

Rest for a Restless World: The Holiness of The Sabbath and Its Implications for Christians Today

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Abstract

This paper examines the meaning and significance of the terms “holiness of the Sabbath” in theology and their implications for contemporary Christian life. It builds upon a critical interpretation of the term “holiness” in theology to draw practical insights for Christians today. The paper argues that three major approaches define the concept of holiness in the Bible: holiness as consecration; holiness as relational; and divine presence and divine glory - a manifestation of holiness. These approaches explain the dimensions of the holiness of the Sabbath as developed in this paper.

Introduction

It was one Sabbath afternoon that I decided to take a walk through the University campus (Theologische Hochschule Friedensau). As I looked around trying to feel God’s presence on this special day, I was struck by a perplexing thought. This experience kept my mind racing in different directions as I struggled to understand what it means for the Sabbath to be a holy time. The problem was not in thinking about it or struggling with it, the bewilderment was the sense of emptiness I felt in understanding the Sabbath as holy. From that time on, I was eager to know and discover the meaning of the holiness of the Sabbath.

As I progressed in my research, I understood that when human history began, time was the first thing that God sanctified. Gen 2:3 states that God made holy the Sabbath at the end of creation. The sanctity of time came first before even the sanctity of man. Therefore, the first holy object ever in the history of the world remains the Sabbath.

Yet, a close reading of Genesis account shows that the sanctity of the Sabbath is not fully explained. There is no explanation of what a “holy time” means. Even in the story of manna in the desert (Ex. 16:23), the holiness of the Sabbath is not fully elucidated. This text only gives some hints. In this passage Sabbath is characterized by divine injunction of no “baking” and no “boiling.” Prescriptive commands of dos and don’ts are insufficient to fully explore the meaning of the holiness of the Sabbath.

The purpose of this study is to explicate the biblical concept of holiness as applied to the Sabbath and to clarify the meaning and relevance of Sabbath holiness in the contemporary world. For this reason, the central question in this study is: what does the holiness of the Sabbath mean in Scriptures and what does this imply for Christians today? The author studies the Scriptures and also analyzes the diversity of views expressed by scholars to determine the meaning and the significance of the sanctity of the Sabbath.

Holiness in the Scriptures

The term, “holiness” in the Scriptures closely relates to the act of consecration, relationship, and divine presence and divine glory. This section examines the meanings of the terms “holiness as consecration, holiness as relationship,” and “the divine presence and divine glory” as connected to the Sabbath.

Holiness as Consecration

The act of setting things, objects, times and people apart unto the Lord was not uncommon in Israel. First, the tabernacle and its belongings were set apart. Second, peoples and objects were dedicated to the Lord as a way of making them holy. And, third, the election of Israel as a nation by God Himself informs in many regards on the meaning of holiness in the Bible.

The sanctuary was an important element in the religious life of the Israelites. The basic idea of the holiness of the sanctuary is embedded in its separateness and uniqueness. Moses consecrated the sanctuary at God’s command. God sanctified it by His presence

(Ex. 25:8). For this reason, the sanctuary was referred to as *qodes*, the holy (Ex. 28:29, 35, 43; 29:30; 35:19; 39:41). Various degrees of holiness were seen in the sanctuary. A curtain is to separate *qodes* from *qodes quodasim*, the most holy where the ark is located (26:33-34).¹

The objects consecrated could be divided into two categories: Specific things consecrated to the sanctuary service; and things consecrated in general. Thus, among the specific objects, these are consecrated: The tent and altar (Ex. 29:44; 40:9; Lev. 8:10; Num. 7:1), temple utensils (Ex. 30:29), the furniture of tabernacle (Ex. 25:10-22; 26:34; 37:6-9; 40:20; Num. 4:4, 19), the altar of burnt-offering (Ex. 29:37; 40:10; Dan. 9: 24), and, all the treasures consecrated to treasury of the tabernacle.² In reference to the general things one can list: The anointing oil of priests (Ex. 30: 25), incense (Ex. 30:35, 37), the sacrifices of animals (Num. 18: 17; Ez. 36:38; 2 Chr. 29:33), the sacrificial food (Lev. 21:22b; Num. 5:9), the garments of priesthood (Ex. 28:2, 4; Lev. 16:4, 32), the inscriptions on the head piece (Ex. 28:36, 39:30).

The concept of holiness can be understood beyond the boundary of the tabernacle or the sanctuary and its objects. In Israel, anything that was dedicated to God becomes automatically holy. This could refer to various elements of Levitical worships and cults called holy (Lev. 5:15,16). It also refers to certain acts and offerings. In biblical times, it was not only the Sabbath that was sacred, but five other times came to be called “holy convocations”:³ The Passover, the Feast of weeks, the Day of the Trumpet Blast, the Day of Atonement, and the Festivals of booths (Lev. 23; Num. 23-29). The “holy convocations” were called such due to their nature and essence.

