

FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY IN THE
EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH:
A REVIEW OF SOME RECENT LITERATURE
PART II: SAMUELE BACCHIOCCHI'S RECONSTRUCTION

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The first part of this review article treated Willy Rordorf's *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church*.¹ We must now turn our attention to Samuele Bacchiocchi's *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), the most recent and comprehensive of several publications by Bacchiocchi on the subject.²

1. *Overview of Bacchiocchi's Reconstruction*

Bacchiocchi's work is basically a rebuttal of the positions of such other scholars as Rordorf and C. S. Mosna.³ In his Introduction he describes this study as largely representing "an abridgment of a doctoral dissertation presented in Italian to the Department of Ecclesiastical History at the Pontifical Gregorian University, in Rome," with the material "substantially condensed

¹ AUSS 16 (1978): 333-342. In addition to the present discussion, several important matters treated by Bacchiocchi are called to attention there (see, e.g., nn. 3, 6, 10, 11, on pp. 337, 338, 340, 341).

² Most notable among his other publications is his *An Examination of the Biblical and Patristic Texts of the First Four Centuries to Ascertain the Time and the Causes of the Origin of Sunday as the Lord's Day* (also under title of *Anti-Judaism and the Origin of Sunday*) (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1975). For a very brief synopsis of his position, see "Rome and the Origin of Sunday Observance," *The Ministry*, Jan. 1977, pp. 16-19.

³ C. S. Mosna's dissertation is *Storia della domenica dalle origini fino agli inizi del V Secolo*, *Analecta Gregoriana* 170 (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1967).

and rearranged" (p. 15). He indicates that the study has "two well definable objectives":

First, it proposes to examine the thesis espoused by numerous scholars who attribute to the Apostles, or even to Christ, the initiative and responsibility for the abandonment of Sabbath-keeping and the institution of Sunday worship. . . .

Secondly, this book designs to evaluate to what extent certain factors such as anti-Judaic feelings, repressive Roman measures taken against the Jews, Sun-worship with its related "day of the Sun," and certain Christian theological motivations, influenced the abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption by the majority of Christians of Sunday as the Lord's day (p. 13).

He indicates, furthermore, that his study "is an attempt to reconstruct a mosaic of factors in a search for a more exact picture of the time and causes that contributed to the adoption of Sunday as the day of worship and rest" and that his "concern is limited to the problem of origins" (pp. 13-14). His chapters 2-9 cover the basic aspects of his subject: "Christ and the Lord's Day" (pp. 17-73), "The Resurrection-Appearances and the Origin of Sunday Observance" (pp. 74-89), "Three New Testament Texts [1 Cor 16:1-3; Acts 20:7-12; Rev 1:10] and the Origin of Sunday" (pp. 90-131), "Jerusalem and the Origin of Sunday" (pp. 132-164), "Rome and the Origin of Sunday" (pp. 165-212), "Anti-Judaism in the Fathers and the Origin of Sunday" (pp. 213-235), "Sun-Worship and the Origin of Sunday" (pp. 236-269), and "The Theology of Sunday" (pp. 270-302).

Bacchiocchi, like Rordorf, comprehensively surveys both the primary and secondary sources dealing with the subject, but the scope of Bacchiocchi's study is more limited than Rordorf's in that he traces the question of "Sabbath to Sunday" only until the early second century—the time when he finds the change of days occurring. The place where this change originated and from which it spread was Rome, not Jerusalem; the specific time was Hadrian's reign (A.D. 117-138); the motivation was anti-Jewish sentiment on the part of Roman Christians and their desire to be differentiated from the Jews, whose main religious celebrations (including the Sabbath) had been prohibited by Hadrian;

and the source from which the Christian Sunday was derived was the pagan (Mithraic) Sunday, borrowed with Christian adaptation and supported by theological argumentation regarding "Christ-the-Sun," eschatological concepts ("eighth day"), etc.

As was mentioned in Part I, Bacchiocchi is more careful than Rordorf to note the historical circumstances when analyzing the NT evidence. By careful examination of Christ's Sabbath healings in their *context*, e.g., Bacchiocchi proposes quite convincingly that Christ did not annul the Sabbath but rather simply endeavored to grant that day its "original dimension" as a "day to honor God by showing concern and compassion to fellow beings," something that "had largely been forgotten in the time of Jesus" (p. 34). In essence, then, Christ indicated what was *lawful* to do on the Sabbath.

Bacchiocchi's treatment of Sabbath and Sunday passages in the book of Acts and in the epistles generally also goes more to the crux of each situation than does the work of Rordorf. One may, however, wish to take issue with Bacchiocchi's treatment of Rev 1:10, where he revives the idea of the *kyriakē hēmera* as referring to the eschatological "day of the Lord." Especially puzzling is his use of Louis T. Talbot's reference to John's hearing "*behind* me a great voice . . . and *being turned*" as an indication that the seer first "looked forward into 'the Day of the Lord,' then he turned back, as it were, and saw this church age in panorama, before looking forward again into the future at things which will surely come to pass" (p. 124).

