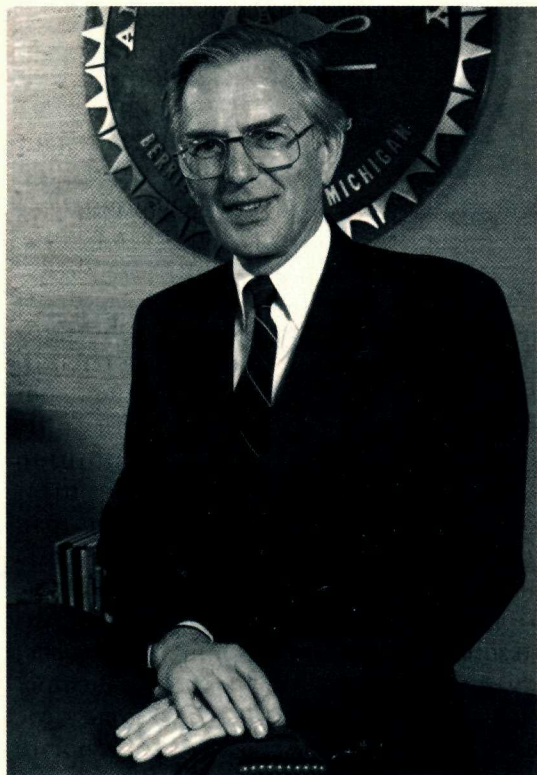


Dr. Niels-Erik Andreassen



A university president pauses to think on the rich values of the Sabbath, "an extraordinary gift" in the busy schedules of modern men.

Niels-Erik Andreassen is president of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. He joined the administration in 1994.

Born in Fredensborg, Denmark, Andreassen lived in Denmark for his first 19 years. He then studied at Newbold College, England, for three years and immigrated to the United States in 1963.

Andreassen holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree in religious studies from Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, which he received in 1971. He earned a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1966 and a Master of Arts degree in biblical studies in 1965 from Andrews University. In 1963, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in religion and history from Newbold College.

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He is a member of the Society of Biblical Literature and the Biblical Research Committee.

Andreassen is married to Demetra Lougani of Athens, Greece. They have one grown son, Michael.

Shabbat Shalom: As president of Andrews University, you have a very busy schedule, so we are very thankful to you for taking this time to pause and reflect with us on the Sabbath. This gesture, in a way, may somehow betray your philosophy on the Sabbath. You have, indeed, written extensively on the Sabbath. This was the topic of your dissertation, and you have also written several articles on the Sabbath. Undoubtedly, this is for you an important pre-occupation. My first question to you is then: Why?

The Sabbath, the seventh day of rest, had an uniqueness to it that could not be paralleled in any way, meaning that it couldn't be traced to any other known historical or sociological practice. It was just there, standing on its own.

Andreasen: It has two roots: One, my interest in the Hebrew Bible as a graduate student drew me into the subject of Israelite and ancient Hebrew worship; and one of the key elements, central themes, in that subject is *Shabbat*—Sabbath. The other one is deeply personal. My parents observed the Sabbath as Seventh-day Adventists, and I grew up experiencing that day of rest from my earliest memories. At the time, my parents lived in the country as a consequence of the war; so the cycle of work and rest, work days and Sabbath, came very close to my childhood experiences.

Shabbat Shalom: So you say that you keep the Sabbath as a Seventh-day Adventist. Perhaps you can say something about it; by the way, why use the designation “seventh day”? Do we perhaps have another day for the Sabbath?

Andreasen: Well, Christians have a problem in that they mostly observe Sunday, which is traditionally referred to as the “first day” of the week.

Shabbat Shalom: It is also called the “Sabbath.”

Andreasen: That is for different reasons, I think (maybe for theological reasons in some cases). But as a result, those Christians who observe the Sabbath on the seventh day need to distinguish themselves from others by counting the days—until the seventh—on which they observe their rest. Most Christians

normally refer to their day of rest, whatever they name it, as the “first day,” the day of resurrection. Seventh-day Adventists are different; they make that difference known in a very clear way by identifying the “seventh day,” the last of the week, as opposed to the first of the week, as their day of rest.

Shabbat Shalom: Is that the only difference?

