

PREFACE

This book began as a research project on "Sunday" sponsored by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research in Cambridge, England, in 1973. We are indebted to the members of that larger group for stimulating discussion and for mutual critique. The contributors to the present volume were at that time doctoral or post-doctoral research students enjoying the rich facilities and heritage of Cambridge University.

Our successive drafts were originally criticized within the study group, and when we moved apart, the task of coordinating and editing the project fell to me. We have continued our research and circulated our findings among the contributors for the benefit of the work as a whole.

The introductory chapter explains how this book was written and points out that it is not merely a symposium but a unified, cooperative effort. The explanation will be given later, but the subtitle of the work is important: it reads, *A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, rather than *Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigations*. We have moved to various parts of the world since 1975. Richard J. Bauckham now lectures in the Department of Theology at the University of Manchester. Harold H. P. Dressler teaches at Northwest Baptist Theological College in Vancouver. Douglas R. de Lacey teaches at London Bible College, but he has just been appointed to a post at Ridley College, Cambridge. Andrew T. Lincoln taught for five years in the New Testament department at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and is now at St. John's College in Nottingham. M. M. B. Turner is the Librarian at London Bible College, and also lectures in New Testament. Chris Rowland has taught at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and is now Dean of Jesus College, Cambridge University. I am now teaching New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

So many people have helped us in this project that I am reluctant to begin a list, lest someone be omitted by mistake. Nevertheless, I must gratefully acknowledge the help of several people without whom this work would have been less comprehensive. John Hughes, though never a member of the study group, spent many hours providing thoughtful, written critiques of some of the early papers. Gerhard F. Hasel and Samuele Bacchiocchi have been most helpful in providing Seventh Day Adventist bibliographies and even in lending books otherwise difficult to procure. Considering the technical complexity of several of the chapters, Patty Light and Karen Sich cheerfully prepared the final typescript with remarkable speed and skill. My graduate assistant Linda Belleville spent scores of hours on technical details and made my task much lighter. To all of them I owe an enormous debt of gratitude. All the contributors worked valiantly to meet deadlines, but I must mention with special gratitude the industry of Richard Bauckham and Andrew Lincoln in particular, not only because the largest assignments fell on their shoulders, but because their written criticisms of the repeatedly circulated papers were the most detailed and painstaking, making my task as editor much easier than it would otherwise have been. Dr. Stan Gundry and his colleagues at Zondervan have handled this long and technical manuscript with extraordinary efficiency.

Finally, profound thanks go to my wife, Joy, who not only patiently endured but cheerfully supported her husband as he wrestled during long hours with assorted manuscripts.

Soli Deo Gloria.

D. A. Carson

I

INTRODUCTION

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THE NEED FOR THIS INVESTIGATION

The number of books on this subject might prompt the casual observer to think that yet another volume would be superfluous. A brief survey will show that there is a place for our work as well.

Perhaps this spate of books was touched off by the work of Willy Rordorf, who argues that Sabbath in the Old Testament began as a day of rest and ended as a day of rest and worship, and that Sunday in the New Testament was a day of worship that has become in the history of the church a day of worship and rest parallel to the Old Testament Sabbath.¹ Apart from hundreds of articles that have been written since the publication of Rordorf's thesis, a substantial number of books, representing most of the major European languages, have appeared. J. Francke defends the view that has dominated Protestant theology in the last three centuries.² He is joined by R. T. Beckwith and W. Stott.³ This interpretation holds that the principle of one day in seven for rest and worship was established at creation, incorporated into the Mosaic code, and formally presented as moral law. This view states that for people of the Old Testament the appropriate day for the Sabbath was the seventh day, and that the Lord's resurrection on the first day of the week effected a legitimate shift to Sunday. Sabbath or Sunday observance is viewed as symbolic of the special "rest" that God's people enjoy now and will enjoy in fullness after the Parousia.

Paul K. Jewett adopts a similar structure.⁴ But because he acknowledges that the evidence in the New Testament for a transfer from Saturday to Sunday is meager, he bases Sunday observance partly on his estimate of the *practice* of the early church, and much more on the observation that although the "rest" of God was introduced by Christ, its culmination awaits Christ's return; therefore it is still appropriate to select a day to symbolize the rest yet to come. The first Christians, having been set free from slavish observance of the *seventh* day by Christ's claim to lordship over the Sabbath, found it increasingly difficult to join in worship with Jews on the Sabbath and opted instead for Sunday, the day of their Lord's resurrection. In other words, Jewett ultimately comes very close to the position of Francke, Beckwith and Stott, and others, but he gets there by a more circuitous route.

In the same tradition is the work by F. N. Lee, which is approved by the Lord's Day Observance Society (LDOS).⁵ Lee's work, however, besides being quite heated and polemical, is often eccentric. It has some valuable insights, but it is difficult to take seriously a book that bases important conclusions on the identification of the precise hour of the Fall!

