It is generally assumed that Sunday was everywhere observed by Christians as the chief, if not the only day on which they met together for public prayer from the very beginning of the Christian Church until some time in the third or fourth century, when the daily offices of the monastic Hours began to evolve. It is, further, generally assumed that the Eucharist was the service which took place on Sunday, even in the Apostolic Age, though scholars have disputed as to whether or not this primitive Mass or Eucharist was normally accompanied by a common meal (Agape). True, we read in Acts ii 46 that the early Jewish Christians at Jerusalem, καθ’ ἡμέραν τε προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ Ιερῷ, κυλῶντες τε κατ’ οἶκον ἅρτον, μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας. But the presence of the Apostles in the Temple and their participation in the Synagogue services (which is attested elsewhere in Acts) has been generally regarded as something specifically Jewish which ceased to have any direct influence upon Christian worship after the fall of the Temple and the emergence of a largely Gentile Church; and the mention of the breaking of bread is taken to be a reference to a primitive eucharistic meal, the forerunner of the later liturgical Mass.

The present writer has set out elsewhere¹ such evidence as we possess that the Synagogue (as distinct from the Temple) did, in fact, influence both the form of service and the times at which Christians met together for public prayer in the first four centuries of our era to a much greater extent than has sometimes been recognised. It seems that, not only did the early Christians take over into their own public prayer the four main elements of Synagogue worship, viz. Scripture lections, exposition of the portions of Scripture just read in a homily or sermon, psalmody, and prayer, but also that such public prayer took place at the same times as the older Synagogue prayers, viz. at dawn and at sunset.

¹ The Influence of the Synagogue upon the Divine Office, Oxford 1944.
This much seems clear from Tertullian's remark in his De Orat., xxv, where, in commending the new custom of praying at the third, sixth and ninth hours, he says 'exceptis utique legitimis orationibus, quae sineulla admonitione debentur ingessu lucis et noctis'. Both Cyprian and the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus prescribe prayer at these five times each day. 'Thus the influence of the virgins and ascetics was already plainly felt at the beginning of the third century. The prayers at Terce, Sext, and None, once added to the older morning and evening offices, quickly became established in the regular cycle of prayer'.

At about the same date a daily Mass is attested in North Africa (Cyprian, Epp., liv 3, lvi 1). It does not follow that this custom obtained elsewhere—it was certainly unknown in the East at this date—and it seems that the practice in most churches was to celebrate the Eucharist on Saturdays and Sundays and on the Station Days. On these days the daily office, derived from the Synagogue and consisting of the four elements of Scripture lections, a homily, prayer and praise, became the Missa Catechumenorum and it was followed by the Missa Fidelium, containing the Anaphora of the Eucharistic Rite.

But are we right in assuming that Sunday was everywhere observed by Christians from the Apostolic Age onwards as the chief occasion of public prayer, or that it was a day on which the Eucharist was celebrated weekly from the very beginning? and at what time on the Sunday was the Eucharist offered? While noting that the name of Sunday first occurs in the middle of the second century, in Justin Martyr (I Apol., lxvii), and that it was the Jewish Sabbath which set the pattern of a weekly Christian day of worship, Dr. Allan McArthur maintained that the Lord's Day, the first day of the week 'is the foundation of the entire structure' of the Christian year. For him, the Lord's Day, kept as a weekly commemoration of the Resurrection of the Lord 'must long have been supreme', certainly by the sixth decade of the first century when Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth and referred casually to 'the first day of every week' (I Cor. xvi 2). Professor Cullmann has stated categorically: 'Pour les premiers chrétiens, le dimanche était donc une fête de la résurrection. On

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1 Ibid., 68.
3 Ibid., 22.