

Chapter 13

The Attitude of the Early Church to the Ten Commandments

DID the early church hold the Decalogue to have a meaning for the Christian? And, in particular, did the fourth commandment retain any direct application to Christian life?

In any study of the Christian theology of Sunday this is a vital question and one which must be answered if it is at all possible. We have already seen that the Christian church rejected the Jewish sabbath. Moreover, there is no *direct* appeal during the first four centuries at least to the Decalogue, to support an observance of the Christian Sunday. Yet from what we have seen already, if the Christian Church accepted the Decalogue as being still relevant to Christians, they must have faced this problem. They could hardly have failed to see that in rejecting the sabbath of the Jews they were challenging, in some form or other, the fourth commandment. Some explanation would have to be given. Did the Christian Church then reject the Decalogue, with the rest of the Mosaic Law? We must now examine this question, and especially the question of the sabbath command.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE FATHERS: BEFORE CONSTANTINE

1. *Pliny, Dionysius, Theophilus (Asia Minor, Greece, Syria)*

After the New Testament period (see chapter two), the attitude of Christians to the Decalogue remains much the same. There are clear references to the Decalogue in Clement of Rome,¹ in the *Didache* (2), in Aristides (*Apol.* 15.3-5), and in *Barnabas* (19).² Though these do not give us the attitude of the authors to each separate commandment, they show that in the minds of the writers there was no suggestion of the Decalogue being discarded, as the outward ritual was. The Ten Commandments were clearly felt to be still applicable to the Christian. The stronger emphasis is on the second table, which (as in the New Testament) is quoted much more frequently than the first. It seems to be taken for granted that there would be love to God in a Christian.

In Pliny's letter to Trajan (AD 112) there are probably hints that the

Decalogue was used in the worship of the Church. The words are 'on a fixed day before daylight to come together and to sing responsively a song unto Christ as God; and to bind themselves with an oath, not with a view to the commission of some crime, but on the contrary, that they would not commit theft, nor robbery, nor adultery, that they would not break faith, nor refuse to restore a deposit when asked for. . . .' This seems to be a reference to the use of the Ten Commandments (Grant, 'Decalogue', p. 11).

In the passage in Dionysius of Corinth (Eusebius, *HE* 4.23.11; *PG* xx. 389) already examined, the use of the word 'holy' (*hagia*) in connection with Sunday may be a reference to the fourth commandment, 'keep it holy'.

Theophilus of Antioch (AD 160) says, 'But God at least . . . did not abandon mankind but gave a law and sent holy prophets to declare and teach the race of men that each one of us might awake and understand that there is one God. And they also taught us to refrain from unlawful idolatry, and adultery and murder, fornication, theft, avarice, false swearing, wrath, and every incontinence and uncleanness, and that whatever a man would not wish to be done to himself, he should not do to another' (*Autolytus* 2.34f.; *PG* vi. 1108, 1133). Again later he says, 'We have learned a holy law; but we have as lawgiver him who is really God . . . He says, "Thou shalt have no other gods. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. . . .", and of doing good he said, "Honour thy father and thy mother. . . .", and again, "thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Thou shalt not covet . . .". To these are added other ethical commands from Exodus, after which he continues, 'Of this divine law then, Moses, who also was God's servant, was made the minister, both to all the world and chiefly to the Hebrews. . . . Of this great and wonderful law, which tends to all righteousness, the ten heads are such as we have already rehearsed.'

It will be noticed that in neither of Theophilus's accounts is there any reference to the fourth commandment (Rordorf, *op. cit.*, pp. 105f.). Yet in the summary at the end, 'the ten heads', it is clear that Theophilus had not omitted the commandment altogether. The third is also not mentioned in either list. The answer is probably that the explanation needed in writing to a non-Christian would have distracted from the line of thought, though he has in fact mentioned the sabbath earlier on (*PG* vi. 1136b).

