

Which Pope Made the Change from Sabbath to Sunday Rest?

Michael Scheifler

I saw that the Sabbath commandment was not nailed to the cross. If it was, the other nine commandments were; and we are at liberty to break them all, as well as to break the fourth. I saw that God had not changed the Sabbath, for He never changes. But the pope had changed it from the seventh to the first day of the week; for he was to change times and laws [Daniel 7:25]. – Ellen White, *A word to the Little Flock*, page 18, paragraph 3, and *Early Writings*, page 32.

The pope has changed the day of rest from the seventh to the first day. – Ellen White, *Early Writings*, page 65.

The above quotes have been the subject of a challenge to Adventists on the internet recently. Actually, it is no small matter, as the issue involves a prominent characteristic of Daniel's little horn power, also known in Revelation as the mark of the beast, that stands in direct opposition to the seal of God. Here are excerpts from challenges that have suggested the above statements about a Pope to be error:

Challenge 1 to E. G. White

The Seventh-day Adventist hierarchy, knowing that since White claimed she received this information in a vision from God, and knowing that God could not have provided false information, tried for years to produce proof of a name and date of a Pope that had mandated the change of the Sabbath day. Unfortunately since what ever date that they provide to "prove" when the Sabbath was "changed," it can be shown that communities worshipped regularly on Sunday prior to this date--all the way up to Apostolic Times. Further, no documentation has been found to document that a Pope changed the Sabbath as is specified in this prophesy of Ellen White since the teaching does come from Apostolic Times.

Source: **Ellen White, F.P. (False Prophet)**, by Eric Hall, previously on Mario Derksen's **Catholic Insight** web site, but now deleted.

See also **CINApol Archives** for Eric's article as posted on 4 Feb 1999.

Challenge 2

Ellen White would have defined the term "the pope" differently to Catholics - she would likely have meant someone other than the Apostle Peter, someone who lived much later in Christian history. She should name him, and she does not. See also the Catholic Insight web page **Ellen White, F.P. (False Prophet)** [now deleted] to see how Ellen White prophesied falsely on this matter of the imaginary 4th century change to Sunday.

It is interesting that the SDA Church cannot put a name on the Pope that made the change.

That IS interesting: Certainly it shows that they are prepared to make claims, but can't give details when the claims are questioned by informed questioners.

Source: **Constantine, the Papacy, and the real origins of Sunday** from Stephen Korsman's **Seventh-day Adventism A Catholic + biblical perspective** web site.

Challenge 3

We can PROVE that Ellen White was a false prophet by proving that the Pope (Catholic church) DID NOT change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday! You be the judge!

Source: The Interactive Bible **Sabbath Keepers Refuted**.

Challenge 4

- Ellen G. White's visions of seeing the Pope changing the Sabbath to Sunday. If the Pope indeed changed the Sabbath to Sunday, history should tell us the name of this Pope.
- The Catholic Church Claims changing the Sabbath to Sunday but has never named the Pope that made the change.
- Where is the SDA Church support from history that the Pope changed the Sabbath to Sunday?

Source: **The Pope Nor the Catholic Church Changed Sabbath to Sunday!** by Robert K. Sanders

Adventists have published the documented *facts* on the Pope in question for at least the last *forty years*. The following information amply demonstrates that a Pope did indeed declare a transfer of the Sabbath rest to Sunday:

Pope Sylvester I (314-335 A.D.) Decrees the Transfer of Sabbath Rest to Sunday:

Rabanus Maurus (776-856), abbot of Fulda and later archbishop of Mainz, Germany, was rated one of the greatest theologians of his age and probably the most cultured man of his time, and exceptionally learned in patristics. Besides, he was a zealous defender of the papacy and its teachings. In one of his works, he says,

Pope Sylvester instructed the clergy to keep the *feriae*. And, indeed, from an old custom he called the first day [of the week] the "Lord's [day]," on which the light was made in the beginning and also the resurrection of Christ is celebrated.⁶

