

# SOME NOTES ON SABBATH OBSERVANCE IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

ROBERT A. KRAFT

University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

In the inaugural issue of *Seminary Studies*, W. B. Bishai has attempted to shed some light on the development of the custom of observing Sunday as a rest day in addition to the seventh-day Sabbath in early Coptic (and related) Christianity.<sup>1</sup> He suggests that it may have been under the influence of the first Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) that this situation first came about:

It seems possible that Sabbath observance among the Copts in Egypt and Ethiopia may have passed through three stages: 1) Only the seventh-day Sabbath observed—from apostolic times until the Council of Nicea; 2) Sunday and the seventh-day Sabbath both observed—from the Council of Nicea until perhaps a century or two later; and 3) only Sunday designated as a day of public worship—a practice still observed today (p. 31).

Bishai is not unaware of the fact that he is struggling with an extremely complicated problem when he seeks to base this "preliminary study" on evidence drawn from the *Statutes of the Apostles*, commonly known in many publications as the *Apostolic Constitutions* or *Canones Ecclesiastici*.<sup>2</sup> He speaks

<sup>1</sup> "Sabbath Observance from Coptic Sources", *AUSS*, I (1963), 25-31. Strictly speaking, by "Sabbath observance" Bishai apparently means the observance of a day of *rest*—see p. 27, n. 5: "Reference to the Sabbath in the Greek and Latin versions concerns itself merely with assembling the believers and not abstaining from work." Because the available sources are not always so tidy in stating what is or is not done on Sabbath (or on Sunday), the following notes usually will be concerned with the religious function of Sabbath/Sunday in general, without attempting to distinguish between resting from secular labor and assembling for worship.

<sup>2</sup> P. 26. Actually, the work commonly referred to as the "Statutes of the Apostles" or "Canones Ecclesiastici" is not entirely identical with the (Greek) "Apostolic Constitutions," as we shall discover.

of the variety of languages and forms in which this material has come down to us, and of how "difficult" it is "to date the original form" of this literature. Nevertheless, he feels safe in assuming with certain "scholars who have examined these various documents" that the Coptic-Arabic-Ethiopic versions (his "southern group" as opposed to the Greek-Latin-Syriac "northern group") of the *Statutes of the Apostles* derive from a recension of the "original *Vorlage*," which recension was made in "the later part of the fourth century, i.e., after the Council of Nicea and probably before the Council of Ephesus" (p. 26). He then proceeds to cite passages from these Coptic-Arabic-Ethiopic versions as evidence for the practice of the post-Nicene Coptic Church with respect to Sabbath-Sunday observance.

Unfortunately, Bishai does not seem to realize how really complicated his source problem is. His statement that all of the "collections of various church laws and ecclesiastical orders" to which he refers "share enough resemblances to warrant the supposition of a common lost *Vorlage*" (p. 26) has missed the point of decades of modern scholarship—including some of the literature he cites in his notes.<sup>3</sup> A "common lost *Vorlage*" is *not* the answer to this literary labyrinth: instead, there are *at least* three different and originally separate tradition-units which have been welded together to form the most comprehensive of the works to which Bishai refers, the Greek *Apostolic Constitutions*:<sup>4</sup> (1) the *Didascalia*

<sup>3</sup> See esp. the works listed on p. 26, nn. 2, 3 (including such pioneer studies as those by P. A. de Lagarde, H. Achelis, and G. Horner), p. 27, n. 6 (J. Leipoldt), and p. 29, n. 12 (R. H. Connolly). Perhaps Bishai has been confused by the arguments of Horner, *The Statutes of the Apostles or Canones Ecclesiastici* (London, 1904), that the differences between the various versions of the "Statutes" may suggest "the possibility of there having been a lost Church Order" (p. viii)—here Horner is *not* referring to the *entire* tradition known as the *Apostolic Constitutions*, but only to certain material now embedded in Book VIII of that work!

<sup>4</sup> On the *Apostolic Constitutions*, see O. Bardenhewer, *Patrology* (Translated from the German, 2d ed.; St. Louis, Mo., 1908), § 75.

tradition <sup>5</sup> (embedded in *Ap. Const.* I-VI); (2) the *Didache* tradition <sup>6</sup> (included in the first part of *Ap. Const.* VII); and (3) the "Egyptian Church Order" or *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus <sup>7</sup> (in *Ap. Const.* VIII).<sup>8</sup>

Although he shows no awareness of this fact, Bishai is primarily concerned with the last of these divisions, the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus as it circulated in Coptic-Arabic-Ethiopic garb (under the name *Statutes of the Apostles*, etc.). Only once in his main line of argument does he inadvertently (and thus somewhat irrelevantly) move outside this tradition to "prove" a point by referring to the *Didascalia* material.<sup>9</sup> Partly because of his oversimplified view of the

<sup>5</sup> For a relatively up-to-date discussion and bibliography, see J. Quasten, *Patrology*, II (Utrecht, 1953), 147-52.

