

# RORDORF ON SUNDAY

The following quotes are from SUNDAY, by Willy Rordorf, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1968. Dr. Rordorf wrote his book while he was Professor of Patristics and Early Church History in the Theological Faculty of the University of Neuchatel, Switzerland. He dedicated his work to his former teacher, Dr. Oscar Cullmann. He is also a personal friend of Dr. Ferguson of Abilene Christian University. Unfortunately this book has been out of print for a number of years.

<sup>3</sup>It is, however, not only the letter of Pliny which provides us with evidence of a gathering of Christians on Sunday evening. In this connection we must also consider the gospel narratives of the Easter appearance of the risen Lord to the disciples; this took place in connection with a meal in the evening, and in this case certainly a Sunday evening. The liturgical significance of these narratives should not be underestimated, particularly as we are convinced that they stand in the closest possible connection with the origin of the Christian observance of Sunday....<sup>2</sup>. (pp. 204-205).

<sup>3</sup>There was, therefore, an act of Christian worship, combined with a meal, which took place on Sunday evening. We may then conclude that Acts 20:7ff., a passage which in itself contains no clue to the problem whether the gathering took place on the Saturday evening or the Sunday evening, certainly happened on a Sunday evening. We are driven to this conclusion by the fact that in no primitive Christian document is there ever any mention of weekly worship on Saturday evening.<sup>2</sup> (pp. 205). Note: I believe there is an indication that Luke was dealing with the Roman method of counting time (midnight to midnight), and not the Jewish method (sundown to sundown). The passage says, <sup>3</sup>Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.<sup>2</sup> He refers to the <sup>3</sup>next day<sup>2</sup> which was to occur after midnight. If they had met at sundown on Saturday evening, it would have already been the next day. CM

<sup>3</sup>We have attempted to establish the probability that it (the Lord's Supper on each Sunday) goes back to the risen Lord with his disciples after Easter. The first repetition of the Last Supper took place on Easter evening, that is to say on a Sunday evening: the primitive community subsequently celebrated the Lord's Supper regularly on Sunday evening. We can even say that because it is the will of Christ that the Lord's Supper be regularly held in the Christian church, for this very reason there is also a Christian observance of Sunday. Therefore, this observance depends indirectly on Christ's will. At the same time as

instituting the Lord's Supper afresh on Easter evening, Jesus has also instituted<sup>1</sup> the day on which it should henceforth be celebrated: on Sunday. Put more epigrammatically this means: no Lord's Supper without Sunday, no Sunday without the Lord's Supper...In this case the time for worship, i.e. Sunday, is not something fortuitous or trivial, but a matter of primary importance, of equal importance with the necessity of celebrating the Lord's Supper itself. We have seen that the oldest Christian title for Sunday, the 'Lord's day'<sup>1</sup>, is probably derived from the 'Lord's Supper'<sup>1</sup>.....We finally saw how strongly the early Church was attached to its Sunday: all the faithful (unless anyone was prevented by urgent case or was sick) assembled for worship on every Sunday. They knew that here the decisive element in their Christian life was at stake. They needed this assembly in order to be Christians at all, for how could the community be built up except in the community's worship on Sunday? Sunday worship was, in fact, more important for them than their own lives: even in times of persecution they did not omit to assemble together at the risk of being prosecuted and condemned... <sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>In face of all this evidence we cannot take upon ourselves the responsibility of abandoning Sunday as the day of worship by saying that it does not much matter when we assemble for worship. This would irretrievably deprive us of a part of our Christian heritage which has its roots in the very midst of God's saving acts. If there is a problem about Sunday it can be stated in this question, OAre we willing to stand up for Sunday as the day of worship?<sup>1</sup> Sunday as the day for worship is nothing less than one of the central elements in the Christian life....<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup>The Lord's Supper properly belongs to a complete Sunday act of worship. If we do not celebrate any Lord's Supper on Sunday, we have basically no right to call Sunday the OELord's day<sup>1</sup> (or dimanche, domenica), for the very thing which should make it the Lord's day, namely the Lord's Supper, is lacking....<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup>On the other hand, of course, we do not wish to forget that our Sunday services still correspond, by and large, to the form which they had in the days of the early Church: reading from scripture, sermon, prayer, singing, and, if candidates were present, baptism were all parts of worship on Sunday.<sup>2</sup> (pp. 302-307).

Compiled by Carl Mitchell