

## Influential Factors Between the Primacy of Roman Church and the Origin of Sunday

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### Abstract

*The debate between the mysterious rise of Sunday observance and the church dominance in Roman empire throughout the Ante-Nicene period appeared as an emerging discourse in regard to the Sabbath adherence. The historical background has been capable of analyzing the supposed relation between two when the Christian beliefs gradually developed. The connection would seem to bring relevant ramifications to today's theological understanding as far as observing the Sabbath or Sunday concerned. The significant factors between the beginning of Sunday and the supremacy of the Roman church appeared to be intertwined and fused in the early church era. While many other events have circulated the social and religious cultures in Rome, the factors below indicate and strengthen the relationship between both church primacy and Sunday origin in history through a documentary research method. The time of the early church in this discussion is delimited around the year 100 up to 313 AD. Though the focus not only touches on one particular reason as to why Sunday replaced Sabbath, the research questions comprise of how the pre-eminence of papal supremacy took place and why the Sunday worship has seemed to alter the Sabbath observance.*

**Keywords:** church, authority, Sunday, Sabbath.

### Introduction

In the post-apostolic era, the Sabbath-keeping was attached to the church primacy because the church determined whether they should have the desertion or adoption of Sabbath observance. One thing to note that, the point of determination came up because of the influence toward the church members. Then, a change to Sunday worship occurred through such a mature presumption.<sup>1</sup> It gave a lot of effects on the lifespan history of Christianity, especially on people's perception toward both

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<sup>1</sup>Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1977), 185.

Sunday worship, Sabbath observance. On another note, the question on the genesis of Sunday worship in early Christianity has produced discrete concerns among the scholarly world around various religious backgrounds as the Sabbath observance was believed since the beginning.

The interpretations and practice of Sabbath observance wield a spectrum between the side that says the fourth commandment is not necessary and significant<sup>2</sup> while the other side says that the meaning of Sabbath has been lost and it must be restored.<sup>3</sup> On one hand, according to Brattston, the ancient evidences of observing Sabbath were unanimous before the third century AD that although there were a few slight differences as to how weekends should be observed, one thing is certain and was uncontroversial: the main day of the week for early Christians to gather and worship was not the seventh-day Saturday Sabbath, but Sunday, which they sometimes called “the first day,” “the eighth day,” or “the Lord's Day.”<sup>4</sup> On another hand, according to Waggoner, that the original Sabbath was the seventh day and not the first is virtually admitted by everyone who argues to uphold the “change” of the day as the Jews kept the seventh day, and were doing so at the time of Christ, is beyond all question. Jesus Christ recognized the day that they observed, was also an undoubted fact. That the same day that the Jews observed is uniformly called the Sabbath, throughout the New Testament, no one who is acquainted with the Scriptures will deny.<sup>5</sup> This dichotomy results the gap that separates the observance of seventh-day Sabbath and Sunday worship.

Though the diverse approaches in such a painstaking circumstance are considered, the subject has appeared to show a clear evidence of the renewed interest in finding adequate answer to the thought-provoking of all the aspects, such as the place, causes, and time of the beginning of the change of day-keeping. The tendency of knowing above stuffs has been to epitomize the initiative and responsibility of the apostles for the abandonment of Sabbath-keeping and the principal institution of Sunday observance in its place. The examination in which the Sunday observance establishment refers to the early era of Christianity after Jesus Christ has died, risen, and ascended to heaven, leaving the disciples in their missionary works in the world.

Bacchiocchi says that “Not only was Sunday worship urged there, but concrete measures were also taken to wean Christians away from any veneration of the Sabbath. These we shall now consider, endeavoring to identify those motives which may have caused such a course of action.”<sup>6</sup> At least, that statement concerning the alteration from Sabbath to Sunday based on the Church of Rome contributes to the historical clarity that something has to be examined in this particular subject. There seems to be different arguments concerning the origin of Sunday observance within the era of post-apostolicity and by the time before Christianity was given legal status in the Roman empire. While there was a sudden authoritative power rising from the same source or place within the history of Christianity, the datum could bring several evident aspects

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<sup>2</sup>Todd D. Bennett, *Scriptural Truth Concerning the Sabbath and Christian Sunday Observance* (Herkimer, New York: Shema Yisrael Publications, 2005), 15.

<sup>3</sup>Sigve Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2009), 24.

<sup>4</sup>David W. T. Brattston, *Sabbath and Sunday Among the Earliest Christians* (Searcy, Arkansas: Resource Publications), 2017, 10.