2. Irenaeus (*Gaul and Asia Minor*)

Irenaeus gives a much clearer exposition of the Christian attitude to the Decalogue. In *Adv. Haer.* 4.12.3 (*PG* vii. 1004f.) he says, 'The precepts of an absolutely perfect life, since they are the same in each Testament, have pointed out to us the same God, who certainly has promulgated particular laws adapted for each, but the more prominent and the greatest (commandments), without which salvation cannot (be attained), he has exhorted the same in both.' At first sight this might be taken of the two commandments mentioned just before, 'love to God' and 'love to one's neighbour', but he goes on to refer it to Christ's answer to the rich young man, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery, etc. . . .' (12.5). Again, he says, 'And that the Lord did not abrogate the natural (precepts) of the law, by which man is justified (cf. Rom. 2: 27), which also those who were justified by faith and who pleased God did observe previous to the giving of the law, but that he extended and fulfilled them, is shown from his words . . . "It has been said, Do not commit adultery . . . Do not kill . . ." Now he did not teach us these things as being opposed to the law, but as fulfilling the law. . . . neither is it the utterance of one destroying the law, but of one fulfilling, extending and affording greater scope to it. . . .' (13.1). Again, 'Inasmuch as all natural precepts are common to us and to them (the Jews), they had in them indeed the beginning and origin, but in us they have received growth and completion' (13.4). And again, 'Now all these precepts were not of one doing away the law, but of one fulfilling, extending and widening it amongst us; just as if one should say that the more extensive operation of liberty implies that a more complete subjection and affection towards our Liberator had been implanted within us. For he did not set us free that we should depart from him . . . but that the more we receive his grace the more we should love him' (12.3; *PG* vii. 1006ff.).

He goes on to summarise God's dealing with the Jews. 'They had therefore a law, a course of discipline and a prophecy of future things. For God at the first indeed, warning them by means of natural principles, which from the beginning he had implanted in mankind, that is, by means of the Decalogue (which if he does not observe, he has no salvation), did then demand nothing more of them. As Moses said in Deut. 5.22, "These are all the words which the Lord spake". But when they turned. . . back to Egypt, desiring to be slaves . . . he subjected them to a yoke of bondage . . .' (4.15.1).

And again, 'While they obeyed the Decalogue and, being restrained

by him, should not revert to idolatry, nor apostatise from God, but learn to love him with the whole heart' (15.2; PG vii. 1014).

He goes on, 'The righteous fathers had the meaning of the Decalogue written in their hearts and souls; that is, they loved the God who made them and did no injury to their neighbours . . . they had the righteousness of the law in themselves. But when the righteousness and love to God has passed into oblivion and become extinct in Egypt, God did . . . by a voice reveal himself . . . (the law) enjoined love to God and taught just dealing towards our neighbour, that we should neither be unjust, nor unworthy of God, who prepares man for his friendship through the medium of the Decalogue. . . . Preparing man for this life, the Lord himself did speak in his own person to all alike the words of the Decalogue, and therefore in like manner do they remain permanently with us, receiving by means of his advent in the flesh extension and increase, but not abrogation. The laws of bondage however were one by one promulgated by Moses, suited for their instruction or for their punishment. These things therefore, which were given for bondage and for a sign to them, he cancelled by the new covenant of liberty. But he has increased and widened those laws which are natural and noble and common to all, granting to men largely and without grudging . . . to know God the Father and to love him with all the heart' (16.3).

On the other hand, Irenaeus says elsewhere, 'Moreover, we learn from Scripture itself that God gave circumcision, not as the completer of righteousness, but as a sign, that the race of Abraham might continue recognisable. . . . This same does Ezekiel the prophet say with regard to the sabbaths, "Also I gave them my sabbaths to be a sign", Ezek. 20 : 12 (see also Exod. 21 : 13). . . . These things, then, were given for a sign. But the signs were not unsymbolical, that is neither unmeaning, nor to no purpose, inasmuch as they were given by a wise artist. . . . The sabbath taught that we should continue the whole day in God's service (*sabbata autem perseverantiam totius diei³ erga deum deservitionis edocebant*). "For we have been counted", says the Apostle St. Paul, "all the day long as sheep for the slaughter" (Rom. 8 : 36), that is, consecrated (to God) and ministering continually to our faith and persevering in it and abstaining from all avarice. . . . Moreover the sabbath of God (*requies dei*), that is, the kingdom, was . . . indicated by created things; in which the man who shall have persevered in serving God shall in a state of rest partake of God's table' (4.16; PG vii. 1015).

These rather extensive quotations are necessary if we would get a complete picture of Irenaeus' attitude to the Decalogue. The evidence comes from Gaul, and indirectly from Irenaeus's homeland of Asia Minor, but the thought-forms agree in principle so closely with other writings, that we may take it as representing the catholic view of the church.

The points which Irenaeus brings out are these:

(i) The Decalogue is a universal law which has in no sense been abrogated by the New Covenant. There can be no complete salvation if it is not observed. While the patriarchs did not possess it, they lived in its spirit and so did not need it.

(ii) The New Covenant, far from abrogating it, deepened, widened and increased its demands. This was done by its being written on the heart. In other words, the spirit of the commandments was more important than the letter. Its objective was the good of man.

