

**Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann**

**On the Origins of Worship on Sunday:**

## **The Mystery of the Eighth Day\***

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...The liturgy of time [i.e., the daily cycle of evening prayer (Vespers) and morning song (Matins) and the other hours of prayer; the weekly cycle moving from Sabbath to Sabbath; and the yearly cycle of feasts and seasons] now recognized as the old Jewish cult preserved by the Church was... preserved in a way by necessity— as the completion of the Eucharist, without which the application of the Eucharist to time or any real sanctification of the life of this world would be incomplete. The Eucharist does not replace the liturgy of time, since by nature it is the manifestation in this aeon of another Aeon, it is the communion of the faithful in eternal life, in the Kingdom of God already 'come in power.' It cannot abolish the liturgy of time, because then time would be really emptied and deprived of meaning, would be nothing but 'intervals' between celebrations of the Eucharist. Thus the new cult, an eschatological cult in the deepest sense of the word, required for its real fulfillment inclusion in the rhythm of time, and combination within this rhythm with the liturgy of time, as the affirmation of the reality of the world which Christ came to save. But, it can be objected all this is simply theological 'interpretation.' Is it possible to find support for what has been said in the fact, of the early Christian liturgical tradition?

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We must first see how well grounded is the idea of the liturgy of time on which we have based our notion of the structure of the early Christian 'rule of prayer.' We find support in the obvious link between the Eucharist and time expressed from the very first days of the Church in the Christian celebration of the Lord's

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\* This section is not titled in the original; the above title has been added for convenience.

Day. This was the day of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, His manifestation of the new life, and this day became in the Church the day of the Eucharist. For an understanding of the place of the 'Lord's Day' in the liturgical life of the early Church it is important to clarify its relationship to the Hebrew sabbath. Christian thought has so ignored this relationship that the whole week has been simply 'advanced,' and the day of resurrection (the first day of the week, the *prima sabbati*) has gradually become another sabbath. All the Old Testament prescriptions and definitions touching the seventh day were little by little transferred to Sunday, and the seventh day has been converted into a kind of 'prototype' of the Christian day of rest. This displacement of the week became especially apparent when the emperor Constantine gave the 'day of the sun' an official state sanction, and made it a generally obligatory day of rest. But even before the end of the fourth century the memory still lived in the mind of the Church of the original relationship of the 'Lord's Day' with the sabbath and the whole Old Testament week. It is still possible to find evidence of this, although in a rather unclear form, in our contemporary Ordo.

For the early Church the Lord's Day was not a substitute for the sabbath; it was not (so to speak) its Christian equivalent. On the contrary the real nature and significance of this new day was defined in relation to the sabbath and to the concept of time connected with it. The key position of the sabbath (and all its related prescriptions) in the Old Testament law and Hebrew piety is well known. From whatever source the weekly cycle of time may have been acquired by Israel, its religious interpretation and experience was rooted in a specifically biblical theology of time. The Seventh Day, the day of complete rest, is a commemoration of the creation of the world, a participation in the rest of God after creation. This rest signifies and expresses the fullness, the completion, the 'goodness' of the world, it is the eternal actualization of the word spoken about the world by God from the beginning: 'it is very good.' The sabbath sanctions the whole natural life of the world unfolding through the cycles of time, because it is the divinely instituted sign of the correspondence of the world to God's will and purpose. On this day the Law prescribes joy: 'thou shalt eat and drink

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and give thanks to Him who created all things,' since 'He who created all things honoured and sanctified the sabbath day and commanded that it should be so' (2 Macc. 15:2-4). Faithfulness to the sabbath was bound up with the ultimate mystical depths of the people of Israel, and only by understanding it as something for which men were prepared to die is it possible to comprehend the significance of the new day introduced by the Church.