We do not lack more specialized volumes. C. S. Mosna traces Sunday observance to the fifth century.⁶ Niels-Erik A. Andreasen attempts to uncover

the roots of the Sabbath in the Old Testament and earlier, while tracing development through the Old Testament itself.⁷ N. Negretti provides a theology of the Sabbath in the Old Testament based on a critical reconstruction of Sabbath traditions.⁸

Without doubt, the work that has stirred up most interest in the subject, at least in the English-speaking world, is that of Samuele Bacchiocchi.⁹ Remarkably, Bacchiocchi wrote his book as a doctoral dissertation for the Pontifical Gregorian University even though he himself is a Seventh Day Adventist. He argues that Sunday observance, as opposed to seventh day observance, did not arise in the Jerusalem church, which practiced seventh day Sabbath observance until the second destruction of the city in A.D. 135. Sunday observance, he suggests, arose in Rome during the reign of Hadrian (A.D. 117–135) when Roman repression of the Jews prompted the church to adopt policies of deliberate differentiation. Sunday was chosen, as opposed to some other day, because Christians could easily adopt the symbolism of the powerful pagan Sun cults and Christianize them.

Bacchiocchi's book has exerted vast influence due to several factors. In the first place, it is well written and easy to follow, even though it is extensively documented. On the whole it has received very positive reviews. Moreover, because the work has been marketed well (inexpensive price and extensive advertising among clergy), it had sold, by June 1979, in the vicinity of 42,000 copies.¹⁰ Bacchiocchi has also popularized his findings in several places, most recently in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, where his article sparked voluminous correspondence.¹¹ Most important of all, he has established links with the LDOS. As a Seventh Day Adventist, Bacchiocchi obviously cannot agree with the LDOS people on every point, but he did give the ninetieth-anniversary address to the LDOS (14 February 1979), outlining possible areas of cooperation. He insisted, among other things, that "a proper observance of God's holy day reflects a healthy relationship with God, while disregard for it bespeaks of spiritual decline or even death."¹²

Interest in these matters, then, is not restricted to academic circles. Two of the contributors to this book have been involved with dialogues between Christians and Jews, and in each instance the Sabbath/Sunday question quickly arose. Moreover, even within Christendom, the diversity of perspectives is a deeply divisive thing. We shall do well to continue probing as honestly and industriously as possible all areas of dispute, in the hope of narrowing some differences of opinion or at least of establishing the reasons for those differences.

Fairly early in our study we came to several conclusions that were reinforced as time went by, and that set our direction apart from much recent

investigation. This confirmed that another book was needed. This introduction is not the place to set out our conclusions, nor to detail the contributions that we hope this volume will make; but it may be worth listing some of the arguments and conclusions of previous study with which we have come to disagree.

First, we are not persuaded that the New Testament unambiguously develops a "transfer theology," according to which the Sabbath moves from the seventh day to the first day of the week. We are not persuaded that Sabbath keeping is presented in the Old Testament as the norm from the time of creation onward. Nor are we persuaded that the New Testament develops patterns of continuity and discontinuity on the basis of moral/civil/ceremonial distinctions. However useful and accurate such categories may be, it is anachronistic to think that any New Testament writer adopted them as the basis for his distinctions between the Old Testament and the gospel of Christ. We are also not persuaded that Sunday observance arose only in the second century A.D. We think, however, that although Sunday worship arose in New Testament times, it was not perceived as a Christian *Sabbath*. We disagree profoundly with historical reconstructions of the patristic period that read out from isolated and ambiguous expressions massive theological schemes that in reality developed only much later.

Yet to say so many negative things is to run the risk of giving a false impression. We have not written in order to demolish the theories of others. Indeed, as a matter of policy we have focused attention on primary sources; we refute opposing positions only when it is necessary to do so in order to establish our own position. Our final chapter takes considerable pains to be as positive and synthetic as possible. We want to provide a comprehensive guide to the interpretation of the sources for Christian readers.

THE SCOPE OF THIS INVESTIGATION

One of the reasons why the Sabbath/Sunday question continues to arouse such interest is that it impinges on so many areas of study. The same fact means that any competent discussion must be painfully broad if it is to prove satisfying.

In the first place, the Sabbath/Sunday question demands close study of numerous passages in both Testaments of the canon—so numerous, in fact, that broad knowledge of biblical theology is indispensable. Inevitably, exegetical discussion of these passages brings up questions of authenticity, dependence, text, and the like. Moreover, broad areas of history outside the canon must also be explored, including both the intertestamental period and the history of the church. The study of church history dissipates false notions,

exposes anachronisms, and adds depth by revealing that the church has always wrestled with these questions. Our modern options are so often the same as those of earlier but forgotten periods. Although it is not on the same level as Scripture, church history has the salutary effect of promoting humility.

The Sabbath/Sunday question also touches many areas of theological study. I have already mentioned creation ordinance and moral law. Other areas include the relationship between the Old Testament and the New, the relationship among the covenants, the proper understanding of salvation history, the nature of prophecy and fulfillment, biblical patterns of eschatology, and the normativeness of any particular biblical law.