¹ John Gammie, *Holiness in Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 14.

² It is important to notice that although all things referring to the cult are typified by the nominative *QDS*, they are not of equal status. There exists a kind of gradation of holiness. For example Aaron and his sons are designated as most holy (1 Chron. 23: 13) in apparent contrast to the Levites who were referred to as holy (2 Chron. 23:6). See Jackie A. Naudé, “Qds” in *New International Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 3, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan, 1997), 880.

³ Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, 22.

Furthermore, in biblical thought, Israel could even be defined by his election by God. This implies an act of consecration which affects or determines a special relationship with the Holy One who created the whole universe. Israel was designated to be holy as God the Father (Lev. 21:6). According to Ex. 19:6, the people of Israel are a “*goy kadosh*, a priestly kingdom, and Yahweh’s treasured possession.”⁴ Israel was supposed to be *kadosh* (Jer. 2:3). In this vein, the people of Israel were the chosen ones of God to show the greatness of Yahweh to the whole world. Therefore, Deut. 26:19 enjoins them to keep the commandments in order to maintain their status of being *kadosh*.

Out of the general election of Israel as a nation, God used or elected some specific people for specific purposes. These people were specifically designated as holy. In the eyes of the Pentateuchal and priestly writers, Aaron and sons were *kadosh* (Lev. 16:1-17:11). Moses then declared the sons of Aaron holy and no priest was allowed to come closer to burn incense except the Aaronites.⁵ The term *kadosh* can even be extended to the first-born of humans as well as animals (Ex. 13:2). Technically speaking, consecration is a path to relational holiness because it is in being set apart that holiness becomes an outpouring of love.

Holiness as Relational

The term “holiness” has been majorly viewed as intrinsically linked to the concept of separation.⁶ “Cleanness” and “purity” have been taken as prerequisites for holiness. Jay Jongsung Kim noticed: “We are told to keep the Sabbath holy, bring holy offerings, and worship the Lord in holy splendor. Thus, the concept of holiness

⁴ Helmer Ringgren, “*Qds*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. XII, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 531.

⁵ Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, 36.

⁶ A significant number of studies put emphasis on the ethical dimension of holiness. John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003); and Philip P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1992), and, Jan Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17-26* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

in most cases has been understood in its rituals aspect.”⁷⁷ John Gammie recognized in his monograph that holiness is viewed in its functional aspects in Israel in consideration of the prophets, the priests and the sages: “the kind of cleanness required by holiness varied. For the prophets it was a cleanness of social justice, for the priests a cleanness of proper ritual and maintenance of separation, for the sages it was a cleanness of inner integrity and individual moral acts.”⁷⁸ There is a variation in understanding the term holiness.

There are some scholars who have seen the limitation of defining the term “holiness” as linked to separation. For instance, Henry Novello warns that “holiness should not...be reduced to a moral concept or identified with perfection, for it is an unfathomable ontological reality.”⁷⁹ According to him, holiness is “connatural” for “It is [not] simply by knowing God that we shall be transformed into the likeness of God, but rather by being united with God through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁰ Thus, Christlikeness is holiness. Similarly, J. E. Robson argues that the model of separation for defining the concept of holiness is insufficient. “It is my contention that this sense of separation, represented cultically in terms of ritual and sometimes literal separation and ethically in terms of metaphorical moral separation, should not be allowed to override another dimension of YHWH’s holiness, holiness as love.”⁸¹ According to Robson, holiness as love is identified as the forgotten dimension in holiness hermeneutic. It is therefore a notable aspect of holiness. Furthermore, according to Jackie A. Naudé, separateness could not be the basic meaning of holiness. It is rather its necessary consequence; for, “consecration is separation to God rather than a separation from the world.”⁸²

⁷ Jay Jongsung Kim, “The Concept of Holiness in Pauline Epistles,” (Ph.D. Diss., the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004), 1.

⁸ Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, 196.

⁹ Henry L. Novello “Wrestling with Holiness: Sharing in the Travail of Creation,” *Compass* 45 (2011): 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ J. E. Robson, “Forgotten Dimensions of Holiness,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 33 (2011): 131.

¹² Naudé, “Qds,” 885.

Holiness is inherently linked to God. It is from God's holiness that one can understand the concept of holiness as applied to things or to persons. God, the Holy One of Israel, is ontologically relational. It is in this way that Trinity cooperates and functions. God the Father enters into relationship with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and vice versa.¹³ Moreover, it is this relational holiness that is seen in the dynamic relationship between God and humanity.

