

Box 80 A

THE LORD'S DAY

---

by  
D. B. KNOX

THE PROTESTANT FAITH

MOORE THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE LIBRARY



3 2042 00092044 1

At the end of this month we will be asked to vote on whether hotels should trade on Sunday and the debate may be expected to highlight the use and abuse of alcoholic liquors, and in particular, to bring under review the road toll, to which alcohol so largely contributes, and the break up of home life which drunkenness inevitably involves. But I would like to turn your attention to a matter which is more fundamental still, though it may not be so prominent in the discussion, and that is, the observation of Sunday, the Lord's Day.

We are a Christian community and Christians are bound to honour their Lord, Jesus Christ; but every society and community has an obligation to honour God, quite apart from whether it is a Christian community, for every society and community is ultimately based on belief in God, that is, on Theism. An atheistic society is a contradiction. It is true that atheistic governments exist in communist countries, as in Nazi Germany. But such governments cannot create societies or communities; they must ever remain totalitarian dictatorships based on ruthlessness and secrecy. Society is based on fellowship and openness and these in turn are based on reverence for God. So every society has the obligation to honour the God on whom it believes, and because of the nature of the structure of human life this obligation means that time must be set aside for the honouring of

God.

We first meet the explicit command to honour God by setting aside one day a week for Him in the fourth commandment of the ten commandments in Exodus chapter 20. These ten commandments were spoken directly by God to the people of Israel without the intermediary of a prophet. They were spoken in awe inspiring circumstances - thunder, lightning, the smoking mountain - drawing attention to the solemnity of the occasion. And when God had spoken these ten words He wrote them on two tablets of stone, which were laid up in the Ark as a witness to God's will. These circumstances underline that the ten commandments are a permanent revelation of God's will for mankind. They reveal God's complete will, for as Moses said in recounting the event, "God added no more words" Deut. 5:2. The Fourth Commandment shares this permanent character with the other nine. The commandment begins "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy". This word "remember" points to the fact that the command was no new revelation, as though it applied only to the Hebrew nation. Already in Exodus 16 there are indications that the people knew of the Sabbath day and a seven day period formed part of the Passover celebrations in Exodus 12.

We do not know the origin of the seven day week, but already in the days of the flood seven days plays a repeated part in the narrative and the



number seven seems from ancient times to have been a sacred number, and this is strange in view of the fact that seven does not correspond to any experience of nature. The Bible tells us that the seven day week runs back to creation itself. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Why this six day/one day period? For God could have created the world in the twinkling of a flash so the question arises, for what purpose did God create the world in six days and rest on the seventh? and even if we believe that the Genesis narrative is pictorial rather than literal, so that the six days stand for thousands of years, it remains true that God has given us a knowledge of creation in a narrative in which six days followed by one day is the prominent structure. Why is this so except to emphasise the seventh day? the day on which the Scripture says God completed His creation, resting on it and blessing it and hallowing it. We read "God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it" (Gen. 2). To hallow means to make it God's.

It is for our sake that this structure of seven days with one day hallowed to God has been revealed. Written into the structure of creation itself (that is to say, into our human nature and life) is this necessity of resting on one day for the purpose of hallowing it to God. Unless we take time to honour God we will forget Him. This is true of us as individuals in our daily life: we must take time for

prayer and Bible reading and the joint worship of God, and it is also true of our community which as we have seen is ultimately based on belief in God. If we do not make time for the honouring of God in our thoughts and by our actions in a regular way we will sink into materialism and ultimately atheism and so destroy our society. Therefore it is of the utmost importance for the health of our society that we should as a social unit acknowledge God by honouring His day and seeking on that day to turn our thoughts to Him and to His honour. This is our first duty as members of any society and if the Sabbath commandment is ignored the rest of our social behaviour will in due course cease to be Christian.