<sup>5</sup>Ellet J. Waggoner, *Sunday: The Origin of Its Observance* (Scotts Valley, California: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform), 2016, 1.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

needed to answer the curiosity.

### **Methodology**

The study simply used a documentary research method whereby the researcher had opportunities to explore the shreds of evidence from multiple sources of literature. This method is utilized to investigate and identify a set of documents for its historical and social values. The analysis involves the use of documents from different times and contexts as relevant supply materials.

### **Radical Pre-Eminent Primacy of Papacy**

A pursuit to seek the emergence of church primacy could be expected in the early ages of Christianity. By the reality within this contemporary time, the literature reviews have concreted and confirmed its ideas in this matter. The discussion below provides the conditionality that occurs amidst different understandings among some people regarding the idea of pre-eminent church authority as the significant aspects in Sabbath allegations.

In one of his volumes, Schaff says, “The first example of the exercise of a sort of papal authority is found towards the close of the first century in the letter of the Roman bishop, Clement, to the bereaved and distracted church of Corinth.”<sup>7</sup> This statement indicates how the seemingly regular occurrence of ecclesiastical authority in Rome became significant in the early centuries. The prominence of the Roman church was implied by the sort of intimidating tone of the letter that looked for obedience or submission. Clement, the Bishop of Rome (35-99 AD) says, for instance, to the Corinthian church in 80 AD: “If any disobeys what has been said by him [i.e., Christ] through us, let them know that they will involve themselves in no slight transgression or danger.”<sup>8</sup> He again, about the year A.D. 95, wrote a letter to the Corinthian church to settle a dispute that happened within the church and had caused the rift among the church leaders. This fact appealed one to say, “Rome was conscious of its authority and the responsibility which this involved; Corinth also recognized it and bowed to it. Batiffol described this intervention as ‘the Epiphany of the Roman Primacy,’ and he is right.”<sup>9</sup> The church authority in Rome dominated other churches from their personal initiatives and impacted them in such different ways.

Such various gestures have transpired in the Church of Rome as the one that was primarily responsible for liturgical novelty such as Easter Sunday, weekly Sunday worship and even, Sabbath fasting.<sup>10</sup> The Church of Rome already, in this sense, seemed to employ fair authority to influentially govern in the more significant part of Christendom. The prospective power was defined not before, but after the proper establishment. Though the nature of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the Roman Church was not clear enough, the above description at least appeared to be the existing situation in the second century. The supporting statement also came from Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons (130- 202 AD), who describes the Church of Rome as “the very great,

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<sup>7</sup>Philip Schaff, “Letter to the Corinthians 1” *The History of the Christian Church* (vol. 2; Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1889), 157.

<sup>8</sup>The Apostolic Fathers, 78. See <https://www.churchfathers.org/authority-of-the-pope>.

<sup>9</sup>J. Lebreton and J. Zeiller, *The History of the Primitive Church*, (vol. 1; New York: The MacMilan Company, 1949), 413.

<sup>10</sup>Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 207.

the very ancient and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul...For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre-eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere.”<sup>11</sup> Irenaeus recognized Clement’s authority or, in some sense, the influence of the church of Rome. He wrote that “In the time of this Clement...the Church of Rome despatched a most powerful letter to the Corinthians, exhorting them to peace, renewing their faith, and declaring the tradition which it had lately received from the apostles, proclaiming the one God. . .”<sup>12</sup>

Irenaeus also recorded the order of Roman bishops; Clement, Evaristus, Alexander, Sixtus, Telephorus, Hyginus, Pius, Anicetus, Soter, and Eleutherius. He recorded from Clement up to his contemporary time. He said that they “hold the inheritance of the episcopate. In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us.”<sup>13</sup> Schaff anatomizes that this kind of statement from other bishops, like Irenaeus somehow, “places her above the other apostolic churches, to which a precedence is allowed. This is surely to be understood, however, as a precedence only of honor, not of jurisdiction.”<sup>14</sup> The Church of Rome became gradually exceptional among the rest of the churches among the diaspora.