Implicitly, of course, because the Sabbath/Sunday question touches the relationship between the Testaments, it also involves ethics. In that sense, the Sabbath/Sunday question is a test case, an important paradigm for broader theological and ethical reflection. One cannot consider these things in depth without asking such questions as these: On what basis should Christians adopt or reject Old Testament laws concerning slavery? On what basis should one applaud the insistence on justice in Deuteronomy and Amos, but declare invalid the racial segregation of Nehemiah and Malachi?

Small wonder, then, that the Sabbath/Sunday question continues to attract attention. It is one of the most difficult areas in the study of the relationship between the Testaments, and in the history of the development of doctrine. If it is handled rightly, however, our further study of this question ought to provide a synthesis that will at least offer a basic model for theological and ethical reflections.

We are under no illusions that our study will convince everyone, but in addition to the specific reconstruction we propose in these pages, we would like to convince as many as possible that the view of Joseph Hart (1712–1768), expressed in quaint poetry, is to be applauded for its forbearance and catholicity:

Some Christians to the Lord regard a day,
And others to the Lord regard it not;
Now, though these seem to choose a different way,
Yet both, at last, to one same point are brought.

He that regards the day will reason thus—
"This glorious day our Saviour and our King
Perform'd some mighty act of love for us;
Observe the time in mem'ry of the thing."

Thus he to Jesus points his kind intent,
And offers prayers and praises in his name;
As to the Lord above his love is meant,
The Lord accepts it; and who dare to blame?

For, though the shell indeed is not the meat,
 'Tis not rejected when the meat's within;
 Though superstition is a vain conceit,
 Commemoration surely is no sin.
 He also, that to days has no regard,
 The shadows only for the substance quits;
 Towards the Saviour's presence presses hard,
 And outward things through eagerness omits.
 For warmly to himself he thus reflects—
 "My Lord alone I count my chiefest good;
 All empty forms my craving soul rejects,
 And seeks the solid riches of his blood.
 "All days and times I place my sole delight
 In him, the only object of my care;
 External shows for his dear sake I slight,
 Lest ought but Jesus my respect should share."
 Let not th' observer, therefore, entertain
 Against his brother any secret grudge;
 Nor let the non-observer call him vain;
 But use his freedom, and forbear to judge.
 Thus both may bring their motives to the test;
 Our condescending Lord will both approve.
 Let each pursue the way that likes him best;
 He cannot walk amiss, that walks in love.

THE METHOD OF THIS INVESTIGATION

It is important at the outset to insist that this work is not a symposium in the ordinary sense of that word; it is a unified, cooperative investigation. The contributing scholars have written in areas of their special competence and submitted their work to the scrutiny of their colleagues. Most of the essays have been rewritten three times; all have been edited to ensure proper integration. Chapters 4 and 5 necessarily overlap a little, and the final chapter, a synthesis, necessarily reviews earlier findings. The argument is progressive and sustained despite the plurality of authors. In the earliest stages, the papers were circulated and there were sessions in which the contributors discussed and criticized each other's work by the hour. The synthesis forged on the anvil of those discussions is well tempered.

This is not to say that each contributor agrees with every other contributor in all details; close reading will reveal minor differences of opinion. Each writer is responsible only for his own work. Nevertheless, the argument is based on close study of the manuscripts, topics, and periods indicated by the chapter headings, and the results of this study converge in a single reconstruction.

Some may wish we had focused more attention on a particular subject; for example, the intertestamental period or the rise of seventh-day groups in the Christian era. We have had to make decisions about what to include and what to exclude; these decisions reflect partly our own interests, but also our judgment concerning where proper emphasis should be laid. Similarly, regarding bibliography and interaction with secondary literature, we have tried to be broadly (but not exhaustively) comprehensive; we have then chosen to interact in detail with representative works and positions. Any other approach would have unnecessarily lengthened the book.

The result of these methodological priorities and strictures lies in the next eleven chapters.

NOTES

¹W. Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (London: SCM, 1968), first published in German in 1962.

²J. Francke, *Van Sabbat naar Zondag* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1973).

³R. T. Beckwith and W. Stott, *This Is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday in Its Jewish and Early Christian Setting* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1978).

⁴Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord's Day: A Theological Guide to the Christian Day of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

⁵F. N. Lee, *The Covenantal Sabbath* (London: LDOS, 1969).

⁶C. S. Mosna, *Storia della domenica dalle origini fino agli inizi del V Secolo* (Rome: Libreria editrice dell'Università gregoriana, 1969).

⁷N.-E. A. Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1972).

⁸N. Negretti, *Il Settimo Giorno: Indagine critico-teologica delle tradizioni presacerdotali e sacerdotali circa il sabato biblico* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1972).

⁹S. Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1977). Dr. Bacchiocchi is about to publish a companion volume on the theology of the Sabbath.

¹⁰Dr. Bacchiocchi told me this in a private telephone conversation.

¹¹S. Bacchiocchi, "How It Came About: From Saturday to Sunday," *BAR* 4/3 (1978): 32-40.

¹²Dr. Bacchiocchi graciously provided me with a copy of his paper, which was subsequently published in "The Sabbath Sentinel," April, 1979.