Rabanus Maurus does not mean to say that Sylvester was the first man who referred to the days of the week as *feriae* or who first started the observance of Sunday among Christians. He means that, according to the testimony of Roman Catholic writers, Sylvester confirmed those practices and made them official insofar as his church was concerned. Hence Rabanus says elsewhere in his writings:

Pope Sylvester first among the Romans ordered that the names of the days [of the week], which they previously called after the name of their gods, that is, [the day] of the Sun, [the day] of the Moon, [the day] of Mars, [the day] of Mercury, [the day] of Jupiter, [the day] of Venus, [the day] of Saturn, they should call *feriae* thereafter, that is the first *feria*, the second *feria*, the third *feria*, the fourth *feria*, the fifth *feria*, the sixth *feria*, because that in the beginning of Genesis it is written that God said concerning each day: on the first, "Let there be light"; on the second, "Let there be a firmament"; on the third, "Let the earth bring forth verdure"; etc. But he [Sylvester] ordered [them] to call the Sabbath by the ancient term of the law, [to call] the first *feria* the "Lord's day," because on it the Lord rose [from the dead], Moreover, the same pope decreed that the rest of the Sabbath should be transferred rather to the Lord's day [Sunday], in order that on that day we should rest from worldly works for the praise of God.⁷

Note particularly, he says that "the same pope [Sylvester I] decreed that the rest of the Sabbath should be transferred rather to the Lord's day [Sunday]."⁸ According to this statement, he was the first bishop to introduce the idea that the divinely appointed rest of the Sabbath day should be transferred to the first day of the week. This is significant, especially in view of the fact that it was during Sylvester's pontificate that the emperor of Rome [Constantine] issued the first civil laws compelling men to rest from secular labor on Sunday, and that Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, was the first theologian on record to present arguments, allegedly from the Scriptures, that Christ did transfer the rest of the Sabbath day to Sunday.

⁶ Rabanus Maurus, *Liber de Computo* (A book Concerning Computation), Chap. XXVII ("Concerning Festivals"), as translated by the writer from the Latin text in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CVII, col. 682.

⁷ *De Clericorum Institutione* (Concerning the Instruction of the Clergymen), Book II, Chap. XLVI, as translated by the writer from the Latin text in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CVII, col. 361.

⁸ The wording in the Latin text reads: "*Statuit autem idem papa ut otium Sabbati magis in diem Dominicam transferretur, ut ea die a terrenis operibus ad laudandum Deum vacaremus.*"

Source: *Sabbath and Sunday in Early Christianity*, by Robert L. Odom, © 1977 by the Review and Herald Publishing Association (An Adventist publishing house), pages 247-248.

Now the above quotes are, as noted, from **Migne's Patrologia Latina** (MPL), a well known scholarly compilation of the writings of Latin Fathers, a work of 221 volumes, which can be searched online at major universities to confirm the Latin sentence quoted in footnote 8 above,

in which Rabanus Maurus attributes the change to Sunday rest to Pope Sylvester I.

Brepols Publishers have recently reprinted Migne's Patrologia Latina, and **Volume 107** (quoted from above) can be purchased individually for about \$105.00 (91.00 Euros).

De Clericorum Institutione by Rabanus Maurus was published in 1900 in Munich by Dr. Aloisius Knoepfler and is online at Google Books. The text (in Latin) on page 154 from book 2, chapter 46, regarding the transfer of the Sabbath rest to Sunday by Pope Sylvester I. The relevant pages in .gif format: Title page & 152 - Pages 153 & 154.

1765. Week, Names of Days, Decreed Changed by Pope Sylvester (314–335) From Name of Gods

Source: Rabanus Maurus, *De Clericorum Institutione* (On the Institution of the Clergy), bk. 2, chap. 46, in *MPL*, Vol. 107, col. 361. Trans. from the Latin by Frank H. Yost. Used by permission of Mrs. Frank H. Yost.