(iii) The sum and substance of the Decalogue was love to God and justice to man. In other words, the whole intention was to develop these objectives.

(iv) But at the same time the sabbaths were a sign of Judaism, as circumcision was. Yet these had an inner meaning, the circumcision of the heart and the giving of the whole day to God. The rest of God is God's rule over the heart, which excludes the passion for worldly things and prepares us for the final rest.

3. Tertullian (North Africa)

In his *De Pud.* 5 (PL ii. 987a) Tertullian says, 'And now God's primeval law (the Decalogue) will serve to show us how serious a crime adultery is . . . for after condemning the superstitious worship of strange gods and the making of idols, after commending the observance of the sabbath (*post commendatam sabbati venerationem*), after enjoining (*imperatum*) a reverence for parents, immediately after that which is due to God it is laid down, "thou shalt not commit adultery".' It seems quite plain from this passage that Tertullian adopts the same positive attitude as Irenaeus to the Decalogue.

4. Clement of Alexandria (Egypt)

We turn now to Alexandria. Clement of Alexandria, writing about AD 200 in the *Stromata* 6.16, deals with the Decalogue.⁴ This passage, as we have seen in a former chapter, is full of allegorical speculations and so has to be read with great reserve. He goes into the mystical meaning of numbers and this has repelled some people from trying to find out

his underlying thought (see Hessey, *Sunday*, p. 45 and notes 112-15). The passage is too long to quote in full (PG ix. 364b ff.). After dealing with the first two commandments he says, "The third [our fourth] commandment is that which intimates that the world was created by God. He gave us a seventh day as a rest on account of the trouble there is in life. For God is incapable of weariness, suffering or want. But we who bear flesh need rest, abstraction from ills, preparing for the primal day, our true rest, which in truth is the first creation of light, in which all things are viewed and possessed."

The first point to note in this passage is that Clement takes the commandment as applying to Christians. This must be the meaning of 'us' in 'he gave us'. It is inconceivable that Clement means 'the Jews'. He may mean 'mankind', but if this is so then he is suggesting that the sabbath conception of one day in seven as rest is valid for the whole human race.

The next point is that he is here suggesting that *physical* rest is necessary for 'us'. The words cannot primarily mean spiritual rest, even though Clement's thought moves to that later on. 'God is incapable of weariness' and 'we who bear flesh' must mean physical rest, as we have seen in our previous discussion of the passage. So in this Clement is suggesting that to the Christian, as to the Jew, a day of rest was necessary, and that this meaning was included in the idea of the fourth commandment, as it applied to Christians. At the same time, we noticed earlier that Clement omits the article with 'seventh' in applying it to 'us'. 'He gave us a seventh day.' And if the suggested explanation there of 'seventh' and 'eighth' is right, then his idea seems to be that 'a seventh day' is for the Christian 'the eighth'.

In another passage, *Paedagogus* 3.12 (PG viii, 668a), Clement says, "We have the Decalogue given by Moses, which, indicating by an elementary principle, simple and of one kind, defines the designation of sins in a way conducive to salvation, "Thou shalt not commit adultery . . ." and so forth. These things are to be observed."

5. Origen (*Egypt and Palestine*)

Origen in *Fragments* 62 on *Jeremiah* mentions the Decalogue as the perfect law provided by God (GCS 3, p. 228), and in the *Homilies on Exodus* 8 (PG xii. 350) takes it as spoken to Christians, who have come from the bondage of sin into the liberty of Christ. In what has survived, he does not go beyond the first three commandments and so does not deal with the fourth.

6. *The Didascalia (Syria)*

In the *Didascalia* (9) the writer says, 'Hear, thou catholic church of God, . . . thou didst receive the Ten Words and learn the law. . . .' This the writer does not include in the second legislation, the ritual law, added afterwards (FXF 2.26.1f., p. 102; Connolly, op. cit. p. 86). Again, in ch. 26 he says, 'For whereas he spoke the Ten Words, he signified Jesus. For "ten" represents God. . . . He does not undo the law but teaches what is the law and what the second legislation (the ceremonial law). The law therefore is indissoluble. Now the law consists of the Ten Words and the Judgments, to which Jesus bore witness and said, "One jot or one tittle shall not pass from the law" . . . This is the simple and light law, wherein is no burden, nor distinction of meats. . . .' (FXF 6.15.1-3, p. 346; Connolly, p. 216). In chap. 2 he says, 'For the first law is that which the Lord God spoke before the people had made the calf and served idols, which consists of the Ten Words and the Judgments. But after they had served idols, he justly laid upon them the bonds . . . of the second legislation. . . . Do thou therefore read without the weight of these burdens, read the simple law, which is in accord with the gospel. . . .' (FXF 1.6.10, p. 16; Connolly, p. 14). And in chap. 1, 'As also in the gospel Christ renews and confirms and fulfils the Ten Words of the law. . . .' (FXF 1.1.1-4, p. 4; Connolly, p. 4).