The appearance of this new day is rooted in the expectation of salvation, in that striving toward the future and in those messianic hopes which were just as characteristic of the theology of the Old Covenant as the cult of the Law. If in the sabbath the Hebrew honours the Creator of the universe and His perfect Law, he knows too that within this world created by God hostile forces are rebelling against Him, that this world is spoiled by sin. The Law has been broken, man is sick, life is poisoned by sin. The time which is included in the weekly cycle is not only the time of a blessed and God-pleasing life, but also the time of a struggle between light and darkness, between God and all that has rebelled against Him. This is the time of the history of salvation which is founded in an eschatological realization— the Day of the Messiah. And again, no matter what may have been the original content and genesis of Hebrew Messianism and the apocalypticism connected with it, the important thing for us is that the time of the manifestation of Christianity coincided with the ultimate limit of intensity of these expectations, with their growth into a universal eschatological outlook. It was precisely in connection with or as a result of this eschatology that there arose the idea of the Lord's Day, the day of Messianic fulfilment, as the 'Eighth Day, 'overcoming' the week and leading outside of its boundaries.<sup>33</sup> In the eschatological perspective of the struggle of God with 'the prince of this world' and the expectation of the new aeon, the week and its final unit— the sabbath— appear as signs of this fallen world, of the old aeon, of that which must be overcome with the advent of the Lord's Day. The Eighth Day is the day beyond the limits of the cycle outlined by the week and punctuated by the sabbath— this is the first day of the New Aeon, the figure of the time of the Messiah. 'And I have also established the eighth day,' we read in the book of Enoch, a characteristic example of late Hebrew apocalypticism, 'that the eighth day be the first after my creation, that in the beginning of the eighth (millennium) there be time without reckoning, everlasting, without years, months, weeks, days or hours.' The concept of the eighth day is connected with another idea characteristic of Jewish apocalypticism: the cosmic week of seven thousand years. Each week is thus a figure of all time, and all

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time, that is the whole of 'this age,' is one week. So then the eighth day and the eighth millennium are the beginning of the New Aeon not to be reckoned in time. This eighth day (coming after and standing outside the week) is also, therefore, the first day, the beginning of the world which has been saved and restored.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. J. Danielou, 'La Theologie du dimanche' in *Le Jour du Seigneur*, pp. 120ff.

Christ rose not on the sabbath, but on the first day of the week (μία σαββάτων). The sabbath was the day of His rest, His 'en-sabbathment' in the tomb, the day which completed His task within the limits of the 'old aeon.' But the new life, the life which had begun to 'shine out of the tomb,' began on the first day of the week. This was the first day, the beginning of the risen life over which 'death has no dominion.' This day also became the day of the Eucharist as the 'confession of His resurrection,' the day of the communication to the Church of this risen life.<sup>34</sup> And here it is quite remarkable that in early Christianity, up to and including the time of Basil the Great, this day was often called in fact 'the eighth day.' This means that the symbolism of Hebrew apocalypticism was adopted by Christians and became one of the theological 'keys' to their liturgical consciousness. There is no need to dwell especially on the first epistle of Peter, in which there seems to be a hint of the significance of the number eight (3:20-1). In the Gospel according to John, undoubtedly the most 'liturgical' of all the Gospels, the risen Christ appears after eight days (John 20:26). Later the 'mystery' of the eighth day is explained by Christian authors in application to the Eucharistic Day of the Lord, which points to a clear tradition. These numerous texts on the eighth day have been collected by J. Danielou.<sup>35</sup> Their meaning is clear: Christ rose on the first day, i.e. on the day of the beginning of creation, because He restores creation after sin. But this day which concludes the history of salvation, the day of victory over the forces of evil, is also the eighth day, since it is the beginning of the New Aeon. 'So the day which was first,' writes St. Augustine, 'will be also the eighth, so that the first life might not be done away, but rather made eternal.'<sup>36</sup> And even more clearly St. Basil the Great writes: 'The Lord's Day is great and glorious. The Scripture knows this day without evening, having no other day, a day without end; the psalmist called it the eighth day, since it is outside of time measured in weeks. Whether you call it a day or an age, it is all the same. If you call it an aeon, it is one, and not a part of a whole....'<sup>37</sup> In this way the eighth day 'is defined in opposition to the week,' writes J. Danielou. 'The week is related to time. The eighth day is outside time.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. H. Chirat, 'Le Dimanche dans l'antiquite chretienne' in *Etudes de Pastorale Liturgique*, Paris, Cerf, 1944, pp. 127-48; H. Callewaert, 'La synaxe eucharistique a Jerusalem, berceau du dimanche' in *Ephemerides Theolog. Lovanienses*, 15, 1938, pp. 34-73; Dom H. Dumaine, art. 'Dimanche' in *Dict. Archeol. Lit. Chret.*, 4, 1, 858-994.