The book of Isaiah is of special concern. Isa. 6:1-3 is well known in prophetic literature. It contains a vision of the divine glory. At first sight, the message that Isaiah is called to preach is disastrous. "How long, O Lord?" The answer seems not satisfactory: "Until the land is made desolate" (6:13). The prophet's ministry was defined by negation. His efforts in bringing the repentance will harden even more the heart of Judah. Apparently, his ministry consisted in making people dull, rendering their ears heavy, and shutting their eyes (v.10). Such view prompted up the disregard of Isaiah's vision (v. 1-4) as an inaugural vision.¹⁴ A close examination of this chapter could speak against such a narrow interpretation. God in His holiness approaches humans and calls them out of darkness into His marvelous light. By approaching the unclean Isaiah (Isa. 6:5), God finds a way of making him holy like Himself. Indeed, holiness is contagious. He whom God approaches becomes holy and only loses his holiness when he moves away from God.

Thus, understanding the concept of holiness as primarily relational is theologically correct. The Bible is wholly describing a dynamic relationship between the Holy One and human beings. This affects the relationship that human beings are called to have with their fellow beings.

¹³ For more insights on relational Trinity see Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 3-5.

¹⁴ Mordecai Kapplan, "Isaiah's Vision in the ascension of Isaiah and the Early Church," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 45 (1926): 251.

Holiness as Manifestation of Divine Presence and Glory

The glory (*Kabod*) of God is at the heart of every religious group. This affects and gives meaning to the joy and elation – or sometimes the fear that punctuates any religious experience with the divine. It confirms His presence and presents to the limited human eyes what can only be properly viewed in a good spiritual stance—the holiness of God.¹⁵

The word, “glory,” is derived from the Hebrew word, *kabod*. Scholars agree that the latter denotes “heaviness” in the physical sense, and honor and respect in the spiritual sense.¹⁶ *Qll* stands as an antonym of *kbd* and expresses “lightness” when taken in the physical sense; and lack of honor and respect when it is considered in the figurative sense. It is also assumed that the equivalent of *kabod* in Aramaic is *yeqar* which also has a dual connotation of “heavy, difficult” and “respected, honored.”¹⁷ It is further argued that the word *kabod* denotes “substance,” “quantity” as well as “power” or “might.”¹⁸ Isa. 5: 13 could be taken as an example where *Kebodo* stands in parallel with *hamono* and means “multitude.”¹⁹

Kabod, meaning “glory” is usually referred to God and His sanctuary.²⁰ It denotes in this case the manifest presence of God in relation to His people. The term first appears in Ex. 16:7, “and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord.” Scholars think that the main synonyms of glory in the English language are *hod*, majesty; *hadar*, splendor; and *tip’eret*, beauty and dignity.²¹

¹⁵ John H. Hayes, Frederick C. Prussner, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 80. This observation helps to get a meaningful conception of the term “holiness” which stands at the heart of this research.

¹⁶ Moshe Weinfeld, “*Kabod*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 7, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 23.

¹⁷ Weinfeld, “*Kabod*,” 23.

¹⁸ Weinfeld, “*Kabod*,” 25.

¹⁹ Weinfeld, “*Kabod*,” 25.

²⁰ Significant studies have researched on “glory”: Freiherr von Gall, *Die Herrlichkeit Gottes* (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1990); Cassin, *La Splendeur Divine: Introduction à l’Etude de la Pensée Mésopotamienne* (Paris: The Hague, 1968).

²¹ John C. Collins, “KBD.” In *New International Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 2. Ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 584, and Weinfeld, 28- 31.

Weinfeld subscribes to Otto's analysis of *kabod* properly rendered as "majesty."²² Gammie, by stating that "majesty is glory in being" and "power is glory in action," ties the relationship existent in the two terms, fitting in the description of the divine glory.²³ The glory as manifestation of holiness relates thus to majesty, power, beauty, splendor, honor, or dignity and carries as well the connotation of wealth (Gen. 31:1; Isa. 10:3), possession (Isa. 6:3), worth and value (Prov. 27:3; Isa. 10:16), and status (Isa. 1:9) as emphasized by Gammie.²⁴

The term, glory, in the NT is *doxa*, which seemingly carries many usages. It is used to signify "honor," "fame", and "recognition" (Jn. 5:44; 7:18). Thus, it contrasts with "dishonor" (1 Cor. 11:14, 15; 15:43).²⁵ In 2 Cor. 3: 18 Paul places special emphasis on the glory that is to shine in the life of Christians. As the glory of God shone upon the face of Moses (Ex. 34:29-35), believers are to reflect in their lives "the glory of the Lord as it shines forth to the lost world in the face of the Savior."²⁶ According to the Apostle, the believer who faithfully submits their will to the will of Christ, the one who constantly looks to Him will go on from glory to glory. This pictures a restoration of the image of God in man.

