

**HOW DID THE JEWISH SABBATH BECOME THE CHRISTIAN
SUNDAY?: A REVIEW OF THE REVIEWS OF BACCHIOCCHI'S
*FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY***

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The process whereby the Jewish Sabbath became the Christian Sunday in Western Christianity is well known and is not subject to much current scholarly disagreement. However, there continues to be a discussion about the process whereby the practice of Sunday worship appeared and was augmented by Sunday as a Sabbath rest in the early church. An examination of the reviews of Samuele Bacchocchi's book *From Sabbath to Sunday* reveals a significant shift in thinking on this issue. Partly in response to Bacchocchi's book, the defense of Sunday as a Sabbath based on apostolic authority seems to have faded and in its place has appeared an argument for Sunday as a day of worship based on the practice of the early church.

During the first three hundred years of the Common Era Christian *worship* did take place on Sunday, but there is no evidence that Sunday was seen as a Sabbath or a day of *rest*. As far as the process of officially transforming Sunday into a day of rest, the first evidence is found in Constantine's decree of 321. At virtually the same time, Eusebius of Caesarea provided the first extant theological foundation for a Sunday Sabbath.¹ However, observance of Sunday as both a day of worship and rest did not develop in the West until the early medieval period. In the East, the liturgy honored Sabbath as a day of rest in theory, and Sabbath rest was the practice in some locations, while

¹The text of Constantine's Sunday Law of 321 A.D. is: "On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country however persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits because it often happens that another day is not suitable for gain-sowing or vine planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost. (Given the 7th day of March, Crispus and Constantine being consuls each of them the second time.)" *Codex Justinianus*, lib. 3, tit. 12, 3 (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. [New York: Scribner, 1910], 3:380).

Eusebius, *Comm. Ps.* (PG 23 [Paris, 1857–1886] 1172): καὶ πάντα δὴ ὅσα ἄλλα ἐχρῆν ἐν σαββάτῳ τελεῖν, ταῦτα ἡμεῖς ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ μετατεθείκαμεν ('and so all the other things that one must observe on the Sabbath, these things we have transposed to the Lord's Day'). See the entire context and the extended discussion in Richard Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church" in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 282ff.

worship was celebrated on Sunday.²

Aquinas affirmed a Sunday Sabbath, arguing that the Church had the authority to set Sunday as the time for rest and worship.³ Three hundred years later Protestants resisted this assertion of ecclesial authority and either denied that one day was more sacred than another or came to advance the idea that Sunday rest and worship had a biblical basis rather than an ecclesial basis.⁴ The latter perspective was adopted by English puritans and became a way in which they could uphold the principle of *sola scriptura*, affirm the continued validity of the entire Decalogue, and observe Sunday as the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. Thus the idea of observing Sabbath on Sunday *on the basis of apostolic authority* originated in the sixteenth century.

While there is a consensus about the process whereby the Sunday as a Sabbath rest was added to Sunday worship, scholars have not been able to come to an agreement about the process whereby Sunday came to be a Christian day of worship in the first place. Samuele Bacchiocchi's book, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*, published in 1977, provided a closely reasoned discussion of the topic.⁵ The book was based on Bacchiocchi's doctoral dissertation at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. It was reviewed by a broad spectrum of scholars in eighteen journals and a major monograph. This paper will attempt to summarize the reactions of the reviewers and draw some conclusions about the issues at stake.

First, let me describe Bacchiocchi's main ideas. He begins by arguing that Jesus sought to reform the Jewish Sabbath, shearing it of its legalistic rituals and tying it to his work of healing and redemption. He finds nothing in the gospels that suggest the abolition of the Sabbath or that anticipates a new day of worship. Bacchiocchi then focuses on the three New Testament

²Werner K. Vyhmeister, "The Sabbath in Asia" and "The Sabbath in Egypt and Ethiopia," in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 151–189.

³See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a 2ae, 122, 4. "In the New Law the observance of the Lord's day took the place of the observance of the Sabbath, not by virtue of the precept but by the institution of the Church and the custom of Christian people."

⁴John Eck, Luther's antagonist, challenged Protestant views of *sola scriptura* with the argument that "Scripture teaches: 'Remember to hallow the Sabbath....' Yet the Church has changed the Sabbath into Sunday on its own authority, on which you have not scripture." Elsewhere he says, "The Sabbath is manifoldly commanded by God and neither in the Gospel nor in Paul is it set forth the Sabbath was to cease." Johann Eck, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces against Luther and Other Enemies of the Church*, trans., Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 13, 101.

⁵Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977).

texts that seem to address the issue of Sunday observance. In 1 Cor. 16:1-3 Paul admonishes the congregation to lay by themselves a sum of money for the collection he is making for the Jerusalem church. Bacchiocchi argues that the laying aside of the funds was done individually, not corporately, and thus it does not address the issue of Sunday as a Christian day of worship. He treats Acts 20:7-12 similarly, suggesting that the Sunday gathering was an extraordinary occasion rather than a habitual custom. Finally, he argues that the "Lord's day" mentioned in Rev 1:10 as the day on which John received his revelation, is the eschatological Day of the Lord. Moving to the historical evidence, Bacchiocchi contends that the staunch Judaism of the first-century Jerusalem church discredits any attempt to make it the source of Sunday worship. Rather, Bacchiocchi argues, there were three factors that influenced the adoption of Sunday observance in early Christianity. These factors were (1) the primacy of the Church of Rome (165–212), (2) sun worship (236–259), and (3) anti-Judaism (213–235). He concludes that Sunday has no apostolic authorization and the church should reconsider adopting the seventh day of the week as its Sabbath.