<sup>35</sup> Danielou, 'La Theologie du dimanche,' pp. 120ff., and also a special issue of *Vie Spirituelle* ('Le Huitieme Jour'), April 1947.

<sup>36</sup> Epist. 55:17.

<sup>37</sup> Migne, *Patr. Graec.*, 29, 49.

The week stands within the sequence of days, the eighth day has nothing coming after it, it is the 'last one.' The week involves multiplicity; the eighth day is one....<sup>38</sup>

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In the Church this first-eighth day (the Lord's Day: κυριακή ἡμέρα) is the day of the Eucharist. The early Christian tradition bears uniform witness to this fact. The Eucharist has its day, Christians gather together on a *statu die*<sup>39</sup>— on an established day. We know that the 'Day of the Sun' was not a holy day of rest in either the Jewish or the Roman calendars. Nonetheless the Eucharist 'became so firmly connected with this day that nothing has ever been able or will be able to undermine this connection.'<sup>40</sup> But then this is the whole point: though the Eucharist is celebrated on a *statu die*, though it has its own day and thus reveals a connection with and is set in the framework of time, still this day is not simply 'one out of many.' Everything that has been said above about the first and eighth day shows that this connection of the Eucharist with time emphasizes the eschatological nature of the Eucharist, the manifestation in it of the Lord's Day, the New Aeon. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of the Church. It is the *parousia*, the presence of the Risen and Glorified Lord in the midst of 'His own,' those who in Him constitute the Church and are already 'not of this world' but partakers of the new life of the New Aeon. The day of the Eucharist is the day of the 'actualization' or manifestation in time of the Day of the Lord as the Kingdom of Christ. The early Church did not connect either the idea of repose or the idea of a natural cycle of work and rest with the Eucharistic Day of the Lord. Constantine established this connection with his sanction of the Christian Sunday. For the Church the Lord's Day is the joyful day of the Kingdom. The Lord's Day signifies for her not the substitution of one form of reckoning time by another, the replacement of Saturday by Sunday, but a break into the 'New Aeon,' a participation in a time that is by nature totally different.

In this connection of the Eucharist with the Lord's Day, so well supported by evidence from the liturgical tradition of the early Church, we have therefore a confirmation of that eschatological theology of time of which we have been speaking. The eschatology of the new Christian cult does not mean the renunciation of time. There would have been no need for a fixed day (*statu die*) in a 'wholly world-renouncing' cult, it could be celebrated on any day and at any

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<sup>38</sup> Danielou, 'La Theologie du dimanche,' p. 126.

<sup>39</sup> Pliny, Epist. 10:96.

<sup>40</sup> Danielou, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

hour. Nor does this eschatology become related to time through the sanctification of one of the days of the week, like the sabbath in the Old Testament law. The 'Lord's Day' actualized in the Eucharist was not 'one of the ordinary sequence of days.' just as the Church herself while existing in 'this world' manifests a life which is 'not of this world,' so also the 'Lord's Day,' while it is actualized within time on a given day, manifests within this sequence that which is above time and belongs

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to another aeon. Just as the Church though 'not of this world' is present in this world for its salvation, so also the Sacrament of the Lord's Day, the Sacrament of the new aeon is joined with time in order that time itself might become the time of the Church, the time of salvation. It is precisely this fulfilment of time by the '*Eschaton*,' by that which overcomes time and is above it and bears witness to its finitude and limitedness, which constitutes the sanctification of time.

But if the connection of the Eucharist with a 'fixed day' and the nature of this day as the 'Lord's Day' point to a definite theology of time, and if they confirm our first hypothesis concerning the early Christian rule of prayer, they do not yet prove the existence in the early Church of what we have defined as the liturgy of time, i.e. of a form of worship distinct from the Sunday Eucharistic assembly and immediately connected with the natural cycles of time. We have already said that the opinions of historians differ as to the origin of this form of worship, which will occupy such a large place in the liturgical life of the Church in the following epoch. We have also expressed our conviction that to the extent that the 'liturgical dualism' of Judeo-Christianity represented something essential and basic in the Church's faith, it had to be preserved in one form or another after Christianity's final break with Judaism. Are we now able to point out the facts which support this hypothesis?

