

Holy or wholly? A systematic theological study of Sabbath  
keeping in the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J.  
Dawn

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## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a study of the doctrinal concept of Sabbath keeping in the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn, respectively. Bacchiocchi is from the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church which believes that the seventh day of the week is to be kept as the Sabbath. On the other hand, Marva Dawn is a Lutheran who believes in the relevance and benefits of keeping one day in a week as the Sabbath. Using a qualitative content analysis of books and articles by these two Theologians the doctrinal concept of Sabbath keeping is extensively studied in their respective works to find the distinctive theological contributions to Sabbath keeping that each author offers. In addition, other theologians including those who have written on Sabbath keeping are cited as secondary sources to maximize the critical theological discourse and outcome of this study. The intention of this process is to facilitate a critical engagement on Sabbath keeping in the works of Bacchiocchi and Dawn to gain a new, more complex, and nuanced understandings of Sabbath keeping. The study is then concluded by summarising the findings of the research, how the theology of Sabbath keeping can be enriched, developed, nuanced, and problematized through this critical theological engagement between the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn, and suggesting areas for future research.

## Opsomming

Hierdie tesis is 'n studie van die leerstelling oor Sabbats onderhoud in die werke van Samuele Bacchiocchi en Marva J. Dawn onderskeidelik. Bacchiocchi werk van die perspektief van die Sewende Daagse Adventiste Kerk (SDA) wat glo dat die sewende dag as die Sabbat onderhoud moet word. Marva J. Dawn, aan die ander kant, is 'n Lutheraan wat die tradisie verteenwoordig wat die relevansie en voordele uitwys om een dag in die week as Sabbat te onderhou. Deur gebruik te maak van kwalitatiewe inhoud analise van boeke en artikels deur hierdie twee teoloë, is die leerstelling en dogma van Sabbat onderhoud in diepte bestudeer in die onderskeie werke om sodoende 'n kenmerkende bydrae na Sabbats onderhoud te bevorder deur ook beide teoloë se bydrae te respekteer. Bykomend word ander teoloë wat bydraes maak oor Sabbats onderhoud as sekondêre bronne aangehaal om sodoende kritiese teologiese diskoers en uitkomst te maksimaliseer. Die intensie van die proses is om 'n kritiese interaksie oor Sabbat onderhoud in die werke van Bacchiocchi en Dawn te fasiliteer om sodoende nuwe, meer komplekse en genuanseerde verstaan van Sabbat onderhoud te ontwikkel. Die studie se gevolgtrekking gaan opsommend om met die bevindinge en meer spesifiek hoe die teologie van Sabbat onderhoud verdiep, meer ontwikkel en genuanseerd kan wees deur kritiese teologiese interaksie met die werke van Samuele Bacchiocchi en Marva J. Dawn. Daar word ook voorstelle gemaak vir toekomstige navorsing in hierdie veld.

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the worldwide Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church. Two local congregations in Maseru, Lesotho come to mind, namely: Seoli SDA Church and Lithoteng SDA Church. While I was baptised at the former congregation, I was one of the founding members of the latter, thus the two congregations have nurtured my relationship with God for a long time. Therefore, I especially dedicate this work to the two mentioned local congregations.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

## 1.1 Background and rationale

The Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church to which I belong has as its one of its teachings the doctrine of the Sabbath.<sup>1</sup> This doctrine advocates for the keeping of the seventh day of each week as the Sabbath of God in obedience to the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. As such there is need to continually have the latest research on this doctrine or at least we should continually reconsider our beliefs in the light of different theological traditions and perspectives. For “Christians want to understand what they believe, what they can hope for, and what they ought to love” (Migliore 2004:2). SDA Church members also wish to continually grow in the knowledge of what they believe including the doctrine of the Sabbath especially the Sabbath keeping aspect thereof.

As the world gets busier and people scramble for better jobs that pay more SDA Church members are ever faced with a risk of giving up their belief of a week of six days of work and one day of rest. There is some resonance between this challenge and what Brueggemann (2014: xiii- xiv) notes regarding Sabbath (even though he views the notion of Sabbath differently to generally held views in the SDA Churches),

in our own contemporary context of the rat race of anxiety, the celebration of Sabbath is an act of both resistance and alternative...Such an act of resistance requires enormous intentionality and communal reinforcement amid the barrage of seductive pressures from the insatiable insinuations of the market, with its intrusion into every part of our life from family to the national budget.

This is more so because these days it seems that we want more time so that we may produce more. Therefore, it is necessary to make a case for the relevance of the Sabbath in our

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the doctrine of the Sabbath according to the SDA Church see Cress, James A. 2005. *Seventh-Day Adventists Believe, A Biblical Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Special Africa Edition*. Silver Spring: Ministerial Association General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, p. 281-300.

technologically ever advancing world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, it is necessary to put forward an argument on how the Sabbath can be of benefit to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

“Theology arises from the freedom and responsibility of the Christian community to inquire about its faith in God” (Migliore 2004:1). Therefore, there is need to learn more about Sabbath keeping and in the process, answer the questions that people have about this topic. In the light of the Sabbath teaching of the SDA Church, others may think that the said Church is legalistic. Therefore, it is imperative to study how the Sabbath is to be kept to establish whether this is indeed a legalistic exercise or not. Kessler notices that “according to Wolf (1981:137), the Sabbath commandment is a shining example of the fact that the Ten Commandments were not meant to be demands but a liberation from demands. The Sabbath is a gift of free time” (Kessler 2012:3).

It would, however, be wrong to limit the Sabbath to the SDA Church because an increasing number of Christian theologians of other denominations are developing an interest in the topic of Sabbath keeping.<sup>2</sup> Hence the decision to write on Sabbath keeping in the works of two theologians, one an SDA member and the other a non-SDA member to make sure that we learn as much as we can about Sabbath keeping. Therefore, this study proposes to look at Sabbath keeping in the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn.

Samuele Bacchiocchi, a member of the SDA Church, was a Church Historian who earned a PhD from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. His dissertation, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, was later published as a book that earned him respect as a Sabbath scholar. He also authored other books and articles on the Sabbath. Bacchiocchi died from cancer on 20 December 2008 at the age of 70, leaving behind a wealth of works on the Sabbath that continue to speak to and be cited by theologians of different disciplines today.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To mention but a few: Marva J. Dawn (who will form a conversation partner in this research); Baab, Lynne M; Bass, Dorothy C; Berry, Wendell; Buchanan, Mark; and Heschel, Abraham Joshua. This list has been taken from ‘*For further Reading*’ in Marva J. Dawn. 2006. *The Sense of the call*. Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>3</sup> For more on Bacchiocchi see <http://www.thejournal.org/issues/issue132/sam-bacchiocchi-dies.html> accessed 25 May 2016. Also, see the back cover of: Samuele, Bacchiocchi. 1998. *The Sabbath under Crossfire*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives.

On the other hand, Marva J. Dawn is “a Lutheran Theologian” (Bacchiocchi 1998: 263). According to her website,<sup>4</sup> she holds a PhD and M.A. in Christian Ethics and the Scriptures from the University of Notre Dame, IN. Moreover, Dawn also holds a Th.M in Old Testament from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, CA. Furthermore, Dawn holds an M.Div. in New Testament from Western Evangelical Seminary, Portland. Her widely cited book *Keeping the Sabbath wholly* was published by Eerdmans in 1989. She also wrote another book on Sabbath keeping, *The Sense of the Call*, which was also published by Eerdmans in 2006.

It is, therefore, my hope that bringing together these two theologians in this theological study will ensure that maximum benefits are reaped from this study by the SDA Church. However, it is important at this stage to point out one fundamental difference between the two proposed conversation partners in this study. Bacchiocchi holds that the Sabbath of God is to be kept on the seventh day of each week, as the fourth commandment of the Decalogue directs, while Dawn prefers to keep her Sabbath on Sunday, the first day of the week. Nevertheless, this study’s focus is on the Sabbath keeping aspect of the Sabbath teaching. Therefore, for the purposes of this research that difference will not be an impediment, but a catalyst, as this study’s aim is to find out about Sabbath keeping from people who think differently. Though not the focus of this study, this difference will be theologically accounted for in the text. Indeed, as a seeker of truth this study dare not be selective in its sources, but, open to new ideas wherever and by whomsoever they are communicated.

As pointed out earlier on in this chapter, our 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by people who are caught up in busyness as they seek to produce more. Consequently, we are a restless generation that desperately needs rest. In fact, we are so busy that even professed Christians are not as healthy as they should be spiritually. Sometimes we go for several days without having time to read our Bibles or to attend church. Though writing in a different context Blomberg’s (1999: 29) observation that ours is “an age of growing biblical illiteracy, even among church-goers....” remains a valid point even for our study.

Therefore, our generation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a busy one that desperately needs rest. This study will seek to find out whether Sabbath keeping can help us rest. Rest entails healing for

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.marvadawn.org/about\\_marva](http://www.marvadawn.org/about_marva) accessed 25 May 2016.

our spiritual lives, social life, physical being, moral life, intellectual life, and our emotional health. Beyond offering rest to us physically, the Sabbath day is God's gift by which God also offers us a reason and an opportunity to celebrate. Indeed:

The Sabbath day renews our minds with the things of God and reminds us of our confident hope, which empowers us to live according to the values of the Kingdom in spite of what surrounds us (Dawn 2006:43).

During the working week, the family members are usually busy each with his or her endeavours. Husband and wife are usually at their respective work places during the weekdays while children will usually be at school. Members of the family would sometimes meet only in the evening. However, sometimes one of the parents or a child would come home so late that he or she would miss meeting their family. And in the morning each member would leave home for their work or school at a time different from other members of the family thus risking not seeing the family in the mornings as well. Hence in our 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is not uncommon to not see one's family, which one stays with, in a week.

As we work there will always come that time when we feel a need to rest from our work. Even when we enjoy our work we would always want some rest from it. Many people would take holidays from work to regain their strength as it were. However, after the holidays they would usually try to work seven days of the week and for long hours on each day. Before they know it, they would be needing a holiday again. Usually, such holidays involve spending a handsome amount of money on travel, lodging, adventure, or having some fun as it were. However, the Sabbath day challenges us to work six days a week and rest in one to make sure that when we begin a new week we would always begin it productively. A gift of God to us, the Sabbath day may be God's free holiday meant for our enjoyment regardless of our socio-economic status, or whether we can afford a holiday or not.

We live in a time that is also characterised by moral scandals. Unfortunately, in many instances, such scandals also affect Christians where they are reported as culprits. It would seem like, in the busyness of our lives, we are losing an aspect of our identity as Christians. The pressures of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to produce more and to have more would appear to be dethroning our cherished values and ethics. However, according to Bacchiocchi (1998:269); "Christians who give priority to the Lord in their thinking and living during the Sabbath day ultimately give

priority to the Lord every day of their lives”. This statement by Bacchiocchi triggers an interest for more research into the area of Sabbath keeping.

Against what our society believes that to be happy we should have more material goods, it appears that we are a worried and anxious generation yet we have more. We are worried about unfinished work yet we do not appreciate the finished work of God. We are anxious about being affluent yet we have more than we need to thank God for. Therefore, we continually feel a need to work more, to produce more, to accomplish more, and to have more. Yet in our abundance, we have a sense of meaninglessness in our lives. Perhaps we need to consider the alternative. There is need to study whether Sabbath keeping is or not that alternative.

The Sabbath day is a time when we may channel our effort to doing works of charity in society. Though it did not necessarily take place on a Sabbath, Johnson (2011: 15) notes that the first disciples of Jesus left behind what was dear to them to follow Jesus: “The tax collector left a lucrative sinecure; Peter and the sons of Zebedee left their source of livelihood”. If the first disciplines sacrificed so much we can surely share our possessions with those who do not have enough on a Sabbath day. The Sabbath is a call to remember God, to remember that we have a provider in God, who sustains life and gives it meaning. The Sabbath is an invitation to cease our worry and anxiety and to trust in God.

On the other hand, some of us have been disappointed by people that we trusted and we wonder whether we may trust anybody. Sabbath keeping is an invitation to trust in God more than we trust ourselves or our friends. Sabbath keeping presents a time in which we can be consoled by God in our different perplexities in our lives. We may have been pulled down and discouraged by others in their sharp words, but Sabbath keeping presents a time when we can hear what our maker, God, really thinks of us. Through Sabbath keeping God heals us emotionally. However, there is a need to stretch the benefits of Sabbath keeping and learn more about this area of Theology.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The Seventh - day Adventist (SDA) church believes that the seventh day Sabbath of the week is still to be kept holy as the fourth commandment of the Decalogue directs. Therefore, there is a need for continual research in this area, especially the Sabbath keeping aspect thereof, to



help continue to develop theological insight into this important doctrinal concept. However, lately, other Christian scholars that do not necessarily belong to the SDA church have taken a great interest in the doctrine of the Sabbath especially in the aspect of Sabbath keeping. This research will bring together two theologians who have written extensively on Sabbath keeping from different theological traditions to find out what may be learned from a theological consideration of their respective writings.

This research will intentionally put a Seventh Day Adventist theologian with a non-Seventh Day Adventist theologian to think about this doctrine from a fresh and novel perspective. Therefore, the question that this research will seek to answer is: How can the theology of Sabbath keeping be enriched, developed, nuanced, and problematized through a critical theological engagement between the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn?

### **Research questions**

#### **Primary question:**

How can the theology of Sabbath keeping be enriched, developed, nuanced, and problematized through a critical and comparative theological engagement with the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn?

#### **Secondary questions:**

- i) What are some of the distinctive theological contributions to Sabbath keeping from the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi?
- ii) What are some of the distinctive theological contributions to Sabbath keeping from the works of Marva J. Dawn?
- iii) What are some of the differences in theological understanding and emphasis between Bacchiocchi and Dawn?
- iv) What are some of the areas of similarity and harmony in the understanding of Sabbath keeping between Bacchiocchi and Dawn?

- v) What aspects of this theological dialogue can enrich, texture, and develop the SDA understanding of Sabbath keeping at the intersection of the work by the previously mentioned theologians?

### **1.3 Contribution and relevance**

This study will be especially useful to the SDA church which believes that the seventh day of each week is the Sabbath of God and therefore should be kept holy as the fourth commandment of the Decalogue directs. This does not invalidate Dawn's contribution on Sabbath keeping (Dawn holds that the Sabbath takes place on the first day of the week). However, her theological approach will be brought into conversation with Bacchiocchi's views on the Seventh day of the week (among others) to see what can be learnt from such an engagement.

It is hoped that this study will contribute deep, rich, textured, and scholarly knowledge on Sabbath keeping. Moreover, this research contribution will open further inquiry, a deeper searching for truth, a greater appreciation for the complexity of this theological concept, and a desire to facilitate deeper and richer dialogues among theologians and Christians about concepts such as the Sabbath and Sabbath keeping.

### **1.4 Research methodology and goal(s)**

A qualitative content analysis of books and articles on Sabbath keeping from both Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn will be used as primary data to study this topic of research. Moreover, other theologians who help us to locate the two authors' contributions within the larger theological discourse on Sabbath keeping will also be studied. These will be studied as secondary data to maximize the critical theological outcome of this study. Finally, the two primary conversation partners chosen for this study will be brought into a conversation with each other to gain a new, more complex, and nuanced understanding of Sabbath keeping because of the research method and processes.

### **1.5 Literature Review**

Several authors have written on Sabbath keeping including the two theologians that I wish to engage in this study. Beyond Sabbath keeping Samuele Bacchiocchi has written extensively

on the Sabbath. His PhD dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday* in 1977 at the Pontifical Gregorian University is probably the work that put him in the spotlight as a Sabbath theologian. In his dissertation, Bacchiocchi wanted to find out the history behind most Christians worshipping on Sunday when the fourth commandment directs the keeping holy of the Sabbath instead.

It is therefore important to note that as a Seventh Day Adventist scholar Bacchiocchi had in mind the seventh day of the week when he wrote about the Sabbath. On the other hand, an increasing number of theologians tend to refer to Sunday, the first day of the week, as the Sabbath. Some call it ‘their’ Sabbath while Bacchiocchi refers to the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of God. Marva J. Dawn is a good example of such a theologian who calls Sunday ‘her Sabbath’. This fundamental difference will not impede this study but it will enrich it.

*The Sabbath under crossfire* that was published by Biblical Perspectives in 1998 is another work on the topic of Sabbath by Bacchiocchi. In this work, Bacchiocchi argues for the continued validity of the seventh day of the week as God’s Sabbath against Sunday as the Sabbath. In fact, Bacchiocchi (1998: 9) concedes that “the first event that compelled me to write this book is the promulgation of the Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini* by Pope Paul John II on May 31, 1998”. In the last chapter, Samuele Bacchiocchi looks at the Sabbath aspect of Sabbath keeping.

In 1980 the Pontifical Gregorian University published Samuele Bacchiocchi’s *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*. In this work, Bacchiocchi argues that as human beings we are restless in many ways and for many reasons. He then proposes that the Sabbath is God’s gift to us so that we may enjoy the rest of God.

*Matthew 11:28-30: Jesus’ Rest and the Sabbath* by Bacchiocchi was published by Andrews University Press in 1984. In this work, Samuel Bacchiocchi makes a case that the Sabbath is God’s gift to us so that we may enjoy Jesus’ rest that is characterized by his easy yoke. Furthermore, *The Sabbath in the New Testament* is another work on the Sabbath by Bacchiocchi. Published in 1980 by Biblical Perspectives the book looks at a host of issues about the Sabbath. However, chapter 5 of the book specifically looks at Sabbath keeping in the New Testament while chapter 10 looks at questions on Sabbath keeping in general.

On the other hand, Marva J. Dawn has written two books on Sabbath keeping that I am aware of. *Keeping the Sabbath wholly* was published by Wm. B. Eerdmans in 1989. A widely cited work the book offers a fresh and deep insight into Sabbath keeping to readers. In the book, Dawn argues that for us to enjoy God's gift of the Sabbath we would have to keep it wholly. Following her case closely one begins to see that to keep the Sabbath holy entails keeping it wholly. As recent as 2006 Wm. B. Eerdmans published another book on Sabbath keeping by Marva J. Dawn entitled *The Sense of the Call*. In this work, she makes a case for the relevance of the Sabbath for Christians who work for the Church, other entities including public service outside Church employment, and indeed for all Christians. She argues that Sabbath keeping is not just a mere once in a week event but as it were a way of life.

## **1.6 The structure of the thesis**

### Chapter 1

This chapter will serve as a general introduction to this study and consist of the research proposal. A general overview of the theme, structure, methodology, background and rationale, research questions as well as the hoped-for contribution of this study will be included in this chapter.

### Chapter 2

This chapter will look at Sabbath keeping in the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi. The chapter will seek to find the distinctive theological contributions to Sabbath keeping in the works of Bacchiocchi.

### Chapter 3

Continuing from the previous chapter this chapter will look at Sabbath keeping in the works of Marva J. Dawn. Like the preceding chapter, this chapter will seek to find the distinctive theological contributions to Sabbath keeping in the works of Dawn.

### Chapter 4

This chapter will facilitate a conversation on Sabbath keeping in the writings of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn. The chapter will seek to find some of the differences in theological understanding and emphasis between Bacchiocchi and Dawn. Moreover, the chapter will seek to find some of the areas of similarity and harmony in the understanding of

Sabbath keeping between the two authors. Furthermore, the chapter will seek to find the aspects of this theological dialogue that can enrich, texture, and develop the SDA understanding of Sabbath keeping.

## Chapter 5

This will be the final chapter of the study. The chapter will basically form the conclusion of the study by summarizing how the theology of Sabbath keeping can be enriched, developed, nuanced, and problematized through a critical theological engagement with the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn.

### **1.7 Limitation(s) of the study**

This study will be limited to Sabbath keeping in the writings of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn. Debates on whether to keep the Sabbath on the seventh or first day of the week are outside of the primary focus of this study, although I will account for the theological difference of the two conversation partners on this point and see what can be learnt from their various perspectives without needing to make a judgement on which perspective is more valid in relation to the other. Both Bacchiocchi and Dawn have written extensively on various theological topics. However, this study will not engage the entire corpus of their respective contributions but will focus primarily on their thoughts on Sabbath keeping in their works.

### **1.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have introduced the study. We have looked at the background and rationale, statement of the problem, contribution and relevance, research methodology and goals, literature review, provisional structure of the thesis, and limitations of the study.

## Chapter 2: Sabbath keeping in the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi

### 2.1 Introduction

Samuele Bacchiocchi was a Seventh Day Adventist Church historian who earned his PhD in Church history at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.<sup>5</sup> A prolific writer and a respected scholar Bacchiocchi wrote on a variety of theological topics in articles and books. Beyond Sabbath, he also wrote about marriage, music, immortality and resurrection, the role of women in the church, wine and the use of alcoholic beverages by Christians, Christian adornment and dress, Sunday observance, Hell, God's festivals, the signs of the times, headship, submission and equality in scripture, the Iraqi war, et cetera, to mention but a few areas.<sup>6</sup> He died from cancer on 20 December 2008.

However, for the purposes of this study, we will be concentrating on Sabbath keeping in the writings of Bacchiocchi. This is important to state right at the beginning because the topic of

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<sup>5</sup> For more on Bacchiocchi see <http://www.thejournal.org/issues/issue132/sam-bacchiocchi-dies.html> accessed on 25 May 2016. Also, see the back cover of: Samuele, Bacchiocchi. 1998. *The Sabbath under Crossfire*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives.

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1977. *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*. Rome, Italy: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1980. *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today*. Rome, Italy: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1997. *Immortality or Resurrection? A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1987. *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1991. *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1989. *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the use of alcoholic beverages*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. "Sabbatical Typologies of Messianic Redemption." JSJ 17 (1986): 153-76; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. "Matthew 11: 28-30: Jesus' Rest and the Sabbath." AUSS 22.3, 1984, 289-316; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1985. *The Sabbath in the New Testament: Answers to Questions*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1998. *The Sabbath Under Crossfire: A Biblical Analysis of recent Sabbath/Sunday Developments*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 2000. *The Christian and Rock Music: A Study on Biblical Principles of music*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1975. *Anti-Judaism and the origin of Sunday*. Rome, Italy: The Gregorian Pontifical University Press; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1982. *The Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*. Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association; Bacchiocchi S, Damsteegt L, & Jamison H. 1995. *Christian Dress and Adornment*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1986. *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1976. *Rest for Modern Man: The Sabbath for Today*. Nashville: Southern Publishing Association; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. "Hell: Eternal Torment or Annihilation?" *End time Issues*, 7 (1999): 1- 8; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1985. *The Time of the Crucifixion and Resurrection*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; et cetera.

Sabbath is a very broad one. Indeed, Samuele Bacchiocchi has written extensively on the Sabbath as well. However, this study will seek to learn more about keeping a weekly Sabbath instead. We will seek to learn what some of the distinctive theological contributions to Sabbath keeping from the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi may be. In the process of our study, we will also learn how Samuele Bacchiocchi does his theology, his hermeneutics, and theological factors that influence his conclusions.

## 2.2 The significance of Sabbath keeping in our time

In this section, we will seek to find the significance of Sabbath keeping for our time. We recognise the importance of the applicability of any study that is undertaken. Therefore, it is imperative to elucidate on how significant Sabbath keeping is for our time and generation. Moreover, it is crucial to appreciate that in the works of Bacchiocchi the main interest is to find out what the Bible says on a Theological theme, including on our current theme of Sabbath keeping.<sup>7</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi (1999:9; Cf. 1987a:25) states, for instance, in the introduction to his book *The Sabbath under crossfire*, that,

This book is written from a biblical perspective. I accept the Bible as normative for defining Christian beliefs and practices. Because the words of the Bible contain a divine message written by human authors who lived in specific historical situations, every effort must be made to understand their meaning in their historical context. My conviction is that an understanding of both the historical and literary context of relevant Biblical texts is indispensable in establishing both their original meaning and their present relevance.<sup>8</sup> This conviction is reflected in the methodology in examining

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<sup>7</sup> The wording of many titles of Bacchiocchi's publications give a clear indication of this. For instance, look at the following actual titles of his works: Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1997. *Immortality or Resurrection? A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1987. *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1991. *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1989. *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the use of alcoholic beverages*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; and, Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 2000. *The Christian and Rock Music: A Study on Biblical Principles of music*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1995. *Christian Dress & Adornment*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives. See especially pp. 74-100 where Samuele Bacchiocchi studies his theme from Christian history's point of view. Also, see Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1995. *God's Festivals in Scripture and History, Part I: Spring Festivals*.



those controversial biblical texts that relate to the Law, in general, and the Sabbath, in particular.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, in his other book *Wine in the Bible*, Bacchiocchi dedicate the work “to all Christians who find in *the Scripture* the moral conviction not only to abstain themselves from intoxicating substances but also to help others to do likewise” (1989).<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, on the back cover of his book *Christian Dress and Adornment*, it is significant that it is said that “this book examines *the Biblical* teachings regarding dress, cosmetics and ornaments. Seven basic principles regarding dress and adornment are developed from a careful analysis of the relevant *Biblical passages*” (1995a: Back cover, emphasis mine).<sup>11</sup> The above characteristics of Bacchiocchi’s works are largely that of Seventh Day Adventists in their approach to doing theology (Cf. Bacchiocchi 1987b: Adjacent Cover page). Samuele Bacchiocchi believes in both the old and the new testaments of the Bible (1986b:31-62, 63-84).