Bacchiocchi, however, notes that “The process of affirmation of the primacy of the Bishop and the Church of Rome in the early Church is difficult to trace, primarily because the sources available report facts or event, but do not define the jurisdictional authority exerted at that time by the Church of Rome.”<sup>15</sup> Hence, one is able to say that the church of Rome first had the primacy over other churches by *de facto* but not by *de jure* yet in that particular time. As the era passed by, they became acknowledged more legitimately. “Among the great bishops of Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome, the Roman bishop combined all the conditions for a primacy, which, from a purely honorary distinction, gradually became the basis of a supremacy of jurisdiction...In the present period we already find the faint beginnings of the papacy, in both its good and its evil features; and with them, too, the first examples of earnest protest against the abuse of its power.”<sup>16</sup>

Schaff even goes further to propose the causes that made the Roman church authoritative to the rest of the Christian churches. The historical influences which favored the ascendancy of the Roman see were because of:

- 1) The high antiquity of the Roman church, which had been honored even by Paul with the essential doctrinal epistle of the New Testament.
- 2) The labors, martyrdom, and burial of Peter and Paul, the two leading apostles.
- 3) The political pre-eminence of that metropolis of the world, which was

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<sup>11</sup>Irenaeus, *ANF*, 2.415-6. In the Latin words, “Ad hanc enim ecclesiam propter (pre-eminent authority) potiore principalitatem/ potentiore principalitatem/ potentior principalitas [different conjectures] necesse est omnem convenier ecclesiam.”

<sup>12</sup>Irenaeus, *ANF*, 3.416.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Schaff, *The History*, 157.

<sup>15</sup>Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 207.

<sup>16</sup>Schaff, *The History*, 156.

destined to rule the European races with the sceptre of the cross, as she had formerly ruled them with the sword.

- 4) The executive wisdom. The catholic, orthodox instinct of the Roman church.

He even added the secondary causes, such as her firmness under persecutions, and her benevolent care for suffering brethren, even in distant places.<sup>17</sup>

### **Birth and Rise of Sunday Worship among Church Fathers**

By saying all the above explanations, the primacy of Roman emerged in such a dramatic way. In the next discussion, the coercive policies and hostile attitudes appearing toward the Jews was part of the dimensions the Church of Rome had. The Roman authorities clarified her severance with Judaism, and it gave birth to the Sunday observance. Any change in the attitude of Christians needs to be explained not solely based on the Roman-Jewish conflict, but also in the light of the connection which Christians had with the Romans and with the Jews. This puzzle would fill the missing part of the bigger picture.

After the papal supremacy gradually came to its development, the emergence of Sunday dominance took place. Norman Gulley asserts that Philo, the Greek philosopher, was instrumental in replacing creation rooted in the earth to an immortality theory rooted in Greek philosophy, and this separated the meaning of the Sabbath from a physical establishment. Philo's Platonic philosophy influenced the church fathers. None of them supported the Sabbath of creation. Accordingly, that diligent venture helped the rise of Sunday to take place. Gulley added that "(1) the Sabbath was downgraded because it was regarded as Jewish rather than as a gift given to all humankind at creation; (2) Greek philosophy disconnected the Sabbath from the physical earth, thus questioning a creation Sabbath; and (3) through Mithraism, the sun god was worshiped and honored by the day of the sun (Sunday)."

Besides the ancient Greek influence, the impact to the early church period was there in the writings of Church Fathers signified the abandonment of Sabbath and the adoration of Sunday in their anti-Judaistic feelings and measures. A few writings of the fathers are taken to represent and exemplify here in focusing on the Church of Rome as the basis of this part. Their negative feelings toward Judaism influenced their thoughts. Bacchiocchi stated that "Though denunciations of Sabbath observance can be found in the writings of Church Fathers from many geographical areas, it is in the Church of Rome that we find evidence of the earliest concrete measures to wean Christians away from veneration of the Sabbath and to urge Sunday observance exclusively."<sup>18</sup>

The writings were circulating to sway the circumstance of the churches. "Literarily, a new wave of anti-Semitic literature surged at that time, undoubtedly reflecting the Roman mood against the Jews. Writers such as Seneca, Persius, Petronius, Quintilian, Martial, Plutarch, Juvenal, and Tacitus, who lived in Rome for most of their professional lives, reviled the Jews racially and culturally. Particularly were the Jewish customs of Sabbath-keeping and circumcision contemptuously

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 156-7.