<sup>6</sup> See Quasten, *Patrology*, I (Utrecht, 1950), 37f. Actually, this "Didache" tradition can be further subdivided into the "Two Ways" catechism (*Did.* 1-6, *Barnabas* 18-20), which once seems to have circulated separately (see the Latin *Doctrina*) and which became incorporated, in part, into the first section of the "Apostolic Church Order" manual in the East (see Quasten, *op. cit.*, II, 119-20); and the more specifically ecclesiastical materials (*Did.* 7-15) which resemble much more closely the usual subject matter of related church manuals (*Didascalia*, *Apostolic Traditions* of Hippolytus, remainder of the "Apostolic Church Order," etc.).

<sup>7</sup> See Quasten, *op. cit.*, II, 180-94; also B. S. Easton, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (New York, 1934); G. Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome* (New York, 1937).

<sup>8</sup> The prayers (and other materials) of *Ap. Const.* VII. 33ff could also be included here as a 4th (5th, 6th, etc.) tradition which has been incorporated into the present document; see, e.g. J. M. Harden, *The Ethiopic Didascalia* (New York, 1920), pp. x-xi.

<sup>9</sup> "Comparing this attitude of the southern group of churches [i.e., observance of both Sabbath and Sunday] to that of the northern group as illustrated by the Syriac version of the *Statutes of the Apostles* [*sic*!], we find a sharp difference of opinion" (p. 29). Actually, he cites from the *Latin* and Syriac *Didascalia* (not *Statutes*) here. It is true that the Latin passage refers only to the Lord's Day observance and does not mention Sabbath here (section 13), but the parallel *Greek* material in *Ap. Const.* II. 59 includes reference to both Sabbath and Sunday assemblies (is this what Bishai alludes to in n. 5 on p. 27?), while the main textual tradition of the Ethiopic *Didascalia* (12; Harden, *op. cit.*, p. 78) speaks only of the "Christian Sabbath which is (the day of) his holy resurrection [thus, probably Sunday, although

sources, however, he fails to see that the evidence he is adducing has only secondary relevance for an examination of Coptic Christianity. That is to say, granted that the circulation of this material in the Coptic language implies that many Copts may have agreed with its contents, it is clear that the Coptic (-Arabic-Ethiopic) is a translation from a *Greek* original.<sup>10</sup> Thus there is something suspicious in Bishai's appeal to this translation in support of his theory that the practice of "the non-Hellenistic southern churches of Egypt and Ethiopia" differed significantly from the practice of the "Hellenistic Christians" with regard to Sabbath/Sunday observance in pre-Nicene times (p. 30 and n. 17).

This suspicion is borne out by a closer look at the passages adduced—the "Coptic statute regarding Sabbath observance" which Bishai cites as prime evidence (p. 27) is in fact a verbatim translation from *Greek* and is preserved in a parallel Greek form in *Ap. Const.* VIII. 33.2:

*Greek Ap. Const.*<sup>11</sup>

ἐργαζέσθωσαν οἱ δοῦλοι  
πέντε ἡμέρας

*Sahidic "Statutes"*<sup>12</sup>

Let the slaves<sup>13</sup> work  
five days,

elsewhere this version of *Didasc.* argues that Jesus actually rose on *Passover Sabbath* (!) and appeared on Sunday—see esp. sec. 30, 36, 38j"—another Ethiopic manuscript mentions both Sabbath and Sunday in this passage! Bishai's "northern"/"southern" distinction is frustrated here.

<sup>10</sup> See Quasten *op. cit.*, II, 181f: "Of these oriental versions, the Sahidic alone is based directly on the Greek. . . . It contains many transliterated Greek words, so that the original terms are obvious. . . . The Arabic was derived from the Sahidic. . . . The Ethiopic . . . is thrice-removed from the original, having been done from the Arabic" (or from an older form of the Arabic). Perhaps this is also the place to note that, in fact, the Coptic "version" to which Bishai refers itself contains two different Coptic versions of the "Egyptian Church Order" material; see Horner, *op. cit.*, p. vii—"The Saidic, Arabic, and Ethiopic preserve two forms of these same canons."

<sup>11</sup> Cited from the ed. by F. X. Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Paderborn, 1905).

<sup>12</sup> Translated literally from the Coptic text given by Bishai, p. 27 (from Leipoldt's ed.). I have italicized Greek words which are simply transliterated in the Coptic.

