

## Sunday Observance and Sunday Trading

(A report from the Standing Committee)

### Policy

1. Limited Sunday trading has been permitted in leases of commercial property held on trust for the Anglican church in the Diocese of Sydney since at least 1967. Some leases have never had a limitation on Sunday trading as the question does not arise, leases for residential purposes being an example.
2. The *Church Trust Property (Declaration of Certain Purposes and Objects) Ordinance 1979* provides -
  2. The purposes and objects of the Anglican Church of Australia in the Diocese of Sydney include (but are not limited to) preventing the use of church trust property for such purposes as have been or may be from time to time proscribed by ordinance of the Synod or ordinance or resolution of the Standing Committee thereof.
  3. Without limiting the generality of clause 2, a purpose shall have been proscribed if an ordinance of the Synod or an ordinance or resolution of the Standing Committee thereof directs a trustee of church trust property to include in a lease granted in respect of that property a covenant which forbids or restricts the use of that property for a purpose specified in such ordinance or resolution."
3. The Standing Committee's policy on Sunday Trading, confirmed on 2 May 1988, is that "church trust property for or for the use, benefit or purposes of the Anglican Church of Australia in the Diocese of Sydney should not be used -
 

“....

  - (f) for trade on Sunday except for the sale of food, newspapers, petrol, pharmaceutical services and supplies or other services urgently required on Sundays and for purposes approved by the Standing Committee in the context of specific local circumstances.”
4. This limited Sunday trading policy has not been changed substantially since it was made in 1967, except for the addition in 1989 of the words "and for purposes approved by the Standing Committee in the context of specific local circumstances".
5. It would not be possible to lease a licensed church for commercial purposes, including Sunday trading, although churches are frequently used by parishioners for the sale of Christian books and other items on Sundays.

### Variations from Policy

6. I can recall only 3 approved variations from this policy over the years.
  - (a) In the 1970's approval was given for the St Andrew's House Car Park to trade on Sundays.
  - (b) In 1989, a furniture store on property held in trust for the Parish of Yagoona was given permission to open on Sundays.
  - (c) In 1994, authority was given by an ordinance to enable the shops in Town Hall Arcade to trade on Sundays. Some do trade on Sundays but most do not.
7. The provision in 6(a) was to help the Cathedral but it had to be a commercial decision. The permission in 6(b) and the authority in 6(c) were given in adverse trading situations.
8. A sampling of 16 current commercial leases held by the Property Trust shows that most of the leases in the sample included Sunday trading restrictions. There were 5 exceptions: of those 5, 2 were able to trade on Sundays within our present policy, 1 was for Government offices (no Sunday trade) and 1 was for a real estate agent who does not trade on Sundays. The last of the 5, also a real estate agent, was a mistake and should have contained the Sunday trading restrictions.

### Doctrine Commission's Report

9. Due to pressures to change the limited Sunday trading policy, the Standing Committee in 1989 asked the Diocesan Doctrine Commission to report on the matter of Sunday/Sabbath observance. The Commission's report follows.

**Conclusion**

10. The Standing Committee would like time to consider the Doctrine Commission's report and to work through any practical issues arising from that consideration.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee

WARREN GOTLEY  
*Diocesan Secretary*

22 September 1995

## Sunday Observance and Sunday Trading

(A report from the Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.)

### Introduction

1. In 1989 the Standing Committee requested that the Diocesan Doctrine Commission examine the matter of Sunday/Sabbath observance and report back to the Standing Committee. This question was asked in the context of the tension which has arisen over the Standing Committee's policy governing the use of church trust property, in particular that it should not be used "for trade on Sundays except for the sale of food, newspapers, petrol, pharmaceutical services and supplies or other services urgently required on Sundays." The members of the Commission are -

Bishop P.W. Barnett	The Rev E.A. Mathieson
The Rev S.S. Fifer	The Rev Dr P.T. O'Brien
Canon R.C. Forsyth	Bishop D.W.B. Robinson
Canon P.F. Jensen	Deaconess M.A. Rodgers
The Rev J.G. Mason	The Rev Dr J.W. Woodhouse

2. Our research and discussions have been protracted on account of -
- other more urgent matters, in particular God, Language and Gender, and Lay and Diaconal Administration; and
  - genuine and deeply held differences on this subject within the Commission.
3. Four or five separate papers have been written, none of them finding wholesale agreement or support. Two of these papers have been attached to this report. They are serious essays, deserving careful reading and reflection.
4. What follows is the Commission's attempt to bring the matter to a conclusion.