<sup>18</sup>Bacchiocchi in Kenneth Strand, *Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 137.

derided as examples of degrading superstition.”<sup>19</sup> The examples came from Justin, the Martyr (100-165 AD) who had the frame of mind that circumcision and Sabbath were “a distinguishing mark for the Jews to suffer.” He said that:

- 1) Since “before Moses, there was no need for Sabbaths and festivals, they are not needed now...” (temporary ordinance until Jesus).
- 2) God does not intend the Sabbath should be kept. He himself “does not stop controlling the movement of the universe on that day.”
- 3) In the new dispensation, Christians are to observe a perpetual Sabbath...by abstaining themselves continually from sin.”
- 4) Both are the signs of the unfaithfulness of the Jews...”<sup>20</sup>

In his historical letters, he said “And on the day called Sunday [*Greek words supplied*], all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.”<sup>21</sup> Justin Martyr, writing from Rome, presented the most threatening and structured condemnation of the Sabbath and gave the explicit account of Christian Sunday worship services. He emptied the Sabbath of all its theological importance, treating it only as a temporary ordinance derived from Moses, which God forced solely on the Jews as “a mark to single them out for punishment they so well deserve for their infidelities.”<sup>22</sup> He refers, on the other hand, to Sunday as “the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from death.”<sup>23</sup>

The seeming quaint birth of Sunday observance noted a tangible anti-Judaic political and social climate in Rome. The church married the fact that the Christian community at Rome was likely to be Gentile with an environment in which the Roman Christians distinguished themselves from Jews by overlooking the Jewish day of worship, the Sabbath, and paying attention to Sunday as a day of worship.<sup>24</sup>

### **Relationship between Sunday Worship and Church Authority in the Anti-Semitic Climate**

The attitudes of many Christian authors in the early churches toward the Jews were undermining in the Church of Rome, mainly, because the literature in the second century attacked the Jews socially and theologically. Though it is beyond the scope of the present study to examine all the kinds of literature, the anti-Semitic climate in Rome was vigorously emblazing. Anti-Semitism did not come by accidents. It was the desires of the Christians to be different than the Jews mainly because of the unbelief in Jesus Christ. The Christians had the desires to prevent the dignity of Sabbath as one of the Jewish practices. Bacchiocchi affirms that the practice of fasting on Sabbath was one of the means the Christians attempted to provide the place for Sunday

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Bacchiocchi, *Sabbath in Scripture*, 226.

<sup>21</sup>Justin Martyr, ANF, 1.186.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Robert McIver, “When, Where, and Why did the Change from Sabbath to Sunday Worship Take Place in the Early Church?” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 53 (1), 27.

observance. After distinguishing themselves from the Jews, the Roman Christian attitudes would be the source of Sunday Easter.<sup>25</sup>

On the other book, Bacchiocchi's description of the "anti-Judaism of differentiation" in second-century Christianity has highlighted an essential establishment in the Christian attitudes to the Sabbath. The Church of Rome had "a complex phenomenon, incorporating the Pauline theological concern for the freedom of Gentile Christians from the law, along with the desire for the practical advantages of dissociation from Judaism in the eyes of the Roman authorities, and also an element of sheer anti-Semitism, which was rife in the Roman world."<sup>26</sup> These factors certainly inspired some second-century Christian writers to speak of the Jewish Sabbath with humiliation.

Anti-Judaism exhibited in second-century Christianity went against precisely Jewish Sabbath observance, but it did lead to the recognition of Christian Sunday worship gradually. Contemptuous discussions of the Jewish Sabbath do not usually refer to the Christian Sunday.<sup>27</sup> If Sunday were a new substitute for the Jewish Sabbath, the more far-reaching examination of the superiority of Sunday to the Sabbath is highly needed. In the Roman church, the situation was primarily different than the other Christian churches around. After the supremacy was being embraced, the Sunday worship was being then established there. The Christians were urged to abandon the Sabbath observance. The relationship between the two sides of the same coin is told.

Regarding Sabbath, Christianity generally holds "two views, one that saw the Sabbath as relevant for all human beings, being given at the creation of the race, whereas the other group saw the Sabbath as only relevant to the Jews because it was instituted for that nation alone."<sup>28</sup> Bacchiocchi suggests that the primacy could tell the successful substitution of Sunday for the Sabbath specifically in the second century church of the Church of Rome. For him, it was the authority of the bishop of Rome that influenced the entire church to adopt this new practice. The enactment and acceptance of Sunday as the particular alternative day of worshipping God preceded the ignorance and humiliation of the Sabbath. The assumption now can say that the Roman church adopted some efforts to disregard Sabbath observance as Sunday worship was first made known and imposed.