<sup>13</sup> Certainly not "servants (of the Lord)" as Bishai renders it

σάββατον δὲ καὶ κυριακὴν	<i>But on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day</i>
σχολαζέτωσαν	let them devote themselves
ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ	to the <i>church</i>
διὰ τὴν διδασκαλίαν	that they may be instructed
τῆς εὐσεβείας.	in piety.
τὸ μὲν γὰρ σάββατον	The <i>Sabbath, indeed</i> , because
εἴπομεν	God himself rested on it when
δημιουργίας λόγον ἔχειν,	he completed all the creation,
τὴν δὲ κυριακὴν	<i>and the Lord's Day</i> because
ἀναστάσεως.	it is the day of the
	<i>resurrection</i> of the Lord.

Thus the statement that such passages are exclusive to the "southern group" (Coptic-Arabic-Ethiopic) as opposed to the "northern group" (Greek-Latin-Syriac) is incorrect. On this point alone, the framework of Bishai's argument collapses—which is not to say that his conclusions are necessarily false, but only that they do not follow from the evidence he cites.

Additional evidence that what Bishai refers to as Coptic practice also obtained in certain Greek-speaking "Hellenistic Christian" communities in the 4th century is abundant. In fact, Bishai himself claims that Athanasius, "who was a chief Egyptian delegate at Nicea, in his canons dated around A.D. 366 points out the necessity of observing both days" (p. 30); but the "Egypt" which Athanasius represented was "Hellenistic" (Alexandria), not primarily Coptic! <sup>14</sup> Similarly,

(p. 27). The context of both Greek and Coptic requires here "slaves" or "workers" in an economic-social sense.

<sup>14</sup> Does Bishai think that Athanasius wrote in Coptic? Note his reference on p. 31, n. 18, to "the Coptic original" as contrasted with "the Arabic version" of the so-called *Canons of Athanasius of Alexandria* which were edited and translated from the Arabic and Coptic versions by W. Riedel and W. E. Crum (London, 1904). It is not clear that these canons actually are derived from a work of Athanasius, although Riedel favors that view (Riedel, *op. cit.*, p. XXVI); in any event, the canons were originally written in Greek and must be dated within the period 350-500 (Riedel, *op. cit.*, p. XIV). For similar material attributed to Athanasius, see the Greek *Syntagma Didascalias* 2 (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, XXVIII, 835ff) which forbids "guarding" (φυλάττειν) Sabbath (as a day of rest?) but does speak of both Sabbath and "Lord's Day" as special days of worship.

Timotheus, Bishop of Alexandria in 381-85, speaks of the necessity of abstaining from sexual relations (*κοινωνία γάμου*) on "the Sabbath and the Lord's Day [Sunday] . . . because on these days the spiritual sacrifice [the eucharist] is offered to the Lord."<sup>15</sup> Epiphanius of Salamis (Cyprus) also bears witness to the special place of the Sabbath alongside of Sunday as a day of Christian gathering—see his "Exposition of the Faith" 24 at the end of his *Panarion* (finished c. 380).<sup>16</sup> The Greek form of the *Didascalía* tradition, which probably dates from the 4th century (from Syria?), exhorts the people not to forsake the daily assemblies, especially the Sabbath and Sunday days of rejoicing.<sup>17</sup>

Various other sources supplement this material by giving us a more precise picture of what was (or was not) involved in "Sabbath observance." The 29th canon of the Synod of Laodicea (c. 380) argues against a "judaistic" manner of keeping the Sabbath—i.e., in idleness:

For it is not necessary that Christians judaize and have leisure on the Sabbath, but let them work on that day, and give precedence to the Lord's Day—if indeed they are able to have leisure as Christians.<sup>18</sup>

But the same Synod prescribes that "the Gospels along with other scriptures be read on the Sabbath" (Canon 16), and recognizes the special nature of the two days, Sabbath

<sup>15</sup> *Responsa Canonica* (Migne, *op. cit.*, XXXIII, 1305): ἐξ ἀνάγκης δὲ τὸ σάββατον καὶ τὴν κυριακὴν ἀπέχεσθαι δεῖ διὰ τὸ ἐν αὐταῖς τὴν πνευματικὴν θυσίαν ἀναφέρεισθαι τῷ κυρίῳ (with reference to 1 Cor 7: 5).

<sup>16</sup> Migne, *op. cit.*, XXIV, 832A: ἐν τισὶ δὲ τόποις καὶ ἐν τοῖς σάββασι συνάξεις ἐπιτελοῦσιν.