These passages show that the Decalogue was treated in quite a different way from the Jewish ritual law. In fact there is the same treatment, stated in different terms, as we have seen in Irenaeus. The Decalogue is simple, natural and permanent, and received the approval of Christ himself and the church. It is therefore still applicable to Christians.

A SUMMARY OF THESE VIEWS

If we summarise the attitude of the church before Constantine, there is no doubt but that they were unanimous in treating the Decalogue as being still applicable to Christians. It is treated as natural law, which is equally binding on those under the Old Covenant and those under the New. Christ, while deepening its meaning, as shown in chapter two, by no means abolished it. At the same time, it is these writers who state emphatically that the *Jewish* sabbath is not applicable to Christians. The only writer who seems to face the difficulty is Clement of Alexandria, who, as we have seen, in speaking of the fourth (third) commandment claims that man as a creature needs physical rest and that God has given a seventh day in each week for this purpose.

It will be well to examine here a writer whose work, though some twenty years after the edict of Constantine, could hardly have been influenced by it: Aphrahat, or Aphraates, the Persian. His writings probably date from between AD 336 and 345. Where he lived is not certain, though it seems likely he suffered persecution under the Persian king Sapor the Great. He is writing about the sabbath and is making the point that the sabbath commandment is not one of life and death, sin and righteousness, but is a commandment of mercy. He says in the *Thirteenth Sermon*⁵ (*De Sabbato*), 'The sabbath was set up not because from it came death and life. This is plain because it was commanded also for animals, as well as men. If the law of the sabbath was fixed for life and death, sin and righteousness, what use was there in its being observed by an animal. . . . There is no resurrection of animals. Nor do they receive a reward for keeping the sabbath, nor do they come into judgment. . . . The sabbath was given for rest to all creatures which work and get tired in their wearisome labour.' He goes on to show that things which do not grow tired—rivers, waves, lightning, etc.—do not observe a sabbath, and that it was not until after the law of labour was given that a sabbath was set up. 'But because God did not impose on Adam laborious work before the transgression, he did not give a sabbath to him.' God cares for all his creatures. 'Therefore he advised and ordered that there should be rest for them on the sabbath day. . . .' 'If God, who did not tire, rested on the seventh day, how much more ought he, who still in servitude is subject to weariness, to rest. . . . But God is wearied with our sins. . . .' He goes on to say that the Jews were driven out into all countries because they only kept the sabbath 'in a bodily way'. 'Let us then keep the sabbath of God, that we may do the "rest" of his will and that we may enter into the sabbath of rest. For through it heaven and earth keep sabbath and rest and cease.'

In these passages there seem to be two main thoughts. The first is that men and animals need the relaxation of a weekly day of rest. This is tied up with the command to labour. While the command to labour remains, the need for rest remains, and this is provided in God's care for his creatures. The second thought is that this is not linked to the sabbath day as a matter of spiritual necessity, life, and death, as is shown by the fact that the patriarchs did not observe that day. The true rest is in doing God's will. It is of no use merely to keep a corporal

observance of a day, it needs the doing of God's will as the basis behind it.

There is no direct reference here to the Christian Sunday, merely to the conception of the sabbath. But here is a confirmation of what we have seen in Clement of Alexandria, who says that 'we who are in the flesh need rest', and who does mention the Lord's Day in this connection. It shows that, before Constantine's edict, or apart from it, the church felt that a day of rest was needed for mankind, and yet that the Jewish sabbath had been rejected; that there was no divine significance in the day as such. The important thing was the weekly 'rest' for man and beast.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE FATHERS: AFTER CONSTANTINE

1. *Ephrem Syrus (Syria)*

It is interesting to find the same attitude in another writer from much the same background as Aphrahat, though writing slightly later. Ephrem Syrus, in the *Hymns of the Nativity* (xix. 10), speaks of the sabbath as a rest for men and animals (*NPNF* 13, p. 261). Both these writers speak of the Ten Commandments⁶ and both evidently recognise the need for a day of bodily rest.⁷

2. *The Apostolic Constitutions (Syria)*

In the *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.36.1f. (*FXF*, pp. 121, 349) there is a discussion of the Ten Commandments. Here the fourth commandment is not taken in a spiritual sense, but assumed to refer to the seventh day, the sabbath of the Jews; but the writer stresses that the important thing is not a giving up of work on the Saturday, but a remembrance of the creation. This is repeated in 6.19.2 and 20.1ff. At the same time, he makes it quite clear that the Lord's Day is to be kept more diligently (2.59.2; *FXF*, p. 171). For slaves, both Saturday and Sunday were free (8.33.1; *FXF*, p. 538).