### 2.2.1 An initial theological definition of Sabbath

Before we delve into the study on Sabbath keeping it would be prudent to first know what ‘Sabbath’ is. Knowing the meaning of the keywords that we are dealing with can go a long way in giving us insights that otherwise, we would not have.<sup>12</sup> Our English word ‘Sabbath’ has been taken from the Hebrew ‘Shabat’ (שַׁבָּת). This Hebrew verb means ‘to cease from doing’, ‘to desist from doing’, and therefore ‘to rest’ (Bacchiocchi 1980: 83). To add, citing Stolz, Kessler

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Michigan: Biblical Perspectives in which Samuele Bacchiocchi historically studies the Passover and Pentecost from the Old Testament into the New Testament and through the early church. Moreover, also see Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1996. *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History, Part II: The Fall Festivals*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives. Note the emphasis on *Scripture* and *History* in the last two books. As a Historical theologian who believes in the authority of the Bible *Scripture* and *History* are very important to his theology. Moreover, also see Bacchiocchi, Samuele (1981) “John 5:17: Negation or clarification of the Sabbath?”, Andrews University Seminary Studies: Vol. 19: No. 1, 3-19, p.4.

<sup>9</sup> In introducing his earlier work Samuele Bacchiocchi had said the same words. See Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1987a. *Women in the Church, a Biblical study on the role of women in the Church*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> See the unnumbered dedication page at the beginning of the book. Also, see pp.78-103,224-258 of the same book.

<sup>11</sup> For Samuele Bacchiocchi’s theological argument on Christian Dress and Adornment see his book: Bacchiocchi, Samuele.1995. *Christian Dress & Adornment*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives. See especially his chapters on both the Old and New Testaments on pp. 28-72.

<sup>12</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi uses meaning of words in Hebrew and Greek to develop his Theology. See for example Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1989. *Wine in the Bible, a Biblical study on the use of alcoholic beverages*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives. See pp. 59-73.



recognises that “the noun Sabbath is derived from the Hebrew verb for ‘stop, rest’” (Kessler 2012: 2).<sup>13</sup>

As such studies on Sabbath keeping are concerned with helping people to rest in the deepest sense of the word. Indeed, many people would agree that our generation struggles with busyness and restlessness (Brueggemann 2014:89; Bacchiocchi 1998:284; Kessler 2012:1; and, Finley 2010:14).

### **2.2.2 A rediscovery of the Sabbath as a therapeutic benefit**

The teaching of Sabbath keeping has largely been ignored in Christianity (Bacchiocchi 1998:261). Karl Barth also shares the same sentiment when he writes on the Sabbath commandment: “In general, theological ethics has handled this command of God, or the one command of God in this particular application, with a casualness and feebleness which certainly do not match its importance in Holy Scripture or its decisive material significance” (1961:50). However, lately, Christian Theologians have taken a keen interest in this teaching mainly because they have realised its benefits (Bacchiocchi 1998:263). It has come to the attention of theologians that the world is getting busier to keep the economy running, thus stimulating interest in studies on Sabbath rest.

Admittedly, some Christians still reject any idea of a Christian Sabbath, saying such is a characteristic of Judaic law instead of Christianity (Bacchiocchi 2000:16). They view it as a form of bondage or legalism that we have been freed from by the person and work of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Samuele Bacchiocchi is of the view that “the permanence of Sabbath keeping is the marked continuity between Judaism and Christianity which I perceive in the New Testament” (2000:16). Bacchiocchi further observes that “a paradox of our time is that while some Christians are rejecting the Sabbath as an Old Covenant institution nailed to the cross, an increasing number of other Christians are rediscovering the continuity and value of the Sabbath for our tension – filled and restless lives” (1998:261).

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<sup>13</sup> See Stolz 1995a:864.

While the rediscovery of the Sabbath calls for celebration it is important to note that Christian theologians do not necessarily agree on the day of the week to be kept as the Sabbath (Cf. Claassens 2011; Carson 1982; Brueggemann 2014; Harrelson 2006; Walker 1999; Bacchiocchi 1980; Bacchiocchi 1998; Finley 2010; and Baab 2005). In a way, the rediscovery of the Sabbath is a rediscovery of the Seventh day of the week for some while it is a rediscovery of the first day of the week for others. Examples of Theologians who are for the first day of the week as the Sabbath include: Carson, D.A; Claassens, L.J.M; Brueggemann, W; Harrelson,W; and Baab,L.M.<sup>14</sup> On the hand, Theologians who believe that the Sabbath should be kept on the Seventh day of the week include: Bacchiocchi, S; Finley, M; and Walker, C.P.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, both sides agree that human beings need to follow God's rhythm of six days of work and one day of rest if we are to be healthy and happy in life ( Cf. Brueggemann 2014:27; Bacchiocchi 1998:287; Heschel 1951:10; Bass 1997:76; Tsevat 1980:51; Millgram 1944:214; Baab 2005:15; Walker 1999:16; Postema 1997:30; and, Finley 2010:8). Whatever the theological differences among Christian Theologians on this issue the point is that

the rediscovery of the Sabbath by both Sunday-Sabbatarians and Seventh-day Sabbatarians is motivated also by the realization that the values of the Sabbath as a day for spiritual, physical, moral, and social renewal are essential for revitalizing the religious experience of millions of Christians today (Bacchiocchi 1998:263).

In this section, we have seen that indeed Sabbath keeping is important for our time as we need rest. We have also seen that an increasing number of Christian Theologians are taking an interest in the theology of Sabbath keeping. Though Christian Theologians do not necessarily agree on one single day to be kept as the Sabbath by all Christians, they do however recognise the significance of the Sabbath for our tension-filled and restless generation.

### **2.3 Sabbath keeping and Creation**

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<sup>14</sup> See Carson 1982; Claassens 2011; Brueggemann 2014; Harrelson 2006; and, Baab 2005.

<sup>15</sup> See Bacchiocchi 1980; Bacchiocchi 1998; Bacchiocchi 1999; Finley 2010; and Walker 1999.

The doctrine of Sabbath keeping is deeply rooted in the creation story (Bacchiocchi 1998:285,287; Bacchiocchi 1980:85,87,88,238; Heschel 1951:10; Bass 1997:76; Millgram 1944:214; Baab 2005:39; Postema 1997:55; and Finley 2010:8,13,76,77).<sup>16</sup> We are told in the scriptures that God created things and beings in six days and rested on the seventh day of that first creation week, thus setting a pattern for humans to follow as he would later in Exodus 20 command human beings to keep the Sabbath day holy.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, “scripture is indispensable in bringing us into a new relationship with the living God through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, and thus into a new relationship with others and with the entire creation” (Migliore 2004:50). Hence Bacchiocchi maintains that the Sabbath day is the seventh day<sup>18</sup> of the week and thus a day to be kept holy. “The Sabbath brings Christ’s rest to our souls by constantly reassuring us that our lives have meaning, value, and hope because they are rooted in God from creation to eternity” (Bacchiocchi 1998: 285). In fact, the Sabbath is “the creation Sabbath” (Andreasen 1972:196). Interestingly, “the permanence of the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping” is also validated by “New Testament allusions to the creation origin of the Sabbath” (Bacchiocchi 2000:26).<sup>19</sup>

Bacchiocchi goes on to state that Augustine “expresses this truth poetically: ‘Thy resting on the seventh day after the completion of thy works foretells us through the voice of Thy Book, that we also, after completing our works through Thy generosity, in the Sabbath of eternal life shall rest in Thee’” (Bacchiocchi 1998: 286). To keep the Sabbath in this busy world is a foretaste of the rest that God’s children will enjoy in the coming kingdom of God. In this way, we see the doctrine of last things intertwined with that of creation. This is indeed precisely what Colin Gunton notes, “the doctrine of the last things is already embedded within any adequate Christian account of God and creation” (1997:226). This is because the God who created is the same God who redeems (McGrath 2001:296).

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<sup>16</sup> Also, see Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1995. *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History, Part I: The Spring Festivals*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives; see the backcover of the book.

<sup>17</sup> On this point see Keck, Leaner E. 1994. *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol I*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. See especially pp 844-846; and, Meyers, Carol. 2005. *Exodus: The New Cambridge Bible Commentary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See pp. 132-133, &, 173.

<sup>18</sup> For an analysis of the significance of the number ‘seven’ see Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1980. *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*. Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press. See pp.79-83.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed discussion see Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 2000. *The Sabbath In the New Testament*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives. See especially pp. 26-29.

However, the Sabbath day is not just good for human beings but indeed for the rest of the creation of God. During the six days of work humans and other creatures are busy with a lot of activities but on the Sabbath day, we are to rest from all our works as human beings. As human beings do various works including mining the earth's resources and clearing land for cultivation and construction the creation suffers depletion and even depreciation. Resting on the Sabbath ensures that the creation recovers from human use of its resources (McGrath 2001:304). This point is such an important one much that Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church wrote an Encyclical on caring for our environment. In this document, Pope Francis compares our habitat, planet earth, with our sister and our mother who cries out for our care (Laudate Si 2015:3).

Bacchiocchi argues also that the doctrine of creation is a foundation for the doctrine of the second coming of Christ (1986b:33)<sup>20</sup>. He argues that initially, God came “into this world to bring order out of disorder, cosmos out of chaos” (1986b:33) just like he will through the second coming of Christ. According to Bacchiocchi, Sabbath keeping “offers both theological assurance and practical opportunities to nourish and strengthen the Advent Hope” (1986b:414).<sup>21</sup>

### **2.3.1 Sabbath keeping as renewal of faith in a perfect Creator**

In our technologically and scientifically advancing world it is not uncommon for people to deny the existence of God (Bacchiocchi 1998:287; Ibid 1980:86-88); let alone that God created the universe and people (Ibid 1998:287; Ibid 1980:86-88). Bacchiocchi (1980:87) notes that

the triumph of scientific and rational thinking has resulted in the tendency to discard the whole concept of the existence of a supernatural God...The attempt to explain the origin of life and of this world on a natural and rational

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<sup>20</sup> In his book *The advent hope for human hopelessness*.

<sup>21</sup> For an extensive link between Sabbath and the second advent in Bacchiocchi see his book: Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1986. *The advent hope for human hopelessness*. Berrien Springs, Michigan: Biblical Perspectives, see pp. 414-417.

basis has led not only secular thinkers but also many professing Christians to reject the Biblical teaching of a Divine fiat (spoken) creation.

On the other hand, Daniel Migliore argues that the problem of God in modern theology is complex and has a host of causes related to how people view God (2004).<sup>22</sup> However, as Colin Gunton rightly notes about the doctrine of creation, “all cultures, ancient and modern alike, seek for a way of accounting for the universe that will give their lives coherence and meaning” (1997:141). Sabbath keeping is both an expression and renewal of our faith in God as the Perfect Creator, and therefore the one who gives our lives coherence and meaning. Elsewhere, Samuele Bacchiocchi concedes that meaning, courage, and hope in believers’ lives is to be found in “the certain Biblical assurance of a soon-coming *personal saviour*” (1987b:10 & Back cover, Emphasis his).

This is especially so because “a person who neglects the Sabbath, the memorial of creation, is liable to forget and become sceptical about the God of creation” (Bacchiocchi 1980:88). George Elliot (in Bacchiocchi 1980: 86-87) rightly observes that

...against atheism, which denies the existence of a personal God; against materialism, which denies that this visible universe has its roots in the unseen; and against secularism, which denies the need to worship, the Sabbath is an eternal witness. It symbolically commemorates that creative power which spoke all things into being, the wisdom which ordered their adaptations and harmony, and the love which made, as well as pronounced, all ‘very good’. It is set as the perpetual guardian of man against that spiritual infirmity which has everywhere led him to a denial of the God who made him, or to the degradation of that God into a creature made with his own hands.

This lengthy quotation captures the essence of the point being emphasised so eloquently. Bacchiocchi here quoted George Elliot. The point here is that Sabbath keeping reminds us of one of the important teachings of Christianity; namely, the doctrine of creation. In fact, Karl

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<sup>22</sup> For further discussion on this point see Migliore, Daniel L. 2004. *Faith Seeking Understanding*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, pp.64-68.

Barth stretches this point even further. By asking a series of questions, he argues that if the doctrine of creation was a false one, then the teaching of reconciliation and redemption would be false as well (Barth 1958:22-23). This is so because the doctrine of creation is closely related to the doctrine of reconciliation and redemption. Sabbath keeping reminds us of the important place which the doctrine of creation occupies in Christianity (Bacchiocchi 1980:86-88; Ibid 1998:287).

### **2.3.2 Sabbath keeping: The good news of human roots**

Because we live in an imperfect world characterised by violence, corruption, greed, injustice, suffering, and death we need consolation and divine intervention (Bacchiocchi 1980:50). According to Bacchiocchi (1980:50), the Sabbath is a weekly appointment with God in which he reminds us that he is our creator and that he has created us for a purpose. In Bacchiocchi's works, the doctrine of creation is crucial. It is also to some extent the basis for his theology on the role of women in the church.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the Sabbath "reassures us that our origin and destiny are rooted in God" (Bacchiocchi 1980:50). It is important to appreciate that in Bacchiocchi's works the main aim is to construct a theology of Sabbath keeping that is in harmony with the Bible and that this is partly done by carefully studying the history behind the development of this doctrine (Bacchiocchi 1977:308).

In this way, according to Bacchiocchi (1980:50), Sabbath keeping fills us with hope by reminding us of our roots and our destination. By instilling faith in the doctrine of creation, Sabbath keeping, in turn, instils the same faith in the doctrine of eschatology. Indeed, "Christian faith is expectant faith. It eagerly awaits the completion of the creative and redemptive activity of God" (Migliore 2004:330). Put in another way, if we believe that God created the universe and its inhabitants including human beings, then we may believe that the same God has plans for his creation.

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<sup>23</sup> For an elaborate discussion on this aspect of Bacchiocchi's theology see Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1987a. *Women in the Church, a Biblical study on the role of women in the Church*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives. See pp. 30,65-86.

For Bacchiocchi, Sabbath keeping is deeply rooted in the doctrine of creation. It is no surprise therefore that Dorothy Bass suggests that “relocating our understanding of this day in the biblical stories of *creation*, exodus, and resurrection will be essential if we are to discover the gifts it offers” (1997:76, emphasis mine).<sup>24</sup> Noting the significance of the doctrine of creation Abraham Joshua Heschel rightly notes that the Sabbath’s “date is not determined by any event in nature, such as the new moon, but by the act of creation” (1951:10). Thus, each week we celebrate the creative works of God by keeping the Sabbath. As we keep the Sabbath our faith in God grows and we are filled with hope to face the uncertain future. Hence Sabbath keeping keeps us in God our creator to whom we belong if we live and keep this day holy.

## **2.4 The Sabbath day: A holy day?**

The other interesting aspect of the theology of Sabbath keeping in the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi is that of the holiness of the Sabbath day. Below we explore this concept in detail.

### **2.4.1 The holiness of the Sabbath day**

According to Bacchiocchi (1980), the Sabbath is not just any other day but it is a holy day sanctified by God himself. “The fundamental meaning of the word ‘holy’ appears to be ‘separation, setting apart’ for divine manifestation” (Bacchiocchi 1980:121). Here Bacchiocchi cited *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962, s.v. “Holiness”. Naomi Koltun-Fromm agrees with Bacchiocchi by noting that Bible authors reserve the word ‘holy’ to refer to ‘things’, ‘people’, and ‘time’ ‘that belong exclusively to God’ (2010:32). God set apart the Sabbath by resting from his work on this day. It is not surprising therefore that we are to keep the Sabbath by interrupting our works. In fact, “this interruption is the holy day” (Barth 1961:50). And in the Sabbath commandment when God calls upon us to keep the Sabbath holy he means that we should set it apart from all the other days by resting from all our works that characterise all the other six days of the week.

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<sup>24</sup> Bass is here writing about Sunday, the first day of the week. However, the point of contact is that she is referring to that day as the Sabbath. Basically, her theology of the Sabbath sheds more light on Bacchiocchi’s, the difference being in the day to be kept as the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a special day to the people of God. On this day, God's people are reminded of their special relationship with God and of their call to tell the world about the good news of God. Since Sabbath time is the holy time it is a special time. Claassens (2011:2)<sup>25</sup> also notes that Sabbath is indeed a holy time when she writes that "it served as a mark of identity both for the community in exile and for the one left behind in Judah, with holy time replacing holy space as long as the temple lay in ruins". On this day God's people are challenged to be special even in their conduct. Indeed, "holiness in time points to holiness of being" (Bacchiocchi 1980:122). Holy time is to be used to preserve life. That is why Jesus argued that if David and his men ate the showbread when they were hungry, then suffering humanity can be alleviated on a Sabbath day (Bacchiocchi 1977:37). Willy Rordorf argues that Jesus healed those who needed help, not just the people who were at risk of dying if not healed immediately (1968:70).

Thomas Aquinas rightly notes that "...it is right that the seventh day should have been sanctified, since the special sanctification of every creature consists in resting in God. For this reason things dedicated to God are said to be sanctified" (1947:355). This is a time when we seek God in our lives and as we do so everything else comes to a halt as we focus on God. It is a day when we cease to seek our interests and let God be in our lives. Harrelson (2006:43) puts it eloquently when he writes that,

Exodus 20:11 ties the Sabbath directly to God's rest following the creation of the universe. Genesis 2:2-3 says that God observed the Sabbath, the first Sabbath ever, rested from divine labours, and hallowed it. How did God hallow, or sanctify ('make holy,' 'set apart for a special use') the Sabbath? Simply by resting... If God rested on the Sabbath day, how could the community not rest?

The Sabbath is a day on which we follow God's example and rest from our works as he did from his. Indeed, "every seventh day the Israelite renounces his autonomy and affirms God's dominion over him" (Tsevat 1980:48). Arguably, this is not only true for Israelites but for Christians as well.

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<sup>25</sup> Here Claassens quoted Johanna Van Wijk-Bos. 2005. *Making Wise the simple, The Torah in Christian faith and Practice*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 54.



### **2.4.2 Sabbath keeping: An antidote against idolatry**

One of the drawbacks of the breakthrough in technology, modern science, and rationalistic thinking is that they have influenced our generation to worship our achievements instead of the creator God. We tend to increasingly have more confidence in what we and our fellow human beings can achieve and disregard God in the whole equation. To add, we are increasingly worshipping our commodities as well. However, as Brueggemann (2014: 87) points out Sabbath keeping "...is no to the worship of commodity; it is no to the pursuit of community". Brueggemann seems to be saying something similar to the point that is made by Bacchiocchi.

However, Sabbath keeping is an antidote against this form of modern-day idolatry. By keeping the Sabbath holy, we celebrate the creative works of God, and in the process, our minds are impressed with the greatness of God. Through the study of God's word, we are also reminded of the redemptive acts of God, and of his promises for a beautiful future. All these challenge us to put our trust in the Creator God instead of ourselves or our fellow human beings. Indeed, as Samuele Bacchiocchi put it, "the Sabbath is a most effective vehicle through which the Church can promote the restoration of true worship" (1980:201).

### **2.4.3 Sabbath keeping: An antidote for material greediness**

In addition to trusting in our abilities instead of God our generation, because of the many material possessions that it has accumulated also tends to trust in these goods instead of God. In fact, the goods seem to have occupied the most important place above God as we disregard the will of God to get as much as we can. This trend leaves us greedy for material goods.

However, the practice of Sabbath keeping helps us to pause for a day and stop being in a rush of wanting and seeking more goods. Instead, Sabbath keeping puts us in a grateful and appreciative mood. Indeed, "the Sabbath is designed to cure such insatiable greediness by enjoining to rest, that is, to stop being greedy and start being grateful" (Bacchiocchi 1980:126).

To have peace and rest in our lives, we do not necessarily have to have more than we need, but we need to be thankful to God for providing for our needs.

In this section, we have seen that the Sabbath day is holy. It was set apart by God by resting at the end of the creation week. On this day, we experience the presence of God as we set the day apart from usual use. The presence of God dispels unholy deeds like idolatry and greediness for material gain. Thus, on the Sabbath, we give God time to cleanse us not just for the Sabbath day but for other days of the week as well. So, the Sabbath day is special, set apart for holy use, and is, therefore, a holy day.

## **2.5 Sabbath keeping for human restlessness**

Our generation is restless in a myriad of ways. We are worn out physically because we overwork ourselves to keep our economies running. In addition, we are also suffering socially as evidenced in the soaring statistics of the rate of divorce, and in delinquents. Moreover, we are also suffering spiritually as we are increasingly running out of time for God, for the church, and for the study of the word of God. We long for a voice higher than ourselves and our fellow human beings. Indeed, we feel a sense of hollowness that we do not know how to fill. All the above factors rob us of inner peace and therefore makes us an increasingly restless generation.

### **2.5.1 Sabbath keeping as an antidote for our restlessness**

Our generation is a restless one. This is demonstrated by the higher numbers of people seeking holidays to relax. Kessler also agrees that “today many people suffer from restlessness” (2012:1). Moreover, we are increasingly becoming a stressed generation. We seek to find fulfilment by our achievements but since we do not always achieve what we have set for ourselves we are left unfulfilled, dissatisfied and therefore restless. However, Augustine did learn that as human beings we truly find rest in God (Bacchiocchi 1998:285).

Sabbath keeping is foundational to rest. It is the gift of God to human beings and the rest of his creation to pause once in a week and rest from the busyness of the other six days. God did not rest because he was restless but he did so to set a rhythm of six days of work and one of rest for us so that by following his example we may find rest for ourselves. True, lasting rest is found in God. Indeed “our tension-filled and restless lives today more than ever before need the rest and renewal the Sabbath is designed to provide” (Bacchiocchi 1998:285).

Sabbath keeping is God’s appointed means to bring peace into troubled lives. Since it is a day on which we devote 24 hours to God it brings God’s presence into our lives, and it is the presence of God that gives us the peace we so much long for. As we switch off all distractions and focus on God we experience in a real sense the spiritual presence of God in our lives. “The heightened sense of the nearness of Christ’s presence experienced on the Sabbath fills the soul with joy, peace, and rest” (Bacchiocchi 1998:289). As it were this experience flows into the other six days of the week. Indeed, we may come to know that commodities should not hold us into a pattern of restlessness, “but likely not without Sabbath, a rest rooted in God’s own restfulness and extended to our neighbours who also must rest. We, with our hurts, fears, and exhaustion, are left restless until then” (Brueggemann 2014:89).

### **2.5.2 Sabbath and Divine ownership and commitment**

The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that we were created by God, therefore, we belong to God. Indeed, “keeping the Sabbath is acceptance of the sovereignty of God” (Tsevat 1980:49). He is our Father and our God, and we owe our existence to him. Samuele Bacchiocchi rightly points out that, “the Sabbath constantly reminds believers of their belonging to God, (sic) because it is the seal of divine ownership” (1998:293). The Sabbath is a holy time, it is time, and human beings do not own time, neither can they manipulate or control it. The same is true with God; we cannot manipulate or control him. Therefore, Sabbath keeping reminds us of the nature of God and ever keeps our focus on him. And because God owns us we can rest in him on every Sabbath day and indeed such rest is spread to the other six days of the week. So, by keeping the Sabbath we are continually reminded that we can tell God anything that troubles us; that we can turn to him when we feel restless in life.