<sup>17</sup> *Ap. Const.* II.59.3 (see above, n. 9): μάλιστα δὲ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ σαββάτου καὶ ἐν τῇ τοῦ κυρίου ἀναστασίμῳ τῇ κυριακῇ σπουδαιότερως ἀπαντᾶτε. Note also *Ap. Const.* V.20.19: πᾶν μέντοι σάββατον ἄνευ τοῦ ἐνὸς [τοῦ πάσχα] καὶ πᾶσαν κυριακὴν ἐπιτελοῦντες συνόδους εὐφραίνεσθε· ἔνοχος γὰρ ἁμαρτίας ἔσται ὁ τὴν κυριακὴν νηστεύων, ἡμέραν ἀναστάσεως οὔσαν . . .

<sup>18</sup> Synod Laodicea, Can. 29: ὅτι οὐ δεῖ Χριστιανοὺς ἰουδαΐζειν καὶ ἐν τῷ σαββάτῳ σχολάζειν, ἀλλὰ ἐργάζεσθαι αὐτοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ· τὴν δὲ κυριακὴν προτιμώντας, εἴ γε δύναντο σχολάζειν ὡς Χριστιανοί. εἰ δὲ εὐρεθίεν ἰουδαῖσται ἔστωσαν ἀνάθεμα παρὰ Χριστῷ (ed. Mansi).

and Lord's Day, during Lent (Canons 49, 51). A similar attitude is attested by the Christian editor (from Antioch-Syria?) who expanded the Ignatian Epistles at about the same time:

Therefore let us no longer observe the Sabbath in a judaistic way and rejoice in idleness. . . . But each of you should observe Sabbath in a spiritual way, rejoicing in study of laws. . . . And after keeping the Sabbath, let every lover of Christ celebrate the festival of the Lord's Day—the resurrection day, the royal day, the most excellent of all days.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, if we are allowed for the moment to treat the *Apostolic Constitutions* as somewhat of a unity representing 4th-century Hellenistic Egyptian Christianity, we will find that it not only refers to the Sabbath and Sunday festal gatherings which commemorate creation and resurrection respectively,<sup>20</sup> and advocates rest from usual labors on these two days (see above on Bishai's main text, *Ap. Const.* VIII.33.2), but it also guards against leaving the impression that a person should be *idle* on the Sabbath—for creature as for creator, Sabbath rest means study of the laws, not idleness of hands.<sup>21</sup> The *Apostolic Constitutions* and related literature are also quite clear that one is not to *fast* on the Sabbath, except at Passover/Easter time in memory of the Lord's death/burial (see *Ap. Const.* V.14.20; 18.1f; 20.19 [above, n. 17]; VII.23.3f; etc.)—an attitude which is widely attested by other contemporary witnesses such as Basil of Cappadocia (*De jejunio*, hom. I.7,10; II.4.7), John Chrysostom of Antioch (*In Gen.*, hom. 13.2), and even Augustine of Hippo (Ep. 36, *ad Casulanum* 2.4).

<sup>19</sup> Pseudo-Ignatius, *Magnesians* 9.3-4 (ed. Funk-Diekamp): μηκέτι οὖν σαββατιζῶμεν ἰουδαϊκῶς καὶ ἀργίαις χαίροντες . . . ἀλλ' ἕκαστος ὑμῶν σαββατιζέτω πνευματικῶς, μελέτη νόμων χαίρων . . . καὶ μετὰ τὸ σαββατίσαι ἑορταζέτω πᾶς φιλόχριστος τὴν κυριακὴν, τὴν ἀναστάσιμον, τὴν βασιλίδα, τὴν ὑπατον πασῶν τῶν ἡμερῶν. See also *Trallians* 9: 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ap. Const.* VII.23.3 f.: τὸ σάββατον μέντοι καὶ τὴν κυριακὴν ἑορτάζετε, ὅτι τὸ μὲν δημιουργίας ἐστὶν ὑπόμνημα, τὸ δὲ ἀναστάσεως.

<sup>21</sup> *Ap. Const.* VII.36: . . . ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ κατέπαυσας ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων εἰς μελέτην τῶν σῶν νόμων . . . σαββατιεῖς . . . σαββατισμὸν μελέτης νόμων, οὐ χειρῶν ἀργίαν . . . σαββατιζεῖν ἐνετείλω, οὐ πρόφασιν ἀργίας διδοῦς.

This is not to deny that the widespread practice of Coptic Christianity at this time was also to observe both Sabbath and Sunday. Bishai is on solid ground here, as the numerous passages listed by C. Butler in his edition of the *Lausiac History of Palladius* show.<sup>22</sup> But it should be emphasized that this is *not* a practice limited to Coptic Christianity. Both Hellenistic Egypt and the rest of the Hellenistic Christian East knew of the dual observance of Sabbath and Sunday in the 4th century, and had recorded its interpretation of what was meant by "Sabbath observance," in terms of "rest" and idleness. There was no "sharp difference of opinion" (p. 29) between Bishai's "northern" and "southern" groups at this time—at least, not in the sources he has selected.