Let us note first of all that the disagreements of historians on this point are to be explained frequently by an inadequate grasp of the question itself. Until quite recently the attention of liturgiologists has been concentrated almost exclusively on questions connected with the history of the sacramental Christian cult—the Eucharist and Baptism. The other aspects of the liturgical life of the early Church have been left in shadow. Their study is only just beginning: 'too many problems remain unresolved, too many hypotheses unproved.'<sup>41</sup> From the purely historical point of view, therefore, every unconditional 'yes' or 'no' in this matter of the early existence of a Christian liturgy of time must be regarded as

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<sup>41</sup> Dalmais, 'Origine et constitution de l'Office,' p. 21.

premature. Yet even on the basis of the material which has been gathered and studied so far the inadequacy of the hypothesis which insists on the late and specifically monastic origin of the liturgy of the daily cycle is becoming more and more evident. As we shall see shortly, the opinion concerning the post-Constantine origin of the idea of the 'yearly cycle' is also untenable.

We must be able to furnish unanimous evidence from pre-Nicene texts for the hours of prayer, for the connection of prayer with definite times of day. And in fact in the Epistle of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians we read: 'We must do all things in order... at

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fixed times... not haphazardly and not without order, but at definite times and hours.'<sup>42</sup> Three hours of prayer are indicated in the *Didache*,<sup>43</sup> by Tertullian,<sup>44</sup> by Cyprian of Carthage,<sup>45</sup> by Origen,<sup>46</sup> in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus.<sup>47</sup> 'We should pray in the early morning,' writes Cyprian, 'that by means of our morning prayer the resurrection of the Lord might be recalled; also at the setting of the sun and in the evening we should pray again....' The tradition of hours and times of prayer can certainly be accepted as a tradition common to the whole of the early Church. We know that some historians of worship explain this tradition as referring to private prayer rather than to prayer in the Church. But even this would indicate a definite interest in prayer within time, an understanding of time as the necessary 'framework' of prayer. Quite early we find a reference (in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus) to the theological significance of these hours and times. Therefore if we have nothing more in the tradition of the pre-Nicene Church than these prescriptions to say prayers at fixed hours, this would be enough to infer the subsequent development of the daily cycle of worship. Nor would this be a 'liturgical revolution,' but simply the development and ordering of the early tradition.

In fact we can go further. First, the texts which are usually used to defend the exclusively private nature of the prayer of hours and times very plainly show that this prayer could and actually did have an ecclesiological character, was

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<sup>42</sup> *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 60.

<sup>43</sup> *Didache*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> *De Oratione*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> *De Oratione*, 35.

<sup>46</sup> *In Rom.*, 9, 1.

<sup>47</sup> *Apost. Trad.*, 35, 1, 2.

offered in the assemblies of the community. Thus, in the *Apostolic Tradition*, immediately following the prescriptions to pray each morning, it is said: 'but if there is instruction by the word (*catechizatio*) let every one prefer to attend that, since when he has said prayer in the assembly, he will be able to avoid the evil of the day.'<sup>48</sup> We do not know whether these assemblies with 'instruction by the word' and prayer were daily occurrences. But if we take into account the whole spirit and 'ethos' of the early Church, this prayer will have to be defined as 'ecclesio-centric,' having its basis in the experience of the assembly or communion of the *ecclesia* and at the same time being directed to this end.<sup>49</sup> 'Strive to be together as often as possible,' writes St. Ignatius of Antioch;<sup>50</sup> and St. Cyprian of Carthage echoes his words: 'The Lord of unity did not command that prayer be offered to Him individually and in private.'<sup>51</sup> Origen,<sup>52</sup> Tertullian,<sup>53</sup> and others<sup>54</sup> insist on the value of being 'together as often as possible,' in the assembly of common prayer and fellowship. We repeat that it is impossible to make categorical assertions about a regular daily worship on the basis of these texts alone. But they do point, first of all, to a firm tradition of times of prayer in the early

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Church, and second, to the existence of assemblies (although perhaps not in all places) devoted to prayer and sermons. Finally, they point to the acceptance of this prayer of the Church as something necessary, and indeed superior to private prayer. They point therefore to the inclusion of this form of worship in the *lex orandi* of the Church.