Bacchiocchi's treatment of the Jerusalem church during the apostolic era establishes clearly its Jewish orientation. Among the evidences which Bacchiocchi presents are the influx of Jewish converts, the significance of the choice and exaltation of James, the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, and the events recorded in Acts 21 regarding Paul's last visit to Jerusalem (pp. 142-150). Actually, this Jewish orientation did not disappear until Hadrian's expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem following the Bar Cocheba

Revolt of A.D. 132-135. At that time, bishops from among the Gentile Christians replaced the "bishops of the circumcision" as the leaders of the Jerusalem Christian community (pp. 153, 159-163).

Up until this time, Bacchiocchi feels, Sunday would not have replaced the Sabbath in Jerusalem. And after A.D. 135 the city "lost its political and religious prestige for both Jews and Christians," making it vain "to probe further into the origin of Sunday observance among the small new Gentile Church in the city" (p. 163).

But how and where, then, did the rise of Sunday as a replacement for the Sabbath occur? Bacchiocchi believes that the Christian Sunday must have originated and been promoted by a church strong enough to cause its rapid spread throughout the Christian world, and the only power sufficiently strong and with widely enough recognized authority to succeed in such a matter was the Roman church and her bishop (pp. 165, 207). And indeed, Rome does furnish the first clear anti-Sabbath polemics and the earliest description of Christian weekly Sunday worship services—both in the writings of Justin Martyr, ca. A.D. 150.⁴ The evidence indicates too that it was in Rome that the regular Sabbath fast originated, a practice negative to the Sabbath (pp. 186-197).⁵ Moreover, the psychological climate in Rome was especially conducive for the change, in view of Roman anti-Jewish sentiments, which Bacchiocchi documents from the productions of Roman writers (pp. 169-176). He also points out the similar sentiments in Christian literature of the time; and he indicates, as well, that the Roman Christians must have had a strong desire to differentiate themselves from Judaism because of Hadrian's hostility to the Jews and Jewish practices, including Sabbath observance (pp. 177-185).

⁴ For anti-Sabbath polemics, see *Dialogue with Trypho* (e.g., chaps. 9, 12, 18, 19, 23); and for description of Sunday worship services, see *1 Apology*, chap. 67.

⁵ Bacchiocchi treats the matter at some length on the pages indicated. Also see Kenneth A. Strand, "Some Notes on the Sabbath Fast in Early Christianity," *AUSS* 3 (1965): 167-174.

Bacchiocchi's case for Rome's early adoption of a weekly Sunday observance and anti-Sabbath attitude connected with anti-Jewish feelings is a strong one. But why, he asks, did the Roman Christians choose *Sunday* as the substitute rather than some other day of the week (p. 235)? The answer, put succinctly, is that Sunday was a ready-made day of honor or worship already at hand among pagans, that by observance of this day Christians could expect to ingratiate themselves with the Roman authorities, and that adoption of Sunday found a justification or rationale in Jewish and/or Christian theological symbology (see chaps. 8 and 9, pp. 236-302).

In positing such a basis for the choice of Sunday, Bacchiocchi recognizes that three elements must have existed in Rome: (1) the planetary week, (2) sun cults, and (3) Sunday as a day honored within this planetary week among sun cultists. That sun cults were widespread in antiquity is well known, but hitherto the existence of the planetary week has been a problem in that its presence in the western part of the Roman empire has seemed to be too late for a pagan Sunday observance that could have been adopted by the early Christians. In this respect, Bacchiocchi has performed a genuine service in marshaling evidence that the planetary week was indeed known in Italy as early as the reigns of Augustus (27 B.C.-A.D. 14) and Tiberius (A.D. 14-37) (see pp. 242-244).

However, the question of special honor to the "day of the Sun" at so early a time is another matter. Mithraism was one cult that did show honor to Sunday, and Bacchiocchi finds that Mithraism reached Rome before the end of the first century A.D. Thus, the Christians did have a source from which to adopt Sunday in Rome by the early second century.

But just how likely a source for adoption of Sunday would Mithraism have provided to second-century Christians? Even during that century Mithraism was a *rival* oriental religion (later to become Christianity's most dangerous rival and foe). Also, its

spread in the Roman world was mainly by military legions; indeed, it was a soldier's religion, with appeal to men more than to women. On the basis of what we know regarding the attitude and composition of earliest Christianity, just how likely a source would this particular pagan religion have been for the borrowing of Sunday by Christians in the early second century?⁶ Moreover, Bacchiocchi's reconstruction in this regard fails to grapple with other serious questions, such as, Why would Christians who were ready to give up life itself rather than to adopt known pagan practices (e.g., Justin Martyr, who did precisely this⁷) choose an obviously pagan Sunday as their Christian day of worship? And how could Christianity so widely—in East as well as West—in a relatively short time have been duped into accepting a purely pagan practice?