While virtually every review of Bacchiocchi's work notes that he is a Seventh-day Adventist, the reviews come from a broad spectrum of theological positions. These include Roman Catholic, Sunday Sabbatarian, those who take a more neutral position, non-Sabbatarian, and Seventh-day Adventist. I will consider each of these five groups in turn.

In the first category, the Roman Catholic reviewers are complimentary and offer few detailed critiques of Bacchiocchi's thesis.

While Alain Martin questions whether the influence of sun worship began as early as the first century, he states his basic agreement with Bacchiocchi's thesis.⁶ Charles Kannengiesser says that though Bacchiocchi's work is suffused with an enthusiasm that may raise suspicion as to the objectivity of his interpretations, it still offers refreshing new perspectives and questions on the subject. While he disagrees with some (non-specified) points of Bacchiocchi's New Testament exegesis, he still finds it an engrossing study.⁷ The general Catholic respect for Bacchiocchi's scholarship is exemplified by Dennis Kennedy who states that "Bacchiocchi's book is unfailingly scholarly, readable, and convincing."⁸

This appreciation for Bacchiocchi's work may be explained in part by

⁶Alain G. Martin, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *ETR* 60.3 (1985): 477–78.

⁷Charles Kannengiesser, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *RSR* 68.1 (1980): 95–110.

⁸David Kennedy, "A Response to S. Bacchiocchi and J. Primus" in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, and William H. Shea (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 131.

Andrew Ciferri's comment that Bacchiocchi is carrying on the discussion of the origins of Sunday worship within a context already conceded by most Roman Catholic scholars.⁹ Many of the Catholic reviewers find Bacchiocchi's work useful in encouraging meaningful Sunday observance.

The second set of reviews, by Sunday Sabbatarians, is almost entirely negative. Two of the reviewers, Roger Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, published a defense of Sabbatarianism in *This is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday in its Jewish and Early Church Settings* at virtually the same time that Bacchiocchi's book appeared.¹⁰

Beckwith states his grave objections to Bacchiocchi's thesis. He finds evidence for the Christian observance of Sunday well before the mid-second century and accuses Bacchiocchi of evading the biblical and patristic evidence by means of special pleading. He disagrees with Bacchiocchi on the origins of the Quartodeciman controversy and argues that the commemoration of Christ's resurrection provides a perfectly intelligible explanation for the rise of the Christian Sunday. He finds Bacchiocchi making bold assertions where he should be more cautious, concluding his brief review with a list of five

⁹Andrew Dominic Ciferri, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Worship* 53.2 (1979): 160–62. See also J. H. McKenna, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *BTB* 9.2 (1979): 94–96. McKenna is unconvinced by some of Bacchiocchi's arguments on the New Testament texts and concerning the relationship of the resurrection appearances to the Eucharist. Yet he agrees with Bacchiocchi that the work represents "the result of a serious effort which has been made to understand and interpret the available sources" (*From Sabbath to Sunday*, 303). He grants that the book "is clear, well written, [and] shows the complexities of Sunday's origins." See also the entirely complimentary view of Gilles Pelland, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *ScEs* 31.1 (1979): 116–17. Pelland writes, "Not all was said about the origins of Sunday even in the important works of W. Rordorf and C. S. Mosna. The author repeats the analysis of the material, showing the fragility of many of the assumptions commonly received. . . . We are indebted to Mr. Bacchiocchi for a polished work, a richly documented book, which is a step forward in the knowledge of an important feature of the ancient Church." In the journal *Irénikon*, a reviewer suggests that Bacchiocchi's conclusion—according to which, for example, Acts 20 describes an isolated cultural event—is something of a *petitio principii*, [that is, it simply begs the question]. The hypothesis that Sunday began in Rome in the 2nd century has a significant weakness: it does not explain why in the East, where the "Jewish" Sabbath also falls into disuse among Christians, Saturday remains a necessarily liturgical day, on which fasting is prohibited. He also argues that Bacchiocchi's study does not do justice to the patristic theology of the eighth day and it passes rather too quickly over such texts as Ignatius, *Mag.* 9.1. I.P., "Du Sabbat au Dimanche." *Irén* 58.2 (1985): 275–276.

¹⁰Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *This Is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday in Its Jewish and Early Church Setting* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1978).

assertions that he finds particularly unsubstantiated.¹¹

Wilfrid Stott's review carefully examines Bacchiocchi's treatment of the biblical and patristic evidence. He states that in each case Bacchiocchi rejects the usual exegesis of the passages. He objects that Bacchiocchi makes no mention of the strong emphasis on the "first day of the week" in the accounts of the resurrection in the Gospels. He asks why the Pauline passages are relegated to an appendix and comments that the usual exegesis of these passages is discarded for ones that fit Bacchiocchi's argument. Bacchiocchi's suggestion that sun worship is behind the change to Sunday worship is ruled out by the fact that the early Christians abhorred pagan practices. Stott maintains that the rejection of the Sabbath can only be accounted for if the early Christians were already observing Sunday. Stott believes that the evidence supports an observance of the first day from the earliest days of the church, though Jewish Christians may have observed both days for some time thereafter.