Is it possible to move behind the 4th century to determine how ancient this dual observance of Sabbath/Sunday may have been? Unfortunately, sources for Coptic Christianity prior to that date are not readily available. But if we can trust those scholars who trace the "Egyptian Church Order" tradition back to Hippolytus and his *Apostolic Tradition*, the dual observance in Hellenistic Christianity may be at least as old as the early 3d century and probably much older.<sup>23</sup> Although it is not possible to determine with precision from what portion of early 3d-century Christianity Hippolytus had derived his traditions, it is probable that he spent his early life somewhere in the Hellenistic East (Alexandria or An-

<sup>22</sup> C. Butler, *The Lausiac History of Palladius*, II ("Texts and Studies, VI," Cambridge, 1904), 198 f, refers to such passages as *Vita Pach.* 20 and *Asceticon* (or *Paralipomena*) 15; *Hist. Mon.* 23; *Apophthegmata*, Poemen. 30 and Sisoe 2; *Vita Schenuti* (ed. Leipoldt, *op. cit.*, p. 132); *Vita Onuphrii* 11; etc., along with the references in the *Lausiac History* itself (7.5; 14.3; 20.2; 25.4; 48.2). See also L. M. O. Duchesne, *Christian Worship: Its Origin and Evolution* (5th ed., New York, 1923), pp. 230ff.

<sup>23</sup> Quasten, *op. cit.*, II, 181, dates the writing of Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* to "about the year 215." Of course, there is no guarantee that the dual observance was part of the original form of the *Ap. Trad.*, but the burden of proof would seem to rest on the person who *denies* this; in any event, the dual observance was already in the Greek form of the tradition, as we have seen.

tioch?) before he came to Rome.<sup>24</sup> Thus the dual observance may have been an established Eastern (Hellenistic) practice at the end of the 2d century.

There are, indeed, a few additional clues from 2d-century Christian literature which suggest that some Christian communities habitually kept the Sabbath at that early date. (1) *Didache* 8:1 retains the Jewish name παρασκευή ("day of preparation" before the Sabbath) for Friday, which might indicate that Sabbath was still observed. It could be argued, per contra, that παρασκευή here has simply become a standard designation for the 6th day of the week and does not carry any implications concerning Sabbath observance. The Jewish-Christian flavor of the *Didache* in general, however, along with the apparently anti-Pharisaic polemic in 8:1f and the preservation of the *Didache* tradition by the Eastern communities which maintained the dual observance (it is embedded in *Ap. Const.* VII) argue against such a neutral use of παρασκευή. In 14:1, the Didachist also speaks of observing the eucharist on the κυριακή—the weekly Lord's Day (or does it mean Easter Sunday?)—showing that the first-day observance also seems to have been practiced by the communities which the *Didache* tradition represents (Syria? Egypt?). (2) The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* also uses the designation παρασκευή (7:1) and does not hesitate to record that Polycarp's death fell on (and was commemorated on?) a "Great Sabbath" (8:1; 21:1), despite the hostile attitude to the Jews exhibited elsewhere in that document (see 12:2; 13:1). Thus it may be that the churches of Asia Minor among whom the *Martyrdom* circulated also retained some contact with Sabbath observances in the later 2d century. Although neither the *Martyrdom* nor the preserved *Epistle* of Polycarp makes mention of Sunday observance, it would be difficult to conclude from

<sup>24</sup> See Quasten, *op. cit.*, II, 163: "There are many reasons for believing that he was not a native Roman nor of Latin origin at all. . . . His entire mentality . . . indicates that he came from the East," possibly from Alexandria.

this that Polycarp and those who revered him did not in fact also observe the Sunday day of gladness. (3) There probably is more than symbolic significance to logion 27 of the *Gospel of Thomas*: "If you do not fast to the world, you will not find the Kingdom; if you do not keep the Sabbath as a true Sabbath, you will not see the Father."<sup>25</sup> These sentiments circulated in the 2d century in Greek, and some years later they were translated into Coptic also. They would seem to find their life-setting in a community which in some way observed the seventh-day Sabbath, although it is not at all clear whether this community also observed Sunday.

Furthermore, the 2d century provides us with another type of evidence that certain Christians may have continued to observe the Jewish Sabbath; namely, by the occasional polemic *against* such a practice. (1) In the opening years of that century, Ignatius of Antioch warns the Magnesians in Asia Minor not to live "in accord with Judaism" but to follow the insight which even the divine prophets of old had received through God's grace and to live "in accord with Christ Jesus," God's Son and God's Logos sent to man.