In later centuries—especially in the “state-church era” after Constantine, when half-converted pagans flocked into the Christian church—, the Sunday observance of such folk undoubtedly

⁶ The basic work on Mithraism has been done by Franz Cumont; see, e.g., his *The Mysteries of Mithra* (Chicago: Open Court Publ. Co., 1910). Cf. also Samuel Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, reprint ed. (New York: Meridian, 1956), pp. 585-626. Earliest Christianity, it must be remembered, was not favorable towards service in either military or political capacity; and its converts appear to have numbered more women than men. In view of this, would it not be somewhat far-fetched to look to a pagan religion fostered mainly by soldiers in the Roman legions as the source for the Christian day of worship?

It may be added that Bacchiocchi does not explicitly declare Mithraism to have been the source for the Christian Sunday, but his line of argumentation points strongly in that direction. On pp. 249-250, the *only* sun cult to which he calls attention as having some sort of Sunday honor (not just sun worship, which existed in many places long before the Christian era) is Mithraism; and indeed, he specifically notes several evidences from Mithraism. Moreover, even with respect to his reference on pp. 248-249 to Tertullian's *Ad nationes* 1.13 (where Mithraism is not mentioned), if he had quoted instead from Tertullian's parallel statement in *Apol.* 16 (where the term “Persians” occurs) he would have provided one further allusion to Mithraism.

⁷ The interrogation of Justin and his companions by the prefect Rusticus is described in a document appearing in ANF 1:305-306. Cf. the remarks on Justin by C. Mervyn Maxwell, “They Loved Jesus,” *The Ministry*, Jan. 1977, p. 9.

made an impact on Christianity.⁸ But was not the situation in the second century quite different? And in his search for as wide an array of circumstances as possible to explain the change from Sabbath to Sunday (p. 13), has Bacchiocchi perhaps missed some important factor or factors? (More will be said regarding this in the next section.)

2. *Bacchiocchi's Treatment of Easter*

Unfortunately, after building a strong case regarding the time and place of origin of weekly Christian Sunday observance, Bacchiocchi introduces what is perhaps the most serious weakness in his entire presentation: his reconstruction of the origin of Easter Sunday (pp. 198-207). Apparently he feels that he will strengthen his position regarding the weekly Sunday if he can show that the Easter Sunday arose in the same place, at the same time, and because of the same motivations, as the weekly Sunday.⁹

His main document to support his theory regarding the Easter Sunday is a letter of Bishop Irenaeus of Gaul to Bishop Victor of Rome written ca. A.D. 190 to 195, and quoted by Eusebius.¹⁰ In a dispute between Victor, who observed the Sunday Easter, and the Quartodeciman Christians (observers of the 14th of Nisan) in the Roman province of Asia in western Asia Minor, Irenaeus, who like Victor was an observer of the Sunday Easter, counseled Victor toward peace with the Asian Christians. The pertinent section of Irenaeus' letter tells of peaceful relations between a

⁸ This is not to deny any influence whatever of the pagan Sunday on Christianity before the time of Constantine, but the changed situation which began with Constantine is well recognized. It may be added that other forms of pagan Sunday honor (besides the Mithraic) may have emerged by Constantine's time, as well (at least, other sun cults, such as that of Elagabal, had gained prominence in the West between the early second century and early fourth century).

⁹ See also Bacchiocchi's more explicit statements in *An Examination of the Biblical and Patristic Texts*, p. 82, and "Rome and the Origin of Sunday Observance," pp. 16-17.

¹⁰ Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, v. 24.11-17, in NPNF, 2d Series, 1: 243-244. The letter is also included among the "Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus" in ANF 1:568-569.

number of Victor's predecessors and Quartodecimans. It reads in part as follows:

Among these were the presbyters before Soter, who presided over the church which thou now rulest. We mean Anicetus, and Pius, and Hyginus, and Telesphorus, and Xystus [Sixtus]. They neither observed it [Nisan 14] themselves, nor did they permit those after them to do so. And yet though not observing it, they were nonetheless at peace with those who came to them from the parishes in which it was observed; although this observance was more opposed to those who did not observe it. But none were ever cast out on account of this form; but the presbyters before thee who did not observe it, sent the eucharist to those of other parishes who observed it. And when the blessed Polycarp was at Rome in the time of Anicetus, and they disagreed a little about certain other things, they immediately made peace with one another, not caring to quarrel over this matter. For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe what he had always observed with John the disciples of our Lord, and the other apostles with whom he had associated; neither could Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it, as he said that he ought to follow the custom of the presbyters that had preceded him. But though matters were in this shape, they communed together, and Anicetus conceded the administration of the eucharist in the church to Polycarp, manifestly as a mark of respect. And they parted from each other in peace, both those who observed, and those who did not, maintaining the peace of the whole church.¹¹

Bacchiocchi concludes that because Sixtus (ca. A.D. 115-125) was the earliest bishop mentioned, he was also the first "non-observant" of the Quartodeciman practice (see p. 200 and p. 202, n. 103), though the text says nothing of the sort. Illustration of peaceful relationship, not the origin of practices, is what is in view; and the two bishops at each end of the sequence were particularly noted for their cordiality to Quartodecimans: Anicetus had Polycarp administer the sacrament in Rome, and Sixtus seems to have been especially well known for his practice of sending the *fermentum* to the Asian Christians in that city.¹²

¹¹ Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.*, v. 24.14-17, in NPNF, 2d Series, 1: 243-244. The details of the controversy are given by Eusebius in v. 23-25, in NPNF, 2d Series, 1: 241-244.