3. *Gregory of Nazianzus (Asia Minor)*

Gregory of Nazianzus takes the Ten Commandments one by one. Of the fourth he says, 'Keep all the sabbaths, exalted (heavenly) and with shadows' (*sabbata panta phylasse metarsia kai skioenta*). The meaning is far from clear. The Latin translation has *sabbata legitima tibi sunt servanda quiete tam quae tecta umbris, quam quae sublima sensu*, and suggests that the seventh day is a shadow of something much higher (*Carmina* 1.1.15.6; *PG* xxxvii. 477).

4. Chrysostom (*Antioch and Constantinople*)

Turning to Chrysostom, we find the problem of the fourth commandment squarely faced in the twelfth *Homily on the Statues*, sect. 3 (PG xlix. 131). Here he says that, of the Decalogue commandments, most have no reason given why they should be observed, as the conscience agrees without question to their rightness. But where there is no natural light from the conscience, as in the case of the fourth commandment, God adds a reason. The reason is God's cessation of creation and the fact that they had been slaves in Egypt. He goes on to say that this commandment was not one of the leading ones (*tōn proōgoumenōn*), but it was 'partial and temporary' *merikē kai proskairos*. As used by Chrysostom, *merikē* seems to have two meanings: firstly, as opposed to *teleios*, 'perfect', in which case the meaning would be that a further development was to follow; and secondly, 'dealing with only a part', which does not seem to yield such a good sense here, though it might express the idea, which we shall see in Augustine, that the Christian gives all his time to God. Then, too, the commandment as it stands is *proskairos*, 'for that time', and therefore 'temporary'. 'After these things it was unloosed' (*katelyste*), or dissolved, Chrysostom explains. At first sight this would imply that, in Chrysostom's view, the commandment has ceased to have any application to Christians, and that there is no day of rest. But if we examine other passages in his writings, it seems clear that this is not his meaning.

It will have been noted that one of the reasons given for the observance of the sabbath was that God rested. If we turn to Chrysostom's commentary on this passage, Gen. 2 : 1-3, he says, 'What is the meaning of "he hallowed it"? He set it then apart. The divine word, teaching us, also added the reason why he has said he hallowed it, that in it he ceased from all his works which God had begun to do. Already from then God provides teaching for us by means of parables in a figure (*ainigmatōdos*), disciplining (*paideuōn*) us that the one day (or the first day, *tēn mian hēmeran*) in the circle of the week we should wholly set apart (*anatithenai*) and separate it for the working (*ergasia*) of spiritual things. Because of this also the Lord says, "having completed in six days the whole of creation, I considered the seventh worthy of blessing" ' (*Hom.* 10.7; PG liii. 89).

Chrysostom is here referring to Christians: 'teaching us', 'disciplining us', that is in the hallowing of the sabbath. He speaks of *ainigmatōdos*,⁸ 'in a figure'. This is almost always used in the Fathers of something foreshadowed in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New. Then he

says, 'God provides teaching for us' (*didaskalian hēmin ho theos par-echetai*). In other words, in the hallowing of one day in seven there was 'a pattern for Christians'. Then too 'the one day' (*tēn mian hēmeran*) may refer to the Christian usage. The article is significant.⁹ It was the earliest name in use for Sunday, though it might here have a general meaning, as I have translated. But perhaps most decisive of all is the word 'working' (*ergasia*), for on the sabbath the Jew was forbidden all work of all kinds, as several of the Fathers point out. The passage, then, would point to the Christian Sunday, implying that in these words of Genesis God was showing the need for one day in seven to be given to spiritual things. This seems to be Chrysostom's line of thought, and, if so, it follows that the 'dissolving' of the fourth commandment would refer to its Jewish associations and not to the principle behind it.