Andreasen: There are other differences, of course, between Sabbath and Sunday, Sabbathkeeping Christians and Sundaykeeping Christians. But I think, that by common consent, at least where I grew up in Denmark, that was the very clear distinction. My friends who went to school on Saturday on their bicycles and my family that rode its bicycles to church services on that same day crossed paths, so it became a very clear mark of distinction that Sev-

enth-day Adventists observe the Sabbath on the seventh day in distinction from those who observe it on the first.

Shabbat Shalom: Coming from a historical point of view and as a biblical scholar, and perhaps also from an existential point of view, where does the Sabbath come from?

Andreasen: Well, in my judgment, it comes from God. That's not meant as a flippant answer. I did spend some time once looking at the various hypotheses on the origin of the Sabbath, and my own conclusion at that time was that none of them offers a satisfactory explanation, so we have to look in some other direction. I remember some years ago, as a postdoctoral student at Yale, reading an essay published by W. W. Hallo, “Sabbath and New Moon: A Study in the Contrasting Approach.” By looking at Near Eastern texts, Hallo concluded that the Sabbath, the seventh day of rest, had a uniqueness to it that could not be paralleled in any way, meaning that it couldn't be traced to any other known historical or sociological practice. It was just there, standing on its own. So my best judgment on

The most holy experience in our life is that time which comes to us, wherever we are in life . . . without any extraordinary effort required by us except that we . . . make room for the Sabbath to arrive, for God's presence to arrive on that day. We don't even have to go and meet Him—we just stop and open the door, and it sort of rolls in, the way the earth rolls on and the sun passes over us on this day; it just comes to us as we prepare ourselves to receive it.

The Sabbath invites us, I think, to schedule our work in such a way that there can be mini-conclusions after which one then enters the day of rest with peace because there has, in fact, been a conclusion to one's work.

the matter is that of the Bible—the Sabbath comes from God.

Shabbat Shalom: So there is something unique about the Sabbath which perhaps makes the Sabbath relevant for everyone, not just for the people of Israel but also for Christians, for non-Christians, and still today, for modern men and women.

Andreasen: The Scriptures, in tracing the origin of the Sabbath to God Himself, make that connection at first in the story of Creation. The first reference to the Sabbath in the Bible is to God observing it Himself in the story of Creation. That connection gives it a universal appeal as though it belongs to the entire human family—in fact, to the whole of life. (It belongs to all life here on earth, which is what the story of creation is about.) There is an interesting text in the Bible which says that on Sabbath even the animals have rest, as though it somehow extends beyond the human family as well.

Shabbat Shalom: According to the biblical tradition, the Sabbath is then for everyone. But it has become especially important for you, coming from a Seventh-day Adventist family. Could you tell me how important the Sabbath is for Seventh-day Adventists, and what would be the meaning, the specific meaning, of the Sabbath for Seventh-day Adventists?

Andreasen: It is a concept; it is an experience that defines Seventh-day Adventist Christians in a fundamental way. It's a little bit like a marriage, in which partners define each other. The Sabbath is like the spouse of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the child is represented by the Advent of the Messiah, perhaps, if I may speak of it like that. Of all the teachings, practices, and beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Sabbath is perhaps the most defining, along with the Second Advent. It's in our registered name, "Seventh-day Adventist."

Shabbat Shalom: It is very interesting that you are using this comparison. In Judaism, we find the same imagery of the Sabbath being the bride and the child being the Messiah who embodies the hope of Israel. Perhaps to be a little more relevant for today, what are the values of the Sabbath which modern men and women may learn from practicing the Sabbath? Is there something relevant today? Do we still need today to keep the Sabbath?

Andreasen: Yes, of course. There have been many studies on that, and we could talk at great length about the personal, family, social, and even the physical benefits that come to people who seriously observe the Sabbath.

Shabbat Shalom: Because of the rest?

Andreasen: Yes, by just taking a day of rest. But there is something else. The Sabbath, by definition, is the last day. I don't know if we have thought enough about that; it's a day *after* work has been concluded, finished. That's how it was defined in its original reference in Scripture, and I think we per-

The Sabbath is a very generous gift, and observing it requires us to be generous with it toward other people, other life, and even the environment in which we live. I think there is an environmental message in this.

haps have overlooked the invitation of the Sabbath to conclude our work. That doesn't mean there is not work the following week, but it comes to a certain conclusion each week. The Sabbath invites us, I think, to schedule our work in such a way that there can be mini-conclusions after which one then enters the day of rest with peace because there has, in fact, been a conclusion to one's work. The desk has some material on it, but it's nicely stacked in piles, waiting happily until a future time—say Monday morning or something like that. This means that we work toward a goal; we finish it in some fashion and then enter the rest, which brings with it these many personal, physical, social, and

spiritual benefits. The Sabbath would be received and welcomed better this way than if our work was merely stopped by force, as it were. You see, if we stop working, but the work remains in our minds, that would not create a good Sabbath. But working from the first day through the sixth with the goal in mind of achieving a completion—working creatively—prepares us for the Sabbath rest.