¹² B. H. Streeter, *The Primitive Church Studied with Special Reference to the Origins of the Christian Ministry* (London: Macmillan, 1929), p. 226, sug-

(If origins were really a matter of concern in the letter—which they are not—, the mention of Sixtus might signify that Asians first brought Quartodecimanism to Rome during his time; for in any event, the text *does refer* to those who came to Rome from the parishes observing the 14th of Nisan.)

Bacchiocchi recognizes the hazard of depending heavily on this letter of Irenaeus for proof that the Easter Sunday originated with Sixtus, but he believes the fact that Sixtus and Hadrian were contemporaries adds support: The same anti-Jewish motivation would, he feels, be operative in substituting the Sunday Easter for Quartodecimanism as was present in the change from Sabbath to Sunday (p. 200).

But it is precisely here that Bacchiocchi's theory falls completely apart. Anti-Jewish sentiments are clear in the earliest second-century references to the weekly Sabbath and Sunday, but the opposite is the case regarding Quartodecimanism and the Easter Sunday. Only considerably later does anti-Jewish sentiment enter the picture with regard to Quartodecimanism. Indeed, the very point in Irenaeus' letter to Victor is that the Roman bishops from Sixtus to Anicetus had *cordial relationships with the Quartodecimans*.¹³

Another problem for Bacchiocchi's thesis is the widespread distribution of the Easter Sunday—in East as well as West—by the time of Victor. Could a purely Roman innovation from the early second century so quickly have supplanted Quartodecimanism throughout most of the Christian world—especially when Victor at the end of the century was unable to accomplish such a change in even the relatively small geographical area of Roman Asia?

gests that the practice of taking the *fermentum* to the Asian Christians in Rome *originated* with Sixtus, strengthening the bishop's position with the groups of Christians in Rome.

¹³ Since Soter, Anicetus' successor, is excluded, it could be that the schismatic activities of Blastus during Soter's episcopate were the source of the changing attitude of Roman bishops toward Quartodecimanism. Cf. C. J. Hefele, *A History of the Christian Councils*, 2d ed., 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883): 313.

In support of his position Bacchiocchi attributes willful exaggeration to Eusebius in the account given by that early church historian regarding the widespread existence of Sunday Easter at the time of Victor (pp. 198-199, n. 97). But in this connection it must be remembered that Eusebius had in hand letters from the very time and places which he mentions. It is hard to argue with contemporary documentary evidence from councils and bishops in Gaul, Corinth, Pontus, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea, Jerusalem, and even Osrhoëne in Mesopotamia that declared the Sunday Easter to be their practice.¹⁴

And Bacchiocchi's reference to sources that apparently contradict Eusebius (see p. 199, n. 97) is meaningless too, for these sources are basically irrelevant to the issue; they tend either to deal with Asia or Asian Christians or to pertain to a later time period. For instance, the *Epistola Apostolorum* and the fragment from Apollinarius of Hierapolis are of Asian provenance; Hippolytus of Rome refers to a place where an Asian community was known to exist; and such sources as Athanasius of Alexandria and Epiphanius of Salamis deal with a time which is a century or more later, when Quartodecimanism may have spread or reappeared. In fact, in one of his quotations from Epiphanius, Bacchiocchi makes it appear that this is precisely what did happen—that Quartodecimanism “rose up again” (ibid.).

Moreover, the *opinions* of modern scholars and the fact that some of them use the term “Roman-Easter” (p. 201) do not help us with the question of the origin of Easter Sunday. Neither does testimony from Constantine's time regarding Rome's role at that *later period* (pp. 202-203). That the Roman bishop was prominent in promoting the Sunday Easter is not in question either; Victor certainly endeavored to promote it, and so did later Roman bishops. But all of this has nothing to do with the *origin* of the practice, and in this regard several things must be kept in mind:

¹⁴ Eusebius, v. 23:2-3 and v. 25. The latter reference mentions Alexandria too as observing the Sunday Easter, as disclosed by correspondence referred to in the letter of the Palestinian bishops.

(1) Irenaeus does *not* give evidence that the Sunday Easter was first instituted by Sixtus; (2) the wide distribution of the practice by the time of Victor makes the theory suspect; and (3) the anti-Jewish sentiments obvious from the outset regarding the Sabbath/Sunday issue do not appear in the Easter/Quartodeciman question until later.