Sylvester the pope first among the Romans ordered that the names of the days, which before they called according to the names of their own gods, that is (the day) of the sun, of the moon, of Mars, of Mercury, of Venus, of Saturn, they should call *feria* (day of celebration), that is, first feria, second feria, third feria, fourth feria, fifth feria, sixth feria, because in the beginning of Genesis it is written that God had said for each day: first, "Let there be light"; second, "Let there be the firmament"; third, "Let the earth produce living plants", etc. But the Sabbath he commanded they call by the ancient name of the law, and the first feria the Lord's day, because the Lord rose on that day. Moreover the same pope ordered that the rest (*otium*) of the Sabbath would better be transferred to the Lord's day, so that we should leave that day free of worldly works in order to praise God.

Source: *Bible Student's Source Book (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 9)*, edited by Don F. Neufeld and Julia Neuffer, published and © 1962 by the Review and Herald Publishing Association (An Adventist publishing house), Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number 62-9139, entry #1765, page 1078.

The decree by Pope Sylvester I to call the days of the week *feria* was issued in the year 316 A.D. according to *Medii ævi Kalendarium Or, Dates, Charters, and Customs of the Middle Ages, Volume Two*, by Robert Thomas Hampson, published in London by H. K. Causten, 1841, entry on FERIA, pages 137, 138. It was likely this same decree that transferred the Sabbath rest to Sunday.

Bede, the noted English monk and ecclesiastical writer (672-735 A.D.), repeatedly declares that Sylvester attempted to change the pagan names of the days of the week. He says: "But the holy Sylvester ordered them to be called *feriae*, calling the first day the 'Lord's [day]': imitating the Hebrews, who named [them] the first of the week, the second of the week. and so on the others." ¹²

Bede says also in another work: "*Question: Who first taught to observe *feriae*? Answer: Pope Sylvester instructed the clergy to observe *feriae*, to whom, resting only to God, it was allowed*

to engage in no military service or worldly business. ... And indeed because light in the beginning was made on the first day, and the resurrection of Christ [being] celebrated [on it], he called [it] the Lord's [day].' " ¹³

¹² Bede, *De Temporibus*, chap. 4, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol 90, col. 281, author's translation. See also Bede, *De Divisionibus*, chap. 10; *De Temporum Ratione*, chap. 8, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol 90, cols 657-658, 326-332.

¹³ Bede, *De Ratione Computi*, chap. 5, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol 90, col. 584, author's translation.

Source: *Sunday in Roman Paganism*, by Robert Leo Odom, Chapter 14, Sylvester and the Days of the Week, page 197, Copyright © 2003 TEACH Services, Inc. ISBN 1-57258-242-1, Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 2002111504.

Patrologia Latina was first published from 1844 to 1855, so it is evident that long standing historical proof does in fact exist, and that Ellen White (1827-1915) was likely aware that the information was contained in *Patrologia Latina*, though she apparently never cited it (MPL) in her writings. Note that she also knew the bishop of Rome had deemed Sunday to be the Lord's day:

Constantine, while still a heathen, issued a decree enjoining the general observance of Sunday as a public festival throughout the Roman empire. After his conversion, he remained a staunch advocate of Sunday, and his pagan edict was then enforced by him in the interests of his new faith. But the honor shown this day was not as yet sufficient to prevent Christians from regarding the true Sabbath as the holy of the Lord. Another step must be taken; the false Sabbath must be exalted to an equality with the true. A few years after the issue of Constantine's decree, the bishop of Rome conferred on the Sunday the title of Lord's day. Thus the people were gradually led to regard it as possessing a degree of sacredness. Still the original Sabbath was kept. – Ellen White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Volume 4, 1884, pg. 55.