If, then, those who walked in the ancient customs [i.e., the aforementioned prophets] came to have a new hope, no longer 'sabbatizing' but living in accord with the Lord's life—in which life there sprang up also our life through him and through his death — . . . how shall we be able to live apart from him, of whom the pro-

<sup>25</sup> *G. Thom.* 86.17-20 as known from Pap. Oxyrhynchus 1.2: ἐὰν μὴ νηστεύσῃται τὸν κόσμον, οὐ μὴ εὑρηται τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ· καὶ ἐὰν μὴ σαββατίσατε τὸ σάββατον, οὐκ ὄψεσθε τὸ <ν> π(ατε)ρᾶ. In this connection, note that Justin, *Dial.* 12. 3, presents a moral = spiritual interpretation of "keeping the Sabbath" (right conduct) which is in general accord with the approach of *Barnabas* 15 (see also Tertullian, *Adv. Judaeos* 4). "Sabbath" also became a symbol in the Gnostic tradition which preserved the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*, as *Gospel of Truth* 32.18ff shows—the "Sabbath" means the "Day" in which it is not fitting for salvation to be idle. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily follow that the *Gospel of Thomas* logion is irrelevant in discussions concerning the literal observance of the seventh-day Sabbath in some branches of 2d-century Christianity, especially in view of other "Jewish-Christian" tendencies which are embodied in the *Gospel of Thomas*.

phets also were disciples, since they had received him as teacher in the spirit? Wherefore, he whom they justly awaited when he arrived, raised them from the death. . . . Thus, we should be his disciples—we should learn to live in accord with Christianity. . . . It is absurd to proclaim Jesus Christ and to 'judaize'. For Christianity has not placed its trust in Judaism, but vice-versa.<sup>26</sup>

It is certainly illegitimate to see behind this context a simple (!) Sabbath/Sunday controversy. It is rather a contrast of two different ways of living—one apart from 'grace' ('judaizing'), the other in the power of the resurrection life. Nevertheless, one of the sets of slogans used to characterize the conflicting positions does focus on *at least* the Jewish Sabbath observance—it is not so clear whether Sunday as a day in contrast to Sabbath is in the picture at all. Probably the contrast intended is that between Sabbath *solemnity* and *idleness* (as later Christians often alleged) and the resurrection life (*re-creation*) of the Christian. As we have seen (above, n. 19), the later editor (and expander) of the Ignatian corpus interpreted this passage in terms of Sabbath/Sunday issues, but this is by no means decisive for the meaning of the passage in the 2d century. (2) Less ambiguous is the *Epistle of Barnabas*, which possibly reflects the situation in the outlying districts around Alexandria a few years later. The author condemns "the present (Jewish) Sabbaths" as unacceptable to the Lord, and exhorts his readers to "observe the 8th day with gladness, on which Jesus also rose from the dead and, when he had been manifested, ascended to heaven."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Magnesians* 8-10 (compare *Philadelphians* 5-6). The most pertinent words, in *Magn.* 9: 1, are: εἰ οὖν οἱ ἐν παλαιοῖς πράγμασιν ἀναστραφέντες εἰς καινότητα ἐλπίδος ἤλθον, μηκέτι σαββατίζοντες, ἀλλὰ κατὰ κυριακὴν ζωὴν ζῶντες, ἐν ᾗ καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἡμῶν ἀνέτειλεν δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ. . . . I am indebted to the recent article of F. Guy, "The Lord's Day' in the Letter of Ignatius to the Magnesians," *AUSS*, II (1964), 1-17, for the light it has shed on this passage by calling attention to the fact that the text-critical grounds for reading *κυριακὴν* instead of *κυριακὴν ζωὴν* (as the best Greek witness has) are indeed slim. As the above translation shows, I do not take *κυριακὴ* here in the technical sense of 'Lord's Day' which it came to acquire (see below, n. 28).

<sup>27</sup> *Barnabas* 15.9: διὸ καὶ ἄγομεν τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ὀγδόην εἰς εὐφροσύνην

Bishai's remarks on the arguments of Justin (representing Ephesus-Rome?) and Tertullian (North Africa) in favor of the excellency of Sunday worship rather than Sabbath observance during the 2d century are also relevant here.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, as we have seen, this anti-Sabbath attitude was not characteristic of *all* Greek-speaking Christians in the 2d (or 3d, or 4th) century.