In spite of Bacchiocchi's argumentation against an early Easter Sunday, it should be noted that allowing the possibility of a chronological priority of the Easter Sunday over the weekly Christian Sunday would help his main thesis by affording "the greatest number of possible contributory factors—theological, social, political and pagan—which may have played a minor or greater role in inducing the adoption of Sunday as a day of worship" (p. 13). Could it be, as some scholars contend, that both the Easter Sunday observance and Quartodecimanism stemmed from Jewish antecedents?¹⁵ Such would explain (1) the widespread distribution of the annual Sunday celebration as early as the time of Victor and (2) the lack of anti-Jewish sentiments toward the Quartodeciman practice in the early second century. And it could also well be that this prior annual Sunday provided a base from which the weekly observance of Sunday developed.¹⁶

3. *Bacchiocchi on the Primacy of the Church of Rome*

Immediately following his discussion of "Rome and the Easter-Controversy" (pp. 198-207), Bacchiocchi devotes attention to a question that arises as a corollary, namely "The Primacy of the Church of Rome" (pp. 207-211). He states specifically:

In the course of our investigation various indications have emerged which point to the Church of Rome as the one pri-

¹⁵ See esp. J. van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars*, 2d rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1961), pp. 19-20, 23, 25-26, 29.

¹⁶ Two possibilities as to how this may have occurred are afforded by van Goudoever, p. 167, and by Philip Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Calendar* (Cambridge, Engl.: University Press, 1952), p. 38. For an excellent discussion of Easter in relationship to the weekly Sunday, see Lawrence T. Geraty, "The Pascha and the Origin of Sunday Observance," *AUSS* 3 (1965): 85-96.

marily responsible for liturgical innovations such as Easter-Sunday, weekly Sunday and Sabbath fasting. But the question could be raised, did the Church of Rome in the second century already exert sufficient authority through her Bishop to influence the greater part of Christendom to accept new festivities? (p. 207).

It will be pertinent to take an overview of Bacchiocchi's line of argumentation before proceeding to the implications for his main thesis. (In this summary, only sources relating to the second century or earlier will be noted; for although Bacchiocchi includes post-second-century sources, the matter under consideration is the authority of the bishop of Rome during the second century, not later.)

1. *Arguments from Correspondence.* Bacchiocchi calls attention to the letter of Clement of Rome, ca. A.D. 95, to the church in Corinth, suggesting that it has "in some cases a threatening tone" and expects obedience (pp. 207-208); but he fails to note that it is written anonymously and does not so much as mention a bishop of Rome. He calls attention to the fact that Ignatius of Antioch in writing to the Roman church between ca. A.D. 110 and 117 praises this church and makes only "respectful requests" whereas Ignatius' epistles to other churches "admonishes and warns the members" (p. 208), but misses the import of the context as well as the fact that the other epistles are not devoid of praise.¹⁷ Ignatius was en route to Rome, where he was to be martyred, and he wrote ahead, making requests. His other correspondence consisted of five letters to Asian churches and one letter to Polycarp—all six addressed to a region through which he traveled and in which he saw church members endangered by the prevalence of heresies. More important here is another point which Bacchiocchi has missed: The Roman letter does *not so much as greet or even mention a bishop of Rome*—a striking contrast to the repeated references to bishops in Ignatius' other letters (and a curious fact indeed if the Roman bishop had the importance Bacchiocchi claims for him)! Regarding the Quartodeciman controversy, Bacchiocchi quotes P. Battifol approvingly that it "is Rome alone that Ephesus answers and resists" (p. 210); but the question must be asked, Who else was there to answer and resist? The others defended the right of Ephesus to maintain its practice.¹⁸ Bacchi-

¹⁷ See, e.g., Ign. *Eph.*, chaps. 1, 2, 8, 9, for examples of praise.

¹⁸ Irenaeus was but one among the bishops who, though holding the same practice as Victor, disagreed with Victor's attitude toward the Asian Christians. Indeed, Victor's excommunication of these Christians did not represent the church universal, for Eusebius explicitly states (v. 24.10, in NPNF, 2d Series, I: 243) that Victor's action "did not please all the bishops," and that words "of theirs are extant, sharply rebuking Victor."

occhi also calls attention, e.g., to Irenaeus' letter to Victor (p. 209), quoted in part above. This letter, giving Victor a sharp rebuke, hardly bespeaks a subordinate's manner of addressing a superior. Moreover, Irenaeus wrote other letters during the Quartodeciman controversy, another point apparently overlooked by Bacchiocchi. Eusebius reports that Irenaeus "conferred by letter . . . not only with Victor, but also with most of the other rulers of the churches."¹⁹ Utilizing Bacchiocchi's kind of approach to letter-writing, this would lead us to conclude that Irenaeus of Gaul, not Victor of Rome, was the true ecclesiastical primate at that time! And the conclusion would be strengthened by the fact that on another occasion Irenaeus corresponded with the schismatics Florinus and Blastus in Rome in an effort to terminate the divisive activities of those individuals there.²⁰ (But to see in this the primacy of Gaul is nonsensical, of course.) All in all, it must be recognized that the type of correspondence with which Bacchiocchi has dealt represents a *mutuality of Christian concern* rather than an ecclesiastical authority and dominance.