### The Issues

5. The issues present themselves in a logical sequence -
- Is there a biblical mandate obliging Christians to observe Sunday, the first day, as the Lord's Day or as a "Christian Sabbath"?
  - Is the individual Christian thereby precluded from engaging in business activities on that day?
  - Is the property owned by a church or denomination precluded from business activity on that day?

### Conclusions and Recommendations

6. Our research and discussion has revealed significant difficulties on questions of exegesis and hermeneutics. These difficulties may be endemic to the question itself.
7. Some members find in the New Testament a pattern of the Christians gathering on the "first day of the week," which they think is corroborated in Christian and non-Christian writings in the period immediately after the New Testament era. They see here a basis for meeting on Sunday as a normal pattern for Christian practice.
8. Other members see nothing normative about any such pattern and do not give doctrinal weight to non-canonical writings which may illuminate the sparse New Testament references.
9. Some relate the Christian "first day" for church gathering to the seventh day of the biblical creation narrative, making Sunday a "Christian Sabbath." Others do not find a basis for this conjunction in the New Testament. They believe that there is no such explicit teaching in the New Testament and that Sunday as a "Sabbath" only became a possibility after the post-Constantinian settlement in the fourth century.
10. In regard to the question of the obligation on the individual Christian, it is clear from our protracted discussions that the Doctrine Commission is unable to present an agreed theological position on either (1) Sunday as a norm for Christian gathering, or (2) Sunday as a day of "rest from labours".
11. It appears to us, therefore, that each Christian, and each church or denomination, must read the Bible and exercise Christian wisdom and responsibility in regard to these matters.
12. It follows from this conclusion that the individual Christian must reach his or her own decision in regard to engaging in business or paid employment on Sundays.
13. In exercising this liberty, however, at least three other considerations need to be noted -

- (a) love for neighbour requires us to consider whether the good of our society as a whole is best served by a common day of rest in each week;
- (b) such actions as are taken should be mindful of the need to act in fellowship including in regard to the "weak brother"; and
- (c) a pattern of regular<sup>1</sup> gathering for believers is desirable (Heb 10:25).

14. It also follows that our denomination must exercise Christian wisdom and responsibility in considering the policy with regard to its tenants engaging in business on Sunday. The members of a trustee of church trust property would also need to weigh up other considerations, e.g. as on one hand the possible inconsistency of public trading in an arcade close by a cathedral when public worship is being held, and on the other the potential unfairness of placing restrictions on tenants relative to their business competitors in neighbouring arcades.

For and on behalf of the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission

PAUL BARNETT  
*Chairman*

May 1995

1. It must be noted, however, that if no pattern of "first day" gathering is allowed from New Testament exegesis then the pattern of weekly gatherings as a norm must be given up. Once the "first day" as a pattern is foregone there is no biblical basis for *weekly* gathering. On that account church-going could be daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually or occasionally and irregularly.

## **Appendix 1: Sunday Observance and Sunday Trading: A Doctrinal Issue?**

1. The views of the Doctrine Commission have been sought on the matter of Sunday Observance and, in particular, the use of Anglican church property for commerce and trade on Sundays.

### **Is a question of Christian Doctrine Involved?**

2. It can scarcely be denied that the Christian designation of Sunday as the Lord's Day implies a doctrine concerning the day, with possible implications for Christian conduct on that day. What that doctrine is, and what the ethical implications may be, require some explication and justification. A certain view may be implicit in the provisions for Sunday in the Book of Common Prayer, and is certainly explicit in the Homily "Of the Place and Time of Prayer" and in Canon 13 of 1603. We may therefore refer to these formularies for the Anglican doctrine of the Lord's Day.

3. As the Homily in particular asserts, and as Christian history from early centuries reveals, the Lord's Day can be considered as fulfilling the divine purpose of the Sabbath, as interpreted by Jesus, without the demand of what some would call a strict Sabbatarian approach.

