# Andrews University Digital Commons @ Andrews University

**Faculty Publications** 

4-30-1981

### **Divine Rest for Human Restlessness**

Samuele Bacchiocchi Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs

Part of the Biblical Studies Commons, and the Practical Theology Commons

#### **Recommended Citation**

Bacchiocchi, Samuele, "Divine Rest for Human Restlessness" (1981). *Faculty Publications*. 3751. https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/3751

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

# Divine rest for human restlessness

In the light of the cross, the Sabbath is the weekly celebration and jubilation of a liberated people; it is the day when we cease from our work to allow God to work in us, to experience through physical rest His greater rest of forgiveness and salvation.

#### By SAMUELE BACCHIOCCHI

Our tension-filled and restless lives long for rest. But how difficult it is to work off tension, to quiet restlessness! Some join athletic clubs, others join meditation groups. Still others seek release from their tension by taking vacations, tranquilizers, drugs, or alcohol. However, experience tells us that even vacations in exotic places or magic pills can provide at best only a temporary evasion, not a permanent quieting of inner tension and restlessness. Why? Because true rest is to be found not in *places* or *pills*, but rather in a right relationship with a *Person*, our Saviour, who says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"" (Matt. 11:28, N.I.V.).

Perfect rest and peace are not a human achievement, but a divine gift. Just as the various components of an orchestra need the direction of a skillful maestro to blend them into harmonious music, so the physical, mental, and spiritual components of our being need the guidance of the Master in order for us to experience harmonious rest and peace.

How can we make it possible for Christ to bring harmony and quiet to our restless lives? The Scriptures tell us that before and after the Fall, God gave to the human family a most vital institution, the Sabbath day—a day

Samuele Bacchiocchi is associate professor of religion at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. ADVENTIST REVIEW, APRIL 30, 1981

specifically designed to free us from daily pressures and restlessness in order to experience rest in God (Heb. 4:9, 10). On the Sabbath the body can rest because the mind is at rest, and the mind is at rest because it rests in God. To appreciate more fully this vital function of the Sabbath, let us briefly consider seven ways in which proper Sabbathkeeping enables the Saviour to bring us peace and rest.

1. The rest of Creation. The Sabbath regularly reassures us that our lives have meaning, value, and hope, because they are rooted in God from Creation to eternity. Many thinking persons are searching for this kind of rest. Not knowing where they come from or where they are heading, they feel restless and disillusioned by their meaningless existence. Some, perhaps inspired by Alex Haley's book Roots, seek to overcome their sense of meaninglessness by tracing their ancestral roots. Many who do this hope to add value and meaning to their lives by finding royal or noble ancestors. Through the Sabbath, Christ offers us a much greater reassurance: the restful assurance that our roots can be traced back to God Himself (Gen. 1:26, 27): the assurance that our existence has value because it is not the product of chance, but of a personal choice on the part of a loving Creator.

In the Creation story the seventh day expresses the culmination, celebration, and inauguration of human life and history. The creation and blessing of mankind (verses 26-31) is followed immediately by the creation and blessing of the Sabbath (chap. 2:1-3). The reason is obvious. God wanted to celebrate with human beings the birthday of this perfect world on and through the seventh day. Adam and Eve's first full day of life was a Sabbath day. They did not spend it working, but celebrating with their Maker the inauguration of a completed and perfect Creation. To celebrate the Sabbath, then, means first of all to celebrate the divine origin, value, and destiny of human life. It means to experience the restful assurance that, in spite of its apparent futility and tragedy, our life has value and hope because it proceeds from and moves toward a glorious destiny with God.

2. The rest of Divine Presence. Sabbathkeeping brings Christ's rest to our lives by enabling us to experience His divine presence. As Christ's presence brought stillness to the stormy Lake of Galilee (Matt. 8:23-27), the assurance of His presence brings peace and stillness to troubled lives today. This aspect of the holiness of the Sabbath is frequently mentioned in the Bible.

In a special sense the Sabbath is God's sanctuary in time: a sanctuary that has survived the Fall, the Flood, the Egyptian slavery, the Babylonian Exile, the Roman anti-Sabbath legislation, the French and Russian temporary introduction of the ten-day week, antinomianism, and modern secularism; a sanctuary that still invites believers to enter weekly through its portals, laying aside their secular concerns in order to experience the spiritual presence of Christ.

Because we enter into the spiritual presence and (407) 7

communion of the Lord on the Sabbath, the fourth commandment enjoins us to do all our work in six days in order that we can be free on the seventh day to "have a vacation with God," as Thomas Aquinas expressed it. Without the Sabbath vacation with God, our weekdays would be as tasteless as spaghetti without sauce or as food without salt.