2. *Arguments Based on the Attitudes of Polycarp and Polycrates to Victor.* Polycarp, says Bacchiocchi, "felt the compulsion in A.D. 154 to go personally to Anicetus of Rome to regulate the Passover question and other matters," and Polycrates of Ephesus "complied with the order of Victor to summon a council" (p. 209). That Polycarp felt "compulsion" is not indicated in Irenaeus' letter (see p. 92, above); and if superiority is implied (which I doubt that it is), would not that superiority go in the direction of Polycarp? Both bishops *equally* defended their positions on the Easter question, *but* Polycarp administered the sacrament. Moreover, Irenaeus tells us elsewhere that while Polycarp was in Rome at the time of Anicetus, the Smyrnaean bishop worked effectively against the heretics Valentinus and Marcion, bringing many people back to the church (apparently he was doing something in Rome that even the Roman bishops had not been as well able to do).²¹ As for Polycrates, did he not summon the council simply as a courtesy to Victor and as a practical matter for his own constituency? Bacchiocchi's translation of the text to say that Victor "required" Polycrates to summon the council (p. 210) is too strong. The translation should rather be "requested."²²

3. *Argument from a Statement of Irenaeus on Rome's Preeminence.* Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies* explicitly states that "it is a matter of

¹⁹ Eusebius, v. 24.18, in NPNF, 2d Series, 1: 244.

²⁰ See Eusebius, v. 20.1, and cf. also v. 15, in NPNF, 2d Series, 1: 237-238, 229.

²¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, iii.3.4, in ANF 1: 416.

²² So the translation in the Christian Frederick Cruse edition entitled *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*. . . , reprint ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1962), p. 209: "whom you requested to be summoned by me." The rendition in NPNF, 2d Series, 1: 242 is: "whom I summoned at your desire." The expression occurs in Eusebius, v. 24.8.

necessity that every Church should agree with this Church [the Roman church], on account of its preeminent authority (*potentior principalitas*) that is, the faithful everywhere" (p. 209). But this ANF translation is questionable, as even the translators admit.²³ The remainder of the sentence itself (not given above) and the complete context in which the statement is found would favor a translation more like that of the American editor of ANF: "For it is necessary for every Church (that is to say, the faithful from all parts) to meet in this Church, on account of the superior magistracy; in which Church, by those who are from all places, the tradition of the apostles has been preserved."²⁴ That editor's "metaphrase" is also worth noting: "On account of the chief magistracy [of the empire], the faithful from all parts, representing every Church, are obliged to resort to Rome, and there to come together; so that [it is the distinction of this Church that], in it, the tradition of the apostles has been preserved by Christians gathered together out of all the Churches."²⁵ Interestingly, it is later in this same discussion that Irenaeus mentions the work of Polycarp of Smyrna, who in a visit to Rome reclaimed for the Roman church many people who had been led astray by Valentinus and Marcion—an event to which we have already alluded above.

The foregoing kinds of argument presented by Bacchiocchi are debatable, at best. That the bishop of Rome *later* had the jurisdictional authority which Bacchiocchi ascribes to him in the second century is not in dispute, of course; nor is the fact that the Roman church was a particularly prestigious church even during the first century (by virtue of two apostles having labored in it, by its being at the center of the Roman empire, etc.). The question that must be raised here is whether "the Church of Rome in the second century" already exerted "sufficient authority through her Bishop to influence the greater part of Christendom to accept new festivities"—Easter Sunday, the weekly Sunday as a substitute for the Sabbath, and Sabbath fasting (p. 207; quoted more fully above).

²³ See ANF 1: 415, n. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

²⁵ *Ibid.* W. Ernest Beet, *The Early Roman Episcopate to A.D. 384* (London: Epworth, 1913), pp. 114-119, deals with the question in a vein somewhat similar to that of the American editor of ANF, and makes the interesting observation that "Hippolytus, who no doubt was familiar with the Greek text of Irenaeus which is lost to us," did not interpret the passage in the sense that "it was the moral duty" of believers from all over the world to agree with Rome's "doctrine or submit to her decisions" (p. 117, n. 1 *con't.*). The obscure Latin is given both in ANF 1: 415, n. 3, and Beet, p. 115, n. 1.