In the Mosaic legislation the rules for the Sabbath were elaborated in detail, as were the food laws, and the laws of sacrifice. For example, no fires could be lit, no sticks gathered, no burdens carried on the Sabbath. These external ceremonies were meant to emphasise the principle of the Sabbath, namely that we honour God by resting in Him through faith. Thus, for example, it required real faith in God to obey the Mosaic Sabbath law, not to sow or harvest on that day. All these externalisings of the law in the form of ceremony have of course been abolished with the coming of Christ who is the fulfilment of the law. St Paul says explicitly in Colossians 2 that the Old Testament Sabbath was a shadow of Christ who is



the substance. Yet even in the Old Testament it was recognised that the Sabbath was more than ceremony; thus in Is. 58 - a chapter which emphasises that God's requirements for honoring him are internal in the heart rather than ceremonial, so that the laws of fasting are not fulfilled by mere abstinence from meat but rather by positive acts of self-denial in providing for other people's needs - in this chapter the observation of the Sabbath is reiterated not in its Mosaic details but in its general principles. We are called upon to turn away from doing our own will on the Sabbath, as it is God's day and we are to regard it as a delight to honour God by regarding His day as honourable.

That the purpose of the Sabbath rest is trusting rest of faith in God is clear from the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapters 3 and 4. But it remains true that if we are to exercise this trust in God we need to provide opportunity for directing our thoughts to Him in the way we allocate our time. This is a necessity from the way that we have been created with a physical frame and in a social structure. From the beginning of creation God has made His mind clear to us that we should set aside time in order that we might rest in Him by directing our thoughts towards His bountiful providence in creation and now as the result of the Christian revelation to His provision of eternal salvation through the redemption in

Christ.

The Mosaic laws for the observance of the Sabbath are no longer operative. They have been fulfilled in Christ, and we must not allow other people to dictate to us, or to judge us in the way we seek to fulfil the principles underlying those laws, which of course, are permanent, namely, honouring God by trusting Him.

If we are in a position to honour God with our time every day then the commandment is fulfilled, for then we hallow not one day in seven only, but seven days in seven. But most of us are not in the position to do this. The obligations of our ordinary life fill our time during the week, and so it becomes a divine duty to set aside one day for God, so as to grow in our faith and our honoring of Him. It would seem from the New Testament that the early Christians marked the first day rather than the seventh day in the way we divide up our week, for the first day was the day on which Jesus rose from the dead, on which He appeared to His disciples on the day of the resurrection as well as a week later, and was also the day on which the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost.

In Acts we find Christians assembling for common worship on the first day of the week, and it is called the Lord's day in the Book of Revelation. We should note that it is the Lord's day, and not the Lord's hour,



for some seem to think that the hour of worship is sufficient to fulfil the Sabbath commandment.

Though we Christians are not under obligation to observe the Mosaic ceremonies, we still need to set aside one day for the honoring of God. This arises from the unchanged relationship which we sustain towards God our Creator to whom we owe honor and secondly from the unchanged character of our human nature and way of life. If we are to honor him every day we need to set aside one day to give our minds to this. The way we honor Him is by trusting Him, by resting in Him. God Himself has made clear to us this need in the way He created the world, resting on the seventh day, blessing it and hallowing it as His day. So we are under obligation to put our minds to the question of how best to observe this day to the honour of God? It is a question we should be constantly considering, for if we fail to honour God in obedience to the fourth commandment we are likely to fail to honour Him in the rest of the week. God in His providence has provided us with Sunday. If our society is to be God-fearing, it must be a society that values and preserves the Lord's day. The fundamental question that we need to apply ourselves to at the referendum is how should we shape our community activities on the day which He has named for Himself as the Lord's day. Just as the honoring of God is our first obligation in any activity which



we undertake, so the proper observance  
of the Lord's day is the basis of  
Christian ethics.

"THE PROTESTANT FAITH"  
is broadcast  
every second Sunday  
at 9.15 p.m.  
over 2CH

Copies of these fortnightly  
broadcasts may be obtained  
(\$2.00 per year posted) by  
writing to "The Protestant  
Faith", C/- 2CH, York Street  
Sydney.

19. 2.11.69