The concept of holiness necessitates and implies a reflection on the concept of consecration, relational holiness, and divine presence and glory. The Old Testament and the New Testament offer a theology of holiness based on these three approaches. These constitute valuable help for an examination of the holiness of the Sabbath in the Bible.

Sabbath Holiness in The Bible

The sanctity of the Sabbath seems to be less emphasized in scholarly works. This may in part be due to the particular interest scholars place in its historical perspective. Exploring the sanctity

²² Weinfeld, "Kabod," 23, 25.

²³ Hans Urs von Balthasar's study *The Glory of the Lord*, 3 vols. (New York/San Francisco: Crossroads/Ignatius, 1982/1986) is a relevant tool for this discussion.

²⁴ Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, 87.

²⁵ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 1957, 502.

²⁶ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 1957, 851.

of the Sabbath is necessary because of the renewed interest in the concept of the Sabbath.²⁷ According to the Scriptures, the holiness of the Sabbath implies the idea of divine consecration, divine closeness; and manifestation of divine glory and divine presence.

Sabbath Holiness as Consecration

The consecration of the Sabbath is a divine act. It puts the Sabbath into the realm of holiness. The Sabbath is divinely instituted and its prescriptions are divinely issued. In addition, the Sabbath is a sign of a covenant between God and His people.

The institution of the Sabbath is not from man, it is from God. This contrasts with the claim that Israel has borrowed the Sabbath from other nations.²⁸ For God Himself took the initiative at the end of creation to create a Sabbath day. It was in the atmosphere of celebrating the end of creation that the Sabbath was born. Its birth not only marks the end of creation but it crowns it. It is in this vein that Karl Barth affirmed: “Not man but the divine rest on the seventh day is the crown of creation. It is the radiance of this crown shining back on the totality of things (and primarily on man) which illumines and justifies this totality (and primarily man).”²⁹ As one looks into the creation account, one can confirm Barth’s statement for it is said: “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God

²⁷ Christopher D. Ringwald, *Day Apart: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Find Faith, Freedom, and Joy on the Sabbath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁸ Reinder Bruinsma, *The Day God Created* (Alma Park, Grantham: Stanborough Press, 1992), 11, and Niels-Erik Andreasen, *Rest and Redemption: A Study of the Biblical Sabbath* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978), 12-19. Some scholars who contest the divine origin of the Sabbath think that Israel got the idea of the Sabbath from the Babylonians. It is assumed that this argument had its basis in George Smith’s discovery. He found “a Babylonian calendar which gave special significance to every seventh, fourteenth, nineteenth, twenty-first and twenty-eighth day.” (Bruinsma, 12) This is a mere assumption that can hardly affect one’s understanding of the divine origin of the Sabbath, for the extra biblical knowledge could be important but not at the point of defining and ruling the authenticity of the Bible.

²⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3 part 1, translated by J.W Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight, edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958), 223.

had created and made” (Gen. 2:3). The book of Genesis affirms the divine nature of the Sabbath.

The nature of the Sabbath as a divine and holy day has been recalled throughout the history of Israel. In the book of Exodus, the divine injunction is made: “Remember the seventh day” (20:8). This call of remembrance synchronized the celebration of each Sabbath in Israel with the first Sabbath celebrated by God, Adam and Eve. Therefore, each Sabbath celebration echoed the week of creation of the world; it can be seen as the “birthday of the world.”³⁰ The Sabbath is a sacred day.

The connection of the Sabbath to the creation thus strengthens its origin. It was designed “to be a special object of divine favor.”³¹ It goes even further to proclaim the existence of a powerful and marvelous Creator—God. It is in this sense that the prescriptions in relation to the Sabbath could better resound.

What follows the divine command of remembering the Sabbath day is an injunction: to keep the Sabbath holy (Ex. 20:8). This takes its root from Gen. 2:2: “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.” This text states that God rested after the completion of six days of Creation. Thus, His rest at the end of Creation justifies the rest that is required from His people on that special day. “But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns” (Ex. 20:10). On the Sabbath day, God requires His people to stop their daily activities. They have to set themselves unto the Lord, for Sabbath is “a day to the Lord your God.” This commandment, Reinder Bruinsma has observed, “stands in the heart of God’s law.”³² It connotes a vertical relationship contrary to the six last commandments which

³⁰ Philo Judaeus, “The Birthday of the World,” in *The Sabbath: The Day of Delight*, Abraham E. Millgram (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1944), 213.