We have already questioned this authority with regard to the Easter Sunday, since Victor was unable to bring about its observance in the relatively small region of Roman Asia. As for the Sabbath fast, the evidence given by Bacchiocchi himself reveals that *as late as the fifth century* this practice—which the Church of Rome was “anxious to impose” on other Christian communities (p. 189)—had not spread to the East and was far from universal in the West (p. 192)!²⁶

Was Rome’s success in the second century greater regarding the weekly Sunday, or were other factors operative in its dissemination—factors which Bacchiocchi may have missed? It is important in this connection to observe that during the third through fifth centuries there is evidence of widespread observance of *both Sabbath and Sunday* rather than the substitution of the Sabbath by Sunday, the practice called to attention by Bacchiocchi for Rome.²⁷

Bacchiocchi’s main thesis that Rome, rather than Jerusalem, was the place of origin of Christian Sunday observance still stands (though he should probably have included Alexandria with Rome²⁸); but confusion enters the picture of what happened thereafter. This is so because of his emphasis on early Roman primacy, coupled with his failure (1) to treat adequately the later source materials, and (2) to distinguish properly between Sunday as a day of worship and Sunday as a day of rest. He should not be faulted, of course, for choosing to make the second century the *intended* terminus for his investigation, but he should

²⁶ See n. 30, below.

²⁷ In addition to Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen, mentioned in n. 29, below, see e.g. Tertullian, *On Fasting*, chap. 14 (ANF 4: 111-112); Pseudo-Ign. *Magn.*, chap. 9 (ANF 1: 62-63); *Apost. Consts.* ii.59, vii.23, and viii.33 (ANF 7: 423, 469, 495); John Cassian, *Insts.* iii.2 and v.26 (NPNF, 2d Series, 11: 213, 243); Asterius of Amasea, *Hom.* 5 on Matt 19:3 (PG, vol. 40, col. 225); and various references in Augustine to the Sabbath fast, including those mentioned in n. 30, below.

²⁸ On the basis of the Epistle of Barnabas (written, in fact, some two decades earlier than Justin’s *Dialogue* and *1 Apology*). Bacchiocchi deals with Barnabas on pp. 218-223.

revise accordingly his *stated* objective of dealing with Sunday as a day of "worship and rest" (p. 14). The earliest Christian observance of Sunday was for worship (a role which for several centuries, and widely throughout Christendom, it held *side by side* with the Sabbath); only in post-Constantinian times did it become a day of rest (which it did basically in *substitution* for the Sabbath). Even the second-century Roman substitution to which Bacchiocchi calls attention did not involve making Sunday a day of rest.

This brings us directly to the wider implications of Bacchiocchi's investigation as these pertain to the relationship and roles of the Sabbath and Sunday during the third through fifth centuries. Bacchiocchi leaves the impression that Rome's substitution of Sunday for the Sabbath in the early second century spread quickly, becoming universal in the West, though being somewhat retarded in the East because of a "constant influx of converts from the synagogue" (pp. 216-218; see also pp. 211-212). But how can such a view be aligned with the reports, e.g., of the fifth-century historians Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen who state that even as late as their time there were throughout almost *all* of Christendom, *except at Rome and Alexandria*, regular Sabbath services (as well as Sunday services) to celebrate the Lord's Supper?²⁹ And what shall we say, further, of such testimony as that of Augustine, who, according to Bacchiocchi himself, limited "the practice of Sabbath fasting prevailing in his day [ca. A.D. 400] to 'the Roman Church and hitherto a few of the Western communities'" (p. 192)?³⁰

Further questions could be raised regarding various points

²⁹ Socrates, *Eccl. Hist.*, v. 22, and Sozomen, *Eccl. Hist.*, vii.19 (NPNF, 2d Series, 2: 132, 390).

³⁰ Augustine, *Ep. to Casulanus*, par. 27. In the same epistle, par. 32, and in his *Ep. to Januarius*, par. 3, he mentions Ambrose's counsel to Augustine's mother to fast or not fast according to the custom prevailing where she might be, just as Ambrose himself fasted on the Sabbath in Rome but not in Milan. (In NPNF, 1st Series, vol. 1, the epistles to Casulanus and to Januarius are numbered 36 and 54, respectively.)

in Bacchiocchi's reconstruction,³¹ but special attention has been given here to his view of the role of the Roman church and bishop in the second century because of the vital way in which he relates this view to the early history of the Sabbath and Sunday in the Christian church. And in this regard it seems evident that revision is in order so as to clarify (1) just what did happen with respect to the Sabbath and Sunday *throughout Christendom* during the second century and subsequent several centuries, and (2) just how and when the Roman bishop's influence was felt in the *spread* of Sunday as a *substitute* for the Sabbath as a rest day, a development later than the second century.

4. *In Conclusion: Rordorf and Bacchiocchi Compared and Contrasted*

In concluding this review article, it will be appropriate to present a brief statement of comparisons and contrasts between the works of Rordorf and Bacchiocchi treated herein:

1. Rordorf's scope is broader than Bacchiocchi's by dealing with the Sabbath and Sunday into post-Constantinian times, whereas Bacchiocchi's main attention is directed toward the origin of Christian Sunday observance, which he places in the early second century.