In a review published in the *Anglican Theological Review* Louis Weil states that Bacchiocchi's work appears to cross the line between an objective scientific investigation and the substantiation of a bias.¹² As such, Bacchiocchi's work is insensitive to the significance of other interpretations of the data at hand. Weil says that his bias is also evident in his speculative suggestion that Sunday observance might have been introduced simply as a way of indicating the distinction of Christians from Jews. However, Weil's major objection to Bacchiocchi's work deals with whether the "apostles *instituted* Sunday as the day of Christian observance."¹³ He admits that the apostles did not *institute* Sunday in the sense that they did not also *institute* liturgical forms for the celebration of the sacraments. For Weil, the meaning of the word *institute* has a more profound meaning in this context. "The apostolic *institution* of the observance of Sunday must be understood in deeply organic terms, from within the life of the Church, but certainly not explicitly articulated in a set of laws or regulations." From this perspective Weil is able to argue that Sunday is not only of apostolic origin, but it "must also be specifically associated with the

¹¹R. Beckwith, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Churchman* 94.1 (1980): 81–82. The five points of disagreement are: Bacchiocchi misquotes and misapplies a statement by Epiphanius; he assumes that Christian attendance at synagogue in the late first century shows that they were not observing Sunday; he evades the evidence from the Ebionites; he confuses Narcissus with his co-adjutor Alexander and he dates and locates Alexander's lost treatise inaccurately; and he confuses the Quartodeciman controversy with the different Easter controversy discussed at the Council of Nicea. See footnote 21 for discussion of a further point in Beckwith's review.

¹²Louis Weil, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Anglican Theological Review* 61.3 (1979): 420–22.

¹³Weil italicizes the word "*institute*" and its cognates throughout his review.

Church at Jerusalem.” Weil concludes that Bacchiocchi’s insistence that there is no explicit *institution* for Sunday observance is tantamount to setting up a straw man in order to demolish it.

What seems significant about the reviews by Sunday Sabbatarians is the fact that none of them note the commonality between their position and Bacchiocchi’s position. Both positions are Sabbatarian in that they affirm the continuing validity of the Decalogue and its fourth commandment in the Christian era and both affirm the keeping of a Sabbath as a day of both rest and worship.

The third set of reviews summarize Bacchiocchi’s ideas and take a neutral stance in relation to them. Gerald Borchert comments that Bacchiocchi’s book “is doubtless regarded by many scholars as the best biblical-historical study written by an exponent of Sabbatarianism.”¹⁴ Ronald Jasper compares Bacchiocchi’s book with Beckwith and Stott’s volume and suggests that Bacchiocchi’s is a more exciting book to read, providing more radical ideas on the origins of Sunday. He calls it a fascinating and eminently readable book that along with Beckwith and Stott, provides a useful contribution to the debate on the origin and meaning of Sunday. He does caution the reader to remember Rordorf’s statement that early evidence is all too scanty, and certain proof on many points is still not possible.¹⁵ Agreeing with that sentiment LeMoine Lewis, writing in *Church History*, admits that Bacchiocchi makes the reader aware of how much previous studies built on gaps in the evidence. However, Lewis remains unconvinced that Bacchiocchi’s reconstruction really bridges the gap from Sabbath to Sunday.¹⁶ In a similar vein, the Orthodox scholar Andrew Louth notes that “Bacchiocchi’s thesis is a piece in a jigsaw of second-century Christianity that might have been designed by Walter Bauer. . . . With evidence so slight and hypotheses so fragile, the methods of research and argument employed need a corresponding delicacy which Bacchiocchi does not always display.”¹⁷

A fourth set of reviews come from non-Sabbatarians. Many agree with some of Bacchiocchi’s biblical interpretations, but strongly dissent from his ultimate conclusion. This is where the most significant discussion of Bacchiocchi’s ideas is found.

John Hughes, writing in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, com-

¹⁴G. L. Borchert, review of *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *RevExp* 78.1 (1981): 111–12.

¹⁵Ronald Claud Dudley Jasper, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *JEH* 30.4 (1979): 475–76.

¹⁶Lemoine G. Lewis, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday*, by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *CH* 50.03 (1981): 329.

¹⁷Andrew Louth, “Review of *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*,” *JTS* 31.1 (1980): 206.

pliments Bacchiocchi for writing a richly detailed and clearly written work.¹⁸ His main objection to Bacchiocchi's thesis is based on Pauline theology. He notes that Paul, the author whose writings and theology seem explicitly to preclude any form of Sabbatarianism, is relegated in Bacchiocchi's work to an appendix that follows the bibliography! He notes that Bacchiocchi gives scant attention to Gal 4:8–11 and Rom 14:5–6 and concentrates his attention on Col 2. Hughes finds inconceivable Bacchiocchi's argument that Paul simply condemned a perverted observation of Jewish religious traditions. Instead he contends that Paul seems categorically to have denied the necessity of obeying any *this-worldly* religious regulation (Col 2:23) because "Torah and the Mosaic covenant belong to the old order of creation, but the Christian belongs to the new."