When God rested on the first Sabbath he did so to demonstrate that he has time for his creation especially the crown of that creation: Human beings whom he created in his own image. So, by the Sabbath God assures us of his availability and presence with us always even when we feel restless. Through the Sabbath, God is showing his commitment to helping us to rest in him in a busy world that leaves us exhausted and restless at the end of every week.

### **2.5.3 Sabbath and human commitment to and dependence upon God**

Sabbath keeping is also a good sign that Christians are committed to God. Time is the most important commodity in life because with it all other commodities are generated. Time is life and life is time (Bacchiocchi 1998:295). Therefore, when we set aside one full 24-hour day as holy to God we show a profound commitment to God. We demonstrate how much our relationship with God means. Cafferky is right to note that “the Sabbath day is a means for humans to continually renounce human autonomy and acknowledge God’s Lordship in our life” (2012:6).

Similarly, Samuele Bacchiocchi observes that Sabbath keeping “represents the Christians’ response to God’s claim on their lives” (1998:295). Moreover, Sabbath keeping is also a declaration by us that we depend on God. It is a declaration that we do not live as we please without regard to God but that we are guided by his will for our lives. “The Sabbath, symbol of divine creatorship and ownership, is designed to aid the believer in overcoming any incipient feeling of self-sufficiency” (Bacchiocchi 1998:293-294).

### **2.5.4 Restlessness? Resting as if all work were done**

One of the major reasons why our generation is such a restless one is because we seek validation by achievement. For us to accept ourselves and even allow ourselves to rest we feel that we must have achieved or completed something big. Unfortunately, even in our society people want to associate with achievers. Those who are achievers are the respected of us.

Consequently, we push ourselves too hard in our desire to achieve and complete tasks. Unless tasks are completed we feel that we cannot rest or take a break from work.

It is good and right to complete tasks; however, it is enslaving to make one's life hinge on completed tasks. The fact of life is that we will not always complete the tasks we have set for ourselves to complete at certain times. Should we then work continuously for seven days? No. On the contrary, we should take the rest we so much need on the Sabbath. Samuele Bacchiocchi points out that, "a first way to celebrate the completion and perfection of God's original creation is resting on the Sabbath as if all our work were done" (1980:85).

This makes such perfect sense because in the beginning God completed his work on our behalf and rested on the first Sabbath day to set an example for us that we should rest on every seventh day of the week. For us to break the shackles of restlessness we must recognise that on the Sabbath day we are celebrating the completion and perfection of God's original creation. We might not have managed to complete ours on the Sabbath but what matters is that God completed his and we, therefore, should joyfully enter the rest of God on his Sabbath day.

In this section, it has been argued that Sabbath keeping is very helpful in giving rest to a restless generation like ours. Indeed, Sabbath-keeping is an antidote for human restlessness. In addition, we have seen that the Sabbath day is a sign that God owns us and indeed the whole universe and that through this day God systematically reminds us that he is committed to our welfare much that he honours this day by his presence among believers.

We particularly understand the deeper meaning of the Sabbath when we keep it holy and not just have a theoretical knowledge about Sabbath keeping. Moreover, when we keep the Sabbath day holy we show that we are also committed to God and that we depend on him always. Sabbath keeping is a declaration of our consecration to God, and of our faith in him and his ways above ourselves and our ways. We particularly find rest for our restless lives on the Sabbath day when we rest on that day as if all our work were completed in the preceding six days.

## 2.6 Sabbath keeping as renewal

Keeping the Sabbath holy is not just about ceasing or desisting from our works. The Sabbath day was intended for our good, for our joy on that day, and we cannot reap the maximum benefits of Sabbath keeping by simply ceasing from our works (Bacchiocchi 2000:26). To put it in another way, cessation does not always mean that we are resting. Inactivity is as much as capable of causing us to be restless as too much activity. Moreover, Sabbath keeping renews us in different ways. In the words of Samuele Bacchiocchi, “the original purpose of the Sabbath...is to ensure physical and spiritual well-being” (2000:26). Indeed, “the task of Christian theology is to clarify what is distinctively theological in its account of personhood and to formulate a criteria for what is authentically Christian in its accounts of human being” (Gunton 1997:158).

Bacchiocchi appeals to Mark 2:27 as one of the examples for his Theological position. The text reads as follows: “Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath’”.<sup>26</sup> Commenting on the text Bacchiocchi asserts that, “our Lord’s choice of words is significant. The verb ‘made-ginomai’ alludes to the original ‘making’ of the Sabbath and the word ‘man-anthropos’ suggests its human function. Thus, to establish the human and universal value of the Sabbath, Christ reverts to its very origin, right after the creation of man” (2000:26). The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary adds that, ‘anthropos’ literally means ‘a person’ “a generic term including men, women, and children”, and that “the Sabbath was designed and ordained by a loving Creator for the welfare of humanity” (Nichol 1956:588).<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, Carson disagrees with Bacchiocchi that ‘ginomai’ has something to do with the act of creation that was executed by God in the beginning (Carson 1982:89).<sup>28</sup> However, it is interesting to appreciate that “the gnostic saying in v.27 may have been added to the

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<sup>26</sup> As rendered in New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Holy Bible. The person of Jesus Christ is speaking in this text.

<sup>27</sup> For an elaborate comment on this text see pp. 588-589 of the cited work.

<sup>28</sup> For further discussion on this point also see Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1977. *From Sabbath To Sunday*. Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press. See especially pp. 59-61.

periscope during its oral transmission” and that “scholars are divided over whether the Son of Man saying originated with Mark or had already been attached to the story” (Keck 1995:556).

### 2.6.1 Spiritual renewal

One of the consequences of our busy and restless society is that people, including Christians, are spiritually deficient and sometimes ‘dead’. There is a need to revitalise our spiritual health. It has dawned upon the minds of Sabbath Theologians that life is not all about acquiring material possessions and keeping one’s status quo in society. Indeed, “the Christian faith is rooted in the belief that God has acted in human history by creating, redeeming, and ultimately restoring His creatures. These redemptive acts of God are commemorated in the Bible weekly through the Sabbath...” (Bacchiocchi 1995b: Back cover). It has been observed that it is possible to achieve a lot materially and yet be spiritually dry and hungry where one feels hollow and a need for something much deeper than what they have (Bacchiocchi 1980:208).

Spirituality must do with a recognition of a higher being, God, beyond ourselves in our lives. It is the acknowledgement of one’s creator to whom we owe our very existence and allegiance. There is rest in worshipping God with one’s whole being. In addition to the observance of the weekly Sabbath, Samuele Bacchiocchi (1995b:15) proposes a church calendar with special divine days in order

...to enrich church worship...that focuses during the course of the year on the redemptive accomplishments of Christ’s first and second advents. We cannot preach the whole Bible in one sermon. We cannot celebrate the whole story of redemption in one Sabbath. A church calendar patterned after the calendar of Israel can help us to do justice to all the important salvific acts of God.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For a detailed theological study of the feasts that Samuele Bacchiocchi proposes in addition to the Sabbath see his book, Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1995b. *God’s Festivals in Scripture and History, Part I: The Spring Festivals*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives.

As Barth (1961:50) notes,

in deference to God and to the heart and meaning of His work, there must be from time to time an interruption, a rest, a deliberate non-continuation, a temporal pause, to reflect on God and His work and to participate consciously in the salvation provided by Him and to be awaited from Him.

The Sabbath day, when we keep it holy, offers us an opportunity to pause from our busyness for one day, and worship God. Samuele Bacchiocchi rightly points out that “Christians who give priority to the Lord in their thinking and living during the Sabbath day ultimately give priority to the Lord every day of their lives” (1998:269).

Sabbath keeping is God’s gift through which we are spiritually revived not just for the Sabbath day but also for the other six days of the week. As Augustine confessed, “thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee” (Bacchiocchi 1998: 285). If we are to have genuine rest it would have, to begin with, God. So, on Sabbath day, we fellowship with the other members of the body of Christ, the Church, as we worship God in Hymns and hear his word preached to us.

As we worship God we acknowledge that He is spiritually present among us. It is indeed a very comforting thought that the majesty of Heaven is with us, gracing the worship service with his holy presence on his day. The presence of God among us is the continual reminder that we belong to him, that we are his children. What a blessed thought to remember as one worships God with other Christians.

And because we are God’s children we truly depend on him. Sabbath keeping continually teaches us that we should depend on God because he created the universe and therefore knows the end from the beginning. Indeed, “believers who accept God’s claim over the last day of the week- the Sabbath- accepts God’s claim over their whole lives and world” (Bacchiocchi 1998:294). Disregard for God in one’s life is the beginning of one’s restlessness. Thus, spiritual rest is a very important component of resting on the Sabbath day.



Sabbath keeping is the way we express our commitment to God, a way we acknowledge God's authority in our lives. As Samuele Bacchiocchi puts it, "a mutual belonging relationship can endure only if both parties remember and honor their respective obligations. The Sabbath expresses both divine and human commitments" (1998:294). As we keep the Sabbath, God honours our Sabbath keeping with his presence. He revives us through the word and song. On the other hand, "the free offering of time to God is a supreme act of worship because it means acknowledging God with the very essence of human life: time" (Bacchiocchi 1998:295).

Moreover, Sabbath-keeping is an antidote against idolatry. God wants us to worship him and him only. He is a jealous God who does not tolerate it when his people worship other gods. During the Old Testament times, the children of Israel would many times fall into this trap. They would worship various gods of different types. However, the underlining factor about all those gods is that they were objects made with the hands of human beings. The Sabbath is neither an object or a shrine that one may touch but holy time. Abraham Joshua Heschel put it eloquently when he writes: "The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals, and our Holy of Holies is a shrine that neither the Romans nor the Germans were able to burn; a shrine that even apostasy cannot easily obliterate: the Day of Atonement" (1951:8). Furthermore, Samuele Bacchiocchi also captures the significance of Sabbath time when he writes, "being time, a mystery that defies human attempts to define it, the Sabbath provides a constant protection against the worship of objects and a fitting reminder of the spiritual nature of the covenant relationship between God and His people" (1980:131).

### **2.6.2 Physical renewal**

One of the characteristics of our society today is the fact that we are a tired generation. Because of our desire to produce more we work so much that sometimes we overwork ourselves. This is demonstrated by the practice of taking some unfinished work to our homes after office hours. We thus add a strain to our already exhausted state. Consequently, we are physically exhausted and are in desperate need of rest. By adopting God's rhythm of six days of work and one day of rest it is possible to balance work and rest and still be productive. In fact, regular rest intervals would reward us with high productivity as we would return to our work with new strength after a day off on Sabbath.

The Sabbath rest is peculiar because on this day our minds can finally rest even from the work of the next day. We may not have completed our weekly work but on Sabbath, we rest in the completed work of God. In other words, Sabbath keeping is the celebration of the completed works of God. Through the Sabbath, God gives us something to celebrate even when of ourselves we may lack something to celebrate. This understanding helps us to freely leave our works on the Sabbath even if they are unfinished. To enjoy God's gift of the Sabbath, we are called upon to rest as if all our work were complete (Bacchiocchi 1980:127). Elsewhere Bacchiocchi puts it more clearly, "a first way to celebrate the completion and perfection of God's original creation is by resting on the Sabbath as if all our work were done" (Bacchiocchi 1980:85).

Through Sabbath-keeping, we do not only get strength spiritually by worshipping God but God also strengthens us physically by offering us his Sabbath rest. On Sabbath, we can physically be refreshed because on this day God gives us a peace of mind as we worship him and enjoy his presence. For us to rest physically, we would have to have a peace of mind. And this is possible as we trust that God takes care of us and that he loves us. We do not do anything to merit his love.

This assurance teaches us that we do not need to produce and achieve to find favour in God's eyes. On Sabbath, we can rest from competition and the pressure to produce and achieve more. Indeed, "competition can dishearten, dehumanize, and demoralize a person" (Bacchiocchi 1998:291). Thus, if we do not keep the Sabbath but work on the Sabbath we will be restless and be to a larger degree dissatisfied with our lives.

### **2.6.3 Social renewal**

One of the major reasons why many people are restless in our generation is because they feel alienated, they feel like they are not belonging to anybody or anything. It is true that "at the root of much human restlessness is the sense of alienation and estrangement" (Bacchiocchi

1998:292). This sense of alienation would cause one to be angry, bitter, and restless. An angry, bitter, and restless person will also not have peace with himself or herself and with other people.

However, the Sabbath offers us a rare opportunity of fellowship with God on one day out of seven in a week. This is because, as Alister McGrath rightly points out, we can have a relationship with God (2001:269). Sabbath keeping brings Christ's rest and peace into our lives as we are assured that we belong to him and that he loves us and takes great interest in our well-being. "The release from the pressure of work and social inequalities, experienced on and through the Sabbath and its sister institutions, could effectively epitomize both past and future divine deliverance" (Bacchiocchi 1986a:165). Since creation, the Sabbath day has endured and is still available as a reminder of God our saviour and father.

Indeed, "the Sabbath constantly reminds believers of their belonging to God, because it is the seal of divine ownership" (Bacchiocchi 1998:293). God owns the whole universe including us. Even if all people may seem far away from us Sabbath keeping is a constant reminder that God is always close to us, thus inspiring us with hope in difficult times in our lives. This also helps us to be dependent on God always and to trust less of ourselves but more of God. Sabbath keeping is a weekly reminder of the reliability of the friendship of God; and not just his reliability but his power as well.

In a way, the Sabbath is God's sign that he is willing to spend time with his people. And when we keep the Sabbath day holy we express our willingness to have a special relationship with God. Thus, the Sabbath is a sign and a weekly reminder that God is committed to our well-being as much as it is a sign when we keep it holy, that we allow God to work in our lives and therefore an expression of our commitment to God in our special relationship with him. In fact, "by accepting God's invitation to keep the Sabbath with Him, the believer enters into a special relationship with God" (Bacchiocchi 1998:295).

Sabbath keeping does not only nurture our relationship with God but with our fellow human beings too. We are usually separated by the colour of our skin, or our language, or our race, or

even our culture. However, Sabbath keeping is for all races, languages, and cultures. Therefore, as we keep the Sabbath in our differences we are united to God as his children, and the walls of hate and tension are broken down. Samuele Bacchiocchi captures this idea vividly: “True Sabbath keeping enables us to experience Christ’s rest by breaking down social, racial, and cultural barriers” (1998:296). In addition, Samuele Bacchiocchi observes that “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” (1998:296). Hence Sabbath keeping is an adhesive and a catalyst of social cohesion.

Vices and crimes such as the ones mentioned above usually thrive where people are idle and where they have nothing rewarding and fulfilling to do in life. Sabbath keeping is deeply rooted in the creation story where we see God as a working creator who creates the universe in six days and rests on the seventh. It is no wonder therefore that even when God, later on, gave the Sabbath commandment he commanded six days of work and one of rest. Indeed, “a person who is workless is one who feels worthless” (Bacchiocchi 1980:103). We need work to feel a sense of self-worth and rewarded and to better reflect the image of our creator. In addition, as people of different races, languages, and social statuses work together in productive enterprises towards a common goal that would go a long way in further fostering social cohesion in our societies.

But it is not only work that God ordained. Through the gift of the Sabbath day, God also ordained rest to protect us from the modern-day slavery of working without rest. Without Sabbath rest, both employers and employees would be vulnerable to being workaholics who work continuously towards ambitious goals. In addition, employees would also be easily exploited to make maximum profits. Though work is a positive thing that brings about self-worth, when done excessively without rest it can be a chief source of human restlessness. It can drain us physically, and intellectually, and thus rob us of the enjoyment that God intended it to give. When we work continuously without pausing to reflect we risk falling into a trap of meaninglessness of life where we lose sight of why we are working in the first place. This is especially true for employees. “The Sabbath rest then reveals God’s concern especially for the human rights of the defenceless of our society” (Bacchiocchi 1980:104).

One cause of social unrest is greediness where one wants to be ahead of others in any way possible. Therefore, one would be determined to work continuously without any rest, seven days a week, in the process exploiting other people and causing untold harm in relationships. However, Sabbath keeping deals precisely with this greediness to always want more at any cost. By resting from work on a Sabbath our greediness is cured and we are invited instead to be grateful for the gains that we have already made from the six days of work. In this way, greediness is replaced with thankfulness. Interestingly, Samuele Bacchiocchi states that “a grateful heart is indispensable for maintaining a meaningful, mutual, belonging relationship, and for experiencing inner rest and peace” (1980:126).

On a more intimate level, the Sabbath is a day when relationships with family members and spouses are strengthened. During the working six days of the week, the demands of work may be so heavy that one is forced to ‘neglect’ their family. But on the Sabbath day, all work is laid aside and one can finally have time with the family through prayers, devotion, sharing experiences of the week and in going to church fellowship together. Daniel Migliore rightly notes that, “in the New Testament the church (ecclesia, ‘assembly’ or ‘congregation’) refers to the new community of believers gathered to praise and serve God in the power of the Holy Spirit in response to the gospel of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (2004:251). Though writing on the doctrine of the church, Migliore’s comments highlight the importance of a gathering with the purpose of praising God. So, on the Sabbath, the larger church family is also embraced as all worship, sing, and hear the word of God together. In this way, Sabbath keeping helps in maintaining both the family and the church intimate.

In an age where the rate of divorce is skyrocketing the Sabbath can indeed be a catalyst to keep marriages intact. The basic cause of divorce is the breakdown of intimacy and communication in a couple. As pointed out above Sabbath keeping solidifies the intimacy of the couple through doing things together and communicating in the process. As Samuele Bacchiocchi observed, “a Christian couple who take time on the Sabbath to renew their commitment to God will inevitably renew also their commitment to each other” (1980:215).

However, the social renewal of Sabbath keeping is not only limited to our immediate family members and our church family. Part of Sabbath keeping includes doing good and sharing the blessings of God with strangers. Christ demonstrated this aspect of Sabbath keeping by healing

the sick and the vulnerable of society on the Sabbath day. We are called upon to meet the needs of the needy of society as part of Sabbath keeping (Cf. Migliore 2004:252).<sup>30</sup> On Sabbath, it is right to do good, which includes meeting the needs of the ill, the elderly, the orphan, the lonely, the visitor, and the discouraged who are there in our society. The needs may be anything from food to friendship. And as we meet the needs of others on the Sabbath day, our lives will be enriched “with a sense of satisfaction and restful achievement” (Bacchiocchi 1980:216).

#### **2.6.4 Moral renewal**

In our busy world where we are preoccupied with achieving and accumulating more, we need one day in a week in which we can pause and introspect. This is true because many times in our rush to get things done we tend to make serious mistakes that clash with the Christian values that we espouse. Brueggemann rightly observes that “Sabbath is the chance for self-embodiment of our true identity” (2014:88).

The Sabbath day provides an opportunity whereby we can contemplate on the direction that our lives are taking. As we worship with the Christian community and meditate on the word of God, the values of the Bible are presented to our minds in vivid and fresh ways to make a lasting impression on our minds. And if by chance we realise that our lives were taking a wrong direction, we get a chance to embrace God’s word for our lives and make the necessary changes.

In addition, we are encouraged to view our failures in the light of the successes of God and therefore to attempt again to do the right. Moreover, whichever right values that we are still holding on to, we are encouraged to keep doing the right and not to get tired of doing the right. Thus, after the Sabbath day, we face the challenges of the week ahead with new strength.

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<sup>30</sup> As Migliore notes this first begins when a community of believers practises this among themselves.

Sabbath keeping is indeed the gift of God intended to renew God's people once every week and help them to enjoy life. In this section, it has been argued that Sabbath-keeping is an agent of renewal. Sabbath keeping renews us spiritually, physically, socially, and morally.

## **2.7 Sabbath keeping as rest: Rest of what?**

Earlier on in this chapter, it was stated that the Hebrew word from which 'Sabbath' comes from, among other renderings, means 'to rest'. Bacchiocchi (2000:35) explains that,

In the Old Testament the notion of 'rest' was utilized to express the national aspirations for a peaceful life in a land of rest (Deut 12:9; 25:19; Is 14:3), where the king would give to the people 'rest from all enemies' (2 Sam 7:1) and where God would find His 'resting place' among His people and especially in His sanctuary at Zion (2 Chron 6:41; 1 Chron 23:25; Ps 132:8,13,14; Is 66:1).

Actually, "for Christ the Sabbath is the day to work for the redemption of the whole man" (Bacchiocchi 2000:47). In this section, we will seek to find out what Sabbath keeping is a rest of, and how the practice helps us to rest. It has already been pointed out that to rest involves more than cessation from work. We rest from what wears us, what makes us tired, or from what drains our energies. So, what is the Sabbath a rest of?

### **2.7.1 Rest for creation**

The rest of the Sabbath is first and foremost the rest of creation (Bacchiocchi 1984:305). On Sabbath, we are resting in the completed work of God which he did in six days and rested on the seventh day of that first creation week. In his work, Bacchiocchi uses this rationale to make a point that the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week (1998:263-264). Berkhof (1958:126-127) adds more information on the issue of days when he writes that,

Theophilus was the first Church Father to stress the fact that the days of creation were literal days. This seems to have been the view of Irenaeus and Tertullian as well, and was in all probability the common view in the

Church... The Reformers held firmly to the doctrine of creation out of nothing by a free act of God in or with time, and regarded the days of creation as six literal days.

However, not every Theologian or Church Father subscribes to the view of a literal six-day creation. On the other hand, we have evolutionists who hold that the Genesis account of the origin of the universe is not accurate (Marsh 1944:19).<sup>31</sup> Berkhof (1958:126, emphasis his) continues,

Clement and Origen thought of creation as having been accomplished *in a single indivisible moment*, and conceived of its description as the work of several days merely as a literary device to describe the origin of things in the order of their worth or of their logical connection.<sup>32</sup>

It is crucial to appreciate that “the idea of an eternal creation, as taught by Origen, was commonly rejected” (Berkhof 1958:126). Thomas Aquinas bases his argument, that God created things, in Genesis 1:1 (1947:233).<sup>33</sup> And so, in Bacchiocchi’s works, the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath, a celebration of the creative works of God. By the end of that first creation week God finished all his works, and on the seventh day rested from all his works.

It is, therefore, important to recognise that Sabbath keeping is about the celebration of the achievements of God. On the Sabbath day, God gives us an opportunity to rejoice in his accomplishments. That is why the Sabbath is a day of joy. Celebration in its nature is a joyous occasion. So, even if of ourselves we may feel that we have not achieved much to celebrate, on the Sabbath day God invites us to celebrate his achievements.

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<sup>31</sup> Frank L. Marsh wrote an informative book that brings together arguments on the origin of things from Evolution, Creation, and Science. For an in-depth analysis in this regard the reader is referred to that book. See Marsh, Frank L. 1944. *Evolution, Creation, and Science*. Washington, D.C: Review and Herald.

<sup>32</sup> For an in-depth discussion of divergent views, from Bacchiocchi’s ‘six literal days of creation’, on the duration of creation see Berkhof, Louis. 1958. *Systematic Theology*. Edinburg: The Banner of Truth Trust, pp.126-127. Moreover, for different theories on the origin of the universe see Hodge, Charles. 1875. *Systematic Theology, Vol 1*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, pp. 550-556.

<sup>33</sup> By raising a series of questions and objections, and providing answers thereto, Thomas Aquinas sheds light on the doctrine of creation. See his argument in his ‘treatise on the creation’, pp. 229-256 in Aquinas, Thomas. 1947. *Summa Theologica, Vol One*. New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc.



We can therefore on the Sabbath day rest in God as if all our works were completed because he completed his. Samuele Bacchiocchi rightly urges that: “To celebrate the completion and perfection of God’s original creation is important to rest on the Sabbath as if all our work were done” (1998:286). This should disarm us of any excuse of incomplete projects that may supposedly deny us the rest of God on the Sabbath day. True rest is to be found in the God who demonstrated in the beginning what it means to rest.