In another place, commenting on 1 Cor. 16 : 2, 'on the first day of the week', he says, 'On every such day (let there be) the separation from all work; the soul becomes more joyful from this laying of it aside . . . the rejoicing over ten thousand good things in it (Sunday)' (*De Eleem.* 3; PG li. 265). And further on, 'Because of this (the blessings connected with the day of the Resurrection) it is fitting that we honour it with a spiritual honour . . . and every Lord's Day let the affairs connected with us as masters be laid aside at home.' Here again is the thought that a day is set aside, and that the day in question is Sunday. In his *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, Chrysostom speaks of Sunday and says, 'But it (Sunday) is convenient for a zealous benevolence, because it hath rest (*anesis*) and immunity from toils; the soul when released from labour becoming readier to show mercy' (*Hom.* 43.1 on 1 Cor. 16 : 2; PG lxi. 368).

Again, in his *Homilies on Matthew*, after describing how the sabbath taught the Jews to be gentle and conferred many and great benefits, he says, 'Did Christ then repeal (*elysen*) a thing so highly profitable? Far from it; nay, he greatly enhanced it' (*Hom.* 39 on Matt. 3; PG lvii. 436).

Here perhaps is the explanation of Chrysostom's claim that the sabbath has, and has not, been dissolved. It has been 'enhanced' to claim all the time of a Christian. Just as the local presence of an altar and temple in the Old Testament was a partial realisation of God's presence, to be revealed everywhere in Christ, so in relation to time the partial claim of one day was enhanced to be a claim on all days; and yet this did not, in Chrysostom's eyes, mean the abandoning of a special day devoted to spiritual things, a day of rest on which ordinary work

was laid aside and the day given over to the things of the spirit. It is the same pattern as in Origen, the double claim of the ideal and the practical¹⁰.

5. Augustine (North Africa)

It is in Augustine's works that we find the fullest treatment of the fourth commandment (to him the third) among the Fathers, and so, although he is writing at the end of the fourth century, it is important to study his approach, especially as, in fact, his reasoning could not have been based on any interpretation of Constantine's edict. For whereas Constantine orders all to rest (*quiescant*), Augustine states clearly that the idea of the sabbath to the Christian is not 'inactivity of the body' (*otium carnalis*) (*Serm.* 9.3; *PL* xxxviii. 77). The one could hardly have sprung from the other.

In his *Letter to Januarius*, written probably in AD 400 and answering an enquiry why Easter was always on a Sunday and why the date changed, Augustine gives an explanation of the sabbath, the third (fourth) commandment and the Christian Sunday (*Ep.* 2.55; *PL* xxxiii. 211-15). He states quite definitely that the commandments are to be observed by Christians (*PL*. xxxiii. 214), but of these ten the third (fourth) is the only one to be observed 'in a figure' (*figurate observandum*, perhaps the Latin equivalent of *ainigmatōdos*). In other words, there is an observance of this commandment, but not in the same direct way as the other nine. Elsewhere, in the *Sermons* (136.3; *PL* xxxviii. 752), Augustine states that 'The Lord was dissolving the sabbath' in his healings. It is clear that Augustine, while believing that the Jewish sabbath as such was dissolved, still held that the commandment was to be observed by Christians in some form. What are we to take *figurate* and *figura* to mean, as Augustine uses them? This is a difficult question, for there is more than one shade of meaning in his use of the words. Are we to take them as meaning 'a type', so that there was only a spiritual equivalent to the thought of the sabbath, with no equivalent of a practical nature? It is possible that this is his meaning, but it seems strange that, if this is so, he brings in 'the Lord's Day' to this section at all. In fact, in the letter to Januarius the argument starts from the Sunday thought and moves to the commandment and the sabbath. In his *Commentary on Psalm 150: 1*, Augustine says, 'In that (the Old Covenant) the sabbath was observed (*observatur*): in this the Lord's Day' (*PL* xxxvii. 1960). In the Old Latin and Vulgate of the third (fourth) commandment in Deut. 5: 12ff., the word is *observo*. So it would seem

that in some way the commandment had reference to the Christian Sunday.