4. However, historical scholarship may take us further in our understanding of what was meant by "the Lord's Day". There are some grounds for thinking that the Lord's Day originated in some kind of relation to the Sabbath: whether as the way the first Jewish Christians observed the sabbath, i.e. in the light of Jesus' own assurance that "the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath", or as the use of the first available hours of the first day of the week, i.e. the evening hours after the close of the sabbath, for the assembling of Christians to complement their sabbath worship. However, our earliest post-New Testament documents invest the first day as such with a more than pragmatic significance. Not only is it called "the Lord's Day": it is hailed as the day of the Lord's resurrection and of his first appearances (which the New Testament amply attests), and for some it is "the eighth day", i.e. the first day of the new creation.

5. Behind all this stands an understanding of "days" in the divine economy of creation, based not only on the account of creation in Genesis and on the continuing significance of certain days in the Jewish calendar, but on the idea of "the last days" or "the end of the days" culminating in "the day of the Lord". The day, with its evening and its morning, did not need to be observed in a particular way to be recognised as significant in memory.

6. There is also the strong and consistent connection in the early writings between the Lord's Day and the assembling of the church to offer its thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) to God for both creation and redemption. This was, or came to be, associated the Lord's supper - it is to be noted that the adjective "the Lord's" (*kuriakos*) is applied both to the day and to the supper in the New Testament - yet the offering of the thanksgiving is possibly more basic than its association with the day, reflecting the worship of heaven which John saw on Patmos when he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day". The influence of "The Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10, indeed of the whole of Revelation 1 to 5, on the early Christian understanding of Sunday can hardly be overestimated.

7. The creation of Sunday as a public holiday in the fourth century and its continuance up to our own time has meant that the day has been taken for granted. Christians have not needed to think through the full implications of Sunday as the Lord's day. Present changes in community attitudes, and in legislation, make a reassessment desirable.

### The Issue

*What is the significance of the Lord's Day?*

8. We encounter this designation first in the New Testament (Revelation 1:10), though the sanctification of certain days to the Lord, notably the weekly sabbath, is well established in the Old Testament, where also we encounter the prophetic "day of the Lord". Were the New Testament our only evidence we might have some doubt as to the meaning of "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10. In the NT context alone it might mean the sabbath ("the Son of man is lord of the sabbath"). But in view of the distinctive adjective *kuriaké* with "day", and of the clear meaning of the phrase in other early Christian documents such as the Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, and Justin's Apology, the Lord's Day in Revelation 1:10 can hardly be otherwise understood than as the first day of the week, which has prominence elsewhere in the New Testament, notably as the day on which it was proclaimed that "the Lord is risen indeed". [Luke 24.1, 6, 33, I Cor 16.2, Acts 20.7.]

9. There was no confusion of the Lord's Day with the Jewish sabbath in the early centuries. It did not replace the sabbath, which Jewish Christians continued to observe, though not necessarily according to the rabbinic tradition which Jesus criticized. Sabbath and Lord's Day existed side by side, even in some Christian circles, as a number of documents attest, and their difference was often a matter of note.

10. "The first day of the week" derives its significance from the creation narrative in Genesis. The Epistle of Barnabas - written possibly as early as the Book of Revelation - sees the Lord's Day as the eighth day: "the beginning of the new week, as the dawning of the new creation at whose commencement Jesus rose from the dead ..." (summary in Kittel's Theological Dictionary under *sabbaton*). Justin similarly combines old and new significance. Writing for outsiders he avoids the Christian term "Lord's Day", but describes the Christian day of meeting as "the first day, on which God put to flight darkness and chaos and made the world, and on the same day Jesus Christ our saviour rose from the dead..." (Apology 1.67).

11. There is really no doubt about the theological significance of the first day of the week, Sunday, as the Lord's Day, in the early Christian centuries. Its status as the first day, the beginning of God's creation, was revealed in the scriptures. The resurrection of Jesus on the first day invested it with all the significance of the new era of salvation. The division of time into days, weeks, and years, was integral to both the Jews' and the Christians' consciousness of their relation to God in their earthly life. This was so regardless of how a day was *observed*: but the idea of celebrating a special day with a holy convocation to the Lord was not novel. The Christians, we know, met together in Jesus' name frequently, and the meeting Jesus had with his disciples on the day of his resurrection could hardly have been seen otherwise than as a model for future corporate life. Our early post-apostolic documents reveal unanimously that the first day of the week was hailed as a weekly festival of joy and gladness on which Christians met to offer their corporate thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) in honour of God the creator and Christ the redeemer and risen Lord.

12. The model for the regular *eucharistia* of redeemed creatures may well have been the heavenly worship seen in the vision of John on the Lord's Day in Revelation 4 and 5 when

The whole creation joins in one  
To bless the sacred name  
Of him who sits upon the throne  
And to adore the Lamb.

