

Andrews University

## Digital Commons @ Andrews University

---

Faculty Publications

---

2-20-1975

### My Witness in a Jesuit University

Samuele Bacchiocchi  
*Andrews University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>



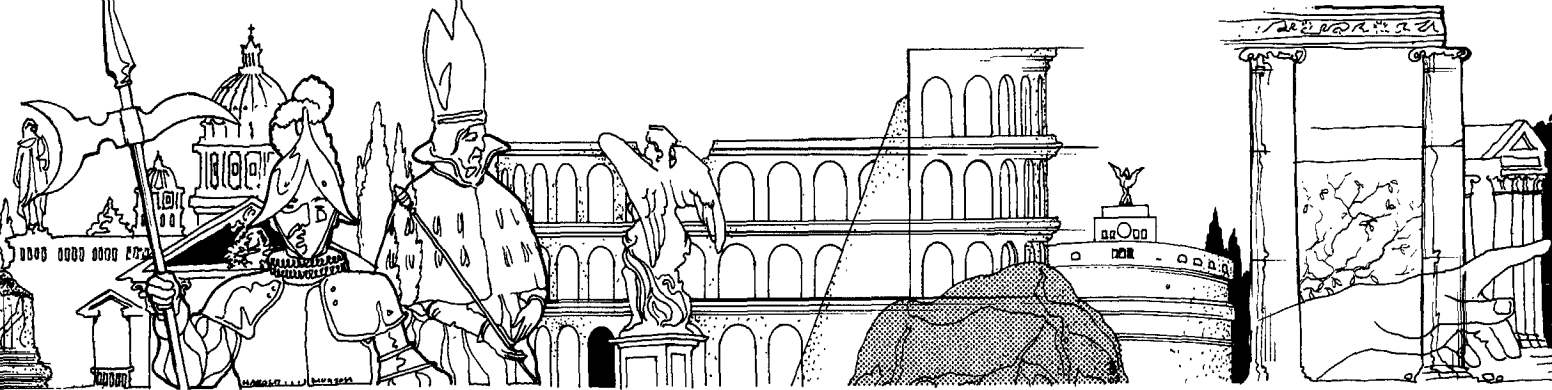
Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Bacchiocchi, Samuele, "My Witness in a Jesuit University" (1975). *Faculty Publications*. 3747.  
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/3747>

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).



# My Witness in a Jesuit University

By SAMUELE BACCHIOCCHI

FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 1974, was an important day for me. On that day the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome awarded me the *doctoratus in Historia Ecclesiastica* with magna cum laude. This was the first time in its 430-year history that the university had awarded such a degree to a non-Catholic.

My motivation for choosing the Gregoriana to undertake my doctoral program was simply an honest desire to gain an inside view of Roman Catholicism. You might be interested to know that the majority of the popes, cardinals, and bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, have received some training at the Gregoriana.

Sitting in classes with Catholic priests and monks from all over the world was a unique experience for me. At the beginning I felt rather uneasy, a bit uncomfortable. However, soon the ice melted and we established warm relationships. I was, in fact, the object of much curiosity on the part of my classmates, for I was the first non-Catholic to attend the university regularly. In between classes we would often become involved in theological discussion, and whenever I attempted to define our church position on certain doctrines or practices, my classmates felt that our church, in many points, was offering an example worth emulating.

I was impressed with the fact that the Second Vatican Council has indeed encouraged the *aggiornamento*, that is, the bringing up to date of the church. But how to accomplish it has not been found an easy task for an institution such as

---

*Samuele Bacchiocchi is assistant professor of theology and church history at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.*

the Roman Catholic Church, with centuries of established traditions. For example, one of the problems has been how to encourage the participation of the laity or the reading of the Bible in a church in which, until a few years ago, the common Catholic was a simple spectator and where the reading of the Bible was discouraged. That is the problem that many Catholic clergymen are facing today. When I shared with them Seventh-day Adventist practices and methods, they were often startled and amazed. In fact, I brought several priests to our church located in Roma-Appia (near the famous Appian Way), and I had them participate in our Sabbath school classes. I remember one who had participated in the Sabbath school saying, "I wish we could introduce something like this in our church!"

After three years of pleasant associations, our graduating class decided to have a farewell party. The problem was to decide where to have it. I suggested to my classmates that if they were not afraid of being excommunicated they were most welcome to come to my house. After a moment of hesitation they accepted my offer, and I was most glad to welcome 15 Catholic priests from approximately ten countries to my house. We had a very pleasant evening together relating experiences and singing, and when the time came to bid one another farewell, each classmate requested an autographed copy of my thesis. I had written on the origin of Sunday observance. As you can imagine, I had made ample provision to satisfy their request.

Perhaps I should explain how I came to choose my topic. I had hardly spent a week at the Gregoriana when I noticed on display among the many scholarly works published by the university, a doctoral dissertation dealing with the problem of the origin of Sunday observance. The author, C. S. Mosna,

was a Jesuit, an alumnus of the Department of Church History of the Gregoriana. He had conducted his research under the guidance of Father V. Monachino, my major professor, a specialist in early church history.