### **2.7.2 The rest of Divine presence**

The other aspect of Sabbath keeping that brings joy, stillness and peace to our restless lives is the assurance of the presence of God among us on this day as we worship him. When we worship God, he honours and graces our worship with his presence. His presence dispels fear, worry, and restlessness. “Now, the Sabbath Day was created by God, so that He Himself might enter into the world and sanctify it by His personal presence. In this way, He makes the world holy” (Richardson 1967:130). Besides being holy because it was set apart from the other days for holy use, the Sabbath is also holy because on this day God is present among his people of faith. Referring to the presence of God on the Sabbath Samuele Bacchiocchi also acknowledges that, “this is basically the meaning of the holiness of the Sabbath which is frequently stated in the Bible” (1998:289).

On this day as we turn off all other distractions and focus on hearing the voice of God we experience his spiritual presence, and therefore his peace, joy, and rest. This high experience of the Sabbath does not only affect our Sabbath day experience but flows into all the other six days of the week. Indeed, as Samuele Bacchiocchi argues, “believers who cultivate Christ’s presence during the Sabbath time and activities experience His rest and peace every day of their lives” (1998:290).

Therefore, Hebert W. Richardson (1967:130) makes sense in his observation,

How often have we heard that Jesus Christ abolishes the Sabbath so that men may be truly free! But this suggestion is sheer theological nonsense. The

work of Jesus Christ cannot contradict the purpose for which God created the world. To assert such a contradiction, by explicitly or implicitly opposing the Sabbath, is to reiterate the old Gnostic claim that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are two different ‘Gods’.

It is encouraging and humbling to know that as we enter the holy hours of the Sabbath each week we enter communion and fellowship with God. This fellowship does not only last for the duration of the worship service but the whole 24 hours of the Sabbath day. Such knowledge is indeed a source of a sense of security and tranquillity in our lives and is the reason to look forward to the Sabbath rest each week. Put in another way, the Sabbath may be an appointment with God on a special day, an appointment set by him to which he has invited us.

### **2.7.3 Rest from competition**

One of the characteristics of our 21<sup>st</sup> century world is that it is a highly competitive one in various areas. Nations continually compete to be the best in sports, in the military, and in aviation. Local sports clubs in any one given country compete for the first position in their league. In addition, individuals also compete against each other economically and academically. Each person simply wants to be the best above everybody else. However, all this competitiveness affects at the core everyone as a person, where we are frustrated especially when we do not achieve what we want. Even when we do achieve what we want we are usually dissatisfied because there is someone who will always be better than us in one way or the other.

Consequently, we are an increasingly unhappy and restless generation that desperately needs some quality rest. Sadly, we may not be aware that we need some rest even as we seek to work seven days in a week to ‘catch up’. However, as Samuele Bacchiocchi rightly observes, “competition can dishearten, dehumanise, and demoralize a person. It can turn friends into foes” (1998:291).

Sabbath keeping puts all into perspective that God has already accepted us. That we need not be achievers to find acceptance with God. His work is complete and we cannot add anything

to it to make it better. Sabbath keeping helps us to look to God, and find rest from ‘it all’ by focusing on God and what he has done for us. Instead of wanting more the practice of Sabbath keeping instils in us the spirit of gratefulness. We thank God for life, good health, water, and shelter. Indeed, “the Sabbath teaches our greedy hearts to be grateful- to stop for one day looking for more and to start instead to gratefully acknowledge the blessings received” (Bacchiocchi 1998:291).

This aspect of Sabbath keeping teaches us to view people, not in terms of how much they make each month but in terms of them being humans made in the image of God. In addition, Sabbath keeping teaches us that as human beings we are a community that depends on each other to lead normal lives. We are not enemies who must always seek to get ahead of the rest, sometimes by hurting other people. In this way, the practice of Sabbath keeping fosters a sense of community instead of competition in us.

#### **2.7.4 Rest of belonging**

Many of the social problems of society stem from the reason that most times the perpetrators do not know who they are. They feel that they do not belong to anybody or anything that loves and appreciates them. Thus, they feel bitter, angry, and insecure and seek attention in dangerous and harmful ways. On the contrary, the Sabbath day is God’s sign between him and his people. Sabbath keeping is the way we express our belonging to God; the God who created the universe and rested on the seventh day of that first creation week.

Indeed, “the Sabbath offers not merely an assurance of belonging to God but also a concrete weekly opportunity to express such a commitment by re-enacting the baptismal covenant of self-renouncement and renewal” (Bacchiocchi 1980:241). To make sense of Bacchiocchi one would need to consider what the meaning of baptism is. We read that “Christian baptism is the sacrament of *initiation* into life in Christ. It marks the beginning of the journey of faith and discipleship that lasts throughout one’s life” (Migliore 2004:282, emphasis his). The good news that we belong to God and that he loves us is indeed a healing to the soul and ushers in a sense of security, peace, and joy in our lives.

The Sabbath is God's gift to believers through which we are to experience a belonging relationship with him. During the six working days, one may feel alienated probably because of the social connections which may not be as good as they must be. But on a Sabbath day, one is reminded that he is in a loving relationship with God the creator and our father. A father loves his children and he always wants to see them happy, secure, and at peace. The same is true with God, in fact, more so than a human father.

### **2.7.5 Rest from social tensions**

In some contexts, the cause of social ills is not lack of belonging but tensions among different social establishments. It could be issues of racism, tribalism, or a tension between different cultural and religious groups. Samuele Bacchiocchi is right by holding that, "the inability or unwillingness to appreciate and accept another person's skin color, culture, language or social status, is a major cause of much social unrest, hate and tension in our contemporary society" (1980:241). By the practice of a rhythm of six days of work and one day of rest, the Sabbath teaches us that every human being is entitled to work for a living. These include people who may not be of our culture, race or religious group.

Moreover, the practice of Sabbath keeping, which is not only to be enjoyed by us but also by those within our sphere of influence such as our employees, equally teaches us to treat every human being with respect and the dignity that he or she deserves. This is especially true because as Dresner rightly points out, on Sabbath "we all stand as equals before God" (1970:41). In society, we work with people from all walks of life and from the cultural, racial, and religious groupings different from ourselves. As we treat all those people with respect, we are in the process learning to love and be tolerant to those different from us. Indeed, "true Sabbath keeping enables us to experience Christ's rest by breaking down social, racial, and cultural barriers" (Bacchiocchi 1998:296).

### 2.7.6 Rest of redemption

The other way that the Sabbath brings rest to our lives should do with our salvation (Bacchiocchi 2000:51). Colin Gunton rightly observes that “the notion of redemption or salvation is a basic constituent in the plot of the story which Christian faith tells about human existence in God’s world” (1997:189). Writing on Sabbath keeping in the Epistle to the Hebrews Samuele Bacchiocchi rightly observes that abstaining from work on the Sabbath day “means experiencing God’s Salvation rest not by *works* but by *faith*, not by *doing* but by *being* saved through *faith*” (2000:51, emphasis his). By offering us physical rest on the Sabbath day God places us in a good position for us to experience the blessings of his rest and the joy of salvation.

Samuele Bacchiocchi concedes that one of the reasons “for believing in the permanence of the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping is the redemptive meaning of the Sabbath which I find expressed in the Sabbath teaching and ministry of Christ” (2000:31). It was on a Sabbath day that Christ inaugurated his public redemptive ministry as prophesied in the Old Testament especially by the prophet Isaiah. Samuele Bacchiocchi observes that “Christ substantiated this claim by revealing His redemptive mission especially through His Sabbath healing and teaching ministry” (1998:297; Cf. 1984:310). Indeed, this is consistent with Bacchiocchi’s much earlier assertion when he writes that, “the meaning of the Sabbath as *redemption, joy, and service*” (1977:22, emphasis his) is demonstrated by the healings that Jesus Christ performed on the Sabbath day.

“Jesus Christ is arguably the centrepiece of every Christian theology in so far as beliefs in and about him mark with special clarity the distinctiveness of a Christian religious perspective and have an impact...” (Gunton 1997:245). Writing on the person and work of Jesus Christ Daniel Migliore observes that, “while Christian theology has many topics to explore, the decisive basis and criterion of all that it says is the person and work of Jesus Christ” (2004:163). Alister McGrath says much the same when he notes that, “the person of Jesus Christ is of central importance to Christian Theology” (2001:347). The reason that Jesus Christ was willing to incarnate and perform those Sabbath healings on a Sabbath day shows that God regards Sabbath as a day of redemption from both physical and spiritual maladies. Christ did not only

heal the ill ones on the Sabbath day but after his crucifixion and death, he rested in the tomb on the Sabbath day. Indeed, “Christ’s Sabbath rest in the tomb reveals the depth of God’s love for His creatures” (Bacchiocchi 1998:298).

Moreover, when God rested on the seventh day of the creation week he had not only saved human beings. God had also saved the rest of his creation “from disorder into order, from chaos into cosmos” (Bacchiocchi 1986a:154). God had brought into existence an orderly creation out of chaos. Because the Sabbath was first presented in the book of Genesis “as the symbol of God’s initial *cosmological* redemption, the Sabbath could easily become a symbol of God’s future *soteriological* activities” (Bacchiocchi 1986a:155, emphasis his).

Furthermore, the redemptive aspect of the Sabbath is seen in the practice of lighting that is done by a Jewish woman on this day (Bacchiocchi 2000:34). Indeed, God’s light shone on Adam though he deserved to be punished because of his disobedience (Bacchiocchi 2000:34). Adam was saved by the Sabbath. Samuele Bacchiocchi (2000:34-35) captures this well when he writes that,

The redemptive role of the primordial Sabbath in the Jewish tradition is impressive. Being viewed as a symbol of primordial redemption, the Sabbath could effectively typify the future Messianic restoration. The tradition of kindling lights on the Sabbath appears then to be symbolically linked both to the supernatural light that shone during the first Sabbath upon Adam as an assurance of salvation as well as to the extraordinary light of the Messianic age.

### **2.7.7 Rest of service**

The other way that the practice of Sabbath keeping offers us rest is by creating time and opportunities for service. Because on the Sabbath day we lay aside our usual labours including employment it means we have time to serve God, other human beings, God’s creation, and

indeed ourselves. Truly, “the Sabbath brings Christ’s rest to our lives by providing time and opportunities for service” (Bacchiocchi 1998:298).

Because on this day we do not pursue our interests but devote the whole day to God means that on this day more than any other we can seek God more as we worship him. Bacchiocchi, when explaining this point, says that during the week we offer a Martha type of service while on Sabbath we offer to God the Mary type of service because on this day, having desisted from all our usual pursuits, we finally can seek God wholly (1998:298). On Sabbath, we acknowledge God as we celebrate his creation, redemption, and the beautiful tomorrow which he has prepared for us. As we honour God on this day, our lives are filled with peace and rest from God.

Moreover, on Sabbath, we also serve others by visiting the ill, those in prisons, as well as the needy, and by sharing our friendship with them. We also on this day, have time to meet their needs. As we do good to others, God fills us with his peace and he affirms that indeed we have done what is right. Samuele Bacchiocchi makes an interesting point that “...the Fourth Commandment gives quite an inclusive list of persons to be remembered on the Sabbath. The list goes from the son to the manservant, from the daughter to the maidservant, and includes also the sojourner and the animals” (1998:300). This shows that Sabbath keeping is not only about enjoying ourselves but that it is also about making sure that those within our sphere of influence are well too. Christ demonstrated this point by healing many people, who were suffering from various ailments, on the Sabbath day.

To add, on the Sabbath, we also serve the creation of God. Because on this day we desist from making any changes to our environment we simply enjoy the sight of its beauty. Consequently, we learn to take care of the creation of God and to desist from exploiting it for monetary gains. Through Sabbath keeping we learn that material gains are not all there is to life, and instead, we experience rest and peace by admiring the creation of God.

Furthermore, we serve ourselves as well through the practice of Sabbath keeping. The resting and worshipping that we do on Sabbath strengthens us spiritually, physically, socially, and morally as individuals. Indeed, “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” (Bacchiocchi 1980:243). As we study the Bible for ourselves and hear God’s word preached from the pulpit we are ministered to, and our relationship with God is strengthened.

In this section, we have seen that rest involves more than mere cessation from work. We have found out that Sabbath keeping involves the rest of creation, the rest of divine presence, rest from competition, rest of belonging, rest from social tensions, rest of redemption, and rest of service. Therefore, it is evident that Sabbath keeping helps us to rest in the ways that have been listed and discussed above.

## **2.8 God’s rhythm of work and rest: Work when? Rest when?**

In this section, it will be argued that work is the gift of a loving God as much as rest is. Though outside the scope of this study it is imperative to appreciate the theology of Samuele Bacchiocchi on when we are to work and when we are to keep the Sabbath day holy. Therefore, we will briefly account, albeit in passing, for this aspect of Bacchiocchi’s theology on the Sabbath because it ultimately affects the Sabbath keeping aspect of the doctrine of the Sabbath which is the focus of this study.

### **2.8.1 Work as God’s care**

Samuele Bacchiocchi, referring to the fourth commandment of Decalogue, observes that, “in the Fourth Commandment the pattern of six days of work and the seventh for rest is based upon the creation week (Ex.20:11)” (1980:103). God ordained six days of work because he knew that it is important for the self-worth of human beings. We feel a sense of achievement when



we have something important to do. In addition, work is a way of providing for our needs as well. So, God provided us with work, hence he is the provider of our needs.

A workless idle person is one who is in danger of finding themselves in various vices and lawless activities. We were made in the image of a working, living, and active God. Therefore, we need to be engaged in productive work so that we may better reflect the image of our creator. Truly, “work is needed to experience self-worth, to develop one’s creative abilities and reflect the image of the ever-active Creator” (Bacchiocchi 1980:103).

### 2.8.2 Rest as God’s care

In addition to work, God decided to give us an accompanying gift of rest. Without rest, we would have nothing to stop us from being greedy and seeking to work seven days a week without interruption to accumulate as much wealth as we could. But God seeing this danger ordained rest at the end of each week. In his *Summa Theologica, Vol One*, Thomas Aquinas raises an objection that according to John 5:17 God has been working, and so the person of Jesus Christ, and so God could not have rested on the seventh day (1947:354). On the same text, Samuele Bacchiocchi asks “does Christ statement represent a negation or a clarification of the Sabbath law?” (1981:4).<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas provides an answer based on Genesis 2:2 to that objection to affirm his stance that indeed God rested from his works on the seventh day. That “God indeed *worketh until now* by preserving and providing for the creatures He has made, but not by the making of new ones” (Aquinas 1947:354, emphasis his).

The following quotation captures the theology of Thomas Aquinas (1947:354, emphasis his) well on the nature of God’s rest on the seventh day,

Hence, when all things were made He is not said to have rested *in* His works,  
as though needing them for His own happiness, but to have rested *from* them,

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<sup>34</sup> See Bacchiocchi’s theology on this text in Bacchiocchi, Samuele (1981) “John 5:17: Negation or clarification of the Sabbath?”, Andrews University Seminary Studies: Vol. 19: No. 1, 3-19 in which he argues that the text in question represents a clarification of the Sabbath law. This article has been adapted from a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, New Orleans, Louisiana, Nov. 21, 1978.

as in fact resting in Himself, as He suffices for Himself and fulfils His own desire. And even though from all eternity He rested in Himself, yet the rest in Himself, which He took after He had finished His works, is that rest which belongs to the seventh day.

The rest of God through the Sabbath day does not only protect those with control over the means of production from greediness for material gain. Such rest also protects the have-nots of society who may be employees of the rich from being exploited by their employers. “The Sabbath rest then reveals God’s concern especially for the human rights of the defenceless of our society” (Bacchiocchi 1980:104).

### 2.8.3 Work when? Rest when?<sup>35</sup>

Samuele Bacchiocchi is of the view that the Sabbath day is God’s (1980:85,110). That God instituted the Sabbath day at the end of the creation week on the seventh day of that week (Bacchiocchi 1999:274; Ibid 1980:33-35,78,103). Therefore, in the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi, the understanding is that the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week (Bacchiocchi 1998:263-264; Ibid 1980:103). Bacchiocchi anchors his argument on both the creation story and the fourth commandment of the Decalogue to argue that God commanded the keeping of the seventh day of the week as his Sabbath (1980:33, 103). We are called to rest as God rested on the seventh day of the week which is God’s Sabbath. Therefore, according to Bacchiocchi the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath of God (1980:103). However, it is noteworthy to consider the book *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day* that has been edited by D.A. Carson. The argument of the book is that “Sunday is new day of worship that was chosen to commemorate the unique, salvation-historical event of the death and resurrection of Christ, rather than merely being another day for celebrating the Sabbath” (Carson 1982: Back cover).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Though not the focus of this study it is imperative to account for Samuele Bacchiocchi’s theology in this regard as it affects how one would keep the Sabbath day. A brief discussion will be given. For an in-depth treatment of this area of Sabbath theology in the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi see; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 2000. *The Sabbath in the New Testament*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives, See especially pp. 67-89; Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1998. *The Sabbath under crossfire*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives, see pp.175-250; and Bacchiocchi Samuele. 1977. *From Sabbath to Sunday*. Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press.

<sup>36</sup> This elaborate work has been jointly written by several scholars, D.A. Carson being part of them as well as the editor of the work. It is the product of painstaking research done on the argument of which day Christians should keep as the Sabbath. The reader is referred to this book.

However, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter Samuele Bacchiocchi argues that keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week is in harmony with the theology of Sabbath keeping as a celebration of the creative, redemptive, and eschatological works of God. As discussed earlier on in this chapter, Jesus even rested in the tomb on a Sabbath day after dying for our sins. Therefore, Bacchiocchi argues that the Sabbath is to be kept on the seventh day of the week and work performed on the six first days of the week (1980:103). According to Bacchiocchi, this means that work is to be done from Sunday to Friday and the Sabbath kept from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset in obedience to the fourth commandment of the Decalogue (1999:277).<sup>37</sup> However, it is interesting to note that Barth thinks that Sunday is the Sabbath and that the title ‘Sunday’ is a heathen one (1961:50). This assertion by Barth is consistent with Bacchiocchi’s argument on Sunday.<sup>38</sup>

By creating the universe in six days and resting on the seventh day God set a rhythm of six days of work and one of rest for us (Bacchiocchi 1980:85,103). Work is a gift of God to us. Through productive work, we provide for our families and ourselves, and we better reflect the image of an ever-active God. In addition, by work, we find meaning in our lives. For one who does not do any productive work feels worthless, insecure, and ultimately restless.

Furthermore, we also need periodic rest in the form of the weekly Sabbath day. We cannot work continuously without rest; for if we do, we would be in danger of becoming greedy for material gain. Moreover, work without rest leads to burnout and restlessness. So, in harmony with God’s example, we should work six days and rest on the seventh day of each week (Bacchiocchi 1980:103). For the Sabbath of God is the seventh day of the week, at least according to Samuele Bacchiocchi as unveiled in this chapter.

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<sup>37</sup> For an extensive study on when a day begins and ends, and therefore when the Sabbath is to be observed see Bacchiocchi, Samuele.2001. *The Time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection*. Michigan: Biblical Perspectives. See especially pp.41-74.

<sup>38</sup> See Bacchiocchi Samuele. 1977. *From Sabbath to Sunday*. Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press. See especially p. 239-274.

## 2.9 Conclusion

The theology of Sabbath keeping is deeply rooted in the doctrine of creation. By keeping the Sabbath day holy, we celebrate the creative works of God. To add, by keeping this day holy, our faith in the Creator God who completed his work in six days is strengthened even as we face the uncertain future. The Sabbath day is indeed holy because God set it apart by resting in it after the work of creation. We experience the presence of the holy God on this day as we set this day apart for holy use. On this day, God cleanses us from ungodliness that includes idolatry and greediness for material gain. Such cleansing is not just for the Sabbath but its effects are spread over the other six days of the week to form part of our lifestyles.

Sabbath keeping is an antidote for human restlessness. When we keep the Sabbath day holy we acknowledge that God owns us and that he is committed to our welfare. On the other hand, by keeping the Sabbath we also show that we are committed to God and depend on him for our rest and welfare. That is why on the Sabbath we can rest as if all our work were done because God had completed his work when he rested on the first Sabbath after creation.

Moreover, Sabbath keeping renews us. To find rest from our restlessness, it follows that we must be renewed. The practice of Sabbath keeping renews us spiritually, physically, socially, and morally. However, to be renewed involves more than mere cessation from work. Through Sabbath keeping, we enjoy the rest of creation, the rest of Divine presence, rest from competition, rest of belonging, rest from social tensions, rest of redemption, and rest of service.

We reap the benefits of Sabbath keeping when we follow God's rhythm of six days of work and one of rest. Both work and rest are gifts of God to us. A person who does not work feels worthless while a person who attempts to work without rest ultimately suffers from burnout. Both the feelings of being worthless and burnout lead to restlessness. Therefore, we need to work in the first six days and rest on the seventh day of each week.

Importantly, we have found that in the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi the Bible is central to doing theology, and indeed to the conclusions that he reaches at the end of his studies. A good example is his understanding of the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8-11. He believes that the Sabbath is on the Seventh day of the week, and he understands the Sabbath to be a day that belongs to God.

## Chapter 3: Sabbath keeping in the works of Marva J. Dawn

### 3.1 Introduction

Marva J. Dawn is a Theologian with a wide knowledge of theology having qualifications in Old and New Testaments, and Ethics and the Scriptures.<sup>39</sup> She is a respected Lutheran Theologian who has also published widely in many areas of theology. Dawn has published works on Worship, Church, God and his power, Hope, Child Guidance, Human sexuality and intimacy, Loneliness, Pastoring, to mention but a few; and of course, on Sabbath keeping.<sup>40</sup>

This chapter, however, will look at Sabbath keeping in the works of Marva Dawn. Indeed, in this chapter, we will embark on “a faith seeking understanding” (Migliore 2014:2-7) journey as we focus on Sabbath keeping. What Dawn says about the Sabbath, her theology of specifically the Sabbath keeping aspect of the doctrine of the Sabbath, her approach, and her hermeneutics will constitute this chapter. Moreover, this chapter will seek to find the distinctive theological contributions to Sabbath keeping in the works of Dawn. To add, she (2006:33) views Sabbath keeping not as a once in a week event but as a way of life that spreads into the other six days of the week in addition to one of rest.

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<sup>39</sup> This is per her website [http://www.marvadawn.org/about\\_marva](http://www.marvadawn.org/about_marva) (accessed 25 May 2016). Cf. Dawn, Marva J. 2003. *How shall we worship?* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, see p. 189 and Backcover., Dawn, Marva J. 2002. *Joy in our weakness, Rev Ed.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, see the backcover.

<sup>40</sup> Per scholar.google.com [accessed 26/04/2017] some of those works include the following: Dawn, Marva J. 1995. *Reaching out without dumbing down.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Dawn, Marva J. 1999. *A royal “waste of time”.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Dawn, Marva J. 2001. *Powers, weakness, and the tabernacling of God.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Dawn, Marva J. 1989. *Keeping the Sabbath wholly.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Dawn, Marva J. 2003. *Unfettered hope.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; Dawn, Marva J. 2006. *The sense of the call.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Dawn, Marva J. 1997. *Is it a lost cause?* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Dawn, Marva J. 1993. *Sexual Character.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Dawn, Marva J. 1992. *Truly the community.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Dawn, Marva J. 2002. *Joy in our weakness, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Dawn, Marva J. 1998. *I’m Lonely, Lord- How Long? Rev Edition.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Dawn, Marva J. 2009. *In the beginning,* God. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.; Dawn, Marva J., & Peterson, Eugene H. 2000. *The unnecessary Pastor.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; and Dawn, Marva J. 1997. *To walk and not faint, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

In the works of Dawn, keeping the Sabbath involves four activities, namely; ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting (1989, 2006). Keeping the Sabbath holy entails keeping it wholly. The Sabbath is God’s gift to us to help us rest and be joyful in the Lord. Above all, Sabbath keeping is for every one of us; whether we work in the public and private sectors, or self-employed, or working for the church.