13. The very early (third century) familiar invitation

Lift up your hearts! **We lift them to the Lord**  
Let us give thanks (*eucharistomen*) to the Lord our God

takes us beyond the breaking of the bread. It is an invitation to join the whole company of heaven. This *sursum corda* is the Lord's Day logo or motif. Its climax is the *sanctus*, which voices the worship of heaven in both Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4. Thus the reference to the Lord's Day in Revelation 1:10 is not just an incidental historical note. It implies a whole theology of time, of the Lord, of "the day", and perhaps also of the Spirit, of prophetic revelation, and of the church gathering for worship with the church in heaven and all creation.

14. It would not be unreasonable to say, from the evidence of the Book of Revelation through to the liturgical forms of the fourth and fifth centuries, that it was the Lord's Day and its significance which both created the context, and provided the obligation, for the assembling of the church. It was more than a convenient or pragmatic arrangement for getting together for edification and worship. It was more even than a weekly commemoration of the creation and the resurrection: it implied a certain understanding of 'salvation in time',

and was an eschatological experience, a regular "tasting the powers of the age to come" and joining in the worship of heaven. To be sure, this experience was not, for spiritually minded Christians, confined to one day a week (see Origen on the subject), but Sunday had this significance for Christians generally, nevertheless.

### How Did Early Christians Actually Use the Lord's Day?

15. We know little about this. That they met together is certain, but the times and length of meeting must have varied according to circumstances. The first day of the week was not a holiday until the fourth century, and in any case we know that there was no inclination to observe it after the manner of the Jewish sabbath. Tertullian (North Africa, c.200) is perhaps the first to record that Christians avoided business on Sunday. Because it was the day of the Lord's resurrection, Christians not only abstained from fasting, or kneeling, or any other posture of anxiety, but deferred "even matters of business, lest we give any place to the devil" (*de oratione*, 23). Tertullian makes it clear that this was not in imitation of the sabbath, but was due to the quite different nature of the *day*, being a day of joy and gladness, and due also to the need to give full attention to the things of the Lord.

16. Was this a doctrinal issue for Tertullian? He is describing actual conduct. Perhaps we could say it constitutes strong advice based on the agreed doctrinal significance of Sunday as the Lord's Day.

17. From about the same period, in Syria, we have the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, which condemns Christians who provide for their own bodily needs on the Lord's Day but neglect "to assemble ... to hear the Word of life and to be nourished with the divine food which endures for ever". If a man is prevented from assembling on the excuse of secular work, "let him know that the handicrafts of believers are called works of superfluity: for the sure work is the fear of God. Do your handicrafts, therefore, as a work of superfluity for your nourishment, but let your real work be the worship of God. Strive, therefore, never to be hindered from the assembly of the church" (ch.13). The passage is not entirely clear, but it seems to say that acting in one's personal interest, even for nourishment, should not take precedence over the obligation of corporate worship. First things first on the Lord's Day!

18. While some Christian writers liked to contrast their celebration of resurrection joy with the sabbath fasting of the Jews (though this may not always have been fair to the Jewish attitude to the sabbath), there developed in time, especially after the State observance of Sunday under Constantine, a convergence of the spiritualizing view of the sabbath (as the "rest" of salvation) with the significance of the Lord's Day. Perhaps inevitably, Sunday became the subject of legislation in Christian states, and a kind of sabbatarianism resulted. For instance, Elizabeth's Act of Uniformity in 1559 required all Englishmen to "resort to the Parish church or chapel accustomed .... upon every Sunday ....and then and there to abide orderly and soberly, during the time of Common Prayer ....". Canon 13, which is the first of the 1603 canons regulating the life of the Church of England, lays down that "all manner of persons within the Church of England shall from henceforth celebrate and keep the Lord's Day, commonly called Sunday .... according to God's holy will and pleasure, and the orders of the Church of England prescribed in that behalf; that is, the hearing the Word of God read and taught; in private and public prayers; in acknowledging their offences to God, and amendment of the same; in reconciling themselves charitably to their neighbours where displeasure hath been; in oftentimes receiving the Communion of the body and blood of Christ; in visiting the poor and sick; using all godly and sober conversation". The tone of this is a long way from the New Testament or the early Fathers, but it does reflect an underlying doctrine of the Lord's Day, its relation to the assembling of the church, and the divine sanction for its "celebration".