Augustine claims that the first three commandments in the Decalogue speak of love to God, the first with special reference to the Father; the second to the Son; and the third to the Holy Spirit (*Ep.* 2.55.11 (20); *PL* xxxiii. 213). He points out that the first use of the word 'hallow' (sanctify) is in connection with the institution of the sabbath in Gen. 2: 1, 2, and therefore that the sabbath rest was meant to include the work of the Holy Spirit sanctifying his people (*Serm.* 9.5; *PL* xxxviii. 80). This meant rest of conscience, the absence of servile works, 'no longer the servant of sin'. All love of the world and its covetous desires is excluded (*Pss.* 91.2; *PL* xxxvii. 1172). He goes on to point out that rest does not necessarily exclude activity, either in the case of God (*Pss.* 92.1; *PL* xxxvii. 1181) or of man (*Ep.* 2.55.9.17; *PL* xxxiii. 212). The two are not incompatible. The sabbath of the Jew was a bodily inactivity, and this is not for the Christian the meaning of the sabbath. Again, Augustine sees in the sabbath the hope of a final rest in the world to come. This rest may be either the millennium, his conception in his early days, or the final rest¹¹ of the world to come, which leads into the eighth day, the resurrection life. In all this Augustine is spiritualising the conception of the sabbath and its application to the Christian. If this is all he meant by the commandment having significance for Christians, its significance would simply be this: 'show your love to God by having a conscience that is quiet, and look forward to the world to come.' But into this framework Augustine brings an observance of the Christian Sunday. As we have already seen, the two days are placed side by side and contrasted. The Christian 'celebrates' (*celebrare*) and 'observes' (*observare*) the Lord's Day.

Augustine claims that this observing of Sunday was due to Christ himself. He states that Christ deliberately chose the time of his Passion. 'My time is not yet come' (John 7: 5). He deliberately suffered on the Cross on the Friday, lay in the grave on the Saturday, the sabbath, and rose again on the Sunday (*Contr. Faust.* 16.29, *PL* xlii. 335; *Ep. ad Januarium* 2.55.9.16, *PL* xxxiii. 211). By so doing he consecrated (*sacratust est*) that day (*De Civit. Dei* 22.30.5, *PL* xli. 804; *Serm.* 169.2, *PL* xxxviii. 916: *consecravit*). As we have already seen, Dionysius of Corinth, two hundred and fifty years before, had spoken of the Lord's Day as the 'holy' day, and Eusebius of Caesarea had claimed that it was instituted by Christ, and a 'holy sabbath'. This, then, does not seem to be any new idea.

Augustine's application of his thought is that the Friday depicts the Christian life, with its crossbearing; the Saturday, the sabbath, the inactivity of the life between death and resurrection; and the Sunday, the final 'rest in activity' of the resurrection life in the world to come. So it would seem that his conception of the Christian Sunday was, as contrasted with the 'inactivity' (*otium, argia*) of the Jewish sabbath, a day devoted to 'rest in activity' in the service of God, corresponding to the sabbath observance of the priests rather than of the common people (*Ep. 55.9.17, PL xxxiii. 212; In Pss. 92.1, PL xxxvii. 1182*).

He seems to imply that the sabbath rest continued into the Sunday; just as the seventh day had no mention of an evening in Gen. 1 and 2, but merged into the eighth day. The rest of the sabbath was not removed, but glorified (*quia non aufert illam requiem [the seventh day] sed glorificat, Ep. 55.13.23, PL xxxiii. 215*).¹² The glorifying of the eighth day seems to mean its connection with the Resurrection, and its translation from a day of simple inactivity to one of active service of God and of festal joy.

What is more, Augustine claims that because this day had been revealed (*declaratus est*) to Christians and consecrated by Christ in the resurrection, it belongs to Christ. After saying that the resurrection of Christ has consecrated the day, Augustine adds, 'What is called the Lord's Day (*dominicus dies*) is itself properly seen to belong (*pertinere*) to the Lord, because on that day the Lord rose again.'

It is interesting that after describing the meaning of the third (fourth) commandment as being 'figurative' (*figurate*), where rest is commended, 'which is loved everywhere but is only found sure and sacred in God alone', he goes on, 'The Lord's Day, however, has been made known not to Jews but to Christians by the resurrection of the Lord, and from him it began to have the festive character which is proper to it' (*Dies tamen Dominicus, non Judaeis, sed Christianis resurrectione Domini declaratus est. . .*) (*PL xxxiii. 215*). This seems to be strengthened by an expression further on in the same passage, where he says (commenting on Eccles. 11: 2, 'A portion for seven and also for eight') that the meaning of the eighth day was largely hid from the Jews, and 'the sabbath alone was handed down to be celebrated'. But, after the resurrection of Christ, 'the eighth day which is also the first should begin to be celebrated' (*jam etiam dies dominicus, id est octavus, qui et primus inciperet celebrari*).