One of the scholars with whom Bacchiocchi spars most directly is Willy Rordorf whose 1962 book *Der Sonntag* was translated into English and published in 1968 as *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church*.¹⁹ Thus, Rordorf's review of Bacchiocchi's book is a significant one.²⁰ In Rordorf's opinion, Bacchiocchi has ploughed over the same ground again and found nothing new; he has merely rearranged the evidence that had already been discovered. Nonetheless, Rordorf summarizes the content of Bacchiocchi's book at length without comment. He concludes by granting that the structure Bacchiocchi builds is seamless [*jungenloses Gebilde*], constructed with diligence, and well documented. An uninformed person might easily be persuaded by it. But then, Rordorf asks whether it is really true. Is it possible that the whole church committed a mistake without attracting any attention from anyone until Ellen White arrived in the nineteenth century and proclaimed the real truth?²¹

¹⁸John J. Hughes, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday*, by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *JETS* 23.3 (1980): 256–57.

¹⁹Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968).

²⁰W. Rordorf, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday*, by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *ZKG* 91.1 (1980): 112–16.

²¹The implication of Rordorf's assertion seems to be that Ellen White originated Saturday Sabbatarianism. In fact, its roots can be found in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Luther's associate, Carlstadt, appears to have toyed with it. A group of Anabaptists in Moravia adopted it. Seventh Day Baptists organized their first church in 1650 in London. It was a Seventh Day Baptist who first advocated the Seventh-day Sabbath to followers of William Miller in 1843 and it was Seventh Day Baptist ideas that persuaded the Millerite Adventist Joseph Bates to adopt the seventh-day Sabbath. His work persuaded James and Ellen White, who began to keep the seventh-day Sabbath six months before Ellen White claimed to see anything related to the Sabbath in her visions.

Beckwith also mentions Ellen White in reference to Bacchiocchi's "Seventh-day

Rordorf then proceeds to knock on the structure that Bacchiocchi has built in order to demonstrate that it is empty. He restricts himself to just five objections:

1. If Jesus was solely concerned with rediscovering the original intent of the Sabbath, why did he have such a serious confrontation with the Jewish authorities? Rordorf seems to imply that the Jewish authorities believed that Jesus really did intend to abolish the Sabbath. He asks, “Does Bacchiocchi intend to say that one should only do acts of love on the Sabbath but not on regular week days?”

2. Paul and the book of Hebrews are not dealt with adequately. The Christological and salvation-history foundation of the early Church Fathers’ view of the Sabbath is ignored. Rordorf argues that the early Christians didn’t feel bound by a literal obedience to the Sabbath commandment because they understood that in Christ’s work of salvation the eschatological Sabbath had begun.

3. It is just plain unbelievable that the Roman church in the 2nd century adopted Sunday worship by adaptation of the Roman sun cult. The Roman church could not have instituted Sunday observance because it never possessed that kind of power. Besides that, the book of Barnabas, which gives the first witness of Sunday worship, is not a Roman document.

4. The three NT texts which speak of Sunday worship in apostolic times cannot be that easily swept under the table, nor is the explanation of Rev. 1:10 satisfactory.

5. The attempt by the author to make us believe that the observance of the Eucharist may have occurred on any day of the week—whenever they felt like it—must certainly be rejected.

Adventist thesis.” He says, “It should be remembered that Mrs. White, the nineteenth-century ‘prophet’ of Adventism, maintained that the early Christians observed the Jewish Sabbath, and that it was only when Constantine was converted, in the fourth century, that he substituted the Christian Sunday, derived from sun-worship. Stated in this form, the theory is completely at variance with the abundant historical evidence for the Christian observance of Sunday before the fourth century, and it is a sign of progress that Bacchiocchi revises the theory radically.” R. Beckwith, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday*, by Samuele Bacchiocchi, Chm 94.1 (January 1, 1980): 81–82. Beckwith has misrepresented Ellen White’s position. See E. G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 52–53: “In the first centuries the true Sabbath had been kept by all Christians. . . . That the attention of the people might be called to the Sunday, it was made a festival in honor of the resurrection of Christ. Religious services were held upon it; yet it was regarded as a day of recreation, the Sabbath being still sacredly observed. . . . While Christians generally continued to observe the Sunday as a joyous festival, [Satan] led them, in order to show their hatred of Judaism, to make the Sabbath a fast, a day of sadness and gloom. In the early part of the fourth century the emperor Constantine issued a decree making Sunday a public festival.”

Rordorf's conclusion is that the Christian Sunday is certainly older than Bacchiocchi wants to admit. It is rooted in Christology and therefore can be observed with a good conscience by Christian churches. However, he argues that the Christian church should not transfer the real meaning of the Sabbath commandment to Sunday. "The early church certainly did not do that before the time of Constantine and later only because it was forced on it. In this respect," Rordorf says, "I agree with the SDAs; but I do not draw the same conclusions as they do."

One of the most thoughtful, irenic, and comprehensive reviews of Bacchiocchi's work comes from Andrew J. Bandstra, now emeritus Professor of New Testament Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary.²² He begins his review by noting that Bacchiocchi's book confronts the reader with one of the fundamental questions of New Testament theology: How much continuity is there between the old and new covenants and in what sense is the new covenant radically new? Before returning to this question in his conclusion, Bandstra examines the details of Bacchiocchi's thesis.