**3.** A rest from competition. True Sabbathkeeping also brings Christ's rest to our lives by releasing us from the pressure to produce and achieve. The pressure that our competitive society exerts on us causes untold frustrations. Competition can dishearten, dehumanize, and demoralize people. It turns friends into enemies. In order to keep up with the Joneses, some Christians choose to "moonlight" even on the Sabbath. They hope to get more and more, but are never fully satisfied. Scripture points to the senselessness of unsatiable greediness when it states with irony, "They found none [manna]" (Ex. 16:27). The Sabbath teaches greedy hearts that there is something more important to do with our time and talents than to serve self.

By restricting temporarily our productivity, the Sabbath teaches us to commune rather than to compete with one another. It teaches us to view fellow beings in terms of their human values rather than in terms of economic status. By releasing us from the pressure of competition and production, the Sabbath enables us to appreciate more fully the value of people and the beauty of things. This freer and fuller appreciation of God, people, and natural beauty brings joy, harmony, and rest to our lives.

**4.** The rest of belonging. Sabbathkeeping also brings Christ's rest to our lives by reassuring us that we belong to Him. At the root of much human restlessness and insecurity there is a sense of alienation and estrangement, the feeling of not belonging to anyone or anything. Through the relationship of mutual belonging alone do we experience love, identity, security, and rest-the basic ingredients for successful living. God has given such signs and symbols as the rainbow, circumcision, the Passover lamb and blood, the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, and baptism to help us conceptualize our relationship with Him. Among these God-given symbols, the Sabbath occupies a unique place. It is unique in its origin, as it is the first symbol of divine-human fellowship given to mankind. It is unique in its survival, because it has survived throughout history in spite of attempts to outlaw it. It is unique in its function, because it serves as the symbol par excellence of the divine election and mission of God's people: "" "This is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you"" (Ex. 31:13, R.S.V.).

Being God's chosen day—the symbol of divine ownership (chaps. 20:11; 31:17)—the Sabbath effectively reminds the believer of his own divine election, of his belonging to God. Moreover, being God's one holy day 8 (408)

### Spring joy By F. E. BRAINARD

The fragrant scent of apple blooms And lilacs sweet and rare, The soft, pink blush of peaches And children without care; The lazy drone of honeybees, The sky of turquoise blue, Still turn my thoughts to higher things Just like they used to do.

among the days of the week, the Sabbath constantly challenges the believer who keeps it to stand as God's chosen holy person among a perverse generation. Holiness in time points to holiness of being. In a sense the Sabbath is the insignia of the person of faith. It is the emblem of our commitment to God and of God's commitment to us. During the week we may feel frustrated by a sense of anonymity. By renewing the sense of our belonging to the Creator-Redeemer, the Sabbath restores a sense of human dignity, identity, peace, and rest to our lives.

5. A rest from social tensions. Sabbathkeeping also enables us to experience Christ's rest by breaking down social, racial, and cultural barriers. The inability or unwillingness to appreciate and accept another person's skin color, culture, language, or social status is a major cause of much unrest, hate, and tension in our contemporary society. Ever since the Fall an important function of the Sabbath has been to teach concern, equality, and respect for every member of the human society. In Old Testament times, every seven days, seven years (sabbatical year), and seven weeks of years (jubilee year), all persons, beasts, and property were to become free before God. Genuine freedom leads to equality.

Many social injustices could have been avoided in ancient and modern society if the concern for human rights taught by the Sabbath (and its sister institutions, the sabbath years) had always been understood and practiced. The Sabbath teaches us to be concerned for all, from our son to our servant (Ex. 20:10; 23:12; Deut. 5:14). By teaching us humanitarian concern at the moment of worship—the time when we are truest to ourselves—the Sabbath challenges us to be sensitive toward the suffering or social injustices experienced by others. It would be a denial of the human values and experience of the Sabbath if we were to exploit or detest during the week those whom the Sabbath teaches us to respect and love as God's creatures. By teaching us to accept and respect every person, whether rich or poor, black or white, as a human being created and redeemed by the Lord, the Sabbath makes it possible for the peace of Christ to dwell in our hearts.

**6.** The rest of redemption. Sabbathkeeping also brings Christ's rest to our lives by enabling us to experience through the physical rest the greater rest and peace of redemption. The human heart longs for a constant assurance of divine forgiveness, acceptance, and salvation. Since the Fall an important function of the Sabbath has been to nourish this assurance in the hearts of believers. In Old Testament times, the rest and liberation from the hardship of work and from social inequalities that both the weekly and annual Sabbaths granted to every member of the Hebrew society have been viewed not merely as a commemoration of Creation (Ex. 20:11), and of the past Exodus deliverance (Deut. 5:15), but as a prefiguration of the future redemption—rest to be realized through the Messiah.