Comparative liturgics, whose principles and method were developed so brilliantly by Baumstark, has delivered an even more serious blow to the hypothesis of the monastic origin of the daily cycle. This study has shown that the epoch of the development of the daily cycle after Constantine was marked

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Cf. H. Chirat, *L'Assemblée chrétienne à l'Age apostolique*, Paris, Cerf, 1949, pp. 15ff.; G. Bardy, *La Théologie de l'Eglise de St. Clement de Rome à St. Ireneé*, Paris, Cerf, 1945, pp. 19ff.; N. Afanassiev, *Trapeza Gospodnya (The Lord's Table)*, Paris, 1952.

<sup>50</sup> *Eph.*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> *De Oratione*, P.L. 4, 541.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. J. Danielou, *Origine*, Paris, La Table Ronde, 1948, pp. 41ff.

<sup>53</sup> *Apol.*, 1, 39.

<sup>54</sup> Bardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-53.

by a rivalry and even conflict between two types of daily service: 'corporate' and 'monastic' in Baumstark's terminology. We will have occasion to dwell on this rivalry in greater detail in the following chapter. Here it is sufficient to say that this fact clearly demonstrates the preservation in the Church of daily services and a daily cycle which were not only distinct from their monastic types, but even appeared before the rise of monasticism. But what is still more important, there can be no doubt about the connection between the daily services of the 'corporate type with synagogue worship, about their structural dependency on Jewish daily worship. C.W. Dugmore devoted a special work to the study of this dependency, and has demonstrated the synagogical structure of the two basic services of the daily cycle— Vespers and Matins. On the days when the Eucharist was celebrated the daily service (on the pattern of the synagogue worship) preceded the Eucharist, as its first part (*missa catechumenorum*), while on other days it constituted an independent service, assigned usually to definite hours of the day.<sup>55</sup> In the third century, as is evident even from the very partial texts which reflect this epoch, Vespers and Matins 'already occupied their present honoured position in the cycle of daily services.'<sup>56</sup> The existence of these daily services, devoted (according to Tertullian) 'to common prayer... to the reading of Divine Scripture, to exhortations and instructions,' explains the cause and manner of combining the synagogue 'synaxis' with the Eucharist. Srawley's answer— 'it just happened'— acquires greater significance.

In any case the universal acceptance in all *Ordos* of the cycle of Vespers and Matins as liturgical services, i.e. as presupposing an assembly of the Church (cf. the participation in these services of the bishop, the presbyters and deacons, in the *Apostolic Constitution*), and consequently as existing apart from the purely monastic services (Compline, etc.), confirms the theory that they belong to the Church's liturgical tradition, to the Church's *lex orandi*. The clearly synagogal elements which have been preserved in them even down to the present

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day— in spite of extensive monastic reworking— also point to their early inclusion in this *lex orandi*.

So then the liturgy of time which we saw already embodied and expressed in the liturgical dualism of Judeo-Christianity, and later in the cycle of the eschatological 'Day of the Lord,' is also confirmed by the preservation by the 'Gentile Church' of the worship of the daily cycle. From the very beginning the

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<sup>55</sup> Dugmore, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>56</sup> M. Skaballanovich, *Tolkovy Typikon*, p. 87.

Church's liturgical tradition included the idea of the day as a liturgical unit, in which definite hours and times— evening, morning and night— should be devoted to prayer; and not just to private prayer, but also to prayer in the Church. It may be supposed that not all believers had the opportunity to gather twice each day, and that from the beginning it was a minority which participated in these services. Tertullian's distinction between *coetus* and *congregationes* is possibly a reference to this situation; also the exhortations to attend these assemblies which we find, for example, in the Apostolic Constitutions and in the Order, But this does not alter the ecclesiological, liturgical character of these services. The Church is praying 'in order to surround God with common prayers as with an army, gathered together in a single place....'<sup>57</sup> This idea of the praying Church, *ecclesia orans*, clearly corresponds to the whole spirit of early Christian ecclesiology, to the liturgical piety of the pre-Nicene Church.

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There is good reason to regard the principle of the Ordo, i.e. of that co-relation and conjunction of the Eucharist with the liturgy of time in which we recognize the fundamental structure of the Church's prayer, as having existed from the very beginning in her 'rule of prayer,' as the real principle of this rule.

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<sup>57</sup> Tertullian, *Apol.*, 1, 39.