³¹ *SDABC*, vol. 1, 220.

³² Bruinsma, *The Day God Created*, 18.

are concerned about horizontal relationships—they focus on relationships between man (and woman) and their fellow beings.

Sabbath is the uttermost sign of the covenant between God and His people of all the ages. It is probably in this thinking that Hayyim Nahman Bialik suggested that Sabbath is a cornerstone.³³ It links therefore God to His people: it presents to God His people, and to people their God. This connection affects positively God's children. For the contact with the Holy sanctifies, purifies and leads to holiness. It is in this vein that the Lord says: "You shall keep my Sabbath... that you may know that I *am* the Lord who sanctifies you" (Ex. 31:13). Hence "the Sabbath is God's warranty that he has linked himself to his people for all eternity and that it is his abiding purpose to make them 'a holy' people."³⁴ In this light, Sabbath appears to be a privilege and honor freely granted to believers to live a life of meaningful relationships with the divine.

Viewing the Sabbath as a sign also means that it stands as a test. It tests the loyalty of man and woman towards their God. In this sense, Ellen G. White said: "the Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not."³⁵ In this way, the message of Rev. 12:17 becomes understandable. "And the dragon was angry with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Thus, keeping the Sabbath shows that humans have seen in it the signature of God, recognize it, and decide to submit freely to its injunctions. The Sabbath requires from man and woman, respect and honor, for God's signature is on it. God did put His signature to secure the good of man. Did not Christ say: "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath?" (Mk. 2:27). Whatever

³³ Hayyim Nahman Bialik, "The Sabbath is the Cornerstone of Judaism," in *Sabbath: The Day of Delight*, 253.

³⁴ Bruinsma, *The Day God Created*, 22.

³⁵ Ellen White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 605.

explanations one can give to this text, a complete exploration of it should include the recognition of a call of honoring God in His day. Hence, the refusal to obey the commandment of the Sabbath equals the failure of being loyal to God, for “it is the seal of God’s law and the sign of Christ’s total supremacy.”³⁶ The Sabbath is thus a sign of closeness to God.

Sabbath Holiness as Relational

Entering the divine rest demands a spirit of closeness to God. No other institution committed to the Jews played such a role than the Sabbath. It distinguished them by setting them apart as well as tied them to their God.

Sabbath holiness offers to believers the opportunity to be separated unto God. It leads them to understand that they belong to Him. Looking into the life of Israelites, the seventh day appeared to be an agent that helped them to be close to their God. Indeed, “more than Israel has kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept Israel;” for, “Had it not been for the Sabbath, which weekly restored to the people their soul and weekly renewed their spirit, the weekday afflictions would have pulled them farther and farther downward until they sank to the lowest depths of materialism as well as ethical and intellectual poverty.”³⁷ In this regard, Sabbath holiness appears to be a means of dedication of God’s people to Himself. If Aaron and sons were asked to be consecrated by Moses before performing the sacrificial acts, Sabbath holiness later played ipso facto the role of Aaronites to Israelites.

Thus, the cessation of all works on the Sabbath day implies a call to fully concentrate on reviewing and strengthening one’s relationships with God. The celebration of the Sabbath in this case should express a deep sense of vertical relationships. It is therefore meaningful to argue that the day during which the Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai could have been on the Sabbath. The

³⁶ J. L. Shuler, *God’s Everlasting Sign* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publication Association, 1972), 115.

³⁷ Ahad Ha-‘Am, “The Sabbath Has Kept Israel,” in *The Sabbath: The Day of Delight*, 253.

reason for that can be that man is spiritually prepared to welcome the Torah on that day. The ears are widely opened to hear the message of God, the eyes contemplate His glory, and the heart feels His presence. When Moses presented and explained to his fellows God's expectations from them, they answered with one accord: "all the Lord has spoken, we will do" (Ex. 19:8). It is during sacred time that this kind of engaging and deciding words can be pronounced by Israel.

Closeness to God implies separation as corollary. Therefore, entering the Sabbath demands personal holiness as well as collective holiness. The contact with the divine can only be possible when spiritual preparations are made. The experience of Mount Sinai gives a marvelous illustration. The children of Israel were asked to attain some spiritual demands before coming unto the Lord. The Lord commanded Moses: "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes" Ex. 19:10); and "You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves *that* you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death" (v. 12).

In this same vein, as the priests were enjoined to set boundaries before performing acts in the sanctuary, Sabbath holiness as well enjoins each believer to set personal boundaries before entering the divine rest (Num. 8:21). Sabbath was designed to be a sign of separation from sin. For this purpose, "in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy,"³⁸ states Ellen White. This has relational implication. The holiness of believers can only be conceived when they dedicate their efforts to illumine the world. Sabbath holiness in this case sets them to be examples amid corrupted people in the corrupted world.

³⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898), 283.

Sabbath Holiness as God's Presence and God's Glory

Sabbath Holiness as the sanctuary in time offers a meaningful understanding of God's presence and glory that fill the holy time. The presence of God and His glory express their interconnectedness in the sanctuary-time.

In his book chapter, "The Presence of Ultimacy," Fritz Guy notes two qualities of God that invest the Sabbath: His "relatedness and the ultimacy."³⁹ According to Guy, the two qualities give meaning to the Sabbath. Starting with "relatedness of God," he identifies four expressions that are referring to the Sabbath: 1. The original *creation*, 2. God's *presence* in human existence, 3. God's *commitment* to humanity, and, 4. God's *responsiveness* to human decisions and actions. These four expressions affirm how important the Sabbath is to God as well as to humankind. Each of them appears to be a symbol that expresses a reality deeply linked to Sabbath—the relatedness of God.

Furthermore, on the word "ultimacy," Guy argues that in his research, the term is viewed as referring to God "not only as a supreme reality and value, but also the kind of reality and value beyond which nothing can even be conceptualized."⁴⁰ This "ultimacy" according to him, carries the ideas of holiness and that of "otherness" or "beyondness" or "hiddenness." This emphasizes the fact that God has His own being beyond the world which is physically seen or intellectually conceived.

The relatedness and ultimacy of God such as presented by Guy are helpful to the understanding of God's presence in reference to Sabbath holiness in its strict sense. In parallel to the Hebrew tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple in Jerusalem where God showed His manifest presence through the symbols of clouds and that of fire, the Sabbath is filled with the presence of God. The tabernacle in its literal sense served as a visible reassurance that God dwells among His people, for it is said: "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." (Ex. 25:8). The

³⁹ Fritz Guy, "The Presence of Ultimacy" in *Festival of the Sabbath*, ed. By Roy Branson (Takoma Park, MD: Association of Adventist Forums, 1985), 29.

⁴⁰ Guy, "The Presence of Ultimacy," 35.

sanctuary was thus sanctified by God's presence. Similarly, Gen. 2:3 states that at the end of six days God rested from His work. The sanctification of the seventh day implies the presence of God that sanctifies the day. By setting it apart, God granted to humankind a day during which He descends to fill the earth with His presence (Ps. 139:7-10; Isa. 6:5). "Thus the seventh day has etched God's presence into human reality."⁴¹

The presence and the glory of God are interconnected. They are indivisible. It is therefore not safe to pretend to know which one comes first. For, they are united and considered as a total reality. The symbols used to refer to each of them may refer to both of them at the same time. Thus, the pillars of clouds and that of fire are the symbols of God's manifest presence and God's affirming glory. The glory of God is seen in His presence; and His presence is seen in His glory. However, while "thundering" and "sound" may refer to God's presence; "lightness," "beauty," as well as "dignity" and "majesty" may be the valuable correspondents or synonyms of "glory."

Thus, the seventh day sanctified by God is different from the other days of the week. For its hours carries the idea of beauty distinct from humans' action. Nothing that is bad is supposed to occur that day. A research into mortality rates in Israel indicates that deaths decrease considerably on the Sabbath and increase right on Sunday.⁴² This led to this exclamation: "then if every day was Sabbath, we'd never die!"⁴³ It is in this vein that Heschel affirmed: "We arrive at the seventh day, and the Sabbath is endowed with a felicity which enraptures the soul, which glides into our thoughts with a healing sympathy. It is a day on which hours do not oust one another. It is a day that can soothe all sadness away."⁴⁴

The understanding of Sabbath holiness in the Scriptures is derived from the meaning of the biblical concept of holiness itself.

⁴¹ Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2009), 58.

⁴² Ringwald, *Day Apart: How Jews*, 23.

⁴³ Ringwald, *Day Apart: How Jews*, 23.

⁴⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Straus and Giroux, 1980), 20.

In this regard, Sabbath holiness implies divine origin. In other words, there could not be Sabbath holiness without its connection to the divine realm. It is in this line that Sabbath holiness implies closeness to God as well as God's presence and glory which impact the life of Christians even of the postmodern time.

Implications of the Holiness of the Sabbath for Today

If ever an emphasis on Sabbath holiness is needed, it is in this time of postmodernism that is lost in its machinery work. Daily pressures of time clocks contribute majorly to this phenomenon. Thus, the welcoming of Sabbath holiness brings to people's mind that they are bound into relationships of fruitful connecting links with God. Besides, Sabbath holiness dignifies humans irrespective of their status. First, Sabbath holiness relates God to humans. Second, it extends this connection to humans themselves. And, third, it is a relational link between humans and nature.