19. Nor should we overlook the quasi-official view of the Lord's Day expressed in our church hymnals. Hymnals of all varieties of churchmanship have a section on Sunday, and the "standard" hymns are those of á Kempis, Wesley, Watts, Ellerton and Christopher Wordsworth. Even *Hymns for Today's Church* has some of these, plus two modern hymns. There is nothing sabbatarian about these hymns; they reflect a much more primitive understanding of the Lord's Day, as does the devotional poetry of the 17th Century writers George Herbert and Henry Vaughan.

### What Does All This Have to Say to the Question of Whether our Anglican Church Property Should be Used for Commerce and Trade on Sunday?

20. If we were offering advice to individual Anglicans as to whether they should conduct their personal business on Sundays we would have good ground in Christian doctrine (i.e. in the significance of the Lord's Day and "our gathering together to him") to advise or even warn against such conduct, except perhaps in emergency or for charitable need. But is the use of church property by our agents or others to be determined as a corollary of this kind of advice? Does the influence of the "doctrine" stretch so far? Is Tertullian's warning against giving any place to the devil (i.e. the slanderer) of some force? Is there involved a question of the Christian witness to the resurrection with its message of new life over against the present mortality and transience of human concerns? If there is such a question involved, how can this be made clear by shutting down our plant? Eric Liddell refused to run in the Olympics on Sunday, and Jack Hobbs refused to play cricket on Sunday: what was the nature of their witness, beyond conveying that they were men who put personal

principles before pleasure? Is there an honourable consistency in not seeking our own profit, as a Church, on a public holiday granted in public recognition of the sanctity of the Lord's Day?

21. A decision regarding the use of Church property on Sunday should be a deliberate collective decision, based on the corporate Christian mind and judgement. But is the corporate Christian mind at present sufficiently well informed as to the biblical and traditional understanding of the Lord's Day? One would hope that a decision would not be made in the absence of an adequate understanding. Certainly the decision is one for the wisdom and discretion of the Christian community rather than one which can be read directly out of the New Testament or apostolic counsels.

DONALD ROBINSON

November 1994

## Appendix 2: Sunday Observance and Sunday Trading: A Biblical Perspective Revised

### General

1. Any discussion about Sunday invariably raises the question of its relation to the sabbath. Sabbath and Sunday have become entangled in the Christian mind. Most Christians have an imprecise view on how to keep Sunday. This is mainly because the theology of Sunday is insubstantial compared with that of the sabbath. Most references to Sunday are historical and descriptive rather than theological (so eg, Matthew 28:1; John 20:19, 28; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). An exception is Revelation 1:10 which identifies a day (Sunday?) as the "Lord's Day", on which John was "in the spirit".<sup>2</sup>

2. Nowhere is the law concerning sabbath observance cancelled in the New Testament but at the same time nowhere is it affirmed. In the eyes of the Jewish religious leaders Jesus, at best, was lax in his observance of the sabbath; at worst, he constantly broke the law.

### Sabbath: A Biblical Overview

3. The seventh day as a day of rest has its origin in the first creation account in Genesis 2:2-3. The whole notion of sabbath is founded on God's rest. It was more than God's ceasing from the work of creation. For "... God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work that he has done in creation" (2:3). In "hallowing" this day God set it apart as a special day. It is the most important of all days. There is no evening nor morning: It is simply there. The purpose, the end point of God's creation is "rest".

4. This "rest" is much bigger than ceasing work for 24 hours. It suggests time when work is finished, time to benefit from the fruits of work. Supremely it is time to rejoice with the Creator of all that is good and to be glad with him. Genesis 2 anticipates the ultimate rest of heaven.

5. The notion of keeping a sabbath day "holy" specifically occurs in the period of the exodus from Egypt - a time of God's redemptive work and the renewing of the covenant (Exodus 16:22-30). The command to keep the sabbath "holy" is re-inforced in the wilderness wanderings: double quantity of manna being provided on the sixth day. None appears on the seventh. Part of the reason for this is to test Israel's trust in God.

6. The practice of the seventh day being "holy" is enshrined in law: the fourth commandment is most precise (so eg Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). All the commandments are expressed in terms of relationship with God ("I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt..."). It is therefore significant that this rational element is reinforced in the fourth commandment. It is to be "... a sabbath to the Lord your God ..."

