Bithynian Christians had "to separate"—many of them having to labour for their masters and/or employers **from dawn to dusk**—"and then reassemble to partake of . . . food". The "certain fixed day" [*stato die*"] [*sic*] on which the Christians met, is regarded by Seventh-day Adventists as Saturday'- [*sic*] . . . But Sunday is far more likely to have been the "certain fixed day" than Saturday. For if Pliny had been referring to the old Saturday Sabbath, as a Roman he would doubtless have referred to the "later" meeting first and only then to the morning meeting on the day *al ter* [*sic*] the "certain fixed day", seeing that the old Saturday Sabbath was demarcated from the evening of one day to the evening of the following day. But Pliny makes no such reference. Instead, he mentions that the pre-dawn meeting took place first—and only afterwards the later meeting; and that both meetings took place on the same "certain fixed day". This rather points to the Roman (and—more importantly!—New Testament) midnight to midnight demarcation of modern Sunday-keepers than to the evening to evening demarcation of the Jews and the Seventh-day Adventists. (The covenantal [*sic*] Sabbath, Francis Nigel Lee, Pg 242)

Lee makes several questionable assumptions:

1. While he admits that Christians kept the 10 Commandments, Lee assumes that they were cowards when it came to keeping a day of rest. Thus, while they regularly were fed to lions rather than dishonor Christ, they were too scared of their employers to obey God's Sabbath commandment.
2. Lee assumes that when Pliny says that the Christians got together again later in the day, that that means after dusk. Pliny never said that's what he meant. He could just as well have meant later that morning or in the afternoon.
3. If Lee's second assumption is valid, that would mean that Christians met once before dawn and once after dusk on the same Roman day. Today's Sunday keepers often quote Acts 20:7, the only first-day worship service recorded in all the New Testament. That text gives no hint of such a service being a weekly occurrence, but suppose it was done weekly. Since the meeting of Acts 20:7 was on what we call Saturday night, it therefore follows that Pliny could just have easily been talking about a Sabbath pre-dawn meeting, and a meeting after dusk on that same Saturday.

At best, this quote from Pliny proves nothing at all. Assume that the Saturday-night worship service of Acts 20:7 was a regular, weekly occurrence, and at worst, this quote from Pliny says that the Christians met every Sabbath before dawn for worship.