Shabbat Shalom: It requires some faith. It, in fact, affects your anguish to achieve, so you have faith that you have achieved.

Andreasen: That is right. And it's also a reward, and there-

It's the one period in the week when we can casually talk about things or not talk about things and listen to things or read things, enjoy splendid silence or active conversation, as though nothing else mattered. And that, to me, is a manifestation of God's presence.

fore, a joy. It's not a requirement that you must not work; it is an invitation to finish the work and then rest.

Shabbat Shalom: What about the social dimension? You have referred to the social aspect of

the Sabbath. How does it affect our social relationships?

Andreasen: As we complete our work and turn away from the burdens, the present burdens of the week, we can then open ourselves to each other. And so we become friends, as it were, and there's no work between us. Most things that separate people are work or work-related problems, tensions: giving or taking orders, giving or receiving instructions. Generally, that is what creates stress in interpersonal relations at home and on the job. If we set all that aside because work has been finished, the barriers between people are eradicated, and they come together.

Shabbat Shalom: What about the animals, if I may ask this question?

Andreasen: I think there is even some humor in the Bible. I mean, the animals—the domestic animals—would not work without a driver behind. But I think the Bible is saying this with a smile on its lips—even the animals need to rest, so don't work them. Here is another reason for observing Sabbath. (They are part of life as well.) Even the earth itself must get a break in the seventh year. The Sabbath is a very generous gift, and observing it requires us to be generous with it toward other people, other life, and even the environment in which we live. I think there is an environmental message in this.

Shabbat Shalom: You've given here a whole theology and philosophy of the Sabbath. May I ask you the question, What for you, personally, is the meaning of the Sabbath, the value of the Sabbath?

Andreasen: At the deepest

level, the Sabbath connects a person with her or his God. I think everything else springs from that. I speak about the most personal, the deepest cases in our life, those things we pray about, which are probably also the things about which we are most honest. I mean prayer is the most honest kind of language we have—when we confess our sins and ask for blessings and so on. It is this connection, the relationship between the human soul and God, which the Sabbath brings about. The result of that, characteristically, is peace. We speak of *shalom*—life, well-being, say when our soul is at peace in the presence of God. And that is, I think, the centerpiece of it all. From it we can move to the relationships with family (parents and children) and other people. The best memories I have of the meaning of the Sabbath probably come from these relationships, though I recognize that the source of those memories is the relationship between God and ourselves, a deeply personal one, when at the end of the sixth day we say: "I have an appointment with God now. This is the time when I meet with God." And the marvelous thing is that

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it doesn't isolate us from life; it brings us into life and fills our life with memories of walking with parents or playing with brothers and sister or even being alone, leisurely thinking . . .

Shabbat Shalom: You are responding to the question I was going to ask you. What do you do on Sabbath to make Sabbath meaningful and really fulfilling?

Andreasen: That's an interesting question, because people often ask, "If you don't work, what do you do? Is the Sabbath a day when you do nothing?" Well, the one thing we don't do is work. And I think in some ways that's how the Sabbath invites us the most to faith, because on this day we say to ourselves and to everyone around us that we will make it; the world will survive; we will live without putting our efforts into toil on that day. God will provide, even with our inattentiveness to work. But then, what do you do when you don't work? You rest. But rest is an activity—it's not the same as sleep. There is another word for that. Rest is an activity; it's a personal activity; it's a physical activity; it's a spiritual and mental activity and a social activity and from this we can spin out the things we do—time to think, to listen, to speak or not to speak, to walk, to observe, to pay attention to many things that we don't ordinarily notice because of work. Most of them are extremely personal. At home, now that our son has left, it's my wife and I observing the Sabbath, and we do enjoy it immensely. It's the one period in the week when we can casually talk about things or not talk about things and listen to things or read things, enjoy splendid silence or active conversation, as though nothing else mattered.

And that, to me, is a manifestation of God's presence.