The book of Exodus underlines a reality that one cannot fail to acknowledge.

Exodus makes it clear that God, not a place, was the destination of the liberated people. On the eve of the giving of the Ten Commandments, God told the people, "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself" (Exod. 19:4).⁴⁵ At this point, it appears very clearly that the destination of God's people leaving the land of slavery "was not a geographic location in the Middle East."⁴⁶ Instead, "I ... brought you to myself."⁴⁷ Israelites were taken out from slavery into a restoration of fellowship with God in His chosen and sanctified holy rest—a palace in time.⁴⁸

The idea of holy rest as a palace in time relates to the idyllic reality of the Garden. The Garden of Eden was a place where God and humans could meet and fellowship before the fall. Humans could hear the voice of God; they could probably see Him and

⁴⁵ Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 86.

⁴⁶ Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 86.

⁴⁷ Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning*, 86.

⁴⁸ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 12.

freely communicate with Him (Gen. 3:8-10). Thus, the Garden was the ideal place of fellowship between God and His created beings. “In the Garden of Eden,” affirms Andreasen, “divinity and humanity joined in its (*Sabbath*) observance. It was the golden clasp that united heaven and earth then.”⁴⁹ When man and woman disobeyed God, God distanced Himself physically from them, and chose a time as a symbol of His original closeness to them. This fits for relationship with God in this world while man is hoping for a complete restoration. This is why Moltmann thinks that in Jewish thinking “in the Sabbath eternity and time touch.”⁵⁰ Thus, in the process of restoring the close fellowship of God to His created human beings, time took the place of space. Perhaps it is in this vein that Andreasen argues that “the Sabbath command is the only commandment in the observance of which God could join man. ... Man can keep it; and God can keep it.”⁵¹ Divinity and humanity fellowship in time.

Furthermore, Sabbath reveals in a deepest form that the incarnation of Christ sheds light on God’s presence into an earthly world. This is viewed by Bacchiocchi as “*a link par excellence* that reconnects human beings to divine life and presence.”⁵² How does incarnation relate to Sabbath holiness? Bacchiocchi found the answer by looking into the parallel in terms of their functions. According to him, “the purpose of the incarnation is perhaps best epitomized in the two names given to the Lord at His birth: “you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. ... His name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us).”⁵³ From the two names, it can be said, “Christ came to restore life to His people by reuniting them to the presence of God.”⁵⁴ Therefore, Sabbath holiness is, in itself, an assurance of God’s

⁴⁹ M. L. Andreasen, *The Sabbath* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1942), 38.

⁵⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and Spirit of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985/1993), 284.

⁵¹ M. L. Andreasen, *The Sabbath*, 37.

⁵² Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: By the Author, 1980), 92.

⁵³ Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest*, 92.

⁵⁴ Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest*, 92.

presence.⁵⁵ Bacchiocchi summed up his reflections by stating that “what God promised to His creation by blessing and sanctifying the Sabbath, He fulfilled by sending Christ into this world to become Emmanuel—God with us.”⁵⁶ The coming of Christ on earth brought light and redemption into the world; Sabbath holiness as well is the light and hope of time. This is why “Sabbath is one of God’s choicest gifts to man,” writes Andreasen.⁵⁷ “It was brought to earth by God Himself, as the crown and glory of the finished creation.”⁵⁸ God sanctified this day because He might enter personally the world.⁵⁹

Sabbath holiness is also a useful tool that brings togetherness and fellowship among human beings. It helps to react to this world which is influenced by isolationism and individualism. This is due to the fact that human beings are subdued by their own civilization. The effect of internet alone on human social relationship is enormous. Humans spend much of their time alone in contact with their computers. Their minds and attention are directed to what they can discover in the electronic world than what they can gain in associating physically with their fellow humans. They can hardly find time to come closer to their neighbors and friends for interactions. In the world of high civilization, humans have lost a landmark of good life—the coming together to interact and fellowship, and share experiences. However, Sabbath holiness is the solution to this difficulty. From its beginning Sabbath holiness stands as an invitation to every human being to break the spirit of isolationism in order to join themselves to a community of believers. Perhaps it is in this vein that Heschel writes that “the Sabbath is the day on which we learn the art of surpassing civilization.”⁶⁰

Another aspect of the Sabbath holiness is related to humans and nature. The world today faces challenges resulting from human action on nature. In several levels, nature shows signs of

⁵⁵ Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest*, 92.

⁵⁶ Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest*, 92, 93.