By that time, some church members who got perplexed, interestingly, chose Sabbath and Sunday to keep and observe. Carson admitted the evidence for the compliance of both days, particularly in the East. However, this view was merely a compromising manner that the church members carried out to preserve the old Sabbath. They retained the Jewish Sabbath, but the Sunday-keeping was also steadily creeping in the church system within individuals.<sup>29</sup> The significant influence of the Church of Rome occurred in the disappearance of the Sabbath worship. It was self-evident that "perhaps in this the example of Rome, which never had any special cult

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<sup>25</sup>Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath Under Crossfire* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Biblical Perspectives, 1999), 227.

<sup>26</sup>R.J. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D.A. Carson, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 257.

<sup>27</sup>Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday," 257-8.

<sup>28</sup>Norman R. Gulley, "The Battle Against the Sabbath and Its End-time Importance." *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5/2 (Autumn 1994): 81.

<sup>29</sup>Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday," 257.

on the Sabbath, must have been influential.”<sup>30</sup> “The Roman church claims not only human but divine right for the papacy, and traces its institution directly to Christ when he assigned to Peter an eminent position in the work of founding his church, against which even the gates of hades shall never prevail.”<sup>31</sup>

The effects of the church supremacy paved the way for the Sunday observance to make the church even greater. The Church of Rome was “Owing to its metropolitan position, it naturally grew in importance and influence with the spread of the Christian religion in the empire.”<sup>32</sup> As its significance in religion became so robust, the church would later appear to be “the only ecclesiastical authority widely recognized and capable of influencing the greater part of Christendom (even though some churches rejected his instructions) to accept new customs or observances.”<sup>33</sup> The authority in which Christ alone deserved it then was entitled to the church. It showed how compelling the womb of papacy since the beginning.

Eventually Gulley exhorts that, “when you have a choice among seven days, the word "seventh" is integral to the choice and cannot be a choice without it. Furthermore, how could the seventh be ceremonial when there were no ceremonial laws when Christ instituted the seventh-day Sabbath in Eden at the end of the creation week and thus prior to the Fall, which introduced the need for ceremonial laws to point to Christ as Redeemer? The Sabbath cannot be separated from God's covenant with humans.”<sup>34</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the overall study in which the findings have been analyzed and scrutinized according to the flow that has been set up. The introductory section talks about the background of why one's curiosity brings this study to find out why the Sunday arose in the same time as the Roman church dominated.

In the second part, the analysis goes to how the radical pre-eminence of Roman church primacy emerged to be real. The well-known bishop, Clement, behaved as if the Roman church above the rest of the churches. Yet, it was not only one-sided conjecture, the Corinthian church, for example, accepted to comply with the superior action of their brethren. Irenaeus, one of the respected bishops, supported the epiphany of the Roman primacy. Several specific reasons made the process of becoming more authoritative for the Church of Rome gradually undeniable.

In the third part, the continuation of this discussion builds the so-called pillar anti-Semitism. It is the instrumental component in the enigmatic, inevitable birth of Sunday observance in the Church of Rome. This pillar stands tall in this focus without neglecting other pillars or reasons why the church started to keep Sunday. The relationship between the pre-eminent Roman church primacy and the mysterious Sunday observance was proved to be closely connected at the end of this chapter, realizing how the papacy came up from this kind of mother's womb.

For the conclusion, the Seventh-day Sabbath could be dearly understood as God's stoppage on the seventh day of the week from doing any human activities based on the creation in the book of Genesis and the ten commandments in the book of

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<sup>30</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath*, 208.

<sup>31</sup>Schaff, *The History*, 155.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>33</sup>Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath*, 211.

<sup>34</sup>Gulley, “The Battle,” 294.



Exodus. The biblical testimonies do not only assure the expressions of God's yearning for being with his creation and granting best things for his own creatures, but also sacrificing himself for them. That understanding was somehow getting lost as the Church of Rome obtained her gradual supremacy and gave birth to the Sunday observance. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross had spherical connection with the Seventh-day Sabbath, as his creation and redemption are its twofold significance.

After the earliest record of Christianity and before the Edict of Milan, when that religion was treated benevolently in the Roman Empire by Constantine, the relationship between both the 'ideas' of Sunday and the pre-eminent church primacy in Rome was closely tied due to the works of literature that circulated the churches. The little 'seeds' of Sunday origin came from the intense efforts to bring separation from the Jewish traditions. That gradual but progressive abandonment has resulted in the Sunday worship. On the other hand, such implicit cognizance for the Church of Rome to be more authoritative among other churches was flourishing in the entire empire. Therefore, this integral relationship was tangible before it met its further development.

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