There is much that he can agree with. In regard to the material on Christ and the Sabbath, he agrees with Bacchiocchi's basic approach. He agrees in the main with Bacchiocchi that the resurrection appearances could hardly have suggested a weekly commemoration of the resurrection. Certainly 1 Cor 16:2 refers to a private setting aside of funds not to a Sunday worship activity. He agrees with Bacchiocchi that Acts 20:7–12 probably refers to a special meeting rather than an established weekly meeting. In his judgment, Acts 20:7–12 has no probative value for regular Sunday worship as a consistent practice of the New Testament church. He believes Bacchiocchi is correct in asserting that there is no evidence that the early Jerusalem church substituted Sunday for Saturday as the day of rest and worship. He feels that Bacchiocchi is correct in concluding that Acts 15 does not give proof that Sunday observance had been recognized by the entire apostolic church or that it had been adopted by the Pauline churches. He grants that Bacchiocchi is successful in challenging the oft-stated contention that in the NT Sunday was more or less consistently substituted for Saturday as the Christian day of rest and worship.

However, he has reservations regarding Bacchiocchi's treatment of the resurrection and the Lord's Supper. He suggests that John 20 may speak indirectly to the appropriateness of the first day of the week for an encounter with the risen Lord. Concerning "the Lord's day" of Rev 1:10 he believes that both the specific function of giving the time of the vision and the close connection with the risen and exalted One suggest that it should be understood either as Easter Sunday or, more likely, Sunday itself. The early Christian church in Jerusalem recognized its freedom in regard to the place and time

²²Andrew J. Bandstra, review of *From Sabbath to Sunday*, by Samuele Bacchiocchi, *CTJ* 14.2 (1979): 213–21.

for holding specifically Christian meetings. The early Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem insisted that the keeping of the Sabbath was not mandatory for the Gentile church. The Acts 15 account does suggest that, just as circumcision was not required of the Gentiles as a religious rite, so too the keeping of the Sabbath as the day of rest and worship for the Gentiles was not enjoined by the Jerusalem church. In the end, Bandstra's opinion is that Bacchiocchi's thesis does not deal adequately with the concept of fulfillment as freedom to choose the place and time of worship. Towards the end of his lengthy review Bandstra attempts to outline in four steps how "Sunday observance" rests on the foundation of "Biblical theology" and "apostolic authority."²³ He concludes, "When the church felt obligated to recognize a certain day as the day of worship for Christians, it appropriately designated or recognized the first day of the week. . . . While 'Sunday observance' is not explicitly enjoined or consistently practiced in the New Testament, the use of Sunday for worship is, nonetheless, something which is in harmony with the witness of the New Testament."

Bandstra feels that Bacchiocchi carefully considers the primary sources, shows remarkable familiarity with much secondary literature over a wide spectrum of theological scholarship, and gives competent analyses of the material considered. He finds that Bacchiocchi's treatment of the patristic texts is helpful in describing the variety of factors at work in specifying Sunday as the uniquely Christian day of worship and, in some circles, the day of rest. In the end he believes Bacchiocchi's book is an excellent instrument for all to reflect upon the problem of continuity and radical newness of the new covenant.

Not long after Bacchiocchi's book was published, a group of scholars associated with the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research in Cambridge, England issued a collaborative volume that covered some of the same ground previously covered by Bacchiocchi.²⁴ While it deals more extensively with the Old Testament and later church history, the heart of the volume addresses the same issues that Bacchiocchi does, agreeing with some of his positions and challenging others.

D. A. Carson's treatment of Jesus and the Sabbath fits this pattern.²⁵ He

²³First, Bandstra suggests, the church agreed that Jesus *fulfilled* the symbolic aspect of the Old Testament Sabbath. Second, the fulfillment was understood *from the beginning* by the Jewish Christians themselves to allow *freedom* as to time and place of specifically Christian gatherings. Third, both the Jerusalem church and Paul agreed that neither circumcision nor the Sabbath was required of the Gentile church since neither was *essential* to the Christian faith. Fourth, there are some hints in the New Testament that the first day of the week is the appropriate day to make contributions (1 Cor 16) and encounter the risen Lord (John 20:19, 26; Rev 1:10).

²⁴D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

²⁵D. A. Carson, "Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels" in *From Sabbath to*

agrees with Bacchiocchi that Jesus contravened the Halakic Sabbath without contravening the Torah concerning the Sabbath. He agrees that Bacchiocchi is right to protest against those commentators who insist that John intends by 5:17–28 to abolish the Sabbath.²⁶

Yet he disagrees with some details of Bacchiocchi's interpretation of the disciple's plucking grain, the suggestion that in this case Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees for failing to take Jesus and his disciples home for lunch on Sabbath, and his connecting the rest referred to in Matt 11:28–30 with the Sabbath incident in Matt 12:1–14.²⁷

In one of his conclusions, he states that "There is no hint anywhere in the ministry of Jesus that the first day of the week is to take on the character of the Sabbath and replace it." However, the lordship of Jesus over the Sabbath is ultimate and it is just possible that Jesus Himself replaces the Sabbath (85, 84).²⁸