That bishop of Rome was, of course, Sylvester I, as Bede and Rabanus Maurus confirm. A contemporary of Emperor Constantine and Pope Sylvester I., was Eusebius Pamphili 260-341 A.D., Bishop of Cæsarea in Palestine. About 330 A.D. he wrote:

“... and all things whatsoever that it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's day, as more appropriately belonging to it, because it has precedence, and is first in rank, and more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath.” – Eusebius' *Commentary on the Psalms* (Psalm 92, *A Psalm or Song for the Sabbath-day*), in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. XXIII, col. 1171 & 1172, and Bernard de Montfaucon's *Collectio Nova Patrum Et Scriptorum Graecorum* (2 vols., folio, Paris, 1706).

Interestingly enough, it is even boasted on Roman Catholic web sites that Pope Sylvester I made the change to the Sunday Sabbath! The following screen capture is from the **Daily Catholic** web site page for **SUNDAY, volume 11, no. 278, December 31, 2000:**

Then there was this at another Catholic site:

Pope Sylvester I also is known for instituting Sunday as a holy day in memory of the Resurrection, and for creating the "Iron Cross" with a nail from the Holy Cross. He was the first pope to wear the tiara.

St. Sylvester Parish, 695 College Ave., South Milwaukee, Wisconsin, **Who Was St. Sylvester? (archived screen capture)**. St. Sylvester Parish disappeared in a merger of four parishes in July of 2003, and the web site was discontinued.

So while some Roman Catholics were suggesting on the internet that Adventists simply could not prove that a Pope made a change to Sunday, other Roman Catholics were openly proclaiming that Pope Sylvester I had done the deed!

Now I think this is very curious. Surely neither Odom's *Sabbath and Sunday in Early Christianity* or the Adventist's *Bible Student's Source Book* are the source of information for the Catholic web sites, so there must be Catholic source information that credits Pope Sylvester I for decreeing a change to Sunday rest. Perhaps it can be found in a Roman Catholic breviary, since in their liturgical calendar the Latin Church memorializes Pope Sylvester I on December 31st, or perhaps it can be found in a biography or a book on lives of the Saints, which may ultimately lead back to *Patrologia Latina* and Rabanus Maurus.

It should also be noted that Pope Sylvester did not invent Sunday worship, and neither did Emperor Constantine, and Adventists do not make that claim. But, it is evident to everyone that a change did happen to keeping Sunday instead of the Saturday Sabbath. Adventists have been well aware that celebrating the resurrection on Sundays predates the 4th century, though there is no *biblical* proof that the Apostles ever sanctioned a change of the Sabbath to Sunday or practiced it themselves.

On October 21, 2005, Stephen Korsman posted a reply on his blog, the text of which is in the boxes, with my response following.

Michael Scheifler has a "rebuttal" on his website to something I wrote. He claims that the pope who changed the Sabbath to Sunday was Pope Sylvester I.

Actually, I provide historical documentation that states that to be the case.

In light of the teachings of Ellen White, and in light of history – as taught by real historians – this cannot be seen as more than a failed attempt to make the argument seem viable. But it is not.

From Ellen White:

"The 1260 years of papal supremacy began with the establishment of the papacy in A. D. 538, and would therefore terminate on 1798." (Great Controversy, p266, 1888 edition.)

"This period, as stated in the preceding chapters, began with the establishment of the papacy,

A. D. 538, and terminated in 1798. At that time, when the papacy was abolished and the pope was made captive by the French army, the papal power received its deadly wound, and the prediction was fulfilled, 'He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity.' (Great Controversy, p439, 1888 edition)

If the papacy was established in 538 AD (EGW's words were changed in later editions to cover up that mistake) then Sylvester could not have been a pope.

I note that Stephen does not dispute that Sylvester I issued a decree that the rest of the Sabbath would better be transferred to the Lord's day. That is, in effect, a concession that he did. Ellen White stands completely vindicated.

The revision of the cited passages happened in 1911, when new printing plates for *Great Controversy* were produced. Ellen White reviewed and approved all of a number of revisions in the new edition, and the changes are all documented by Adventists today.