The central thesis of Bishai's argument, however, still remains to be considered: Did *Coptic* Christianity observe *only* the Sabbath rest until the mid-4th century, when Sunday observance was added under the influence of Nicea? The failure of adequate evidence from Coptic Christianity prior to the 4th century makes it impossible to discuss this hypothesis with precision. An important aspect of the problem is the date at which one can speak of "Coptic" Christianity as an entity to be compared with other types (e.g., "Hellenistic") of Christianity—Bishai implies that such a distinction is possible "from apostolic times" onward (p. 31), but this is open to serious doubt. Certainly there were Coptic and Ethiopian Christians soon after Christian missionary work began, but no distinctively Coptic Christian community

ἐν ἡ καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ φανερωθεὶς ἀνέβη εἰς οὐρανοῦς.

<sup>28</sup> P. 30. See esp. Justin, *Apology* 67. 3-7 (Christians assemble on the "day of the Sun" in which God began creation and Christ both rose and appeared), *Dialogue* 24.1 (the Christian mystery of the "8th day"), *Dial.* 41.4 (the "8th day" on which Jesus rose is the best of all days), *Dial.* 138. 1 (the "8th day" in which Christ appeared after he had risen); also the anti-Sabbath polemic in *Dial.* 10.1; 18.2f; 47.2; etc. Obviously Justin's type of Christianity did not observe the Sabbath, but only Sunday. Sunday also is important for the 2d-century author of the *Gospel of Peter*, who uses *κυριακή* as a technical designation for the Lord's Day (sec. 9, 12)—there does not seem to be any anti-Sabbath sentiment here, however. By contrast, the "Epistle" to *Diognetus* is clearly anti-Sabbath (4:1-3), although the Lord's Day is not explicitly mentioned in comparison. Tertullian argues for worship on "die solis" (e.g., *Ad Nationes* 1.13.1ff) and against Jewish Sabbath solemnities (e.g., *Adv. Jud.* 4; *De jejuniis* 14: 1ff), but also admits that some Christians continued to keep Sabbath in some sense (*ibid.*, 14:3—the Passover Sabbath?).

emerges until the middle of the 3d century.<sup>29</sup> Prior to that time, it would seem that whatever Christian communities did exist in "non-Hellenistic" Egypt used primarily Greek and not Coptic as their *official* language; since Greek was the political language of Egypt at this time, as well as the language of the Egyptian Church, organized around Alexandria, they were not particularly isolated from "Hellenistic Christianity."<sup>30</sup>

This, plus the fact that the multitude of Coptic texts which refer to the observance of both Sabbath and Sunday in 4th-century Egypt give no hint that this is a *new* practice, seriously undercuts Bishai's thesis. It would seem that as peculiarly Coptic Christianity developed (in the 3d century?), it adopted and translated certain traditions current in the Hellenistic East—like the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus. Thus from its very beginnings, "Coptic Christianity" observed both Sabbath and Sunday, because such was the practice taught in its adopted traditions!

Furthermore, Bishai's reference to "the fact that the Coptic bishop who represented the Copts at Nicea is known to have agreed to hold the Easter festival ["Pascha" ?] on Sunday instead of the Jewish passover" (p. 29) is of much less relevance than he supposes, since it deals with an entirely separate (though remotely related) issue—namely, the perseverance of Quartodeciman views in Egypt over a century after a similar debate had been resolved in Hellenistic Asia Minor. There are numerous passages in the *Didascalia* as well as in the "Egyptian Church Order" tradition which

<sup>29</sup> See Quasten, *op. cit.*, III, 146ff; A. von Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (Translation; 2d ed.; London, 1908), Vol. II, IV, 3.3.7 (esp. pp. 175ff); J. Lebreton and J. Zeiller, *The History of the Primitive Church III* (Translated from the French; New York, 1946), I.19.1.

<sup>30</sup> Note, for example, the numerous Greek papyri containing certificates of sacrifice and connected with the edict of Decius around the year 250 (A. Bludau, *Die ägyptischen Libelli und die Christenverfolgung des Kaisers Decius*, "Römische Quartalschrift Supplement," Vol. XXVII, 1931); the Council of Alexandria in 320/21 at which some 100 Egyptian bishops were represented also illustrates this fact.

reflect this practice of Syrian and Coptic Christianity, to observe (Jewish) Passover on 14 Nisan as part of (if not the climax of) the Easter Season.<sup>31</sup> Bishai's reasoning that "it does not seem sensible that [the Copts] should have honored the resurrection day itself [i.e. Easter] on the Jewish passover if they [regularly] observed Sunday as a weekly rest" (p. 29) is rather strange in the light of the earlier Quartodeciman controversy.<sup>32</sup> As far as can be determined from the sources, the Quartodecimans were not at all considered strange for their *weekly* observances—apparently they kept the Lord's Day as did their opponents.<sup>33</sup> But on the annual Easter festival, they retained the Jewish mode of lunar calculation to determine Passover (14 Nisan), no matter on what day of the week it might fall, while their opponents centered the Easter observance around the *fixed* day of Sunday following the Jewish Passover. The Eastern Christian sources with which we are dealing reflect a compromise position in which both the Passover fast (including Passover Sabbath) and the Easter festal celebration (on Sunday) were observed in commemoration of the Lord's death and resurrection respectively (e.g. *Ap. Const.* V. 17ff; VII.23; see n. 31 above).