In the same volume Max Turner discusses Sabbath and Sunday in Luke/Acts.²⁹ He questions Bacchiocchi's affirmation that Christ identified his mission with the Sabbath in order to make it a fitting memorial of his redemptive activity. He disagrees with the reasons that Bacchiocchi gives for his argument that Jesus' lordship over the Sabbath is grounded in His having made the day for man's benefit.³⁰ In his opinion, the Son of Man has (perhaps) a permanent authority that transcends the law and the institutions revealed therein. However, it is going too far to suggest that the Sabbath is abrogated, and "not even a glimmer of the dawn of the 'Lord's Day' is yet to be seen in the Lukan sky."³¹ On the other hand, Turner says, "Bacchiocchi's claim that the Sabbath is especially hallowed is barely more obvious."³² He agrees with Bacchiocchi that the resurrection narratives provide no hint that a new day was to be celebrated in honor of the risen Christ. In his concluding discussion of the material in Luke, Turner suggests that Luke's Jesus is continually subordinating the Sabbath to the demands of His own mission. Jesus presents the law as being fulfilled but simultaneously being transcended in His teaching and ministry.³³

As far as Acts is concerned, Turner disagrees with Bacchiocchi's argu-

Lord's Day, ed. Carson, 57–97.

²⁶Ibid., 82–4.

²⁷Ibid., 62, 87 n. 24, 75.

²⁸Ibid. 85–4.

²⁹Max M. B. Turner, "The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts" in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. Carson, 99–157.

³⁰Ibid., 102–3.

³¹Ibid., 104.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., 106, 113.

ment that in Acts 15 James indicates a theological commitment to the law.³⁴ In his opinion, the centrality of the law was displaced and it was not to be imposed on Gentiles. Turner affirms that there were many factors that would contribute to the continuity of Jewish Christian (seventh day) Sabbath observance and he asserts that we have, as yet, found no firm evidence for the belief that the teaching of Christ had a significant effect on the pattern of Jewish-Christian Sabbath observance.³⁵ On the other hand, the mention of the first day of the week in Acts 20 by a Gentile in a Gentile church must have been deliberate, according to Turner. He suggests that it is perhaps best understood as an echo of the resurrection appearances. If this is correct, then the path to the “Lord’s Day” in Gentile settings would be relatively simple. Turner disagrees with Bacchiocchi’s argument that the meeting in Acts 20 occurred on Saturday night. However he grants that it would be going too far to see in this account a paradigm of first day observance.³⁶

Turner concludes with three observations. First, he explicitly agrees with Bacchiocchi that first-day Sabbath observance cannot easily be understood as a phenomenon of the apostolic age, dismissing Beckwith and Stott’s argument that Sunday was established as the Lord’s Day shortly after the resurrection. Second, he cannot accept Bacchiocchi’s claim that Christ renewed the church’s theological commitment to the seventh-day Sabbath.³⁷ Finally, he agrees with Bacchiocchi’s contention that Sunday was only gradually patterned after the Jewish Sabbath but disagrees with his affirmation that Sunday worship began only in the post-apostolic period.³⁸

In a further chapter in the same volume, D. R. DeLacey discusses “The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus,” focusing more on the question of the law than on the specific issues of Sabbath and Sunday. However he does interact with Bacchiocchi on at least two of those specific issues. Concerning Col 2:14, although he is unconvinced by all aspects of Bacchiocchi’s argument, he admits that Bacchiocchi is “surely right in his conclusion that this passage cannot be interpreted as stating that the Mosaic

³⁴Ibid., 153 n. 203.

³⁵Turner presents six factors that contributed to continued Sabbath observance among Jewish Christians. These include: habit and religious conservatism, social pressure, fear of stronger forms of sanction, missionary policy, strong conservative leadership at Jerusalem, and theological conviction (124–126).

³⁶Ibid., 123–33.

³⁷Turner comments, “In some ways this position is more theologically coherent and intrinsically more historically probable than that envisioned by Beckwith.” However Turner repudiates it because it is based on an understanding that Jesus hallowed the Sabbath as a memorial of his redemptive activity and because it assumes that the Jerusalem church was committed to the law theologically throughout the period covered by the book of Acts (136, 157 n. 272).

³⁸Ibid., 135–7.

laws itself was ‘wiped out’ in the death of Christ.”³⁹ He also acknowledges Bacchiocchi’s point that the majority of commentators have been over-hasty in seeing a *meeting* for Sunday worship in 1 Cor 16:1-3 when the text actually portrays essentially private and individual almsgiving. He argues, though, that Bacchiocchi goes too far in proposing that this suggests Sabbath worship and rules out a Sunday worship. In the end, the issue of the law dominates the discussion. For DeLacey, the law no longer plays any role in the life of a Christian. The Christian’s obligation is to fulfill the law of love by walking in the Spirit. He argues that Paul not only opposed the re-establishment of the Decalogue as a law for the Christian life, but was also happy to allow the seventh-day Sabbath to be observed. DeLacey makes a point of stating that this position is quite incompatible with any identification of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath.⁴⁰