While Catholics will claim the papacy was established with Peter, even they will admit that it took centuries for the bishop of Rome to develop a recognized and acknowledged ecclesiastical authority that even approaches that exercised by today's pope (to say nothing of temporal authority). Ellen White was not asserting that the bishop of Rome suddenly appeared from nothing in 538 A.D., rather she was referring to the decree of emperor Justinian declaring the bishop of Rome to be the head of all churches, conferring upon the papacy an official recognition by the state. This official state sanction elevated the dignity of the bishop of Rome above his peers in a way that can be rightly called a cornerstone in the imposing edifice that the papacy became over the succeeding 1260 years known as the dark or middle ages. This formal recognition by civil authority was still considered to be an essential element as recently as 1929, when the Lateran Pacts recognized the Roman Catholic Church as the official state religion, in addition to granting the Vatican diplomatic status as a state.

What is problematic is the impression many people get from EGW's statements that the Sabbath was observed "by all Christians . . . in the first centuries" until "the early part of the fourth century [when] the emperor Constantine issued a decree making Sunday a public holiday." (pp. 52-53) ... The earliest documents mentioning Sunday worship go back to Barnabas in 135 and Justin Martyr in 150. Thus, it is evident that Sunday worship was already established by the middle of the second century. This means that to be historically accurate the term "centuries" should be changed to the singular "century." – End Time Issues, #87

More from Ellen White:

"It was on behalf of Sunday that popery first asserted its arrogant claims; and its first resort to the power of the state was to compel the observance of Sunday as 'the Lord's Day.'" (Great Controversy, p447)

"Royal edicts, general councils, and church ordinances sustained by secular power were the steps by which the pagan festival [day of the Sun] attained its position of honor in the Christian world." (Great Controversy, p574)

And Dr. Bacchiocchi's rebuttal:

Both statements just cited are inaccurate, because the secular power of the state did not influence or compel Christians to adopt Sunday during the second and third centuries. At that time the Roman emperors were rather hostile toward Christianity. They were more interested to suppress Christianity than to support church leaders in their promotion of Sunday worship. The bishop of Rome could not have resorted to "the power of the state to compel the observance of Sunday as 'the Lord's Day.'" Eventually, beginning with the fourth century, some Roman emperors actively supported the agenda of the church, but this was long after the establishment of Sunday observance. – End Time Issues, #87

Doctor Bacchiocchi can be, and is, missing relevant facts:

It is a remarkable fact that the first instance upon record in which the bishop of Rome attempted to rule the Christian church was by AN EDICT IN BEHALF OF SUNDAY. It had been the custom of all the churches to celebrate the passover, but with this difference: that while the eastern churches observed it upon the fourteenth day of the first month, no matter what day of the week this might be, the western churches kept it upon the Sunday following that day; or rather, upon the Sunday following Good Friday. Victor, bishop of Rome, in the year

196,³⁶ took upon him to impose the Roman custom upon all the churches; that is, to compel them to observe the passover upon Sunday. "This bold attempt," says Bower, "we may call the first essay of papal usurpation."³⁷ And Dowling terms it the "earliest instance of Romish assumption."³⁸

Source: *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week*, by J.N. Andrews, Chapter 16, *Origin of First-Day Observance*, copyright 1998, TEACH Services, Inc., ISBN 1-57258-107-7, page 276.

³⁶ Bower's *History of the Popes*, vol. 1. pp. 18, 19; Rose's *Neander*, pp. 188-190; Dowling's *History of Romanism*, book 1, chap. 2. sec. 9.

³⁷ *History of the Popes*, vol. 1. p. 18.

³⁸ *History of Romanism*, heading of page 32.