⁵⁷ M. L. Andreasen, *The Sabbath*, 7.

⁵⁸ M. L. Andreasen, *The Sabbath*, 7.

⁵⁹ Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest*, 93.

⁶⁰ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 27.

degradation due to uncontrolled and abusive action by humans against it. Humanity fails to see it as a blessing from above. There is undoubtedly an ecological crisis. It is with regard to this crisis that in his foreword to *Creation: A Biblical Vision to Environment* that the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, affirmed: “We are treating the earth in a senseless, even godless manner because we fail to see it as a divine gift inherited from above and owed to future generations.”⁶¹ He warns that “unless we radically change the way we perceive the world, then we will simply be dealing with symptoms, not their causes. We require a new image of the world if we hope for a ‘new heaven and a new earth.’”⁶² Bartholomew’s concern joins Rachel Carson’s vision and analysis in her book published five decades ago: *Silent Spring*,⁶³ in which she basically described a fictional town in America where there was sickness and death caused by air pollution. A polluted air affects the life of humans. A growing number of persons with heart cancer in the western world may be partly due to it.

Also, massive destruction of trees without replacing them in Africa, in Asia as well as in South America endangers both the life of humans and animals. In Africa for instance, parents used to tell stories to their children about animals in their lifetime that do not exist any longer today. What was the cause of their extinction? The sad answer is: we cut the trees and killed most of the animals for food; the remaining ones would have fled where we don’t know.

Sabbath holiness reminds humans the solemn command of stopping to exploit nature at least for one day: “Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of rest, a holy convocation; ye shall do no work *therein*: it *is* the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings” (Lev. 23:3). Sabbath holiness in this regard helps humans to acknowledge God’s ownership. Nature is the belonging of God. Resting from exploiting the nature once a week fits into the biblical understanding of the Sabbath. “Is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man’s (and

⁶¹ Patriarch Bartholomew, “Foreword,” in *Creation: A Biblical Vision to Environment*, by Margaret Barker (London: T. and T. Clark International, 2010), ix.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (London: Hamilton, 1963).

woman's) progress than the Sabbath?" asked Heschel.⁶⁴ The answer to this question is obvious: there exists no institution comparable to what God Himself sanctified and in the observance of which He partakes.

Sabbath holiness is thus life-enhancing. Its spirit closely leads believers to oppose the enslavement of humans of all kinds. Therefore, it brings humans to experience freedom in life by dignifying them. Its flavor can bring healing to man's and woman's souls; and likewise, it can grant them the delight they long for.

Sabbath holiness gives hope to the world; it leads human beings to understand that there is a better life to come. Indeed, "the Sabbath, like God's final act of redemption, stands before man [and woman] continually, filling him [or her] with expectation and anticipation."⁶⁵ The book of Isaiah in this perspective plays a major role. Three passages (56:1-8; 58:13-14; 66:22-24) have significant eschatological implications in relation to the Sabbath. Sabbath holiness announces eternal blessings for the righteous (Isaiah 56:1); even the eunuchs who find delight in Sabbath holiness will be given an everlasting name that shall not be cut off (56:5). Thus, each righteous who finds joy in Sabbath holiness will "ride upon the heights of the earth" (58:14); he shall abide in the kingdom of the Lord to worship Him (66:23).

Conclusion

The holiness of the Sabbath is deeply rooted in the true understanding of the biblical concept of holiness itself. Three approaches could define the latter: holiness as consecration, holiness as relational, and divine presence and divine glory: a manifestation of holiness. It is from these approaches that a discussion on the holiness of the Sabbath in the Scriptures is explored. It is therefore clear that the holiness of the Sabbath does not come from humanity. God Himself is the source. He made the Sabbath a sign between Himself and His people of all ages. He fills it with His divine

⁶⁴ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 28.

⁶⁵ N-E. Andreasen, *Rest and Redemption*, 116.

presence; and with His glory, which are necessary tools for humans' spiritual and worship life.

Sabbath holiness is relational: Relating humanity and divinity, relating humans with one another, and, relating humans and nature. Sabbath holiness is also deeply connected to the concept of freedom, healings and delight. Thus, Sabbath holiness gives hope; for it is a foretaste of the world to come. If Moses had the duty to consecrate Israelites into holiness, Sabbath holiness today is an agent of dedication, and consecration of humanity into holiness. It stands as a call to be children of God in the world lost in its own inventions, creativities, and civilizations. Besides, Sabbath holiness brings together God and humans and binds them into a relationship that conveys eternity. Sabbath holiness brings a universal message of peace to humanity. Peace between God and human beings, peace between humans and their fellow beings. Indeed, Sabbath holiness is an asylum which welcomes people and offers them joy.

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