7. Two implications concerning Israel's relationship with God are identified. First, Israel is to "remember the sabbath" in that they are to remember what God has taught them. It is a way of remembering God's creating work. For Israel to rest on the sabbath is to remember that they are connected with the God who created them: they enjoy his rest.

8. The second implication of the command picks up the motif of God's saving work. Men and women had rejected God's "rest"; but now God, having saved Israel, was providing a sign to show them what the future now held, namely "rest". It was an indicator of the people who belonged to God. Rest from work on the seventh day was so important that failure to observe it carried the death penalty (Exodus 31:12-15).

9. To rest on the seventh day carried two further consequences. It was a day when everyone, the whole household, would cease from the daily round of work; work which was wearisome in a fallen environment. It was a day of restoration. But, secondly, it was also a taste of life with God. It speaks of relationship and of future blessing. The rest on the seventh day was a gift from God to his people.

10. The New Testament makes a number of allusions to the sabbath, but not in the way one might immediately expect. At first glance Jesus and the other New Testament writers do not interpret or apply the fourth commandment in the way that they do for the remaining nine. Under the new covenant the language of the former commands, "you shall not murder", "you shall not commit adultery" ....., remains.

11. However on further reflection it becomes obvious that in the same way that deeper meaning and significance is given to those commands, so too is it given to the law concerning the sabbath. This is not to say that Jesus has altered the commands (he insists that he has not come to "abolish", but "fulfil" all the law and the prophets, Matthew 5:17f)<sup>3</sup>. Rather, as Carson puts it,<sup>4</sup> "Thus the law and prophets, far from being abolished, find their valid continuity in their outworking in Jesus. The detailed prescriptions of the Old Testament may well be superseded, because whatever is prophetic must be in some sense provisional. But whatever is prophetic likewise discovers its legitimate continuity in the happy arrival of that toward which it has pointed". For Jesus to fulfil the law and the prophets does not mean they have now come to an end, a full stop. Rather they find their focus and their future application in him. He determines how they have their fulfilment in him and just now they have their continuity beyond him.

12. How then does the New Testament interpret the fourth Commandment? A number of points stand out.

13. First, Jesus insists when accused of breaking the Sabbath law, that the "sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Part of his meaning is bound up with his exhortation in Matthew 11:28, 29, "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest .... and you will find rest for your souls". The sabbath is not so much a day off from the daily round of work but an opportunity to express relationship with God: to remember and rejoice in God's work of salvation. Jesus' purpose is to bring people back to God. He uniquely, is able to offer the sabbath rest of God: this is much more than day off work. This sabbath rest is available to "all who are weary".

14. Secondly, as in the Old Testament, 'rest' in the New Testament is about relationship with God. In the New Testament the motif of a sabbath rest is bound up with God as creator and saviour. We are not bound so much to a day but are connected to the person who offers rest. No-one need be excluded from that rest which is the end goal of creation: the invitation is open to all.

15. In the New Testament the emphasis is taken away from the observance of "Sabbaths" (so in Colossians 2:16 - Paul writes strongly against the Gentile observance of Sabbaths and church festivals as a form of ritual or means to express our relationship with God).

16. Greater weight is placed upon the eschatological significance of the Sabbath. The Letter to the Hebrews exemplifies this. In the "sabbath", Israel tasted the future promised rest: it happened because of God's work of salvation. In the New Testament Jesus brings his people their experience of the "rest" of God through his faithful work and their faith in him.

17. The book of Hebrews insists that the pattern of having something now but not yet experiencing its fullness (the now and the not yet of the kingdom), is the thing that should drive us towards the rest. Hebrews 2:1ff is a warning not to neglect what God has promised and has made possible through his Son, lest salvation be lost. Chapters 3 and 4 make it clear that to be saved is to enter God's rest. They prevent themselves from losing it, God's people must continue to keep it in their grasp. Perseverance in faith in Christ is essential. So Hebrews 3 quotes Psalm 95: Israel was cut off from the rest because they did not continue in their relationship with God: they did not listen to him or obey him. Chapter 4 urges, 'take care that you reach it'. To enjoy the benefit of God's perfect rest, people must now persevere in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

18. In the Old Testament there was the sense of having a tiny taste of God's "rest" once a week. In the Letter to the Hebrews, by holding on to Christ, people will enjoy him and his promised "rest" forever. To let go of Christ is to miss out: and the consequences are serious - death. The death penalty in the Old Testament for failure to keep the sabbath pointed to this. God's people today need to urge one another on to maintain their hold on Christ.

