

Strand, Kenneth A., ed. *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*. Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982. 391 pp. \$19.95.

This symposium volume contains essays by nineteen authors, most of them associated with Andrews University, on the general theme of the sabbath. Its chapters are grouped in three sections and are followed by eight appendices, a glossary, and two indices. Due to the considerable variety among the various chapters in both method and approach to the subject, specific comments will be made about each contribution, followed by some concluding assessment of the whole volume.

The biblical section opens with an incisive chapter on the sabbath in the Pentateuch (G. F. Hasel), where the "ideas, themes, and motifs" of the sabbath come to clearest expression (p. 21). Hence, the treatment is largely theological in nature, and despite certain disclaimers, it follows quite closely the findings of a number of theological treatments of the sabbath. On the very difficult question of the early history of sabbath observance, Hasel distances himself (and rightly so, I believe) from the array of recent and current hypotheses. The chapter on the prophetic and historical books (G. F. Hasel and W. G. C. Murdoch) takes the form of a survey of sabbath texts with brief exegetical comments.

Two chapters on the sabbath in "sectarian" and rabbinic Judaism (Sakae Kubo and R. M. Johnston) discuss the sabbath in interaction with a difficult and hostile world. The ensuing tension between strict sabbath rules and leniency in sabbath observance introduced by the pressures of practical life, evokes some sympathy for the Jews of that period, and places their religion in a more favorable light than is familiar to readers of the sabbath conflicts in the gospels. The following two chapters, dealing with sabbath and Sunday in the NT (W. F. Specht), show that the sabbath was observed in the first Christian century as a day of rest and of worship by Jesus and his followers, whereas Sunday was not. This is essentially a historical argument. Theologically speaking, Specht holds that Jesus disclosed the "purpose of the original [sabbath] institution" (p. 101), that he did not abolish it, nor liberate his followers from the sabbath's obligations (p. 105). On this score, one misses an exegetical treatment of much-debated passages such as Rom 14:5 and Col 2:16f. (see, however, Appendices C and D).

The second, historical section of the book traces two themes from the second to the nineteenth century A.D., namely, the emergence and dominance of Sunday observance in Christianity and the scattered and struggling remnants of sabbath (Saturday) observance among isolated Christian groups. The first chapter on early Christianity (Samuele Bacchicchi) traces the displacement of sabbath observance by Sunday observance to anti-Jewish

sentiments among Christians in Rome at the time of the Jewish persecutions, and to the already-existing sun cult. Additional factors contributing to this change (Christ's resurrection, annual Easter-Sunday celebrations, the Easter-to-Pentecost season) are introduced in Appendix B (K. A. Strand), and further information on the complexities of the planetary week, sun day worship, etc., appears in Appendix A (S. D. Waterhouse).

The second theme (remnants of Christian seventh-day sabbath observance) is considered in the two following chapters (W. K. Vyhmeister). Evidence of Saturday-Sunday (two-day) observance is well known in early eastern Christian churches (see also Appendix B), and there is even scattered evidence of Sabbath (Saturday) only observance. However, due to the polemical nature of many of the sources, it is not always clear if observance of Saturday is motivated by latent Jewish influence (p. 157) or renewed Jewish influence (p. 161), or whether it is the result of indigenous Christian considerations of the Bible and of theology (pp. 181-182).

The chapter on the medieval period (Daniel Augsburg) shows the triumph of Sunday observance as a civil and ecclesiastical institution, undergirded by a "sabbath" theology. Faint echoes are heard of seventh-day sabbath observance, though not among the Waldenses (pp. 207-208). The Reformation era (K. A. Strand) confirmed the observance of Sunday, but the Reformers were pressured to justify retaining an ecclesiastical institution while opposing ecclesiastical authority. This pressure led some Reformers to view Sunday observance as a matter of civil ordinance with spiritual overtones gained from the sabbath institution (pp. 218-219), whereas other (radical) Reformers apparently reverted to a seventh-day-sabbath practice; in some instances, but not generally, this was under Jewish influence (pp. 220-225).

The Puritans (W. B. Douglas) developed a strong biblical covenant theology, which included considerations of the sabbath, in their effort to advance a struggling English reformation. On the matter of sabbath observance, a majority—with the help of the so-called "transfer theory" (i.e., what the Bible says about the sabbath really applies to the Christian Sunday)—developed a vigorous sabbath theology and praxis.

A minority (considered to be significant, pp. 237-239) adopted Saturday-sabbath observance, for which they were persecuted. They also formed the first Christian-sabbath-observing communities in the New World (pp. 240-241).

This brings us to the last chapter in the historical section, dealing with the New World (R. F. Cottrell). It differs from the rest of the material by ignoring the majority (Sundaykeepers) and focusing exclusively on the minority (Saturday observers): primarily, but not exclusively, the Seventh-day Adventists. In tracing the early development and growing success of

sabbath observers among New-World Christians, the unusual thesis is formulated (p. 256) that a direct relationship exists between membership growth and the combination of sabbath observance and advent faith. One suspects that other factors played a role as well.