### **3.2 Sabbath Ceasing: Cease what?**

To truly enjoy the Sabbath day, it is important for us to understand that without ceasing we cannot be refreshed. In her book *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* Dawn (1989:3) underscores the importance of ceasing on the Sabbath day, the day which is set apart as holy. She notes that “the name Sabbath comes originally from the Hebrew verb Shabbat; which means primarily ‘to cease or desist’.” In fact, in Genesis 2:2, the Bible records that God himself ‘ceased’ on the Sabbath day. At this point it is crucial to note that to refer to God as ‘himself’ does not necessarily mean that God is male. Indeed, McGrath (2001:265-267) rightly argues that God transcends human sexuality. Walker (1999:26) weighs in by adding that, “the Hebrew verb ‘Shâbath’ means that God stopped or ceased creating. His dramatic action, ceasing creation, testified to the fact that He recognized His creation as perfect.” Dawn (1992: 23-24) argues that this is the same meaning that Paul had in mind when he appealed to his readers in Romans 12:1<sup>41</sup> to present their bodies as a holy sacrifice to God.

In this section, we wish to drill deeper on this important concept by discussing it further. What do we cease or cease from precisely?

#### **3.2.1 Ceasing work**

The first thing that we cease from on the Sabbath day is work. Ellul (1976:496) notes that the Sabbath “is a sign of liberation”, and that “Jesus never calls upon anyone to work” but instead

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<sup>41</sup> Marva Dawn did an impressive exegesis of Romans 12 in Dawn, Marva J. 1992. *Truly the community*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans. The reader is referred to that work. The work is a reprint under a slightly new title but with the same content (as a reprint) of the earlier work with the title *The hilarity of the community*.

calls people from their works. Work may be anything that we do to earn a living. To a student, thesis or dissertation writing is work. While to a University Professor marking is also work to him or her. Whatever that we may consider as work, the point here is that we need to cease from all work on the Sabbath day. Dawn (1989:5) clarifies this point further when she states that, “to cease working on the Sabbath means to quit labouring at anything that is work.”

When we cease from work on the Sabbath we do not waste time as some may suppose. However, ceasing from work on one day in seven means that when we do go back to work on the remaining six days of the week we would work with new strength and tangible results. Indeed, “ceasing from work for one day enables us to return to it with renewed vigor as the new week begins” (Dawn 1989:8). This helps us to cease from all our various kinds of work on the Sabbath day because that day is the day in which we are to totally cease from all our work.

Moreover, ceasing from all work on the Sabbath day frees us for play. We were not created to work continuously without play. If we were, we would be robots that merely exists to fulfil work, and life would be monotonous and boring. Arguably,

There is something tremendously freeing about knowing that we don’t have any work to do on the Sabbath because we have deliberately set it all aside. This affects every aspect of our existence. In our whole being, we find ourselves free to play (Dawn 1989:15-16).

Furthermore, Pastors also need to cease from their routine work on the Sabbath day. Dawn (1999:143) rightly states that preachers (and Pastors are preachers) need a Sabbath rest. It is possible to lose one’s touch with Christ because one is too busy with his work. In her book, *The Sense of the call* Dawn (2006: 47) quotes Howard Baker to make this point clear: “Primarily, I had lost my soul to one of the chief rivals of devotion to Christ, that is, service for Him.”<sup>42</sup> In addition, Dawn (2000: 56,167)<sup>43</sup> is right to note that Pastors need to take a Sabbath from work because they must learn that they are not the messiah of the church. Indeed, in her works, Dawn (2001: Back cover) “has the real church and real pastors in purview.” It is

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted from Baker Howard. 1998. *Soul keeping: Ancient Paths of Spiritual Direction*. Colarado Springs, CO: NavPress, p.34.

<sup>43</sup> The footnote on the indicated page is particularly crucial to Dawn’s argument.



crucial to appreciate that in the works of Marva Dawn Church refers to “those called out (*ekklesia*) by Christ into a way of being in the world to the glory of God for the sake of others” (Dawn 1999:9). Migliore (2014:262, emphasis his) says something similar to Dawn when he defines the church as follows,

In the New Testament the church (*ecclesia*, ‘assembly’ or ‘congregation’) refers to the new community of believers gathered to praise and serve God in the power of the Holy Spirit in response to the gospel of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In discussing the doctrine of the church, it is interesting that McGrath (2001:476) first begins by noting the Greek word for the church which is *ekklesia*, especially to define the area of Christian theology that deals with the church. Thus, McGrath’s understanding of the Church has some resonances with Dawn’s definition.

By ceasing work on the Sabbath day, we express our trust in God as our provider, the one who supplies our needs and sustains our lives. Indeed,

Sabbath ceasing teaches us how useless are our society’s exertions, money, power, fame, gimmicks, and glitz. Sabbath ceasing instead immerses us in the presence of our benevolent and extravagant God and in the Lord’s provision for our future (Dawn 2006:52).

By ceasing our work on the Sabbath day, we affirm our dependence on God even for our very existence and survival.

### **3.2.2 Ceasing productivity and accomplishment**

Marva Dawn recognises the unfortunate state of affairs in our world where we assess one another’s worth by how much we produce and have accomplished (Cf. Dawn 1995:51-52). In addition, she is quick to also note that the problem with such a mindset is that we would always feel that we are not good enough because there would always be somebody else who is more productive and have accomplished more than us. However, the Sabbath way of life teaches us to cease our productivity and accomplishment on the Sabbath day, teaching us that our value

does not lie in our productivity and accomplishment. In this regard, Postema (1997:33) agrees with Dawn by arguing that through Sabbath time “we realize that we are important as human beings created in the image of God and not just for our usefulness, our productivity.” In addition, we are taught that God is the provider for us all and therefore our value emanates from him who created all human beings in his image. We are valuable not because of our productivity and accomplishment but because we have been created in the image of God. Dawn (2001:133) argues that “the Church’s call is to exorcism, rather than effectiveness. Perhaps one of the most recalcitrant spirits that needs to be exorcized is that of needing to be effective.”

Unfortunately, we keep producing more and accomplishing more thinking that we would be satisfied thereby. But when much has been produced and achieved deep inside us we are still left dissatisfied. This is because true satisfaction can only be found in God who has ordained a rhythm of six days of work and one of rest in one given week. Sadly, we keep trying to find satisfaction in mass production and accomplishment. Dawn (1989:18) rightly notes that “we will never satisfy the longing for God himself with the accomplishments of our own efforts, so why do we keep trying?”

So, Sabbath keeping frees us from the urge to produce and accomplish endlessly. By ceasing productivity and accomplishment on the Sabbath day we are taught by God that there is more to life than material goods and human accomplishments. “The second kind of ceasing for which we are freed by the practice of Sabbath keeping is the delight of quitting this endless round of trying to produce” (Dawn 1989:18). This is because “setting aside a holy Sabbath means that we can cease our productivity and accomplishments for one day in every seven” (Dawn 1989:19).

### **3.2.3 Ceasing anxiety, worry and tension**

Numbers of stressed and people with stress-related illnesses like heart disease are increasing shockingly (Dawn 1989, 2006). This can be attributed to the busyness that characterises our society today. We are a generation that is increasingly becoming busy with productivity and generation of wealth. We are obsessed with food security, military security, and in keeping our

nations high on the list of strong economies. Sadly, all this has a huge bearing on us, leaving us worried and vexed with tension.

People are increasingly joining exercise clubs, gymnasiums, as well as jogging to fight off stress in their lives. However, numbers of stressed people continue to increase. That is because though the above-mentioned interventions do help in relieving stress, they do not address the source of that stress in the first place. So, they will help reduce stress but the stress will keep on coming back because the stressor has not been addressed.

Indeed, “one of the main causes of modern stress is that we have too much to do. Consequently, Sabbath days- when we don’t have to do anything-can release us from the anxiety that accompanies our work...” (Dawn 1989:23). Grade (1986:241,247) recounts how, in a time of war, his mother reminded him that he should not forget that he is a Jew and that he should keep the Sabbath. So, the culprit for our anxiety, worry, and tension is restlessness that is also the result of working too much and without adequate rest. By ceasing work, productivity, and our accomplishment on the Sabbath day we make it easy to subsequently cease from anxiety, worry, and tension on that day too. “Thus, our ceasing productivity and accomplishment on Sabbath days is another great stress reliever” (Dawn 1989:23). The Sabbath day is one day in seven when we “refrain from activities that we know will summon worry- activities like paying bills, preparing tax returns, and making lists of things to do in the coming week” (Bass 1997:86). For on the Sabbath day we are to cease anxiety, worry, and tension as well, at least according to Marva Dawn as we have seen thus far in this study.

### **3.2.4 Ceasing our trying to be God**

Sabbath keeping teaches us to depend on God for our future. In the works of Marva Dawn churches, Christian leaders and Christians’ well-being is a very important aspect of doing theology (Cf. 2001: Adjacent copyright page). This explains why the by-product of her theology of Sabbath keeping is apparently geared in that line. When on the Sabbath day we cease work and our productivity we put on hold our creating a future for ourselves. We instead let God be and oversee our lives instead of us being in charge. “One of the reasons that the

Sabbath is so freeing is that when we cease working, we dispense with the need to create our own future” (Dawn 1989:28). We demonstrate that we trust God even with our future. Indeed, “through the chaos of everyday life the Sabbath shines like a beacon, pointing straight to God, reminding us that He is in control” (Walker 1999:29).

By keeping the Sabbath, we learn to have more faith in God than we have in ourselves. We learn that God is higher than us and deserves our allegiance as his people. Indeed, “a major blessing of Sabbath keeping is that it forces us to rely on God for our future” (Dawn 1989:29). One of the lessons about God is that he provides for us. When we cease providing for ourselves on the Sabbath day we acknowledge this lesson. Indeed, “keeping the Sabbath is acceptance of the sovereignty of God” (Tsevat 1980:49). Since we are so used to providing for our needs, Sabbath keeping protects us from the danger of having too much faith in our abilities than we have in God.

In fact, as Dawn (1989:30) testifies, when we keep the Sabbath day and lead a Sabbath way of life we begin to see the work we do in the six days of work as worship; as something through which God and not ourselves should be praised. When we work during the week we do that work as though we were doing it for God. Dawn (1989:30) testifies that “intentional Sabbath ceasing of my striving to be God also makes it more possible for me to think of all the work I do during the week as worship.”

### **3.2.5 Ceasing our possessiveness**

On the Sabbath day, we cease to acquire material things and to be dominated by the urge to acquire more (Dawn 1995:43). In Judaism, the Jews are not to buy and sell on the Sabbath day. In addition, Jews would rather live more simply on the six days of the week so that they may afford the Sabbath candles and its special foods and therefore can welcome Queen Sabbath appropriately (Dawn 1989). In this way, “both a special appreciation of possessions and a desire not to be dominated by them are part of keeping the Sabbath day holy” (Dawn 1989:36).

The Sabbath day is holy time devoted to God as opposed to materialism. Dawn (1989:38-39) elucidates; “on an even deeper level, to refrain from any buying or selling on the Sabbath relates to the day’s whole meaning as holy time, which contrasts with the holy space or materialist holiness of the religions other than Judaism and Christianity.”

During the six working days, we are usually busy with both buying and selling, but the Sabbath day is holy time. On this day, we cease our buying and selling and therefore our possessiveness of things. Instead, we devote the Sabbath day holy time to giving and ceasing our striving for things. Indeed, “as we keep the Sabbath, instead of our possessing things or space, time possesses us” (Dawn 1989:40).

### **3.2.6 Ceasing our enculturation**

Our culture today is characterised by the idolatry of wanting more material things for ourselves (Cf. Dawn 1995:43). In addition, we value space, we want things that are seen and can be touched. That is why we in turn value people on the basis on what they have or have achieved in life instead of based on who they are. However, Sabbath keeping offers the alternative way to that offered by popular culture. This is because Sabbath is composed of holy time as Dawn (1989:41) points out when she writes that, “nothing in Christianity supports our contemporary idolatry of space and things, for its God is the same God whose first declaration of qadosh, holy, applied to the Sabbath.”

Therefore, Sabbath keeping is the continual reminder to us to cease subscribing to the values of the culture around us which are not in harmony with Christianity. Historically, Christianity has been composed of holy time, “the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost” (Dawn 1989:41) all took place in time. As we keep the Sabbath each week we are reminded that we can offer to others an alternative way of life and set of values different from those of the culture around us. For “our moral decisions are guided by our focus on time in contrast to a focus on space and things; our relationships with others find their criteria in time and not space” (Dawn 1989:41-42).

By ceasing work on the Sabbath day and by not doing any work on that day we are already setting ourselves apart from the surrounding culture which advocates for longer working hours that spill into family time and weekends. Instead on the Sabbath parents can be with their children and instil in them the Christian values (cf. Dawn 1997:104-125). In addition, by ceasing productivity and accomplishment on the Sabbath we thereby cease our enculturation. We resist the influence of the culture around us when we cease our trying to be God by trying so hard to secure our future and getting worried about it. Instead, we cease our anxiety, worry, and tension on the Sabbath day as we enjoy the peace of mind that comes from trusting in God. Consequently, we cease our enculturation because the culture around us advocates for the opposite of what a Sabbath way of life promotes.

Against the emphasis of our culture to continually work, a Sabbath way of life recognises that human beings were created on the sixth day of the week by God, in his image, and we are therefore to rest on the Sabbath day as God rested from his works (Dawn 1989:45). Indeed, “the necessarily close connection of the sixth and seventh days would imply that human beings, whom God made in his image on the sixth day, will be faithful to that image by resting and ceasing on the seventh day, even as God did” (Dawn 1989:45).

When we cease our enculturation and set aside the expectations and the values of our surrounding culture, we experience a sense of freedom to be truly ourselves. The pressure to meet certain expectations and standard ceases and we become free from the rush and busyness of producing and accomplishing. We cease to worry and instead leave everything in God’s capable hands. Dawn (1989:47) testifies to this,

For me this is one of the particular delights of the Sabbath, for when I set aside the values of the culture around me- its roles and expectations, its definitions of what it means to be a woman- and focus instead on who God is and how I’m created in his image, I learn all sorts of things about my own femininity. Ceasing to value what the culture expounds sets me free to be more truly myself as a woman formed to reflect the character of God in my own unique ways.

### 3.2.7 Ceasing the humdrum and meaninglessness

Without the Sabbath day, our culture has inculcated in us that we should continually work seven days a week. However, this practice makes all days look the same and this results in meaninglessness in life (Dawn 1989:48). That is why people are increasingly taking holidays out of cities to experience something different in their lives. The solution to this humdrum lies in God's established rhythm of six days of work and one of ceasing (cf. Heschel 1952:14). If we are to have variety in life and find meaning as well, we should keep the Sabbath once every week. Because it is true that "one of the worst problems for those who don't observe the Sabbath day is that life can become so humdrum, every day the same- day after day! The pressures of work never let up; there is always something more to do" (Dawn 1989:48). However, a Sabbath way of life gives us the freedom to say no to hurry and haste. Indeed, "a Sabbath way of life in resting makes it more possible for us to cease from rushing" (Dawn 2006:128).

Ours is an age where we seek meaning in our lives, where we need something that satisfies our longing beyond the material things that we work so tirelessly for. Our hope in finding meaning lies in Sabbath keeping. Unlike the surrounding culture where people's value is measured by how much they own and their achievement in life (cf. Ellul 1964), "those who keep the Sabbath find their criteria in the character of God, in whose image they celebrate life" (Dawn 1989:50).

In this section, we have dwelt more on the concept of Sabbath ceasing. In the first place, we have established that the English noun 'Sabbath' comes from the Hebrew verb 'Shabbath' which means primarily to 'cease or desist'. We also saw that according to Genesis 2:2, God ceased on the Sabbath day. We have seen that on the Sabbath day we cease from work, productivity and accomplishment, anxiety, worry, and tension, our trying to be God, our possessiveness, our enculturation, and the humdrum and meaninglessness.

### 3.3 Sabbath Resting: Rest of what?

Besides the point that God ceased on the Sabbath day, the other point that we get from Genesis 2:2 is that on the Sabbath God also rested from all his work. This is precisely what the fourth commandment of the Decalogue commands us to do: To rest from all our works on the Sabbath day as God rested from his. As Postema (1997:30) ably puts it, “It’s (sic) unhealthy not to have a rhythm of work and rest, activity and receptivity. For this is the rhythm of creation right from the beginning.” Martin Luther stretches this point further to explain that by the fourth commandment God intends “...that we not only cease from our labor and trade but much more- that we let God alone work in us and that in all our powers do we do nothing of our own” (Dawn 1989:52).<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the Hebrew verb, Shabbat meaning to ‘cease or desist’, the same verb can also be rendered ‘to rest’ (Dawn 1989:53). Thus, to ‘cease or desist’ from work is closely related to resting for God, people, animals, and land (Dawn 1989:53). In other words, there is no way in which we may truly rest on the Sabbath day unless we cease as discussed in the previous section of this chapter.

In this section, we will look closely at the Sabbath concept and aspect of resting.

#### 3.3.1 Spiritual rest

It is important to appreciate the fact that the Sabbath day is the gracious gift of God to us. This is important because foundationally true rest is found by accepting the grace of God. Therefore, “to rest utterly in the grace of God is the foundation for wholistic rest” (Dawn 1989:54). And “...we can truly learn how to rest only when we are genuinely freed by God’s grace” (Dawn 1989:55). Thus, we do not secure rest, by ourselves, through the legalistic keeping of the Sabbath day, but the Sabbath day is the gift of God’s grace to rest so that we may rest in him. So, to truly enjoy the rest that God offers through the Sabbath day it follows that a Sabbath

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<sup>44</sup> As cited by Dawn on the indicated page.



keeper must have accepted the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Indeed, on the Sabbath day, “the thousands of things that haunt us, the multiple forms of media that clamor for our attention, the need to do, to find, and to see is stilled for twenty-four hours as the God of the universe stoops low to meet with us for a weekly spiritual date” (Walker 1999:16).<sup>45</sup>

When we have learnt that it is by God’s grace that we live, Sabbath keeping will have the utmost impact on us in reminding us that we and ‘our’ time belong to God who owns everything. Indeed, Sabbath observance “reminds us that God is the master of time” (Dawn 1989:57). That is why Sabbath keeping is a declaration that one accepts the sovereignty of God in their life, and as a Master of time (Tsevat 1980:48, 49). It is interesting that in the creation account in the book of Genesis time is established by naming a day as beginning in the evening and then followed by morning instead of the other way around.

This is not by chance. In the evening, we sleep, then God works his works. In the morning, we wake up to enjoy the works of God that we did not make but which were created by God himself. The lesson of God’s grace is imparted that we enjoy and benefit from the work of God because of His grace. Peterson (in Dawn 1989:58)<sup>46</sup> puts it more clearly:

[This] Hebrew evening/morning sequence conditions us to the rhythms of grace. We go to sleep, and God begins his work. As we sleep he develops his covenant. We wake and are called out to participate in God’s creative action. We respond in faith, in work. But always grace is previous and primary. We wake into a world we didn’t make; into a salvation we didn’t earn. Evening: God begins, without our help, his creative day. Morning, God calls us to enjoy and share and develop the work he initiated.

This mirrors the Sabbath day as the day of God’s grace and the six days as a time for work. Thus, a rhythm of one day of rest and six days of work is established by God himself.

As part of spiritual rest, the word of God, the Bible, is very important. In an era, such as ours that is characterised by “growing biblical illiteracy, even among church- goers, this need has

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Dawn, Marva J. 2002. *Joy in our weakness*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans., see pp.78-82 where Dawn writes wonderful words about renewal.

<sup>46</sup> See Peterson, “The Pastor’s Sabbath”, *Leadership*, Spring 1985, p. 53.

become that much more acute” (Blomberg 1999:29).<sup>47</sup> Dawn (1993:23-24) argues that, if followed, the guidelines given in the bible on sexual morality can go a long way in making sure that we lead happy lives. In one of her chapters in her book *Is it a lost cause?* (1997:33) she boldly states that “It is my goal in this chapter to present warrants for recovering our belief in Scripture as the highest authority for knowing the heart of God for ourselves and our children.” On Sabbath<sup>48</sup>, we are to study the Bible both privately and publicly and to hear it being proclaimed in corporate worship.<sup>49</sup> As we do so, we are encouraged in our difficult times and our minds are elevated into thinking of heavenly things instead of earthly (Dawn 2003: 117). As Dawn (1993:25) correctly notes, the church is an alternative society even in matters of sexuality. She (1992:13-14) further contends that the church’s Sabbath keeping lifestyle would give an opportunity for the church to offer an alternative to the frenzy and pressured productivity that characterises our technological society. Indeed, Dawn (1989:57) is right in pointing out that,

one of the necessary tools for spiritual resting is the Word of God. The Torah was the focus of the Sabbath for the Jews, who spent part of the day immersed in the study of it. For Christians, the entire canon of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures teaches us about God’s covenant love.

But the meaning of Shabbat means more than rest as Heschel (1952:22-23, emphases his) explains:

*Menuha* which we usually render with ‘rest’ means here much more than withdrawal from labor and exertion, more than freedom from toil, strain or activity of any kind. *Menuha* is not a negative concept but something real and intrinsically positive.

The word means inner peace within oneself, the kind of peace that ensures that one is at rest.

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<sup>47</sup> Dawn takes the Scriptures with the seriousness that they deserve. See, for instance, her book; Dawn, Marva J. 2003. *How shall we worship?* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers. In this work, Dawn explores the biblical guidelines for the subject of worship. Cf the backcover of Dawn, Marva J. 1993. *Sexual character*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans. Also Cf. Dawn, Marva J. 2001. *Powers, weakness, and the tabernacling of God*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, see especially pp. 36-57; Dawn, Marva J. 1997. *Is it a lost cause?* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, see pp. 31-46.

<sup>48</sup> By ‘Sabbath’ Marva Dawn is referring to Sunday, the first day of the week. Cf Dawn, Marva J. 1993. *Sexual character*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, p. 42.

<sup>49</sup> Marva Dawn has written a full chapter on the benefits of church. See Dawn, Marva J. 1992. *Truly the community*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, pp. 76-83.

Such peace begins with God. We are to accept the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and thereby be reconciled to God so that we may have this profound peace of God. The importance of this peace is underscored by the fact that without it there is no other kind of peace that is possible. Therefore, for us to truly rest on the Sabbath we must first rest in God through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Dawn (2006:40) underscores how profound and pervasive spiritual rest is when she writes,

If we think of every aspect in our connection to God, who is Spirit, as the whole spiritual sweep of our lives, then the term spiritual encompasses everything, for all of us relates to God- intelligence, attitudes, talents, affections, body actions, our whole being.

Sabbath resting offers us an opportunity to experience the peace of God. On this day, we are more exposed to the word of God, spiritual songs and hymns, and the fellowship of fellow Christians. Therefore, “we become immersed more deeply in this peace of God, this awareness that all the barriers have been broken down” (Dawn 1989:60). In addition, “on days set apart to focus on who God is”, *like on the Sabbath day*, “his gifts of rest and peace are most likely to be experienced” (Dawn 1989:61, words in italics for emphasis are mine).

Another source of strength about Sabbath keeping is the assurance of the presence of God on that day as we worship him.<sup>50</sup> Dawn (2003: xi) argues that worship “is our glad response to the immense grace of the Triune God.” Worship on the Sabbath day, as Dawn (2003:133-134) acknowledges, brings us closer to God and strengthens our faith in him, and empowers us for the work of the following week. The presence of God means a lot to us during adversity of any kind. It reminds us that God cares for us and wishes us well. Indeed, “the greatest result of Sabbath resting is the opportunity to know the presence of God, no matter what our present circumstances might be” (Dawn 1989:61). In addition, Sabbath keeping serves as a continual reminder that we are pilgrims here on earth and that we are passing by to life eternal that God has prepared for us. As we rest on the Sabbath day, in some sense, we experience a foretaste

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<sup>50</sup> Dawn wrote a book about worship. See, Dawn, Marva J. 2003. *How shall we worship?* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, see especially pp. 25-35 in which she answers the question ‘how do we worship God?’

of the eternal life that God has prepared for us. We particularly experience this foretaste when we experience the joys of our eternal home even now.

### **3.3.2 Physical rest**

One of the benefits of Sabbath keeping is that the practice offers us physical rest. This is especially appreciated in cases where our daily work involves a lot of physical or manual labour. But even if our work is mainly sedentary, the fact is that “nearly everyone senses that work alone is not sufficient for human fulfilment” (Edwards 1982:3). Therefore, we need periodic rest from our routine work.