A SUMMARY OF THE PATRISTIC ATTITUDE TO THE DECALOGUE,
AND ESPECIALLY TO THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

If we summarise what has been said about the Decalogue, we find that from the earliest days it has been accepted as a valid law for Christians, as the natural law given in commandments. This is unanimous. At the same time, the commandment about the sabbath has been treated differently from the others, and 'the sabbath' itself linked with the ceremonial law and circumcision, as being 'dissolved' for Christians. Yet there seems in most cases to be a *hesitation* in saying that it has been done away with. Clement of Alexandria claims the need for physical rest on one day in seven; so too do Aphrahat and Ephrem Syrus. All writers claim that the commandment has a spiritual meaning which includes rest of heart and conscience, the giving up of sin (the *opera servilia* of selfish work), and the life consecrated to God. There is also the sabbath in hope, the looking forward to the final rest. Certain writers link this rest of heart and service of God with the Lord's Day, as a day instituted by Christ and consecrated to him, but with a wider import than the Jewish sabbath, and so give it an indirect connection with the fourth commandment.¹³ Instead of emptying the day (*argia, otium*), they seem to suggest an active devotion in service to God, the sabbath of the priestly ministry in the temple.

Yet there is clearly a hesitation in applying the fourth commandment directly to the Christian Sunday, since all time belonged to God, and the sabbath had pre-Christian associations. The Christians were apparently from the earliest days setting a day aside; they were devoting the day to God and were engaged in his service upon it. The need for a day of relaxation, which writers like Clement of Alexandria and Aphrahat saw was necessary, was in fact being supplied, but they did not get the inspiration for this from the fourth commandment, except indirectly. There seems no doubt that Constantine's edict was not based on the fourth commandment directly, but on what the Christian church was already doing. The full meaning of the fourth commandment was that in loving God our time would be his, both in this life and in the world to come. More, not less, was expected of the Christian than the Jew; yet the rhythm of one day in seven was, in practice, maintained.

CHAPTER 13 (pp. 125-139)

1. 1 *Clement* 2.3 The references seem definitely to be to the Ten Commandments and not to the Jewish law in general.
2. But it is not mentioned in the *Shepherd* of Hermas.

3. *Totius diei* surely must be rendered 'the whole day' or 'a whole day', especially in view of the reference to Rom. 8 : 36.
4. In ch. 7 we have discussed these passages from the point of view of Sunday rest, but here we are dealing with them in regard to the authority and interpretation of the Decalogue.
5. The thirteenth sermon, *De Sabbato*, can be found in *CEP* 25, under the name of Jacob of Nisibis; see Rordorf, op. cit., p. 84.
6. Ephrem Syrus, *CSCO* 145; St. Ephrem. *Commentaire de l'évangile concordant*, trans. Louis Leloir, Louvain, 1954, p. 130.
7. In his *Hymns and Sermons* (ed. J. Lamy, Malines, 1882, p. 4, col. 542) Ephrem says that the sabbath has lost the blessings of the first-born, which have been given to the Lord's Day.
8. *Ainigmatōdos*; *ainigma* was originally a riddle; then something seen only dimly; cf. 1 Cor. 13 : 12, 'in a mirror dimly'. It is used also in the LXX, Num. 12 : 8—Moses was to see God face to face, not 'dimly'. The sabbath, then, would give a picture only dimly.
9. If it is taken to mean 'that one day', referring to the sabbath, it is strange that Chrysostom uses 'us', i.e. Christians.
10. In Chrysostom, as in all fourth century writers, the tendency towards monasticism has to be carefully watched, as this will affect the attitude to Sunday; but in the passage quoted this does not come in. When it does, the ideal of all time given to God takes the form of the monastic life.
11. Augustine abandoned his earlier millenarian views later in life; see Daniélou, 'Typologie', p. 16, and *Bible and Liturgy*, pp. 282-6.
12. For this idea compare Justin M., *Fragment 16* (PG vi. 1597).
13. See the passage in Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 4.12 (PL ii. 386ff.), where he says, 'He hath yet put his own sabbaths in a different position (Isa. 58 : 13; 56 : 2). Thus Christ did not at all rescind the sabbath. He kept the law thereof . . . imparting to the sabbath day, which from the beginning had been consecrated by the benediction of the Father, an additional sanctity by his own action.' He speaks of the sabbath as, to do good, to save life—not to destroy it, and of the gentleness, the mercy, suitable to it. Cp. Hippolytus, *On the Pss.*, *Fragment 4* (PG x. 713); Peter of Alexandria, 'Coptic Fragment', in Gebhardt and Harnack, *Texte und Untersuchungen*, Neue Folge, 1899-1901, v. 4.4; Eusebius Caes., *In Pss.* 91 (92) (PG xxiii. 1169); Chrysostom, *In Gen. I*, Hom. 10.7 (PG liii. 89); *Comm. Matt.* 39.3 (PG lvii. 436); Ps.-Athanasius, *De Sab. et Circum.* 2 (PG xxviii. 133).