I eagerly read Mosna's scholarly monograph on the origin of Sunday observance and I was disturbed by the author's attempt to justify the observance of Sunday as a creation of the apostolic church. He advances the thesis that the apostles chose the first day of the week as the new day of worship of the Christian community in order to commemorate with the eucharistic supper the great event of the resurrection. The same thesis is being advanced and supported widely by Protestant scholars. For instance, in his outstanding dissertation W. Rordorf similarly endeavors in a brilliant, speculative way to trace the origin of Sunday to the apostles and to the Christian community of Jerusalem. He emphasizes the appearances of Christ on Sunday night, more than the resurrection, as the theological starting point for the institution of Sunday.

## Research With Scientific Rigor

I became aware of the necessity of undertaking research with scientific rigor and methodology in order to ascertain the true origin of Sunday observance and thus indirectly confirm the validity of the Sabbath commandment and its observance by the early Christians. When I proposed to my major professor, as a topic for my doctoral dissertation to investigate the time and the causes of the origin of Sunday observance, his reaction was that the problem had been amply treated in recent times. In fact he mentioned some of the doctoral dissertations and scholarly articles that have appeared over the past 15 years, besides the doctoral dissertation of Mosna that he himself had directed. I pointed out that I felt



that some of the conclusions being advanced were based on a unilateral analysis of the sources and therefore a new research was justified. With a cautious warning he left me to decide on the matter, reminding me to be sure to base my work on actual analysis of source material available. I accepted the cautious warning as a positive indication that God was offering me a unique opportunity to undertake a research that would bring into focus the validity of the Sabbath truth and

sitting at the examining table, made me very conscious of the solemnity of the moment. The presence of many Adventist friends and of various pastors was of great encouragement to me. I might say that even a number of non-Adventists were present. An Adventist friend drove 25 miles from the airport where he works, in order to bring along a friend who had recently become interested in our message. I became aware that it was not simply a question of presenting and defend-

contribution on a theme of great actuality, as it is revealed by the many scientific studies on the subject in the last 30 years and by the doctoral dissertations of the last 15 years. The work has been well structured and has been conducted with scientific methodology and with accurate analysis of the source material available, and is supported by a vast amount of information and discussions based upon a vast specialized bibliography." Commenting later on the section of the dissertation that deals with the factors that contributed to the origin of Sunday observance, he said: "They have been prudently evaluated according to their strength." Undoubtedly among so many commendations there were also some reservations, but I can say with all frankness that the majority of the conclusions were widely accepted. The most startling words were pronounced by the second censor. He started by saying: "We must recognize that it took an act of courage to choose such a delicate and controversial topic. But it must be admitted that the problem has been handled with velvet gloves." He then went on commenting on what he thought were some of the positive points of the research, expressing some reservations on others. In his closing remarks he then expressed what I considered to be the most impressive testimony in favor of the Sabbath. He said: "Today is Friday, a fitting day to close a dissertation on the Lord's day. And now after all that has been said about the Sabbath day, the only thing that there remains for us to do is to wish Sam Bacchiocchi a good holy Sabbath day of rest." I was thrilled to hear those words, especially as they came out of the mouth of a Jesuit scholar. To me they were worth more than the silver and gold medals they awarded me for the academic distinction of my schoolwork. □

## My three years in a Catholic University, in which I had enrolled to gain an inside view of Roman Catholicism, provided unusual opportunities for witnessing.

thus score a victory for the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I went to work with enthusiasm and determination and, during the two years I wrestled with the problem, I had moments of joy and satisfaction as well as moments of depression and uncertainty. Even though I knew that I was objective in the analysis of the source material, I was constantly aware that my conclusions were undermining some of the recent Catholic assumptions on the subject. Some might smile if I say that I did not dare to purchase the air-ticket nor make any reservations for coming to Andrews University until after June 14, an historic date in my life—the date and day of my defense.

June 14 was a Friday, a good day to close a research on the day of rest and worship of the Christian church. The atmosphere in the defense hall was heavy and dignified. The red carpet, the antique chairs, but, above all, the austere faces of the five Jesuit scholars

ing my dissertation but of giving my testimony in favor of the Sabbath truth in the highest institution of learning of the Roman Catholic Church. Like Luther I felt like saying: "Here I stand. God help me."

### Oral Examinations

I presented a synthesis of the methods, material, and conclusions of my research in approximately one hour and then it was the turn of the two censors to speak. They had spent several weeks examining my dissertation, and now in a most friendly way they presented their evaluation, questioning me on certain points. Their comments were most complimentary, almost too nice to be true. Following are a few lines of the report of my major professor, but I would prefer his remarks be considered not so much as commendations addressed to me as a recognition of the Sabbath truth. He said: "The dissertation of Mr. Bacchiocchi is a serious