³¹ E.g.: Is it proper to claim that "gnostics encouraged Sabbath fasting" on the basis of the sole example of Marcion, whose classification as a genuine gnostic is questionable (p. 122, n. 99, and pp. 186-187)? In what locality was it that Ignatius argued against Judaizing tendencies—in his territory of Syria (p. 213) or in the Roman province of Asia (p. 214), or both? Also, the typographical error of the date of Constantine's Sunday edicts should be corrected from "221" to "321" (p. 248). But perhaps more significant than such matters is the need to question the validity of Bacchiocchi's arguments relating to "Reflexes of Sun-Worship on Christianity" (pp. 252-261). The material presented in this section is interesting in its own right, but one wonders about (1) the viability of Christian sun symbology as a basis for Christian borrowing of a pagan Sunday, (2) the likelihood of eastward orientation in prayer leading to the honoring of Sunday (moreover, contrary to the impression left by Bacchiocchi on p. 255, there appear to have been Jewish antecedents for prayer toward the rising sun; cf., e.g., Josephus, *Wars*, ii.8.5), and (3) the significance of the date of Christmas to Bacchiocchi's whole argument inasmuch as the evidence on Christmas pertains to a later time period.

2. Rordorf has defined the significance and role of Sunday in early Christianity more clearly and precisely than Bacchiocchi by delineating between Sunday as a day of worship and Sunday as a day of rest—a distinction which seems to have escaped Bacchiocchi.

3. Bacchiocchi's treatment of the data pertaining to the Sabbath and Sunday in the first two centuries of the Christian era is much more solid than that of Rordorf, whose reconstruction for this period is built basically on a chain of conjectures and assumptions. Indeed, Bacchiocchi's conclusion that second-century Rome, rather than first-century Jerusalem, was the point of origin for Christian Sunday observance (perhaps he should have included Alexandria with Rome in this respect) seems well founded.

4. Bacchiocchi's treatment of the planetary week appears to be more substantial than Rordorf's, and Bacchiocchi has made an important contribution by calling attention to evidence that this planetary week was undoubtedly in existence in Italy as early as the time of Augustus and Tiberius. Bacchiocchi has also made a fairly impressive case that honor to Sunday among Mithraists could have reached Rome early enough to serve as a possible source for Christian adoption of weekly Sunday observance, but explicit evidence in this regard is lacking. Moreover, he has been unable to overcome certain other difficulties in such a theory.

5. Whereas Rordorf's treatment is very speculative for the first and second centuries, his reconstruction for the third and subsequent centuries is founded more solidly on concrete evidence (though exception would have to be taken to his concept that Gentile-Christian Sabbath-keeping first arose at the turn of the second to third centuries). On the other hand, Bacchiocchi, after presenting a basically solid treatment of the Sabbath and Sunday up through the early second century, gives an emphasis to Rome's practice and authority which, when coupled with lack of investigation of subsequent history, may

lead to a faulty picture as to what the true situation was regarding the two days during the third through fifth centuries.

6. Both scholars have manifested a wide knowledge of primary and secondary literature in their subject areas. Their footnotes are particularly rich with helpful information.

In closing, it must be stated that Rordorf's work, in spite of its shortcomings, has become a standard publication in the field, and undoubtedly with some justification. Bacchiocchi's contributions, even though still very recent at the time of this writing, are already gaining wide attention; and it is to be hoped that they may indeed achieve the general recognition they deserve as a basic corrective to Rordorf and other scholars who have failed to assess sufficiently carefully the history of the Sabbath and Sunday during the first two centuries. It is to be hoped as well that Bacchiocchi may at some future time expand his investigation so as to clarify the history of the Sabbath and Sunday in early Christianity subsequent to the mid-second century.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

1. Aside from presenting a broad overview of Bacchiocchi's coverage and thesis, I have limited my discussion mainly to two specific parts of his treatment which have crucial implications for the particular historical reconstruction which, according to his statement of purpose, he has set out to provide. Space limitations have prohibited any detailed analysis of further interesting aspects of his work. (For instance, useful as would be a review of his "Appendix" material on "Paul and the Sabbath" [pp. 339-369, immediately following the Bibliography], such a review has of necessity been omitted here in favor of giving the reader a fair introduction to, and evaluation of, his handling of his main thesis as presented in the main text of his volume.)

2. After Parts I and II of this series had been completed and the manuscripts sent to the typesetter, a further significant work on the Sabbath and Sunday in the early church appeared: Robert L. Odom, *Sabbath and Sunday in Early Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Review

and Herald, 1977). Although this volume could have been reviewed as a forthcoming "Part III" in the present series, its somewhat different nature from the works of Rordorf and Bacchiocchi (it basically surveys the early literature rather than providing a thoroughgoing historical reconstruction), together with a desire to get a review into print quickly, has led me to treat this publication in a regular book review in the present issue of *AUSS* (see pp. 127-129, below).