Of a truth, “if we are primarily engaged in physical exertion during the week the Sabbath offers a physical respite” (Dawn 1989:67). And this physical respite is enjoyed by us, our children, those who work for us, and our animals. Dawn (1997)<sup>51</sup> argues extensively on the importance of raising children in the fear of God. As the Lord has given us the Sabbath day in which to rest we would also want others to rest on that day as well. On the Sabbath, all of us are to experience the truth that “the Sabbath day gives us time to set aside our frantic pace and worries and to enter into such serenity” (Dawn 2006:41).

### **3.3.3 Emotional rest**

One of the challenges of our fast-paced and increasingly busy world is that as workers we are usually left emotionally drained. And because everything around and in us moves so fast we rarely have time to pause and reflect on our lives and indeed the direction that they are taking. Moreover, the increase in crime and horrific reports that fill our media today leave us emotionally scarred without realising or even admitting it. So, it is that “very often we are too emotionally drained to be able to cope with what is happening to us or because of us” (Dawn 1989:73).

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<sup>51</sup> See Dawn, Marva J. 1997. *Is it a lost cause?* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans.

Against this backdrop “a special day set aside for prayer and meditation is a great gift for our emotional healing” (Dawn 1989:74). This day is available to all who would accept an invitation to rest in it. That day is the Sabbath day. For “...we also need enormous emotional rest on the Sabbath day” (Dawn 2006:43). On this day, our relationship with God is deepened and thus we are also healed emotionally in the process. On this day, God ministers to us through the reading and preaching of his word, singing of hymns and spiritual songs as well as prayer in corporate worship services (Cf. Dawn 1997:245-246). Indeed, “every preacher, by his or her particular passionate involvement with the text, might help us to see meanings we’ve never noticed before” (Dawn 1999:137). Moreover, God meets us as individuals in our private prayers to him, which gives us an opportunity to pour our hearts to God knowing that he listens to us. God “reveals himself to us in tender and compassionate ways” (Dawn 1989:74).

Emotional healing also takes place through the enrichment of our relationships with fellow believers. Sabbath celebrations at the worship services give us an opportunity to form and strengthen relationships and friendships with others, and consequently, those other people bring us emotional healing and rest as well. To add, we also find emotional rest through solitude. Sabbath keeping offers us both the opportunities of fellowship with family and friends as well as time to meditate alone. Indeed, “through our Sabbath keeping we can learn to rest both in our own personalities and in our relationships” (Dawn 1989:75).

### **3.3.4 Intellectual rest**

During the six working days, we use our minds so intensely that we become vulnerable to thinking that life is all about what we plan on it. The suspicion is that this is partly due to intellectual exhaustion where we fail to grasp the larger perspective of life. On the Sabbath day when we rest from all our endeavours and for a day think of God and meditate on his word that gives our minds the rest they so much need. I believe that Marva Dawn is correct in her observation that “Sabbath keeping offers us the time to gain a larger perspective, to view our fragmented existence in light of a larger whole” (1989:78). In fact, “...resting intellectually forms an understanding of our true selves contrary to cultural impositions and teaches us what

it means to abide in the Lord and in the Trinity's paths of righteousness" (Dawn 2006:42). In Christian theology, the Trinity refers to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; three persons who are one God (McGrath 2001:319-343; Cf. Gunton 1997:122). Migliore (2014:70-72) argues that the Christian doctrine of Trinity upholds rather than contradicts Scripture teaching that there is one true God.

When we keep the Sabbath day we begin to see the place of God in this larger whole in life. And when we see how powerful and mighty God is, we find it easy to trust in him and not think that we must get through life and its challenges all by ourselves. This is especially true when we understand the purpose of God for us as his children, and therefore to work towards that purpose even as we apply our minds to the work before us. This is because "the Sabbath day renews our minds with the things of God and reminds us of our confident hope, which empowers us to live according to the values of the Kingdom in spite of what surrounds us" (Dawn 2006:43).

"In the silence of our Sabbath observation our minds can rest, and that often leads to the freedom to learn anew how best to use our minds for the glory of God" (Dawn 1989:79). Resting from all work on the Sabbath day gives us the peace of mind we so much need in a world preoccupied with production and accomplishment. Additionally, our intellectual rest helps us to give up any intellectual pride that might be against the purpose of God for our lives.

Moreover, keeping the Sabbath gives us an opportunity to rest from our usual intellectual labours. Instead, "the Sabbath offers the magnificent gift of an entire day to ponder God's truth instead of our work, to notice God's creations of beauty, and to relish God's goodness in our closest relationships" (Dawn 2006:42). On Sabbath, we do not even have to worry and think about things that we would usually apply our minds to during the working days. Marva Dawn notes that "such a temporary setting aside of those problems refreshes us so that we can return to our usual subjects of thought with new eagerness" (1989:80). To add, after a rest on Sabbath, we can also think more clearly, objectively, and realistically. In addition, "Holy time also creates calm. Not only will that calmness last into the rest of the week and enable us to think things through more thoroughly, but also it will free us to be more creative" (Dawn 1989:80).

Sabbath keeping gives us the intellectual rest we so much need because “the Holy Spirit works primarily through the renewal of our minds – as the Scriptures continually remind us” (Dawn 1989:82).

### **3.3.5 Social rest**

Because Sabbath rest engenders an ethics of peace and rest it also seeks to help us rest as individuals, families, and nations. Put in different words, “Sabbath as rest for everyone is a revolutionary idea. It is a powerful social statement with ethical implications” (Postema 1997:65). As individuals, on the Sabbath day, we get an opportunity to rest from all work and be with a community of believers. Moreover, on the Sabbath day, we have one full day in which to be together and do things as families because each one of us would have rested from all work. Nations are made up of individuals and families. Therefore, when individuals and families are socially healthy so will be the nation.

Against the spirit of violence and war, the Sabbath reminds us “the values of cooperation and sharing, of non-violence and support” (Dawn 1989:93). Berkovits (1983:20) notes that the Mishna teaches that weapons are not to be carried on a Sabbath and that many rabbis agree with this assertion. On the other, Grade (1986:12) narrates how he was rebuked by an elderly man for even thinking of violence as a Jew and a Sabbath keeper. Thus, Sabbath keeping instils in us the desire to be God’s channel of healing both within our families and outside, and within our national boundaries and beyond. Indeed, “the humility and serenity engendered by Sabbath keeping empower us to be agents of healing both near and far” (Dawn 1989:93). This includes taking care of the needy among us. In turn, this is because on Sabbath “we all stand as equals before God” (Dresner 1970:41).

### **3.3.6 An ethics of character**

True rest is found in God. It takes faith in Jesus Christ for us to be transformed into a life that is in line with the will and purpose of God for our lives. But the challenge is that we are very

busy to have time with God and to hear and read his word for ourselves. Hence the Sabbath day gives us the time to focus on God because on this day we lay aside all our work and busyness and instead focus on God. Indeed, as Dawn (1989:97) notes,

Sabbath keeping changes our character. We will be irrevocably transformed by the commitment to a special day set aside for our relationship with God, and that transformation will result in thinking and attitudes and emotions and behaviour consistent with the character of the God who is the focus of our Sabbath keeping.

This is partly due to the worship services that take place on this day (Dawn 1995:116,174-177). Dawn (1997:65) is right in pointing out that “the only thing that the Church does that no one else can do is worship the triune God.”<sup>52</sup> Migliore (2014:260) adds that,

While flawed and always in need of reform and renewal, the church is nonetheless the real beginning of God’s new and inclusive community of liberated creatures reconciled to God and to each other and called to God’s service in the world.

An ethics of character is more about the kind of people that we want to be as opposed to just following a set of rules (Dawn 1993:32-33). In other words, an ethics of character is concerned with forming a character because of the recognition that behaviour results from the character, and vice versa (Dawn 1993:33-35).

Wolterstorff (1983:153) makes an interesting observation when he notes that God’s rest is not a rest of exhaustion from work, or the rest of release from the boredom of work, or a rest to be refreshed so that He may go back to work refreshed, but he argues that “God’s rest is the rest of delight in his works.”

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<sup>52</sup> Marva Dawn wrote a full chapter on worship in Dawn, Marva J. 1997. *Is it a lost cause?* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, see pp. 64-88.



### **3.3.7 Aids to rest**

Since Sabbath keeping is a gift of God for our benefit and not a legalistic ritual or practice there are things that will help one as a person to truly find rest. These aids to rest or the activities that help one to truly rest should be identified and incorporated into the Sabbath experience so that maximum possible rest can be found on the Sabbath day. The other person can find rest through singing hymns while the other can find rest through the study of the word of God, for example. Luther (2001:6)<sup>53</sup> comments on the meaning of the commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy when he writes that “We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect His Word and the preaching of it, but regard it as Holy and gladly hear and learn it.” The bottom line is that each of us should identify the activities that help them rest on the Sabbath day.

In this section, we have looked at the Sabbath aspect of resting. We established that the Hebrew word for Sabbath means ‘to rest’. To add, we drilled deeper into this concept of Sabbath keeping, learning that this resting is not merely resting from work. In summary, we have learned that resting involves the following: Spiritual rest, physical rest, emotional rest, intellectual rest, social rest, an ethics of character, and aids to rest.

## **3.4 Sabbath Embracing: Embrace what?**

The other important aspect of Sabbath keeping is that of embracing. In this section, we will dwell more on this aspect to learn more about it as it relates to the practice of Sabbath keeping. Marva Dawn notes that “the important point in all our imitation is its deliberate intentionality. We don’t just think God’s values are good. We embrace them wholly” (1989:102). With this brief introduction, we delve into our study.

### **3.4.1 Embracing intentionality**

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<sup>53</sup> This is a recently published document. See the full bibliographic entry in the bibliography.

“One of the most important aspects of Sabbath keeping is that we embrace intentionality” (Dawn 1989:103). In other words, if we are to keep the Sabbath, and systematically so, we must have the intention to do so. Sabbath keeping cannot be left up to chance or when we are not busy and therefore have less work to do. That would defeat the very purpose of Sabbath keeping.

To drive the above point home, Sabbath keeping should be treated just like being a Christian and leading an exemplary life. We do not lead our lives in a Christian way only when it is convenient, or when we are in a mood to do so. Instead, we live Christian lives because that is who we are; we are Christians. “Similarly, we offer to the world the beauty of our lifestyles when we choose to be careful about each aspect of them. Such intentionality is not legalistic; on the contrary, it frees us to see and make manifest to others in new ways all the lilies of life” (Dawn 1989:107). Sabbath keeping requires the same intentionality if we are to enjoy the benefits that it brings.

For Jews, Sabbath keeping reminded them of their Jewish identity; that they could worship Yahweh even when the Temple was in ruins. In the beginning, God had first hallowed time and not space, such that the temple was not necessary though its restoration would have marked their restoration as a nation. For the temple was a symbol of the Jewish nation. In the same way, the Sabbath day reminds us as Christians that our relationship with God supersedes the Temple buildings from where we worship him. In other words, Sabbath keeping helps us to embrace the Trinity (Dawn 2006:63-64).

### **3.4.2 Embracing the values of the Christian community**

The Christian community has values that set them apart as a people who have been called out of the world by God. We are intentional about what we do as a people because we want to “recover more firmly in our lives the different set of values that we hold because we are God’s people” (Dawn 1989:111). One such value is the intention to worship and praise God as a community of believers (Dawn 1995:8-10). Sabbath keeping offers one day in seven in which we can gather as a Church of God to worship. Dawn (1997:47-63) argues extensively that

church is indeed an alternative society which is important in forming God-like characters in our children, too. It is during worship services that we study the Word of God, sing songs of praise and hymns, and remember "...our identity as *His* people together, celebrating our oneness in *His* grace" (Dawn 1989:113, Emphasis mine). In addition, we hear the instructions of God for living as his children and seek to know his truth and will in our lives. In her book *The Sense of the Call*, Marva Dawn points out that the Sabbath way of life is characterised by embracing others, too (2006:63).

It is at the worship services, on Sabbath days, that we learn of other values of the Christian community as we hear the Bible being preached and as we study it for ourselves. This is crucial because as Migliore (2014:46) notes, "since the beginning of the church, every Christian theology has implicitly or explicitly acknowledged the special authority of Scripture." Therefore, through Scripture, the Sabbath helps us to deepen our roots in the values of the Christian community. Indeed, "worship and devotional time are especially important because they give us the materials for thinking about other dimensions of God's values that we will want to hold together in the Christian community" (Dawn 1989:113). By keeping the Sabbath, we intentionally use the time that God has given us "...for deepening the bonds of our community and enfolding each of us more foundationally in the values that we share" (Dawn 1989:118).

### **3.4.3 Embracing time instead of space**

One of the values of the Christian community is its emphasis on the importance of time over space; of relationships over things. When we have that kind of perspective on life we would have time for other people instead of having all our time being filled with the production of things. The Sabbath day provides quality time with which to nurture relationships with both family and friends (Dawn 2006:63). On this day, we may make calls to distant loved ones and invite nearby friends over for lunch or dinner. Dawn (1989:119) captures this when she notes that,

we must develop an objective perspective (rather than thinking we are 'out of time') to assess the quality of our days. This perspective has many aspects,

but one of the foremost is the deliberate decision to focus on the events in time with persons rather than using time to acquire or accomplish things.

Cultivating such a perspective on life on a Sabbath day influences us to carry it into the working week as we work and interact with people. As much as we do our work to the best of our ability, we know that we should embrace persons, be intimate with them, and care for them. Indeed, “our Sabbath remembering strengthens us to stand against the technologization of our culture and pursue the intimacy of Christian community and Christ-like caring” (Dawn 1989:123).

#### **3.4.4 Embracing giving instead of requiring**

By ceasing work and resting on the Sabbath, we demonstrate that we trust God to provide for our needs. Such trust can also be stretched further where we also give to the needy because we trust that God is the provider of our needs and security. For “the proclamation of the gospel, the faith that God’s love frees us to love, is made more credible when it is tangibly accompanied by works of love and obedience to God’s covenant instructions to care for the needy” (Dawn 1989:129). Indeed, a Sabbath way of life helps us to embrace our call’s labour and the challenges that come with it (Dawn 2006:66).

#### **3.4.5 Embracing our calling in life**

As Christians, we are called to be children of God. In addition, each of us has their calling or vocation in this life. The Sabbath day offers quality time on which to contemplate our calling in life, as well as to be encouraged from the word of God to fulfil that calling faithfully. Of a fact, “the Sabbath is a day for counting our blessings and embracing the goodness of our own particular circumstances” (Dawn 1989:131). The Sabbath day helps us to embrace our calling in life as well as the suffering, such as handicaps and disabilities, that we may find ourselves in (Dawn 2006:64-66).

As we worship God with other Christians on the Sabbath day, the scripture lessons, the sermon, and the prayers illumine the way in which we can fulfil our calling. “Similarly, the Holy Spirit

uses our personal Bible study, meditation, and prayer to reveal to us and develop in us the character of God” (Dawn 1989:135). In her book, *Truly the community* Marva Dawn explores a ‘Pastoral’ interpretation of Romans 12 to highlight the importance of the church to Christians (1992: ix; Cf. 1993: Back cover).<sup>54</sup> This is the same approach that Marva Dawn adopted in the book *The Unnecessary Pastor* which she co-authored with Eugene Peterson.<sup>55</sup> In *Is it a lost cause?* Dawn (1997:89-103) argues that Pastors are very important in shaping children’s characters after that of the person of Jesus Christ. This is significant because “the person of Jesus Christ is of central importance to Christian theology” (McGrath 2001:347). Moreover, constructive conversations and prayers with our fellow Christians further clarifies our calling in our minds and strengthens us on how best to fulfil it. In fact, a Sabbath way of life helps us to embrace a life of prayer such that prayer becomes a part of our lives (Dawn 2006:63-64).

Marva Dawn argues that “to embrace is to accept with gusto, to live to the hilt, to choose with extra intentionality and tenacity” (1989:135). This follows that to truly embrace our calling in life we need to understand such a calling and be intentional on fulfilling it. Indeed, “immersing ourselves in *his* love on the Sabbath overwhelms us with *his* grace, clarifies our perceptions of our role, and empowers us for the tasks that *he* makes clear” (Dawn 1989:136, Emphasis mine).<sup>56</sup> In this way, Sabbath keeping helps us to embrace our calling in life.

### 3.4.6 Embracing wholeness-shalom

One of the greatest needs of our time is peace. Profound peace where all things are at peace is one of the greatest needs of our time. Unquestionably, God wants to give us peace as individuals and as societies. Peace, as Dawn (1989:137) argues, is not a mere absence of conflict:

The Hebrew word for peace, shalom, begins in reconciliation with God and continues in reconciliation with our sisters and brothers – even our enemies.

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<sup>54</sup> This is also seen in her other book. See, Dawn, Marva J. 1993. *Sexual character*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans.

<sup>55</sup> See Dawn, Marva J., & Peterson, Eugene H. 2000. *The unnecessary Pastor*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans.

<sup>56</sup> In these words, Marva Dawn is referring to God.

Moreover, shalom designates being at peace with ourselves, health, wealth, fulfilment, satisfaction, contentment, tranquillity, and – to sum it all up – wholeness.

One of the characteristics of a Sabbath way of life is that it embraces the gospel of reconciliation (Dawn 2006:65).

We long to have peace in ourselves and with our neighbours. We wish to be in good health and to be fulfilled in life. In short, we would like to be whole. And such wholeness God desires to give us through the gift of the Sabbath. For us to be whole, our worldview, our perspective of the world should be whole. However, as human beings, our knowledge of things is fragmented and so is our world view. Therefore, by adopting God's Sabbath way of life, we adopt the way he sees the world. His view of the world is whole. When we lead a Sabbath way of life "...we no longer dichotomize between mind and matter, our bodies and our spirits or souls, our left and right brains. Rather, all becomes sacred and wholly integrated in our distinction from the world" (Dawn 1989:138). Indeed, "Sabbath keeping ushers us into the wholeness of God's order, the shalom of his love" (Dawn 1989:144).

### **3.4.7 Embracing the world**

Children of God and the Christian Church exists to serve the world. One of the best ways to embrace the world and to be equipped to serve it is by keeping the Sabbath day once in every seven days. Indeed, "the practice does not remove us from the world" (Dawn 1989:146), from other human beings. Instead, Sabbath keeping brings us closer to God through prayer, worship, and the study of his word so that we may be better prepared to serve the world. This helps us to better understand God and his purpose for us as individuals and as the Christian Church in the world. Harris (1999:61) argues that prayer is a very important subject to talk about and that to speak of prayer means "we are on holy ground." The Sabbath way of life "plunges us more deeply into the world and its needs because it carries us more deeply into the heart and purposes of God" (Dawn 1989:146).

In this section, we have dwelt more on the aspect of embracing. In summary, we have established that if we are to enjoy God's gift of Sabbath keeping we are to accept that gift with

intentionality, to embrace it. We looked at the following important points: Embracing intentionality, embracing the values of the Christian Community, embracing time instead of space, embracing giving instead of requiring, embracing our calling in life, embracing wholeness- Shalom, and embracing the World.

### **3.5 Sabbath Feasting: Feasting on or with what?**

One of the key points that we should understand for us to enjoy God's gift of the Sabbath to us is that Sabbath keeping is a call to celebrate. To celebrate the completed works of God, that he created in six days, and thereafter rested on the Sabbath. In addition, Sabbath keeping is a celebration of the redemptive work of Christ on our behalf. Jesus Christ died on the cross that through faith in him we may be saved from sin and have eternal life. Indeed, "Sabbath celebration is especially needed in our technological society" (Dawn 1989:151).

#### **3.5.1 Feasting on the eternal**

We do feast but as Marva Dawn observes, our feasting lasts for such a short time that it leaves us wanting more (1989:153). Perhaps it is because we feast on temporal things, to begin with. However, Christian feasting is both temporal and eternal (Dawn 1989:153). This is one of the truths that Sabbath keeping teaches us every week when we keep it holy. On Sabbath, we devote our full attention to the eternal God; we celebrate his achievements on our behalf, and in that way feast on the eternal. Indeed, as Heschel (1952:16) argues, "the likeness of God can be found in time, which is eternity in disguise."

To add, on the Sabbath day we seek God's presence in our lives, the presence of the eternal immortal God, and dwell on the eschatological promises of God that Christ will one day come and take us to heaven and earth made new where we will celebrate the Sabbath eternally with him. We especially keep these promises vivid in our minds by studying the scriptures individually and as a Church. As we study the word of God many eternal characteristics of God are revealed to us by the inspired words of the Bible. This is not only true to Christianity, but

to Judaism as well where the Torah is studied (Dawn 1989:157). Indeed, the eternity of the character of God is demonstrated by the fact that we in the twenty-first century continue to study his word which was first recorded “in the language of the seventh century B.C.E or the first century C.E.” (Dawn 1989:157).

As Beechy notes, “observing the Sabbath offers us continued practice in keeping silent in order to hear ‘the yearning [of our spirits for God], the Prayer [he has] planted [within] us, and to allow ourselves to be shaped and moved by it’” (in Dawn 1989:158).<sup>57</sup> This is more so because on the Sabbath day we lay aside our daily work and devote an entire day to doing the things of God, to seeking him and his ways, and to seek his presence in our lives. Hence “what *we are* depends on what *the Sabbath is* to us” (Heschel 1952:89, Emphases his).

Contrary to what many people think, Sabbath keeping is not a legalistic burdensome routine. But as it is, it is God’s gift to feast on the eternal, on that which truly satisfies. Amassing great wealth and having great achievements behind one’s name do not necessarily satisfy the longing of one’s inner being. Such satisfaction can only be found in the eternal God who has given us the gift of the Sabbath on which to feast on that which satisfies, the eternal. Indeed, “because God’s eternity enfolds us in our Sabbath celebrations, our weekday lives become more ordered by his priorities” (Dawn 1989:164). Moreover, as Christians, we also look forward to the coming of the kingdom of God in all its fullness, in which our once in a week Sabbath keeping will be kept in the presence of the eternal God.

### **3.5.2 Feasting with music**

One of the important components of any feast is music. Likewise, in the practice of Sabbath keeping music is a crucial component in our feasting. Christian music, in the forms of hymns and spiritual songs, is referred to here. Such music can be sung during worship services with the church, special items of music can also be rendered by selected singing groups within a

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted from Leonard Beechy, “Three Levels of Prayer”, Gospel Herald, 20 Nov. 1984, p.806.



church setting. In addition, one may also play recorded Christian music at home or in their car or even sing to oneself.

It is crucial to appreciate therefore that God must be the subject and object of worship even in our music (Dawn 1995:76,80-81,170-173; Cf. 1999:149-158).<sup>58</sup> Dawn (1995:76, emphasis hers) rightly points out that “the word *worship* comes from the Old English roots *weorth*, meaning ‘honor’ and ‘worthiness’...”. So, we worship God because he is worthy to be worshipped. We also worship him in music because, “no matter how small a congregation is or how untalented its musicians might be, the music of worship can be a feast” (Dawn 1989:171-172).<sup>59</sup>

Dawn (1999:182) also argues that congregational music is to be as diverse and inclusive as to better reflect the composition of the congregation. We should also be willing to sing each other’s songs to better understand each other, and why particular songs especially minister to our brothers and sisters. However, she (1999:182) cautions that since “we live in an increasingly narcissistic culture, we must guard against new songs that are self-centred, that fail to convey the we-ness (and wee-ness) of the Church.”

### 3.5.3 Feasting with beauty

Another important aspect of any feasting is beauty. Whether that beauty is in the decorations or the beautiful people at the feast the bottom line is that beauty should be part of any feasting. In Judaism, the beauty of the Sabbath day is something that is especially emphasised. This is done in the concept in which the Sabbath day is treated as Queen; therefore, as part of welcoming her the house and everything is made ready by cleanliness and beauty (Dawn 1989:173). Since we are so much used to seeing violence on Television and in our streets, such

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<sup>58</sup> See Dawn’s full chapter on music in Dawn, Marva J. 1995. *Reaching out without dumbing down*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, pp.165-204.