19. Sunday seems to be the day when God's people in the New Testament meet together to encourage one another to persevere in Christ - to strengthen the weak and to receive the encouragement from others (hence Hebrews 10:23, 24). In one sense the "rest" is so important that every day is the day to do this ("Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts: Hebrews 4:7). But the descriptions of the New Testament seem to suggest that Sunday is a special day on which this happens. It is the day when the risen Jesus first met with his disciples (so eg John 20:19, 20:28). While others hold a different view, Sunday does seem to have become an important day for the meeting of God's people (eg Acts 20:7<sup>5</sup>, 1Corinthians 16:2).

20. In the New Testament a major shift has occurred in the application of the sabbath law. No longer is it unlawful to work on the seventh day. But it is going too far to insist that the New Testament does not see any significance at all in Sunday as a special day ("the Lord's day", Revelation 1:10?) for the community of God's people. Sunday is a special day for the reminder (and celebration?) of Jesus' resurrection. The Old Testament



sabbath was a symbol and a small taste of God's "rest". The first day of the week is a special reminder of resurrection and the reality and full experience of God's "rest", heaven, which is still to come.

### Some Conclusions

21. The end point of God's creation is "rest". It is "hallowed" by God, set apart as a special "day". This motif of Genesis is taken up and developed in the New Testament.

22. Central to the idea of "rest" is relationship. God's intention is that this people will participate in his "rest" with him.

23. The fourth commandment serves as a reminder of creation and future blessing provided by God through his work of salvation. To obey the sabbath law symbolises confidence in God: his present and his future blessing. As his people follow this command they have a small taste of heaven.

24. In the New Testament Jesus enlarges the picture of "sabbath rest". It is more than just a twenty-four hour break from the daily schedule of work. It has become an "eschatological rest". To restrict the concept of the sabbath to one day in seven is to weaken the significance of this. Every day is important: every day the people of God should be alert to the hope that is before them. Encouragement to live in the light of the final rest is all the more important so that no-one misses out.

25. Nevertheless references to groups of God's people in different contexts meeting specifically on the first day of the week strongly suggest that Sunday is important for the New Testament churches. Apart from any other reason, it is the day on which the resurrection of Jesus is celebrated. Perhaps bound up with this is the further reminder of the resurrection hope and the ultimate "rest" for those who persevere.

### Some Comments

26. As to the matter of Sunday trading, it is evident that the question is more complex than we might at first imagine. So much so in fact, that there is little likelihood of unanimity amongst Christians.

27. Further comments -

- There is no longer a law that requires God's people to meet together one day in seven, be it the seventh day or Sunday.
- Nevertheless there are practical reasons why it is important that we might agree that Sunday is a special day for Christians - to cease from work for the purpose of expressing our relationship together with Christ, to celebrate his resurrection and to stir one another on to perseverance in Christ.
- The specific law in the Old Testament commanding cessation from work one day in seven and the motif of "rest" in the New Testament suggest that work is not the be all and end all of life. Christians need to learn to balance the priorities of work, meeting together as the people of God with the need for leisure.
- It could be said that the practice in the wider community of relief from work one day in seven, practised since the fourth century, is part of God's general providence for the good of humankind. It provides relief from the harshness and/or the boring repetition of work in a world that is under judgment.
- Because of this and because Christians are divided about the use of Sunday, doctrines concerning the "weaker brother" and "duty to one's neighbour" need to be considered in making any decision about Sunday trading and the use of Anglican church property.

### JOHN G. MASON

2. A very helpful reference on the whole subject is, D.A. Carson (Ed.), *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* Zondervan, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1982.
3. The significant word is "fulfil". There is a plethora of interpretations of this verse. However, the suggestions of R. Banks (*Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* C.U.P. 1975, p 210) and supported in the main by O.A. Carson (Op.cit.pp.77ff), is that Jesus fulfils the law in the same sense that he fulfils prophecy. The verb is to be interpreted eschatologically.
4. D.A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: an Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* Baker, 1978, p 37.
5. While the reference to the first day of the week here is usually regarded as descriptive, nevertheless it is quite possible from the emphasis in the sentence together with a reference to the day of the week that Luke sees further significance in this. It suggests that the first day has become the agreed day when the community of God's people meet. See also 1 Corinthians 16:2.