Shabbat Shalom: You introduce a dimension of graciousness, something which has no necessary purpose; it is simply free, gracious.

Andreasen: And that requires that our relationships with each other, with other people, are equalized, which is another thing that happens on Sabbath. That is, we are not employers and employees, masters or slaves. There are no different ranks on the Sabbath. In the church or synagogue, everyone sits in the same pew, so to speak, and that can happen only because we are

The Sabbath blessings require some Sabbathkeeping! It's as though Sabbathkeeping begins on the first day of work, and it has a lot of rigor to it—working hard, consistently, and deliberately with a goal in mind.

not in a work relationship with each other, something which contributes enormously to the blessings of the Sabbath.

Shabbat Shalom: And you don't think that all these values can be found also on Sunday or any other day?

Andreasen: Well, there is a theological argument and a historical argument in response to that. It did strike me as interesting, as you pointed out, that some people have called Sunday, "Sabbath." And I take that to be an admission that without the spirit and the meaning of the Sabbath, Sunday couldn't have

made it on its own as an alternative day of rest. Why do some call it Sabbath? Why not just call it Sunday? Why introduce that concept of the Sabbath into Sunday? It seems to me, the answer is, as Karl Barth pointed out in one of his enormous volumes, that without the element of Sabbath, Sunday would become a day to finish off the work that wasn't done the previous seven days. Perhaps it would be used entirely for fishing or football. But the Sabbath arrests us and says, "No, no, no, there's a different intention with this day." And serious Sunday keepers have realized that, to the degree that some have actually introduced the name Sabbath and transposed it onto their day to achieve that goal. In one sense, that's the strongest argument in support of the idea that it takes the Sabbath to have a day of rest; and the key, I think, is that it comes as a conclusion, a culmination, of our week of work. That's important.

Shabbat Shalom: Why does this day have to start at sunset on Friday night and finish at sunset on Saturday night? We could have started Sabbath in the morning. Why do we have to start at sunset?

Andreasen: There is a biblical answer, of course, to this question: The Bible explains the beginning of the day that way. So, in a sense, we are saying to each other, we want to be faithful to the word of Scripture in doing that. Even if we had a choice, I mean, if it were a toss-up, in practice we would still choose, as believers, to do it the way in which the Bible explains it ought to be done; and then, of course, we can ask, Is there any good reason for that, or is it helpful to observe it like that? And I think it is very

helpful, because, even with changes in work patterns that have been introduced today by shift work and all sorts of new inventions, nevertheless, our work patterns have remained remarkably traditional. Most people go to work in the morning, and most people end their work at night. It fits. Our whole schedule of life is organized that way, and then we rest by sleeping at night—that is a fundamental principle of our routine—of course, with some notable exceptions. And it happens to fit the routine of the Sabbath remarkably well. At the end of the work comes the rest, and we begin that when the work of the week ends, which is Friday evening. And so I would say first, beginning Sabbath at evening on the sixth day is the instruction given in Scripture. And, secondly, it makes good practical sense, even today, thousands of years after the Sabbath was first introduced.

Shabbat Shalom: Interesting .

. . . that's right. Several years ago, a Jewish professor from Bar Ilan University—a very religious person—visited Andrews University to see how the Seventh-day Adventists were keeping the Sabbath. After his little journey with the Seventh-day Adventists, he was asked, "What is the difference?" He gave a very puzzling answer I would like you to comment on: "Well, you Adventists keep the Sabbath; we celebrate the Sabbath." Is it a criticism? Is this perhaps something which the Seventh-day Adventists could learn from the Jews, or is it something perhaps we've missed? In other words, could

you give us, if there is indeed a reason for that, some advice to help us, Jews and Christians, to keep and at the same to celebrate the Sabbath.