Richard Bauckham’s discussion of the Lord’s Day in the same volume contains a significant response to Bacchiocchi’s ideas.⁴¹ To begin with, Bauckham argues against Bacchiocchi’s idea that Rev 1:10 refers to the eschatological “Day of the Lord.”⁴² He then reviews Bacchiocchi’s arguments against the Palestinian Jewish-Christian origin of Sunday observance. He grants their validity, but says they miss the point. Certainly Jewish Christians in Palestine continued to rest on the Sabbath and attend the temple or synagogue services, but they also met as Christians in private houses to hear teaching from the apostles and to break bread together. As Bacchiocchi points out these gatherings are not presented as conflicting with the services of the temple or synagogue but rather complementing them. Bauckham argues that when Bacchiocchi stresses the Jerusalem church’s conformity to Jewish practices he plays down the distinctive Christian self-consciousness of being an eschatological community. This consciousness then demanded distinctively Christian meetings for Christian fellowship. Since the resurrection of Jesus marked the beginning of the time of eschatological fulfillment, “it would at least have been appropriate for the earliest church to choose the weekly recurrence of the day of His resurrection as the time of its regular meeting.”⁴³

³⁹ D. R. DeLacey, “The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, ed. Carson, 173.

⁴⁰Ibid., 175, 184–5.

⁴¹Richard Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, ed. Carson, 211–250.

⁴²Ibid., 232. Bauckham’s arguments are: 1. Why does John not use the normal LXX rendering of ἡμέρα (τοῦ) κυρίουβ (*hemera tou kurion*)? Bauckham admits this is not an entirely decisive argument. 2. But if κυριακή ἡμέρα was already a title for Sunday, John could not have used it in an eschatological sense. 3. The interpretation is difficult to sustain in context.

⁴³Ibid., 238.

Bauckham also discusses Bacchiocchi's contention that Christian Sunday observance originated in the second century.⁴⁴ He evaluates Bacchiocchi's four main arguments as follows:

1. Bacchiocchi claims that Sunday could not have originated in Palestinian Jewish Christianity since they kept Sabbath. But this argument depends on the assumption that Sunday originated as a Christian Sabbath, a day of worship *and rest*. Bauckham argues that there is reason to suppose that Christian worship on Sunday goes back to early Palestinian Christianity not as alternative but as additional to the observance of the Jewish Sabbath.

2. Bacchiocchi argues that the substitution of Sunday for the Sabbath occurred in the early second century as a result of anti-Jewish feeling in the church. But it does not follow that anti-Jewish feelings motivated the introduction of Christian Sunday worship. If Sunday were a recent substitute for the Jewish Sabbath, we should expect far more discussion of the superiority of Sunday to Sabbath.

3. Bacchiocchi suggests that the substitution of Sunday for Sabbath can be explained by the primacy of the Church of Rome. Bauckham finds this to be the weakest of his arguments but also essential to his thesis. Evidence for the authority of the Church of Rome is not convincing. Bacchiocchi's idea fails to account for the universality of the custom of Sunday worship. Unlike Easter Sunday and the Sabbath fast, Sunday worship was never, so far as the evidence goes, disputed.

4. Bacchiocchi posits that the pagan day of the sun is one reason why the Church of Rome adopted Sunday. But he underestimates the resistance to pagan customs in second-century Christianity.

Bauckham and his colleagues conclude that, while Bacchiocchi has usefully stressed the importance of anti-Judaism in second century opposition to Sabbath observance, he has not demonstrated the second century origins of the Christian Lord's Day (272–273).

In sum, the non-Sabbatarian reviewers disagree most clearly with Bacchiocchi (and with Sunday Sabbatarians) on the issue of the law. They contend that the early Christians did not separate the Decalogue from the civil and ceremonial laws and that the death and resurrection of Jesus ushered in a new era no longer characterized by "law" but by love and the Spirit. Thus the New Testament did not require Sabbath observance of any kind from Christian believers. In honor of the resurrection, the first-century church began to worship on Sunday, but the transition away from Sabbath to an exclusive worship *and rest* on Sunday did not occur until later.

Finally, Kenneth Strand, one of Bacchiocchi's colleagues at Andrews University, reviewed *From Sabbath to Sunday* in a nineteen-page article in the journal *Andrews University Seminary Studies*. Strand is favorable toward Bacchiocchi's general thesis, but takes issue with him on a number of points. These include his treatment of the "Day of the Lord" in Rev 1:10;

⁴⁴Richard Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church" in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. Carson, 251–298. The discussion of Bacchiocchi is on pp. 270–273.

his suggestion that sun worship was an important factor in the adoption of Sunday in the second century; and his reconstruction of the origin of Easter Sunday. He then goes to great length to dispute Bacchiocchi's contention that Roman primacy was able to influence the greater part of Christendom to adopt new festivals such as the Easter Sunday, Saturday fast, and the weekly Sunday. Strand argues that Bacchiocchi falls into confusion on this matter because he fails to treat the material later than the second century in an adequate manner and because he fails to "distinguish properly between Sunday as a day of worship and Sunday as a day of rest" (99). Strand points out that the earliest Christian observance of Sunday was for worship. That role was held side by side with the Sabbath for several centuries. This was distinct from observing Sunday as a day of rest. Even the second-century Roman observance of Sunday which Bacchiocchi calls attention to did not involve making Sunday a day of rest.

As a result of examining the reviews of Bacchiocchi's book, a few summary observations are in order:

1. Any reconstruction of the origin of Sunday that ignores the basic Jewish orientation of the earliest church and the virtual certainty that it kept the seventh-day Sabbath is no longer tenable. At the same time, Bacchiocchi's conclusion that the church should re-consider the seventh-day as a Sabbath has not been taken seriously.