By way of summary, it seems that the following conclusions are in line with the evidence: (1) Sunday observance was being

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Syr. *Didasc.* 21; Eth. *Didasc.* 29f; *Ap. Const.* V.13-14, 17-20; Sahidic *Statutes* 55 and 75; Arabic *Statutes* 66; Eth. *Statutes* 67; *Ap. Const.* VIII.33.3f. Earlier Eastern evidence for this tradition is found in the 2d-century *Epistle of the Apostles* 15 (or 26).

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the 2d-century controversy, see F. E. Brightman, "The Quartodeciman Question," *JThS*, XXV (1923/24), 254-70; C. W. Dugmore, "A Note on the Quartodecimans," *Studia Patristica* IV ("Texte und Untersuchungen," LXXIX [Berlin, 1961]), 411-421.

<sup>33</sup> They may have kept both Sabbath and Sunday, although if this were true we might also have expected some reference to it in the sources. Note that Polycarp was a Quartodeciman according to Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, V.24.4 and 14. We have already made some enquiry concerning Polycarp's attitude to the Sabbath/Sunday question (above, pp. 26f.). Another alleged Quartodeciman, Melito of Sardis (see Eus., *Hist. Eccl.*, V. 24.5), is said to have written a treatise "On the Lord's Day" (Eus., *Hist. Eccl.*, IV. 26.2).

urged *instead of* Sabbath rest as early as the beginning of the 2d century;<sup>34</sup> (2) at the same time, a considerable segment of the Christian population continued to observe the (Jewish) Sabbath in some form or other—apparently this continued to be a live issue on into the 4th century in some areas; (3) some Christian communities observed *both* Sabbath *and* Sunday at least from the 3d century, and probably earlier, but there was a widespread attempt to divorce Sabbath observance from the ideas of solemnity (fasting) and idleness by making it a day of meditation and rejoicing (like Sunday)—that is, Sabbath “rest” was interpreted in a much wider sense than Rabbinic Judaism would permit. In the 4th century, when the Church and the Roman Empire were rapidly moving towards alliance, thus allowing the “ecumenical” Church to emerge visibly (and vocally), the official observance of Sunday rest gained political as well as religious overtones. This is clear from Constantine’s law of 321 which commanded all the urban population to “rest on the venerable day of the Sun” while allowing those who pursue agriculture to sow or plant on whatever day is suitable;<sup>35</sup> and from the various Church Councils of the 4th century which spoke on this problem—of Elvira, Can. 21

<sup>34</sup> For further details, see S. V. McCasland, “The Origin of the Lord’s Day,” *JBL*, XLIX (1930), 65-82; and more recently W. Rordorf, *Der Sonntag* (Zürich, 1962); Dugmore, “Lord’s Day and Easter” in Cullmann *Festschrift* (Suppl. to *Novum Testamentum*, VI [1962]), pp. 282-92. No doubt the complex problem of the separation of Church and Synagogue in the 1st and 2d centuries, with its inevitable antagonisms, was a factor here; also the anti-Jewish edicts of emperors like Hadrian would have provided added incentive for Christians to dissociate themselves from certain Jewish practices. On the Sabbath issue, appeal was made to the words and deeds of Jesus by the early church; see F. W. Beare, “The Sabbath Was Made for Man?” *JBL* LXXIX (1960), 130-36. But Beare has certainly gone too far with his statement on p. 136 that “one thing . . . is clear, . . . that the Christians did not keep the sabbath, and . . . their attitude brought upon them the fiercest attacks.”

<sup>35</sup> *Cod. Justinianus* III.12.3 (*Corp. Jur. Civ.* 2.127)—translated in H. S. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (2d ed.; London, 1963), p. 26.

(c. 306); of Laodicea, Can. 16, 29 (see above, n. 18). Here was a matter for Christian and Roman unity. Nevertheless, much of Eastern Christianity in the 4th and 5th centuries continued the older practice of observing both Sabbath and Sunday. Thus it was that Coptic Christianity inherited an older (Eastern) "Hellenistic" practice which had received only limited recognition in western Christianity, and it does not seem to be the case that the Council of Nicea (or related 4th-century councils) seriously modified the attitude of the Copts in the 4th century on this issue.