
For many years it had been recognized among those who have worked closely on this subject that Seventh-Day Adventist literature in this area is not only partisan but also lacking in scholarly acumen—with perhaps the single exception of the major work by J. N. Andrews and L. R. Conradi, History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week (1912). The generalization no longer holds: Not only do we have the work by Samuele Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath to Sunday (1977), but now also the work under review.

Most of the contributors are connected with Andrews University in Michigan or its associated Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary. After a brief introduction by the editor the book offers 16 chapters divided into three general areas. The first six chapters deal with Sabbath and Sunday in the Biblical period: Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Sabbath in the
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The central arguments of Seventh-Day Adventists regarding the Sabbath are well known. The Sabbath law is seen as a permanently binding moral requirement that cannot be weakened in any way, even to a principal “one day in seven” that might allow for the “transfer theology” especially prominent in many strands of Protestantism—a theology that argues for the legitimacy of calling Sunday the Christian Sabbath. A close reading of in-house debates recorded in A.U.S.S in recent years, however, shows quite a number of disagreements among Seventh-Day Adventists regarding a number of technical points. For instance, Bacchiocchi’s reconstruction of the rise of Sunday observance in early Christianity is certainly not shared by all Adventists. The book’s sweep from Biblical materials right through to historical and theological assessments gives a flavor of comprehensiveness; but, correspondingly, a number of critical issues are handled very lightly or not at all. In many of the chapters on various historical periods and locations in the Church, for instance, the authors regularly speak of the “majority” view and the “minority” view at the time, without indicating whether the “minority” view, with which they are almost always in sympathy, was a major option or something reserved for the fringe. The point is not academic: In almost any period one can find fringe groups that believe all sorts of interesting and strange things. But it is misleading to argue that their opinions represent one of the genuine historical options unless one establishes the relative importance of the minority opinion in each of the eras under consideration.

The Biblical material receives rather short shrift, especially the NT. Probably the weakest part of this book is the failure to consider how the canon is put together on central issues. It is probably impossible to talk persuasively about the Sabbath without dealing with the relationships between law and grace, between prophecy and fulfillment, between type and antitype, and much more. There is no attempt to address these matters, and only the briefest consideration is given to Hebrews 4. The central defense of the Adventist position on Rom 14:5-6 is essentially ad hoc rather than exegetical, historical or theological: “Who could have a divine commandment before him and say to others: ‘You can treat that commandment as you please; it really makes no difference whether you keep it or not?’ No apostle could conduct such an argument. And probably no man would be more surprised with that interpretation than Paul himself, who had utmost respect for the Decalogue, God’s law, which is ‘holy, and just, and good’ (chap. 7:12)” (p. 335). There is no even-handed attempt to sort out the bases on which earliest Christianity did not keep some laws. The most common explanation given in Protestantism bases itself on the tripartite distinction

In his acknowledgements Dennison states that the book is a revision of his Th.M. thesis at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1973. The format of the book makes this clear also; it is offset printing from a typed manuscript.

The book is divided into chapters by periods of doctrinal development. Each period is discussed to highlight the developing contrast between Puritans and the established Church regarding Sabbath observance. In the earliest period, 1532-1603, the two groups agreed on the need for enforcing Sabbath observance but disagreed about the basis for such observance. The prelate hoped Sabbath observance would increase attendance at divine service, while the Puritan was also concerned about desecration of the Sabbath through commerce and frolics, "a relic of popery and an offense to God" (p. 22). Later in the period Puritans such as Perkins, Greenham and Bownd asserted that Sabbath observance was a creation ordinance that obligated one day in seven for divine service in worship and deeds of mercy. Bownd's classic work detailing this and other aspects of the Puritan view of the Sabbath was denounced by members of the establishment. Many of the prelatic party believed Sabbath observance was an ordinance of the Church and that other holy days might also be designated by the Church. The chapter on the first period ends with a paradoxical quotation from Richard Hooker, "perfecter of the via media" (p. 42). Hooker seems to side with the Puritan view of the Sabbath rather than with the prelates.

In the second period, 1603-1633, differences between the parties became more polarized. Differences centered on three points: "(1) Whether the keeping of one day in seven is part of God's moral law; (2) Whether the Lord's day is established jure divino; (3) Whether the church may change the day" (p. 47). The Puritans generally affirmed the first two of these points and denied the third, believing that God inspired the apostles relative to point two. The establishment took the opposite position on each issue. Then in 1617 King James I issued the famous Declaration of Lawful Sports that defended the right of humble Englishmen to engage in games and recreation on the Sabbath. This offended Puritans greatly. The offense was heightened later under Charles I and Archbishop William Laud. Differences between the parties hardened as the monarchy insisted on divine right and...