Andreasen: Well, my response would be that Seventh-day Adventist Christians who observe the Sabbath have not figured everything out yet! I can't speak for the Jewish community, and I don't know if all members of that community have figured out what the Sabbath means. But I have suspicions from many friends of mine who are Jewish, that some of them are not so sure what to do with this day, and that some have neglected it altogether. They're struggling

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with it too. So I would accept this comment by saying that we are also struggling with that, but I would take exception to the implication that all Christian Sabbathkeepers are "keeping it" as opposed to "celebrating it." I would characterize my own experience with the Sabbath as more celebration than keeping in a sense of forced activities or inactivity or something like that. I also think in an institution such as this one, which is a Sabbath-observing institution—a Seventh-day Adventist university—institutional constraints and activities sometimes get in the way. How does a family with so many members, thousands of

students, and several hundred faculty and staff members, how does such an institution observe the Sabbath institutionally? This is a home away from home in which thousands of students are attempting to keep Sabbath. That introduces some structure into it, and structure always creates some tensions. So we are trying in a large institution to create as many of the characteristics of Sabbath observance as we can. We don't give assignments; we ask students not to read textbooks; and we close the library to help them remember that; and we think that they get just as good results, perhaps better results, on their exams by doing it that way. But quite apart from that, I would offer this opinion both to ourselves and to our Jewish friends, that perhaps some elements of keeping, along with the elements of worship and celebration, should be combined. Some of that might be a good

thing. The comment has been made, I think by H. H. Rowley in his book on the subject, that without Sabbath worship we would have no Sabbath rest, and vice versa. The Sabbath blessings require some Sabbathkeeping! It's as though Sabbathkeeping begins on the first day of work, and it has a lot of rigor to it—working hard, consistently, and deliberately with a goal in mind. Without that kind of preparatory Sabbath keeping, when the sixth day comes to an end, our work and our office would be in such a mess that there would be little celebration left on the day of rest. I think all of that is part of the "keeping," which is pretty

demanding, so I see a fair bit of rigor in the life of a Sabbath-keeper which then enables that joy and celebration to find their proper place when the day arrives. So, I would maybe like to modify this observation and introduce some deliberate rigor into the life of a Sabbath observer, which is precisely what makes room for the freedom and the joy that come at the end.

Shabbat Shalom: So, I hear that you are referring to the first day of the week in relation to the Sabbath. How, then, would you prepare for the Sabbath?

Andreasen: I actually think of my work in six-day segments. In my particular job, though, many of the assignments I have stretched over months and years. For instance, the university is broken down into quarters or semesters, years and academic segments, long-term strategic planning, and so on. In my personal work, I've always tended to break that down into weekly modules, six-day segments.

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That means that I ask myself when I come to work each week, Of the short-term and long-term projects I have on my desk right now, which one needs to be attended to this week, and how far do I hope to get with it or plan to get with it this week? Then I work toward that so that on Friday my desk is generally the cleanest of all, and things are

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sorted out as much as possible. Emergencies and unusual things happen, but generally speaking, that is how I do it. So, when I do leave the office Friday afternoon, I have this sense not of having finished all of my assignments, but of having completed a segment that I set for myself that week.

Shabbat Shalom: In fact, you are concluding by closing the circle. You are giving yourself small goals.

Andreasen: I've even thought, and this is probably a silly thing, of some longer goals stretching six years and then reviewing my professional life and so on. But certainly the weekly work schedule provides a parameter for the way I set my own work assignments.

Shabbat Shalom: Anything else you wish to say about the Sabbath?

Andreasen: Well, I have stated in writing, and I think I'm about as confirmed in that as I ever was, that the Sabbath is a gift, the true value of which many of us, even those of us who take it seriously, have not fully realized. So, when I talk about it to others, I always wish to talk about it as a gift that they may have at no cost and with little special effort other than organizing their work in harmony with its coming. It is, I think, instructive for Christian Sabbath observers to remember that great truth which we have learned from

our older brothers and sisters in the faith, the Jewish community: The most holy experience in our life is that time which comes to us, wherever we are in life (geographically and chronologically, children or adults), wherever we are situated, without any extraordinary effort required by us except that we organize our work so as to stop at the end of six days and make room for the Sabbath to arrive, for God's presence to arrive on that day. We don't even have to go and meet Him—we just stop and open the door, and it sort of rolls in, the way the earth rolls on and the sun passes over us on this day; it just comes to us as we prepare ourselves to receive it. That gift is extraordinary—I don't know of any other gift that comes quite like that. It's a gift of grace, and I just like to invite people everywhere to receive it and see what happens. They may just be pleasantly surprised.

Shabbat Shalom: In Jewish tradition, the Sabbath is the sign of the gift of eternity, and this is what we have together, a little hint to eternity. You had the faith to take a break in your very heavy schedule to speak with us of another break, and this act also conveys a message. Thank you, Dr. Andreasen, for your guidance and your insightful remarks.

*This interview was conducted by Jacques Doukhan, editor of *Shabbat Shalom*.