2. It would appear that Sunday Sabbatarians have not only lost out in their attempts to retain the Sunday-Sabbath in the general culture of America and Britain, but their position seems to be losing in the scholarly discussions as well. For example, I am not aware of a significant scholarly response from Sunday Sabbatarians to Carson's *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*.⁴⁵

⁴⁵The published reviews are split between those who find *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* persuasive and those who have reservations. Nigel M. DeS. Cameron finds its conclusions are extensively buttressed and persuasive; review of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* by D. A. Carson, *EvQ* 57, (1985): 186–187. Brian Lynch does not agree with all the conclusions of the book, but agrees that "most if not all, traditional Sabbatarian arguments are based on wishful thinking and faulty exegesis;" review of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* by D. A. Carson, *Searching Together*, 12.1 (1983): 8. J. G. Davis says that the authors have "hammered more nails into the coffin of Sabbatarianism;" review of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* by D. A. Carson, *ExpTim* 94.8 (1983): 251. Alan F. Johnson finds the book convincing and coherent, admitting that it has significantly influenced his thinking. It is now the work to be answered or agreed with in future discussions of the topic; review of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* by D. A. Carson, *JETS* 27.2 (1984): 219–223.

On the other hand, R. Buick Knox highlights the tentative nature of the book's assertions: "They admit that their exegesis of many passages is probably, possible, likely, inconclusive, debatable, uncertain, or lacking unanimity, . . . though the final summary chapter admits that it would be presumptuous to claim that these conclusions are 'the only satisfactory solution to the problem;'" review of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* by D. A. Carson, *JEH* 34.3 (1983): 476. Allan Harman suggests that a re-examination of Genesis 2 and Hebrews 4 would show that "there is more to be said for the creation

3. Bacchiocchi's interpretation of Rev 1:10 as the eschatological "Day of the Lord" has not been widely accepted.⁴⁶

4. Bacchiocchi's discussion of the Jerusalem church's attitude toward Judaism and (by inference) the Sabbath, seems to have received rather wide acceptance. However, his discussion of the three factors that influenced the adoption of Sunday observance in the early second century has received some useful criticism. His suggestions that second-century Roman primacy and sun worship gave impetus to the adoption of Sunday observance have been rejected. At the same time, many scholars have come to agree with him that anti-Judaism did have a significant influence in the opposition to Sabbath observance.

5. Distinguishing between Sunday as a day of worship and Sunday as a day of rest helps move the discussion forward. Sunday may well have become a day of worship, regularly or irregularly during the first century without it becoming a substitute for the seventh-day Sabbath. Regardless, the historical evidence on the subject is scant and ambiguous. With three uncertain texts in the New Testament, and with much of the earliest second-century evidence also ambiguous, it is simply difficult to draw hard and fast conclusions about the origins of Sunday worship and about the relationship of Sabbath and Sunday in the first two centuries of Christianity. It must be recognized that we probably will remain ignorant of the actual practice of Sabbath and Sunday among Christians in most locations in the first three centuries of the Common Era.

6. Concerning this ambiguity, if there is any hope of resolving the different approaches to the disputed evidence, it will come from a serious discussion of the presuppositions that are brought to the interpretation of the evidence. This discussion of basic assumptions has begun in Bandstra's review and in Carson's volume *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, but more explicit

ordinance view of the Sabbath than appears here:" review of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* by D. A. Carson, *RTR* 42.3 (1983): 86–87. Arie Blok expresses some angst about the book's findings: "I cannot say that the Fourth Commandment is binding on Christians today in the way that my strict Voetian oriented Dutch Calvinistic upbringing taught me, and yet I see a spiritual peril in neglecting the Lord's Day:" review of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* by D. A. Carson, *RefR* 38.1 (1984): 76–77. Andrew Anderson notes that some will be convinced, but others will wish to make more of the Old Testament and the link between the Lord's Day and God's will at creation. "Still others, concerned to preserve for practical and Christian reasons one distinctive day in the week, will fear that if part of the structure is undermined the whole will come tumbling down." Review of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* by D. A. Carson, *SJT* 38.3 (1985): 455–456.

⁴⁶For a review of the literature on this subject see Ranko Stefanovic, "The Lord's Day of Revelation 1:10 in the Current Debate," *AUSS* 49.2 (2011), 261–284. In this article, presented as a paper in November 2010 at the Sabbath in Text and Tradition Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature, Stefanovic suggests that it is possible to see a double meaning in the term that would include both the Sabbath and the eschatological "Day of the Lord."

attention needs to be given to it. Perhaps the assumptions that one brings to this study, particularly in relationship to the law, determine the interpretation of the evidence.

7. Finally, there seems to be some similarity between the Roman Catholic position on the origins of Sunday observance and that of the non-Sabbatarian position. Both eschew any direct apostolic authority for Sunday as a day of worship and attribute its origins to the church. This marks a significant shift in Protestant thinking on the subject. Protestant scholars appear to have dropped any attempt to describe Sunday as a Sabbath or as a day of rest. Instead, their discussion of Sunday defends it as a day of worship based on early tradition rather than on the apostolic or biblical basis for the practice.