<sup>59</sup> Dawn has written a wonderful chapter on music during worship. See Dawn, Marva J. 2003. *How shall we worship?* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, see especially pp.1-17.

beauty goes a long way in our Sabbath feasting. Therefore, we need to be intentional in making our Sabbath feasting beautiful.

Keeping the Sabbath day holy encourages us as God's people to appreciate the beauty of creation and to remember that God is the creator of the universe. Migliore (2014:96-120) rightly argues that creation is good. Indeed, "Sabbath is a day and a time to cultivate contemplation, to understand the aah of things, to pay attention to God's creation" (Postema 1997:55). This boosts our faith in God. As Gunton (1997:141) notes, "all cultures, ancient and modern alike, seek for a way of accounting for the universe that will give their lives coherence and meaning." The doctrine of creation is the answer to that seeking. To add, by keeping the Sabbath holy, we imitate God, in that God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh day. Thus, we enter God's Sabbath rest. When God rested on the seventh day, he had finished his work of creation. Therefore, on the Sabbath day, we are invited to rest as though our work were complete because on Sabbath we celebrate God's creative and redemptive work on our behalf (Dawn 1989:174). On the Sabbath, we spend the day appreciating the beauty of God's creation and thereby grow in our love and trust for and in him.

Beauty can also be enhanced by intentionally making the temples and sanctuaries where we worship our God beautiful. In addition, our homes should also be made as beautiful as possible for this is one area where we worship God in the other six days of the week apart from the Sabbath. Indeed, even our worship life displays the beauty of the Sabbath way of life. Moreover, "the beauty of the larger temple of nature offers another way to enjoy Sabbath keeping" (Dawn 1989:177). When we see how beautiful the nature of God around us is we are in turn stirred to appreciate our own beauty as people created in the image of God. This is more so because appreciation of nature brings about physical relaxation and emotional and spiritual healing to us. Furthermore, as part of enjoying nature, we particularly enjoy the beauty of light. Marva Dawn notes that the beauty of light has over a long time been part of Judaism (1989:178-179). There are special prayers for different times that are recited in relation to the beauty of light (Millgram 1944:24, 67).

### 3.5.4 Feasting with food

Another important component of a feast is food. In any feast, there is usually food to feast with. Similarly, Sabbath feasting also has food involved as we celebrate God's creative and redemptive accomplishments on our behalf. In Judaism, food is eaten in a certain way on the Sabbath day. On the Sabbath day, "the delicacies of the Sabbath are enjoyed slowly, with time to appreciate each mouthful, and with pauses between each course" (Dawn 1989:181).<sup>60</sup> This goes against the popular culture where people think that to feast means to make gluttons out of themselves. We probably do not know how to feast because we do not know how to fast (Cf. Dawn 1997:162). However, "eating mindfully can bring you back to the present moment and help you savor the meal itself. Before eating, contemplate the food; then eat it with awareness" (Postema 1997:56).

Moreover, a Sabbath way of life teaches us temperance even in the use of our time. By giving up one day for ceasing, resting, and feasting we are in a way having 'a fast of time', and will, therefore, appreciate the Sabbath feasting. In Judaism, it is not uncommon for one to have a simple diet during the six working days so that they may afford a special meal on the Sabbath day (Dawn 1989:180). Because one would have thus fasted during the previous six days, they will better appreciate the feasting on the Sabbath. Surely, "Sabbath feasting-celebration-draws its meaning because of its contrast to the fasting-the simple life-of the other six days" (Dawn 1989:180).

However, as with other aspects of keeping the Sabbath, feasting with food requires a great deal of intentionality from us. We need to try to buy our favourite foods, that we do not eat often, for the Sabbath day. This may require us to deny ourselves of certain luxuries during the six working days so that we may afford a special Sabbath meal. To add, a Sabbath meal can be prepared on a Friday in readiness for Sabbath so that our Sabbath feasting would not be marred by any work (Dawn 1989:180). In addition, we may also want to use special plates and glasses for the special Sabbath meal.

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<sup>60</sup> Here Marva Dawn quotes Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog. 1952. *Life Is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl*. New York: Schocken Books. See p.47.

Feasting with food also caters for the poor, either within our Church or in the neighbourhood. We could host a dinner party or a potluck as a Church, or we could invite our neighbours over for lunch. Because we only have Sabbath feasting once a week, this will make us more conscious of the poor among us. In turn, we would want to spring into action and help the poor in practical ways thus making our Sabbath celebrations meaningful (Dawn 1989:186).

### **3.5.5 Feasting with affection**

One of the drawbacks about our scientifically and technologically advanced world in our century is that many of us lack intimacy in their lives. Many people wish to receive and to give affection, however, the challenge is not only that we lack affection but also that we probably do not know how to be intimate with other people. Given this order of things, a Sabbath way of life is our answer. Indeed, “to keep the Sabbath offers us the possibility for learning to deepen our relationships and to embrace others with godly affection” (Dawn 1989:189).

Since Sabbath is holy time, on this day we find time for meditation, silence, contemplation, as well as a corporate celebration with other children of God. These personal silence and joint celebration go a long way in bringing us the healing for our deepest needs through assuring us of the love of God. On Sabbath, we are not in a hurry, so we have time for our loved ones. Grade (1986:11) imagines the clock pendulum swinging slowly on the Sabbath to emphasise this point. In addition, Sabbath keeping also gives us a community to love and by which we are loved. Consequently, “out of the silence of our communion with God and within the support of our caring Christian community, we are enabled to reach out affectionately to those around us who need our caring tenderness” (Dawn 1989:193-194).

### **3.5.6 Feasting and festival**

Many of us probably think that we may only be able to celebrate when everything in our lives is fine. On the contrary, Sabbath feasting and festivity centres on the creative and redemptive

achievements of God such that we always have a reason to celebrate whether things are or not okay in our lives. We do not need to wait for everything to be well in our lives to enter Sabbath feasting and festivity. In fact, “the festivity itself deepens our communication with God” (Dawn 1989:196) even at times when we feel low and far from God.

On the other hand, some of us associate celebration with negativity, gluttony, drunkenness, and dissipation. Sara Shenk (in Dawn 1989:197)<sup>61</sup> captures what celebration is:

Celebration is the honouring of that which we hold most dear. Celebration is delighting in that which tells us who we are. Celebration is taking the time to cherish each other. Celebration is returning with open arms and thankful hearts to our Maker.

Celeste Perrino Walker adds that “celebration of our special time together with God recharges us and fills us with energy to meet the demands of the coming week- much like a short break from our work” (1999:19). To add, “Sabbath-keeping can become Sabbath-living and even Sabbath-playing! The Sabbath is not only for contemplation but also for celebration. It is for festival, for feasting, rejoicing, and praise” (Postema 1997:69). So, on the Sabbath day, as children of God, we celebrate the creative and redemptive accomplishments of God. On the Sabbath, we delight in God our Creator and spend quality time in his presence. To add, on the Sabbath day we also thank God for his many blessings in our lives.

Moreover, Sabbath keeping offers us quality time to celebrate God’s faithfulness and the quality of life we enjoy under his Lordship. By celebrating the Sabbath once in every seven days, we recognise the truth that the grace of God happens always (Dawn 1989:197). We also celebrate, with hearts full of gratitude, the gifts that God has endowed us with through his grace. In addition, as we gather for worship on the Sabbath day, we also celebrate each other for what the grace of God has done in our respective lives. To add, we celebrate the fact that out of his grace Jesus Christ died for us on the cross so that through faith in him we may have eternal life. We also celebrate the eschatological coming of Christ and that we will be with him.

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<sup>61</sup> See Shenk, Sara W. 1987. *Why Not Celebrate!* Intercourse, Penn: Good Books. See particularly pp.2-3.

Furthermore, “festival also means the heightened involvement of our senses” (Dawn 1989:199). On the Sabbath day, we have enough time to appreciate God’s nature and the people that God has created in God’s own image. Additionally, we also enjoy hearing the good news of salvation through the preaching of the word and singing of hymns and spiritual songs. And as McGrath (2001:407) notes, salvation is “linked with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” We also enjoy the sounds of birds, laughter, and even the breathing of other people as we seat near them during the worship services. To add, we also enjoy the unusual Sabbath foods and the bread and wine during Holy Communion. We also “smell the sweet perfume of Sabbath peace in the fragrances of worship incense, of flowers, of burning logs and glowing candles...” (Dawn 1989:199). We use our sense of touch in Sabbath keeping when we hug and shake hands with loved ones, as we hold and read the Bible, and in physically feeling as well and thus enjoying God’s gift of good health. Even as we feast the study of the Bible connects us to God, to other believers, and indeed to the rest of creation (Migliore 2014:52).

Indeed, Sabbath keeping is an invitation to feast and to have a festival in the truest sense. We feast in every aspect of the word: Physically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Moreover, we feast with music, beauty, food, and affection as discussed above. On Sabbath, we entertain our visitors, enjoy worship with other children of God. Above all, on the Sabbath day, we celebrate the presence of God among us. “The rabbis recommended worship, study of the Torah, warm family life and enjoyment of food as appropriate Sabbath activities” (Baab 2005:44-45). Indeed, the presence of God calls for a festival and expression of our joy in our relationship with God; that through faith in His Son we are his children.

In this section, we have dwelt more on the aspect of Sabbath feasting of Sabbath keeping. We have established that ideally, Sabbath keeping is a feast on the eternal, feasting with music, feasting with beauty, feasting with food, feasting with affection and that it is a feast and a festival at the same time. Ortberg (2005:60) sums up what we have discussed in this section when he writes:

Devote a specific day to acts of celebration so that eventually joy will infuse your entire life. One day a week eat foods you love to eat, listen to music that

moves your soul...read books that refresh your spirit, wear clothes that make you happy, surround yourself with beauty- and as you do these things, give thanks to God for his wonderful goodness.

### 3.6 Sabbath Day: On which day?<sup>62</sup>

In Dawn's work, the focus is not whether the Sabbath day should be kept on Saturday or Sunday. Marva Dawn herself writes that "I'm not too bothered by the argument about whether the Sabbath must be Saturday or Sunday" (1989:7). She also writes that,

I do not argue about which day should be celebrated as Sabbath (which means in Hebrew 'to cease' and not 'seventh day'), for there are good reasons both to continue the Jewish Saturday Sabbath and also for celebrating Sabbath on the Lord's Day or Sunday (1997:120).

Dawn's focus is instead on a rhythm of six days of work and one of rest in a seven-day week cycle. Therefore, for her, one could choose their Sabbath according to how their weekly schedule is structured. To add, in any case, the material in her work can be applied by both Saturday and Sunday keepers, respectively (Dawn 1989: xi). This means that Dawn is mainly interested in the principle and practice of Sabbath keeping rather than on the day to be kept as the Sabbath. However, it is significant that when she writes of a rhythm of six days of work and one day of rest, the day of rest she refers to is Sunday (Dawn 1995:43).

Dawn (1989:125) as a person has decided to have her Sabbath on Sundays because "to the early Christians 'the first day of the week' emphasized the resurrection of their Lord and suggested that what was done on that day came in response to the miracle of that event". Dawn (1995:220, emphasis hers) argues that "one might choose any other day to observe the Sabbath (the Hebrew word *Shabbat* means 'to cease' rather than referring to a certain day of the week)."

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<sup>62</sup> Though the focus of this thesis is not to discuss which day is the Sabbath, it is imperative and unavoidable to theologically account which day is the Sabbath in the work of Marva Dawn. In that regard, a brief discussion will be given. For a further discussion on "The Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday" see Millgram, Abraham E. 1944. *Sabbath: The day of delight*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America. See especially pp. 363-370. The discussion elucidates on the development of Sunday observance in Christianity.

She believes that keeping the Sabbath on Sunday today continues to remind Christians of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This position is also reflected in Dawn & Peterson (2000:88) where they write,

After becoming totally separated from the Jews (precipitated in the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and finalized in the Bar Kochba revolution of 135), Christians made Sunday, ‘the Lord’s Day,’ their Sabbath for worship because of the Resurrection.

Baab (2005:23) agrees with Dawn when she writes that, “even if Sunday was a busy workday, most Christians around the world were gathering for worship on the day of the resurrection, also called the Lord’s Day.” However, it must be quickly pointed out that Dawn is careful not to be legalistic or prescriptive about the day to be kept as the Sabbath, resorting instead to encourage her readers to choose a day most suitable to them as their Sabbath and to make sure that they are intentional about keeping it each week. But Marva Dawn’s position is quite problematic in that in her book *Is it a lost cause?* (1997:230) she rightly acknowledges that keeping the commandments of God including keeping the Sabbath is meant for our welfare. Yet she fails to acknowledge that the Sabbath commandment invites specifically the keeping of the seventh day of the week as the day to cease from our works and rest. In chapter 4, I will critically engage both Bacchiocchi and Dawn on their respective theologies on Sabbath keeping.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on Sabbath keeping in the works of Marva J. Dawn. It has been established that Sabbath keeping is a way of life that encompasses keeping one day in seven as the Sabbath. Sabbath keeping involves four activities that define what Sabbath keeping is. They are: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, and Feasting. In a detailed study of each of the above aspects of Sabbath keeping it has become apparent that “to keep the Sabbath means to cherish it, to honor it as the Queen of our days, in consort with the King of the Universe” (Dawn 1989:203).



On Sabbath ceasing, we saw that our English word ‘Sabbath’ comes from the Hebrew verb ‘Shabbath’ which primarily means to ‘cease or desist’. According to Genesis 2:2, God himself ceased on the Sabbath day. He, therefore, invites us to equally cease, not as a legalistic rudiment but as a way of setting us free from the many pressures that put us down in life. On Sabbath day, we cease to work; productivity and accomplishment; anxiety, worry, and tension; our trying to be God; our possessiveness; our enculturation; and, the humdrum and meaninglessness.

In addition, the Hebrew verb ‘Shabbath’ can also be rendered ‘rest’. God did not just cease from his work on Sabbath, he also rested on that day. Sabbath resting involves Spiritual rest, Physical rest, Emotional rest, Intellectual rest, Social rest, An Ethics of character, and Aids to rest. So, resting is not merely a rest from routine work, but a deeper rest that is meant to refresh us in all the areas mentioned above.

Moreover, Sabbath keeping means that we are to embrace the values of God and not just think that they are good. In other words, we are to be intentional about our Sabbath keeping. We are to embrace: Intentionality, the values of the Christian Community, time instead of space, giving instead of requiring, our calling in life, wholeness-shalom, and the world.

Furthermore, Sabbath keeping is a feast and a festival; it is a celebration of the creative and redemptive achievements of God. We are therefore to feast: On the eternal, with music, with beauty, with food, with affection, and to enjoy the feast and festival of the Sabbath day. For Marva J. Dawn, this day is on a Sunday. However, another or others may celebrate a Sabbath on another day; say a Saturday for instance.

We have also seen that Marva J. Dawn uses words in their original Hebrew and Greek to drill deeper as she develops her theology of the Sabbath. Moreover, Dawn also incorporates ‘Pastoral hermeneutics’ to do her theology. She cares for the church including its leaders the Pastors. She wishes them all well, and this is evident throughout her works as we have seen in this chapter. Furthermore, as a Lutheran Theologian, Marva J. Dawn takes the Scriptures with

the seriousness that they deserve. She carefully studies both the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible, and amazingly covers the Christian doctrines that are the subject matters of Systematic Theology.

## **Chapter 4: A critical theological engagement between the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn on Sabbath keeping**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In the previous two chapters, we individually discussed the theological aspect of Sabbath keeping within the larger doctrine of the Sabbath in the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn, respectively. The current chapter seeks to initiate a critical theological engagement between the works of the said Theologians on the theological concept of Sabbath keeping.

It is hoped that this chapter will find some of the theological differences on Sabbath keeping between Bacchiocchi and Dawn. In addition, it is equally hoped that some of the theological similarities on Sabbath keeping between Bacchiocchi and Dawn will also be established. Moreover, this chapter will seek to find what aspects of this theological dialogue can enrich, texture, and develop the SDA Church understanding of Sabbath keeping at the intersection of the work by the previously mentioned theologians.

### **4.2 Towards a definition of Sabbath**

According to Bacchiocchi (1980:83), our English word ‘Sabbath’ comes from the Hebrew ‘Shabat’ (שָׁבַת). This Hebrew verb means ‘to cease from doing’, ‘to desist from doing’, and therefore ‘to rest’. On the other hand, Dawn (1989:3) notes that “the name Sabbath comes originally from the Hebrew verb Shabbat; which means primarily ‘to cease or desist’”. In addition to the Hebrew verb, Shabbat meaning to ‘cease or desist’, the same verb can also be rendered ‘to rest’ (Dawn 1989:53). Kessler (2012: 2) agrees with the findings of both Bacchiocchi and Dawn when he recognises that “the noun Sabbath is derived from the Hebrew verb for ‘stop, rest’.” Therefore, Philips (2011:5) rightly observes that “Sabbath is a stop that allows for encounter with God.”

On face value, Bacchiocchi and Dawn seem to agree when it comes to the definition of Sabbath. However, a close study does reveal a fundamental difference in definition of Sabbath when it comes to Bacchiocchi and Dawn, respectively. For Bacchiocchi (1999:274) the Sabbath is the seventh day of every week, and ceasing from doing and resting should happen on this day. In other words, Bacchiocchi believes that the Sabbath day is of God, and has therefore been instituted by him to be on the seventh day of the week. He argues, as we have seen in chapter 2, that God rested on the seventh day of the creation week, and later in Exodus 20 commanded that the seventh day of the week be kept as the Sabbath because he had rested on that day. On the other hand, Dawn (1989:7) is not bothered when one rests in each week, but that one should rest once a week. The challenge with Dawn's definition of the Sabbath is that it fails to link the day to creation. The Sabbath is essentially a creation Sabbath. This difference, in Bacchiocchi and Dawn's works, will be nuanced in the sections that follow.

### **4.3 Sabbath keeping and creation**

Bacchiocchi (1998:285,287; 1980:85,87,88,238) argues that Sabbath keeping is deeply rooted in the doctrine of creation. Heschel (1951:10) agrees with Bacchiocchi's assertion. In addition, Phillips (2011:7, Emphasis mine) argues that "Sabbath is a ritual-a practice- that reminds us of *creation* and eternity, turns our attention toward God." Moreover, Bacchiocchi (2000:26) argues that the creation origin of the Sabbath validates the principle and practise of Sabbathkeeping. In fact, the rest of Sabbath is of creation (Bacchiocchi 1984:305). Bacchiocchi (1998:263-264) makes a case that God rested on the seventh day of the creation week thereby instituting that day as the Sabbath.

On the other hand, Dawn (1989) refers to Genesis 2:2 to support her argument that God ceased from his works when he rested on the seventh day of the creation week. However, it is theologically problematic that Marva Dawn is grounding the first day of the week (Sunday) in Genesis 2:2 while God rested on the seventh.<sup>63</sup> Marva Dawn seems to be simply missing the point that Sunday, the first day of the week, is not the Sabbath of creation. Dawn (1989:58)

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<sup>63</sup> To understand why Marva Dawn decides on calling Sunday the Sabbath day, the reader is referred to chapter 3.6 of this thesis. Further discussion of this point will also be done in 4.9.1 of the current chapter.

reasons that the evening and morning sequence of the creation week is a call to have faith in and depend on God. On this latter point, I agree with Marva Dawn.

#### **4.4 The Sabbath day: A holy day?**

An important aspect of any theology of the Sabbath is the holiness of that day. Bacchiocchi (1980:121) is right in his observation that “The fundamental meaning of the word ‘holy’ appears to be ‘separation, setting apart’ for divine manifestation.” Thus Phillips (2011:9) argues that on Sabbath “we are to rest, and that’s called ‘holy’, set apart (qadosh).” Koltun-Fromm (2010:32) agrees with Bacchiocchi by noting that Bible authors reserve the word ‘holy’ to refer to ‘things’, ‘people’, and ‘time’ ‘that belong exclusively to God’. Bacchiocchi (1980:122) asserts that indeed the Sabbath day is holy time. Thus, suffering humanity may be alleviated on this day since saving a life is a special thing to do (Bacchiocchi 1977:37). From my perspective, Bacchiocchi is right in arguing that God set the Sabbath day as holy by resting on that day. My understanding is that God instituted the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath by resting on that day.

On the other hand, Dawn (2006:63) observes that Sabbath time is holy because on this day we emphasize on relationships in a special way. Phillips (2011:9) even suggests that the holiness of the Sabbath day may be seen from an angle where we have a relationship with God. While Dawn’s argument of the holiness of the Sabbath by having relationships is true, that cannot make any other day a Sabbath day as Dawn seems to be suggesting. Indeed, “it is God who hallows the Sabbath, and we who call it ‘holy’ and observe it as such” (Phillips 2011:9). God hallowed the Seventh day by resting from his work on that day. However, the point Dawn is making enriches Bacchiocchi’s argument that the Sabbath should be a day when we emphasize on relationships more. Dawn (1989:119) contends that this is especially so because on Sabbath day we spend time focusing on relationships instead of acquiring things. Indeed, this is consistent with her argument and that of Bacchiocchi that on Sabbath we cease from all our works. However, a problem with Dawn’s consideration of Sunday as the holy Sabbath is that God set apart as a holy Sabbath the seventh day of the week, and not the first. So, Sunday is not a holy Sabbath per se.

#### 4.4.1 Sabbath as a day for church and worship

The other important aspect of the theology of Sabbath keeping is that the Sabbath day is not only a day of ceasing from work and resting but of worship as well (Phillips 2011:7). Bacchiocchi (1980:201) sees the Sabbath as the vehicle through which the church may promote true worship. This is because on the Sabbath day the church meets to worship the creator God. In other words, Bacchiocchi sees the institution of the Sabbath as an antidote against idolatry. Indeed, weekly worship services are a fitting commemoration of God's creative and redemptive accomplishments on our behalf (Bacchiocchi 1995b: Back cover). Bacchiocchi (1998:269) rightly argues that Christians who give priority to God on a Sabbath day ultimately give priority to God on all other days of the week. Thus, worship on the Sabbath moulds us into God's image not only for the Sabbath but even for all the other six days of creation as well.

Moreover, Bacchiocchi (1998:295) rightly notes that "the free offering of time to God is a supreme act of worship because it means acknowledging God with the very essence of human life: time." On the Sabbath day, we offer the whole day to God, and this is an act of worship. As pointed out above, we also devote the Sabbath hours to worshipping God as the Church. Heschel (1951:8) clarifies Bacchiocchi's argument when he makes a case that the Sabbaths are 'great cathedrals, and the Holy of Holies'. Indeed, as Bacchiocchi (1980:131) rightly points out, "being time, a mystery that defies human attempts to define it, the Sabbath provides a constant protection against the worship of objects and a fitting reminder of the spiritual nature of the covenant relationship between God and His people."

On the other hand, Dawn (1989:30) begins her argument by observing that when we keep the Sabbath day and lead a Sabbath way of life we begin to see the work we do in the six days of the week as worship; as something through which God and not ourselves should be praised. This also means that when we work during the week we do that work as though we were doing it for God. In addition, to appreciate Marva Dawn's theology of worship it is crucial to be aware that in her works church refers to "those called out (*ekklesia*) by Christ into a way of being in

the world to the glory of God for the sake of others.” Migliore (2014:262, emphasis his) enriches Dawn definition of Church when he writes that,

In the New Testament the church (ecclesia, ‘assembly’ or ‘congregation’) refers to the new community of believers gathered to praise and serve God in the power of the Holy Spirit in response to the gospel of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Dawn (1989:38-39) further rightly argues that the Sabbath day is holy time on which no selling or buying should take place. On Sabbath day, instead of being possessed by things, time possesses us (Dawn 1989:40). Thus, on the Sabbath day, we have time to form relationships with fellow believers as we meet for worship on this day (Dawn 1989:41-42). During worship, the values that the Church holds are also transmitted to members so that all espouse them (Dawn 1989: 113,118). In addition, on the Sabbath day parents also find time to worship with their children and to instil in them Christian values (Dawn 1997:104-125). Walker (1999:16) calls the time for church in worship on a Sabbath day a ‘spiritual date’ with God to highlight how important it is. Indeed, Dawn (1993:25) rightly observes that the church is an alternative society in matters of sexuality. Moreover, Dawn (1992:13-14) further correctly observes that the church’s Sabbath keeping lifestyle presents an alternative to the busyness of our technological age. In addition, Dawn (1997:47-63) argues that Church offers an alternative to children as well, so that their characters may be formed after that of God.