So I suggest the statement that *"It was on behalf of Sunday that popery first asserted its arrogant claims;"* is referring to Victor's edict imposing Easter Sunday [Note 9 in the appendix also points this out], *"and its first resort to the power of the state was to compel the observance of Sunday as 'the Lord's Day'"* refers, in part, to the civil Sunday law of Constantine. The second quote, which I will extend, points this out:

"Royal edicts, general councils, and church ordinances sustained by secular power were the steps by which the pagan festival [day of the Sun] attained its position of honor in the Christian world. The first public measure enforcing Sunday observance was the law enacted by Constantine. [A. D. 321.] This edict required townspeople to rest on "the venerable day of the sun," but permitted countrymen to continue their agricultural pursuits. Though virtually a heathen statute, it was enforced by the emperor after his nominal acceptance of Christianity."

Emperor Theodosius II, a century later, issued a Sunday law that specifically enforced "the Lord's day" as a Christian day of rest and worship:

"On the following occasions all amusements of the theaters and the circuses shall be denied throughout all cities to the people thereof, and the minds of Christians and of the faithful shall be wholly occupied in the worship of God: namely, on the Lord's day, which is the first day of the whole week, on the Natal Day and Epiphany of Christ, and on the day of Easter and of Pentecost, as long as the vestments that imitate the light of the celestial font attest to the new light of holy baptism; at the time also when the commemoration of the Apostolic Passion, the teacher of all Christianity, is duly celebrated by everyone." (Law of Theodosius II, Feb. 1, 425, in THEODOSIAN CODE 15.5.5, p. 433. Copyright 1952 by Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey.)

Bacchiocchi is presenting a more realistic view of the history of Sunday observance than Ellen White did. No educated historian takes the claim that the pope change the Sabbath seriously. The fact is that Sunday was kept by Christians long before Sylvester, long before Constantine.

Ignatius of Antioch, 107 AD: *let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days of the week.* – Epistle to the Magnesians, chp 9. Ante-Nicene Fathers , vol. 1, pg. 62-63.

The Epistle of Barnabas, 70-120 AD: *Wherefore we Christians keep the eighth day for joy, on which also Jesus arose from the dead and when he appeared ascended into heaven.* – The Epistle of Barnabas, section 15, 100 AD, Ante-Nicene Fathers , vol. 1, pg. 147

Justin Martyr, 150 AD: *But Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day of the week and Jesus our saviour on the same day rose from the dead.* – First apology of Justin, Ch 68

As Bacchiocchi points out in his End Time Issues, #87:

"No Adventist scholar has ever taught or written that Sunday observance began in the fourth century with Constantine. A compelling proof is the symposium *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, produced by 22 Adventist scholars and published by the Review and Herald in 1982. None of the Adventist scholars who contributed to this symposium ever suggest that Sundaykeeping began in the fourth century."

So, Adventism has never denied that Sundaykeeping dates to the second century.

This Pope Sylvester thing is a rather desperate attempt to salvage a claim which should have been abandoned long ago. All it does today is make people laugh at those who suggest it, and when those who believe it realise they have been duped, they will realise that the whole system is based on such misinformation. I didn't think that this is what Adventism wants ... but for some, their traditions seem more important than admitting the facts and moving on to a more productive Christianity.

A rather desperate attempt? Traditions seem more important than admitting the facts?

The fact is that a respected non-Adventist historian documented, before the Adventist denomination was founded, that Sylvester I decreed, in the fourth century, that the Sabbath rest should be transferred to Sunday, and that Sunday should be called the Lord's day. The fact is that Stephen Korsman, and others, said these statements were in error:

I saw that the Sabbath commandment was not nailed to the cross. If it was, the other nine commandments were; and we are at liberty to break them all, as well as to break the fourth. I saw that God had not changed the Sabbath, for He never changes. But the pope had changed it from the seventh to the first day of the week; for he was to change times and laws [Daniel 7:25]. – Ellen White, *A word to the Little Flock*, page 18, paragraph 3, and *Early Writings*, page 32, paragraph 3.

The pope has changed the day of rest from the seventh to the first day. – Ellen White, *Early Writings*, page 65, paragraph 1.

They now have been documented as historical, and a matter of record, *from Roman Catholic sources*.

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