The third section of the volume, dealing with sabbath theology, is disproportionately short, consisting of only three chapters. The sabbath in modern Jewish theology (Roy Branson) portrays the struggle of Judaism with the sabbath institution in a secular world. Is the sabbath ultimately an expression of God's absolute will, or is it rather a contribution to human civilization—or better yet, is it an enrichment of human experience? This divergence, which is said to experience a new convergence, is mild compared with that of contemporary Christian theologies of the sabbath (H. K. LaRondelle). The latter is further exacerbated by a distinction between Christian interpreters who treat the sabbath theologically while ignoring its specific legal and temporal requirements (referred to as radical-critical and neo-orthodox approaches) and evangelical interpreters whose theological energies are exhausted by discussions of the legal and temporal requirements of the "sabbath." This peculiar situation may explain the fact that the last chapter, "Reflections on a Theology of the Sabbath" (Raoul Dederen), seems to find more affinity among the work of so-called critical theologians than among the evangelicals. However, these reflections are ultimately biblically based, with the result that the last chapter returns us repeatedly to the themes of the first chapter, though in a somewhat abbreviated way.

Some of the appendices treat peripheral matters, others elaborate on certain chapters, almost to the point of meriting inclusion among them. The treatment of Rom 14:5f., Col 2:16f., and Heb 4:4-9 (Appendices C, D, and E) is probably too brief to satisfy some readers and would probably have benefited from inclusion in the main part of the volume.

Meaningful detailed assessments of the conclusions of a volume of this scope are difficult, but it may be possible to ask in a general way about the degree to which it has reached its objectives. According to the preface, the book was designed to deal "comprehensively with the two main days of Christian worship" (p. 15). The title of the book, on the other hand, speaks only of the sabbath, and that, it would seem, is more accurate, for it really is a book written in defense of sabbath (Saturday) observance. Thus, it begins with the seventh-day sabbath, traces its confrontation with the first day, records its almost total disappearance during the medieval period, and recounts its re-emergence among the radical Reformers, Puritans, Baptists, and finally, Seventh-day Adventists. Its argument in favor of the sabbath observance is essentially historical in nature, namely, (1) that the seventh-day sabbath was the original day of rest and worship; (2) that its change to Sunday was ecclesiastically, not biblically, motivated;

(3) that therefore it was remembered by non-conformist church communities throughout the history of Christianity; and (4) that it has been reaffirmed by biblically oriented Seventh-day Adventists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Seen this way, the book may be compared and contrasted to D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (reviewed on pp. 177-182, above). This latter volume, of course, defends Sunday observance for Christians, and it does so on the basis of the same history of sabbath-Sunday that we have just reviewed, but its argument is essentially theological in nature, namely, that the change from sabbath to Sunday is justified, though not mandated, by the Christian gospel.

However, since Christianity is a historical religion that values its teachings by biblical and historical judgments, the first volume (edited by Strand) is the more persuasive: The defense of the sabbath (Saturday) observance has Scripture and history on its side. This second volume, in defense of Sunday, must argue theologically so as to bend the development from sabbath to Sunday in its favor, for there simply is no biblical injunction to Sunday observance that parallels the biblical injunction to sabbath observance.

However, the first volume, under review here, may have taken this second theological argument too lightly, because the sabbath observance that it defends on historical grounds must ultimately be seen as thoroughly Christian, not Jewish, in nature. Yet, it is recognized repeatedly that lingering sabbath observance among Christians was frequently motivated by latent Jewish influences. This could lead to the suggestion that the sabbath eventually lost out to Sunday, or nearly so, because it lacked persuasive, convincing, Christian theological support. Therefore, a defense of Christian sabbath (Saturday) observance should give serious consideration to the matters of law, Judaism, new covenant, faith, and certain crucial NT passages such as Rom 14:5f. and Col 2:16f.

In other words, recent Christian sabbath theology has been based essentially on the OT and perhaps on the Gospels, and it has been cited as effectively by defenders of both sabbath and Sunday observance (the latter, under the so-called "transfer theology"). Much good has come of this, but the question still remains: Can we really have an effective Christian sabbath theology without a Christian sabbath observance? Therefore, when a defense of Sunday observance is based upon a theological assessment of a church-historical event (change from sabbath to Sunday observance), a Christian defense of the sabbath, such as is undertaken here, based essentially upon history, cannot avoid a serious theological assessment of that same event. Such an assessment must be based upon a careful

reading of the total Christian canon of Scripture, OT and NT, if it is to avoid letting the influence of latent Judaism, on the one hand, and of the so-called "transfer theology" on the other hand, prejudice its sabbath theology and observance. This task, it seems to me, is still unfinished, the many excellent and helpful contributions of the present volume notwithstanding. To undertake this task we must produce a Christian theology of the sabbath, a theology that explores both the observance and the spirit of the sabbath, for in the long haul, it seems to me, we shall not be able to retain the latter without taking seriously the former.

Of course, these observations do not detract from the positive contributions of the many excellent chapters and appendices in this new sabbath volume, which the serious student of the sabbath can only welcome.

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