For example, the prophet Isaiah utilizes the delightful sabbatical imagery of the jubilee year ("the year of the Lord's favor") to describe the liberation and restoration to be brought about by the Messiah (Isa. 61:1, 2, R.S.V.). Similarly, in Daniel 9, the time to the coming of the Messiah is predicted by means of the sabbatical division of time, "seventy weeks of years" (verse 24, R.S.V.), which add up to 490 years or ten jubilee years. Examples such as these indicate that in Old Testament times the Sabbath served not only to provide rest and liberation from social injustices but also to nourish the Messianic hope of redemption to come.

The existence of this Messianic-redemptive understanding of the Sabbath helps us understand the reason why Christ inaugurated His public ministry on a Sabbath day in the synagogue of Nazareth by quoting the sabbatical passage of Isaiah 61:1, 2, which, as noted earlier, announces the mission of the Messiah through the language and imagery of the restoration and liberation of the Sabbath years (Luke 4:18, 19). The Lord undoubtedly startled the congregation when He claimed briefly but emphatically to be the fulfillment of the Messianic redemption promised by Isaiah through the Sabbath years. "'Today,''' Jesus said, "'this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing''' (verse 21, R.S.V.).

In His subsequent ministry Christ revealed the nature of His redemptive mission especially through His Sabbath healing and teaching ministry. Seven Sabbath healing episodes and ensuing controversies are reported in the Gospels (Matt. 12:9-14; Mark 1:21-28; 3:1-6; Luke 4:31-39; 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:2-18; 7:21-24; 9; cf. Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 4:16-30; 6:1-5). It is noteworthy that in each of these cases Christ ADVENTIST REVIEW, APRIL 30, 1981

intentionally acted against prevailing tradition by healing chronically sick persons on the Sabbath. By offering physical and spiritual liberation on the Sabbath to souls "'whom Satan bound'" (Luke 13:16, R.S.V.), the Saviour made the day a time to celebrate and to experience the blessings of His redemptive ministry.

The historic Friday when the Lord completed His redemptive mission, crying out, "It is finished" (John 19:30), was followed by His resting in the tomb on the Sabbath (Luke 23:54-56). Divine rest on the Sabbath marks the completion of both Creation and redemption. Christ's Sabbath rest in the tomb reveals the depth of God's love for His creatures. It tells us God so loved the world that He was willing to experience not only the limitations of human time at the Creation but also the suffering, agony, and death of human flesh during the Incarnation. In the light of the cross, then, the Sabbath is the weekly celebration and jubilation of a liberated people; it is the day when we cease from our work to allow God to work in us, to experience through physical rest His greater rest of forgiveness and salvation.

7. The rest of service. Sabbathkeeping also brings Christ's rest to our lives by providing time and opportunities for service. Inner rest and peace are not to be found in selfish relaxation, but in unselfish service. Christ's Sabbath teaching and ministry proclaimed the Sabbath to be a day "'to do good'" (Matt. 12:12, R.S.V.), "to save" (Mark 3:4), to loose men and women from physical and spiritual bonds (see Luke 13:12), and a day to show "mercy" rather than religiosity (Matt. 12:7). The Sabbath provides us opportunities to serve God, self, others, and our habitat.

We serve God on the Sabbath by resting to acknowledge His claim over our lives and by worshiping to celebrate His marvelous accomplishments for this world. This celebration of God's goodness offers us a fresh experience of divine rest and peace. We serve our personal needs on the Sabbath by taking time to reorder our lives, to sharpen our moral consciousness, to experience divine forgiveness, presence, and rest. We serve others on the Sabbath by coming closer to loved ones, friends, and needy persons, sharing with them our friendship and concern. The service we render to others on the Sabbath honors God and enriches our lives with a sense of restful satisfaction. We serve our habitat on the Sabbath by learning to act as curators rather than predators of this earth and by taking time to admire rather than to exploit God's creation.

Can the Sabbath bring divine rest to our human restlessness? The Sabbath is a vital institution that enables the Saviour to bring His perfect rest to our lives by offering us the opportunity to experience the rest of Creation, the rest of Divine Presence, a rest from competition, the rest of belonging, a rest from social tensions, the rest of redemption, and the rest of service. May the Sabbath become for all of us the day through which we experience Divine rest for our human restlessness.