

BOOK REVIEWS

Bacchiocchi, Samuele. *The Sabbath under Crossfire: A Biblical Analysis of Recent Sabbath/Sunday Developments*. Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1999. 303 pp.

Samuele Bacchiocchi is well known among theologians and serious Bible students in the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church to which he belongs, and in other denominations as well, as a dedicated and skilled Bible scholar, lecturer, and writer. He is perhaps best known for his doctoral dissertation and subsequent writings on the seventh-day Sabbath and the historical change in the Christian Church from observance of the seventh day to observance of Sunday. Recent debates concerning the Sabbath, in which he has been deeply involved, have gained wide attention.

Two major events provided Bacchiocchi with much of the motivation and material for writing *The Sabbath under Crossfire*. The first was the pastoral letter *Dies Domini* issued by Pope John Paul II on 31 May 1998. The second was a televised discussion on 15 June 1998 and subsequent debates on radio and the internet between Bacchiocchi and Dale Ratzlaff, a former SDA pastor who has come to believe that the Sabbath was an “Old Covenant” institution abolished by Christ on the cross. The book is divided into seven chapters.

In his first chapter, Bacchiocchi presents a number of quotations from Pope John Paul’s encyclical which lead him to the conclusion that the latter demonstrates a significant change in the basis upon which the Roman Catholic Church regards Sunday observance as obligatory. Prior to the letter, according to Bacchiocchi, Catholic theologians had generally held that Christ had given the Church authority to establish holy days and festivals and that the Church had changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday by virtue of that authority. Usually, no scriptural command was given as a direct basis for Sunday observance. John Paul now asserts, however, that Sunday observance is the post-resurrection fulfillment of the command in the Decalogue to remember to keep holy the Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week.

Bacchiocchi’s response to the above assertion is, in the opinion of this reviewer, biblically sound, well-reasoned, and well-balanced—an excellent response. Those who believe in observance of the seventh-day Sabbath will certainly agree, and may regard this chapter alone as making the book well worth its purchase price. Those

who uphold Sunday-sacredness as a fulfillment of the Sabbath command will undoubtedly find it challenging.

Bacchiocchi's second chapter deals with the question of whether the Sabbath was, from its very beginning, creational or ceremonial. In it he musters significant biblical evidence in support of the former position. Like the first chapter, this chapter is well written, which is typical of most of Bacchiocchi's published materials on Sabbath/Sunday issues.

The first part of Bacchiocchi's response to Dale Ratzlaff and other former Sabbath-keepers is presented in chapter III. Against the claim that the Ten Commandments (including the Sabbath commandment) constituted the Old Covenant, that they were "nailed to the cross," and that "New Covenant Christians" therefore need not observe the Sabbath, Bacchiocchi argues that it was the record of human sins, not the Law, which was nailed to the cross. Against Ratzlaff's emphasis on discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants, he points to significant areas of continuity. One such area he seeks to establish is that the New Covenant, as well as the Old, is based on the "Moral Law" of the Ten Commandments.

Bacchiocchi presents many good points in chapter III, but the chapter as a whole is not, in my opinion, his best. When he cites Heb 8 in discussing the Old and New Covenants, he gives little attention to the very significant use the author of Hebrews makes of Jer 31:31-34, although this is briefly mentioned in a later chapter. A thorough biblical study of the covenants, and a careful comparison of his views point-by-point with those of Ratzlaff and similar "New Covenant Christians," can hardly be done effectively in one short chapter. The subject deserves much more.

Chapter IV addresses the relationship between the Savior and the Sabbath. The first part deals with Christ and the Sabbath in the OT. Curiously, it does not seem to apply the NT understanding of Christ's role in creation (e.g., John 14:1-3,14; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:2) to His relationship with the Sabbath at creation, and seems generally strained in trying to establish any significant OT connection between Christ and the Sabbath. Like much of chapter III, it does not seem to represent Bacchiocchi's best writing. The latter part of the chapter is on the relationship between Christ and the Sabbath in the NT and is much more substantive and convincing.

Bacchiocchi's discussion in chapter V on "Paul and the Law" focuses on a number of Pauline "problem" passages which are often interpreted as presenting a very negative attitude toward the Law. This chapter is, for the most part, very good. Even a few SDA theologians, however, may differ with his interpretation of some passages. For instance, they may believe he is correct in disagreeing with Ratzlaff's insistence that when Paul declared Christians to be not "under law" but "under grace" (Rom 6:14), he meant that the Law is no longer to serve as a guide for Christian behavior. But they may also believe that Bacchiocchi's apparent agreement with the traditional SDA interpretation of "under law" as "under the *condemnation* of the law" does not represent the most carefully thought out or the best understanding of the passage.

Chapter VI addresses Pauline “problem texts” which relate directly to the Sabbath. Part 1 deals with Col 2:14-17, and is, in my opinion, very well written and convincing. The same may be said for part 2, which considers the Sabbath in Romans and Galatians.

Part 1 of the final chapter provides interesting and helpful information concerning a number of individuals and groups who have rediscovered the biblical meaning and spirit of Sabbath observance and have endeavored to apply it to the observance of Sunday. Even more interesting and encouraging for SDAs, part 2 identifies some former Sunday-keeping groups which have rediscovered the significance and meaning of the biblical seventh-day Sabbath and have begun to observe it.

The Sabbath under Crossfire is somewhat repetitious in places. Many theologians, even some among SDAs, may not regard it as equally valid or valuable in all chapters and sections. It is, however, and will undoubtedly continue to be, a very important, useful, and helpful book in ongoing discussions concerning Sabbath/Sunday issues and observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. For this, its author is to be commended.

Ronald D. Bissell

Bray, Gerald. *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present*. Downers Grove, IL, and Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1996. 608 pp.

Gerald Bray writes as Anglican Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama. Formerly, he served as Lecturer in Christian Doctrine at Oak Hill College, London. In this book, he has, perhaps, achieved his magnum opus. To my knowledge, this is the first thorough historical survey of biblical interpretation that carefully analyzes the impact of hermeneutical methods on Christian tradition and theology at every stage of Christian history.

Bray's survey is well organized and readable, on the whole. Though not so indicated in the table of contents, each historical period follows the same structure: an introduction to the period and its particular methods of biblical interpretation; a list of the interpreters and their work, giving a brief summary of the major contributions of each; a summary of the major issues that were especially relevant to the period; an analysis of the most representative methods of interpretation; a bibliography; and finally, a case study selected to demonstrate the hermeneutical methods typical of the period. This organization proves most helpful in clearly communicating the distinctive features of each period, though there is some redundancy or overlap between different sections. Only the sections on the interpreters are somewhat laborious and poorly organized in terms of indicating divisions. The problem is due largely to the fact that some minor group headings are set in exactly the same style as the units that fall under them, making it difficult at