Dawn (1989:57) argues that the study of the Scriptures is an important aspect of Church worship and as part of Sabbath keeping. Migliore (2014:46) also highlights the importance of the scriptures in any Theology. Interestingly, Dawn (2006:40) sees our whole being as spiritual, and therefore as worship to God. However, according to Dawn (1989:60,61) on the Sabbath day when the Church is in worship, we experience the peace and rest of God as we see all barriers broken down. Men, women, and children of all races meet on a Sabbath to worship God and celebrate our oneness in his grace (Dawn 1989:113). And the assurance of the presence of God as we worship him on a Sabbath day is a source of strength (Dawn 2003; 1989:61). Dawn (2003: xi) defines worship as “our glad response to the immense grace of the Triune God.” Indeed, worship on the Sabbath day, as Dawn (2003:133-134) rightly notes, brings us closer to God and strengthens our faith in him, and empowers us for the work of the

following week. As Dawn (1995:8-10) rightly argues, it is a characteristic of the Church to worship and praise God.

While Marva Dawn beautifully argued for the Sabbath, it remains a problem that in her Theology of Sabbath keeping the seventh day of the week is regarded as a working day, and not a day of worship. In addition to this, in Dawn's theology of Sabbath keeping, the first day of the week, which forms part of the six working days is regarded as the Sabbath.

#### **4.5 Sabbath keeping as resistance**

The idea of Sabbath keeping as resistance is suggested by Brueggemann (2014). Though not in actual words used by Brueggemann, it runs through the works of both Bacchiocchi and Dawn. The concept's rationale is that Sabbath keeping is an alternative, and liberating spiritually, physically, and socially. Below we study each.

##### **4.5.1 Spiritual resistance**

According to Bacchiocchi (1995b: Backcover), Sabbath keeping is a commemoration of the creative and redemptive acts of God. Human beings need to be spiritually healthy (Bacchiocchi 1980: 208). The weekly commemoration of the creative and redemptive acts of God ensures that our connection with God is maintained. I believe that one who believes that God created the universe and that the same God saved them, that such a person is more likely to keep their faith in God. Bacchiocchi (1998:269) argues that Sabbath keeping ensures that we not only give priority to God on Sabbath but on all days of the week as well. I agree with Bacchiocchi here as well. As the commemoration of the creative and redemptive acts of God, the practice of Sabbath keeping does not only keep our faith in God on that day but on all days of the week as well. Indeed, we find rest in God (Bacchiocchi 1998:285).

When we keep the Sabbath, we offer time and therefore our lives to God (Bacchiocchi 1998:295). Therefore, Sabbath keeping is truly a sign that we have surrendered ourselves to



God. On the other hand, Dawn (1989:54) sees Sabbath time as the gift of God's grace to us. This view adds a fresh insight to Bacchiocchi, in that Dawn sees Sabbath time as a gift of God to us instead of us giving time to God. This makes sense because God is the Master of time (Dawn 1989:57). Time, including Sabbath time, belongs to God. Tsevat (1980:48, 49) also sees time as the gift of God's grace. Dawn (1989:55) argues that God's grace is the foundation for our rest in God. Indeed, Dawn (1989:61) argues that God's rest and peace are likely to be experienced on the Sabbath.

#### **4.5.2 Physical resistance**

Bacchiocchi (1980:127) recognises that our generation is also physically tired because of hard work, and high goals to meet, and suggests that on the Sabbath day we should rest as if our work were completed. This is because Bacchiocchi (1998:291) argues that competition to achieve more can demoralise, dishearten, and dehumanise us. On the other hand, Dawn (1989:67) acknowledges that Sabbath keeping gives us the needed physical rest. However, Bacchiocchi sees that physical rest happening on the seventh day of the week while Dawn believes that rest ought to be on the first day of the week which is Sunday. Edwards (1982:3) rightly notes that work is not sufficient for human fulfilment. Indeed, we need physical rest for us to be fulfilled. However, as much as both Bacchiocchi and Dawn agree that we need physical rest on one day of each week, they differ on which day one should rest as has been noted above.

#### **4.5.3 Social resistance**

Bacchiocchi (1998:292) is right in his observation that "at the root of much human restlessness is the sense of alienation and estrangement." Against that observation, he (1986a:165) argues that the Sabbath epitomizes Divine deliverance because on that day there is release from the pressure of social inequalities. This is especially so because "True Sabbath keeping enables us to experience Christ's rest by breaking down social, racial, and cultural barriers" (Bacchiocchi 1998:296). On the Sabbath, the church, composed of different genders, races, and ages, meets in worship. Thus, social barriers are broken down as both the rich and the poor worship together. I believe that such spirit is carried into the other days of the week. In addition, the

Sabbath reminds us that we belong to God (Bacchiocchi 1998:293). The institution of the Sabbath reminds us that we and our neighbour were created by God, thus further promoting social cohesion. By keeping the Sabbath, we enter a relationship with God (Bacchiocchi 1998:295). We worship God on this day and acknowledge his Lordship in our lives.

A rhythm of work and rest engendered by Sabbath keeping is another liberating factor (Bacchiocchi 1980:103). While work is good Bacchiocchi (1980:104) notes that Sabbath keeping also protects the weak of society in that employees are to be allowed to rest by their employing Sabbath keepers. Phillips (2011:8) also believes that not only are we to enjoy Sabbath rest but that those who work for us are to rest from work on the Sabbath as well. Indeed, Sabbath keeping, if followed would ensure that the powerful do not exploit the weak in that the Sabbath commandment also says that people should allow those under them to also rest on that day.

On the other hand, Dawn (1989:93) observes that the practice of Sabbath keeping engenders “the values of cooperation and sharing, of non-violence and support.” Berkovits (1983:20) sheds some light on Dawn’s claims when he notes that the Mishna teaches against carrying weapons on a Sabbath day and that many Rabbis agree with that assertion. It must be noted at this point that the Sabbath that Berkovits is writing about is that of the seventh day of the week. Thus, further problematizing Dawn’s belief of grounding Sunday in Sabbath keeping theology. Nevertheless, Dawn brings in another important element of Sabbath keeping. When different people are bound together by the common practice of Sabbath keeping, that would reduce tensions that might exist among them. Dresner (1970:41) stretches this point further when he argues that on Sabbath we all stand equal before God. I agree with Dresner in that on the Sabbath day people of different races and socio-economic standing rest and worship God primarily as human beings.

#### **4.6 Sabbath keeping and rest**

As discussed in detail in chapters 1 and 2, both Bacchiocchi and Dawn have ways in which each sees the rest of the Sabbath. Dawn (1989) grounds Sabbath rest on the case of God resting

in Genesis 2:2. However, she does not go far in explaining the text. The problem is that the text on which she builds her theology of rest teaches that God rested on the seventh day of the week as Bacchiocchi (1999:274) argues, and as God would later in Exodus 20:8-11 command the keeping of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of God. Instead, Dawn (1995:43) sees Sunday as the Sabbath. As a Biblical Scholar I had hoped that Dawn would make much more of the link between the Sabbath and Genesis 2:2. As demonstrated in chapter 3.3.1, Marva Dawn takes the scriptures with the seriousness that they deserve. On the other hand, Bacchiocchi (1984:305) also grounds the practice of Sabbath keeping in the doctrine of creation, yet goes at length to explicate it.<sup>64</sup> Bacchiocchi also has a clear theological link between the Sabbath and the doctrine of creation as demonstrated in chapter 2.

Bacchiocchi (2000:47) sees Sabbath as a rest of redemption in which Christ redeems his people. This point is very important because it dispels any notion of legalism in Bacchiocchi's theology of Sabbath keeping. Gunton (1997:189) notes that the concept of salvation is important in Christian theology. Therefore, Bacchiocchi's thinking of connecting Sabbath keeping and the doctrine of salvation is a critical point to note. Interestingly, Bacchiocchi (2000:51) argues correctly that salvation rest does not come with our works but by believing in Jesus Christ. This further demonstrates that Bacchiocchi understands Sabbath keeping not as a way of earning salvation but as a gift of God to the saved. On the other hand, Dawn (1989:54) would like to see accepting God's grace by faith as a foundation of holistic rest. In other words, Dawn believes that true rest begins with God. That to enjoy Sabbath rest we should accept God's grace by faith. This is correct. Walker (1999:16) explains Dawn's view of the Sabbath well when he notes that the Sabbath day is God's spiritual date with his people. This is because one of the activities of keeping the Sabbath is worshipping God. And so, it follows that for us to be able to worship God meaningfully we should accept his grace by believing in him. But if Walker sees the Sabbath as God's spiritual date with his people it means that it is important when the Sabbath is to be celebrated and that the matter may not be left to each of us to decide when to celebrate the Sabbath. This, in turn, means that God is the one who sets such an appointment.

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<sup>64</sup> See especially chapter 2 sections 2.3 and 2.7.1 of this thesis.

Moreover, it is distinctive to Dawn (1989:67) that she pointedly notes the physical rest that the Sabbath gives. This seems to be assumed rather than mentioned in Bacchiocchi's works. Therefore, in this regard Dawn enriches Bacchiocchi's theology of Sabbath keeping. Edwards (1982:3) agrees that work alone is not enough for human fulfilment hence a need for Sabbath rest. In addition, it is distinctively in Dawn (1989:78) where we learn that Sabbath keeping also provides us with intellectual rest. Thus, we again see Dawn enriching Bacchiocchi's theology of Sabbath keeping. On the other hand, Bacchiocchi's Sabbath keeping theology enriches that of Dawn when it comes to the day to be kept as the Sabbath.

#### **4.6.1 Ceasing as a pre-requisite to rest**

We have learned that Dawn (1989:53) observes that Shabbat means 'to cease or desist' and ultimately to 'rest'. Bacchiocchi (1980:83) also captures the same points in his definition of Shabbat. In addition, we have also learned that the doctrine of the Sabbath is deeply rooted in the doctrine of creation (Bacchiocchi 1980:85,87,88,238; Heschel 1951:10; Bass 1997:76; Millgram 1944:214). Dawn (1989) cites Genesis 2:2 to argue that God ceased from his works on the Sabbath so that he could rest. While Dawn rightly points out that God ceased from God's work on the Sabbath, she does not point out that it is the seventh day of the week that the biblical text in question is referring to. Consequently, she links Sunday to Genesis 2:2. The theological logic behind this is, however, not explicated.

Despite the differences in emphases between Bacchiocchi and Dawn we learn that for us to truly find rest we would have to follow God's example and first cease from our works on the Sabbath day as God ceased from his. Indeed, for us to rest from competition as Bacchiocchi (1998:291) argues we should first cease from the accumulation of things on a Sabbath day. Dawn (1989:19) puts it clearly when she argues that "setting aside a holy Sabbath means that we can cease our productivity and accomplishments for one day in every seven." Again, it appears that Bacchiocchi's emphasis is that the ceasing should take place particularly on the seventh day as God ceased from his work on that day. On the other hand, Dawn appears to be interested in God's rhythm of six days of work and one of ceasing from work and rest. For Dawn, any day could be a Sabbath. Nevertheless, the bottom line, in the works of both Bacchiocchi and Dawn, is that on the Sabbath we should cease all our works so that we may

truly rest. Bacchiocchi also captures a rhythm of one day of rest and six of work, but he particularly emphasises the importance of following the pattern that God followed during the creation week.

#### **4.7 Sabbath keeping and Divine presence**

One important component of the theology of Sabbath keeping should do with the presence of God on the Sabbath day. Bacchiocchi (1998:289) argues that the Sabbath day is holy because on this day God is present among his people of faith as they worship him. Since God is holy his presence among his people on Sabbath sanctifies this day. Richardson (1967:130) agrees with Bacchiocchi when he writes:

Now, the Sabbath Day was created by God, so that He Himself might enter into the world and sanctify it by His personal presence. In this way, He makes the world holy.

Bacchiocchi (1998:290) takes his argument further that believers who experience God's presence on the Sabbath also experience his peace and rest on other days of the week. In other words, Sabbath keeping is not a one day in a week practice. It is a practice that permeates the whole week. Indeed, I could not agree with Bacchiocchi more.

On the other hand, Dawn (2003:25-35) argues that when we worship God he is present in that meeting. On this point, she agrees with Bacchiocchi that God is present among his people when they worship him. However, Richardson (1967:130) above rightly notes that God created the Sabbath and that on that day God is present among his people of faith. This, again problematises Dawn's insistence for having Sabbath on Sunday because God created the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week. Interestingly, Dawn (1989:61) agrees that indeed God is present among worshippers on a Sabbath day when she writes that "the greatest result of Sabbath resting is the opportunity to know the presence of God, no matter what our present circumstances might be." It must be pointed out that while Bacchiocchi and Dawn agree that God is present among his people of faith when they worship him on Sabbath day, the two

theologians have two different days of the week as the Sabbath in mind. Bacchiocchi maintains that the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath while Dawn believes that Sunday, the first day of the week is the Sabbath that should be kept by Christians. Bacchiocchi argues that God is present among his people of faith as they worship him on the seventh day of the week. On the other hand, Dawn argues that God is present among his people of faith as they worship him on the first day of the week. Thus, we see an intersection in the works of Bacchiocchi and Dawn, the main difference being in the day to be kept as the Sabbath.

#### **4.8 Sabbath keeping and competition**

In our world of competition in many areas, Bacchiocchi (1998:291) observes that “competition can dishearten, dehumanise, and demoralize a person. It can turn friends into foes.” Bacchiocchi (1998:291) argues that the practice of Sabbath keeping instils in us the spirit of gratefulness for the blessings of God instead of greedily seeking more. Thus, Bacchiocchi believes that on Sabbath day we do not compete for anything nor do we seek more material possessions. Indeed, this is consistent with his argument in chapter 2 of this thesis that the Sabbath day is a day of rest. Bacchiocchi is right in his observation that our world is characterised by lots of competitions among people. I agree with Bacchiocchi that indeed the Sabbath day provides the much-needed rest from competition among ourselves.

On the other hand, Dawn (1995:51-52) observes the unfortunate state of affairs in our world where we assess one another’s worth by what we have achieved in life. By this observation, Dawn takes the argument that we compete among ourselves even further. Those among us who achieve more are held in high esteem, thus more competition is fuelled. Postema (1997:33) argues that through Sabbath time “we realize that we are important as human beings created in the image of God and not just for our usefulness, our productivity.” Thus, Dawn’s argument is that Sabbath keeping ensures the true value of human dignity is protected. In addition, Sabbath keeping dispenses with the need to compete. Dawn (2001:133) argues that “the Church’s call is to exorcism, rather than effectiveness. Perhaps one of the most recalcitrant spirits that needs to be exorcized is that of needing to be effective.” Indeed, Dawn (1989:18) concedes that we would not satisfy our longing for God by more production and accomplishment. This is an argument against the spirit of competition which pervades our world. Thus, Sabbath keeping

helps us to cease production and accomplishment on one day during the week (Dawn 1989:19; 1995:43), which in turn ensures that we do not compete on the Sabbath day.

#### **4.9 Sabbath keeping and the rhythm of rest and work**

In Bacchiocchi's (1980:103) work the fourth Sabbath commandment forms an important foundation of the theology of Sabbath keeping. That commandment, found in Exodus 20:8-11, puts creation by God as the reason for keeping the Sabbath. Since God created things in six days and rested on the seventh day, Bacchiocchi argues that we also are to follow the same rhythm of rest and work each week. Bacchiocchi (1980:103) rightly argues that "work is needed to experience self-worth, to develop one's creative abilities and reflect the image of the ever-active Creator." In addition, God rested on the seventh day of the creation week, so we are to rest, too (Bacchiocchi 1980:104). What Bacchiocchi is advocating for is that our rhythm of rest and work should be structured like God's, such that our rest will be on the seventh day of the week, the day God set apart as the Sabbath.

On the other hand, Dawn (1989:3) anchors her argument on Genesis 2:2 to make a case that God rested on the Sabbath and therefore we are to follow his example. Interestingly, the theology of Exodus 20:8-11 as cited in Bacchiocchi above is based on Genesis 2:2. Thus Dawn goes right at the foundation of the theology of rest. Therefore, according to Dawn (1989:5) on the Sabbath day, we are to cease from anything that is work. Indeed, as Postema (1997:30) rightly puts it, "It's unhealthy not to have a rhythm of work and rest, activity and receptivity. For this is the rhythm of creation right from the beginning." Though Dawn rightly grounds her theology of Sabbath keeping in Genesis 2:2, she seems to miss the point that the text is referring to the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath and not the first day of the week or Sunday as she prefers.

#### 4.9.1 The Sabbath day: When?<sup>65</sup>

This is an interesting area of Sabbath theology in Bacchiocchi and Dawn, respectively. Bacchiocchi (1980:85,110) believes that the Sabbath day belongs to God. In other words, when the Sabbath day should be kept should be determined by God. Bacchiocchi (1999:274; 1980:33-35,78,103) uses this rationale to argue that since God instituted the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week by resting on that day, then the day in question is the Sabbath. Interestingly, the fourth commandment of the Decalogue (Cf. Exodus 20:8-11) commands the keeping holy of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of God as Bacchiocchi (1998:263-264) argues. Phillips (2011:8) also believes that the Decalogue instructs “the sanctification of the Seventh day.” The reason given in the fourth commandment for resting on the seventh day of the week is that God rested on that day, again, just as Bacchiocchi (1980:103) argues.

Indeed, Bacchiocchi (1980:33, 103) bases his argument that the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath of God on both the creation story and the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. According to Bacchiocchi (1999:277) keeping the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of God is the way we obey the fourth commandment of the Decalogue which in turn is rooted in the creation account. Bacchiocchi (1980:85,103) goes further to argue that God, by his example, set for us a rhythm of six days of work and one of rest, and since God rested on the seventh day of the week we are to follow his example as later affirmed by God through the fourth commandment of the Decalogue.

On the other hand, Dawn (1989:7) claims not to be bothered by whether the Sabbath is on Saturday or Sunday. Dawn (1989: xi) argues that her works may be used by both Saturday and Sunday keepers. However, a close study of her works reveals that she prefers to keep her Sabbath on Sunday and that when she uses the word Sabbath in her works she is referring to Sunday (Cf. Dawn 1995:43). The reason she (1989:125) gives for keeping Sunday, the first day of the week, as her Sabbath is that “to the early Christians ‘the first day of the week’ emphasized the resurrection of their Lord and suggested that what was done on that day came in response to the miracle of that event.” However, as a Bible scholar, she does not account

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<sup>65</sup> Though not the focus of this study, this area of Sabbath theology in Bacchiocchi and Dawn, respectively brings our current study into perspective.



that though Christians met to remember the resurrection of Jesus on Sunday there is no command either from Jesus or his apostles for the transference of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. As a Lutheran Theologian Dawn belongs to a Christian denomination that holds the Bible in high regard (Cf. Luther 2004: xx, 3-37).<sup>66</sup> In addition, Dawn (1995:220, emphasis hers) suggests that “one might choose any other day to observe the Sabbath (the Hebrew word *Shabbat* means ‘to cease’ rather than referring to a certain day of the week).” As it shall be argued below, this is problematic because the Sabbath was instituted by God on the seventh day of the week, and then human beings reminded to keep it in Exodus 20:8-11. Suggesting that one may choose any day to keep as the Sabbath appears to not be doctrinally or biblically sound as it basically turns such a day into one’s holiday instead of God’s holy Sabbath as Bacchiocchi argues above.

Moreover, Dawn & Peterson (2000:88) argue that Sunday keeping serves as a continual reminder to Christians of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ when they write that,

After becoming totally separated from the Jews (precipitated in the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and finalized in the Bar Kochba revolution of 135), Christians made Sunday, ‘the Lord’s Day,’ their Sabbath for worship because of the Resurrection.

Baab (2005:23) appears to be agreeing with Dawn when she writes that, “even if Sunday was a busy workday, most Christians around the world were gathering for worship on the day of the resurrection, also called the Lord’s Day.” Bacchiocchi (1977:153-164)<sup>67</sup> disagrees with Dawn’s assertion above, though. Bacchiocchi (1977) argues at length that while Christians celebrated the resurrection of Jesus on Sunday, they kept the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week. Christians were not even required to totally abstain from work on Sundays as they would do on Sabbath (Bacchiocchi 1977:316). Again, as a bible scholar, Dawn does not go far enough to critique her above statement by comparing it with accounts of congregations that Paul visited

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<sup>66</sup> This recent work which has been published in Luther’s name contains excerpts from Luther’s conversations with his students and colleagues, and some of his words.

<sup>67</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi devoted a whole book to investigate the rise of Sunday observance in early Christianity. The reader is referred to that book. See Bacchiocchi, Samuele. 1977. *From Sabbath to Sunday: A historical investigation of the rise of Sunday observance in early Christianity*. Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press.

on the seventh day of the week in the New Testament. Against these New Testament accounts, especially in the book of Acts, of congregations meeting on the seventh day of the week for worship, Dawn's assertion is not convincing.

Interestingly, Dawn (1997:120, emphasis mine) also writes,

I do not argue about which day should be celebrated as Sabbath (which means in Hebrew 'to cease' and *not* 'seventh day'), for there are good reasons both to continue *the Jewish Saturday Sabbath* and also for celebrating Sabbath on the Lord's Day or Sunday.

More interesting is her (1997:230) acknowledgement that the commandments of God including the one to keep the Sabbath are meant for our well-being. It is problematic that as a Bible scholar she seems to not appreciate that Sunday, the first day of the week, is not the Sabbath of creation and the one referred to in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. Bacchiocchi (1998:264) rightly observes that

Dawn's attempt to invest Sunday with the meaning and experience of the Sabbath ignores the fundamental fact that Sunday is not the Sabbath. The two days...are different in their origin, meaning, and experience.

The fourth commandment specifically calls for the keeping of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of God. Marva Dawn argues above that *Shabbat* means 'to cease' not 'seventh day'. This assertion is problematic, especially coming from a Bible scholar, as in both the creation account of Genesis and the fourth commandment of the Decalogue the day that is called the Sabbath is the seventh not the first of the week.

Moreover, Dawn argues above that 'Saturday is a Jewish Sabbath'. That is problematic as well because when God instituted the Sabbath on the seventh day of the creation week there was no Jew. In addition, the commandment to keep the Sabbath is rooted in the creation account of the book of Genesis. I, therefore, think that it would be informative if Dawn were to write and deal with this area of Sabbath Theology which she stated above that she is not interested in. At the

moment, I am unable to fairly engage Bacchiocchi and Dawn on this area of Sabbath theology as the latter has not dealt with it adequately in her works.

#### 4.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have critically engaged the works of Bacchiocchi and Dawn on the theological concept of Sabbath keeping. We have seen that Dawn enriches Bacchiocchi when it comes to the benefits of Sabbath keeping. In addition, we have also learned that at the foundation of the differences in an argument on Sabbath keeping in Bacchiocchi and Dawn, is their difference on the day to be observed as the Sabbath. Samuele Bacchiocchi argues that the Sabbath is on the seventh day of the week while Marva Dawn believes that a Sabbath may be observed on any other day. Therefore, Dawn chooses Sunday as her Sabbath in commemoration of the resurrection of the person of Jesus Christ. In a way, Bacchiocchi's voice represents that of the SDA Church to which he belonged.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, Dawn enriches the SDA Church Sabbath keeping Theology when it comes to the benefits of keeping the Sabbath. She extensively outlines the benefits of Sabbath keeping as argued in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Marva Dawn deals extensively with the ceasing part of Sabbath keeping theology. Indeed, for us to benefit from Sabbath keeping we should first cease from our works so that we may rest.

Though both Bacchiocchi and Dawn almost use the same words to define the Sabbath, a close study reveals that they are talking about different days. Bacchiocchi grounds the Sabbath in the doctrine of creation, and while Dawn draws on creation the link in her theology and argument is lacking as studied in this chapter. Bacchiocchi sees the Sabbath of creation as holy because God set it apart by resting on that seventh day of the creation week. On the other hand, Dawn sees Sunday as holy because on that day relationships with fellow believers are established and nurtured. Though Dawn has Sunday in her mind as she argues she tends to enrich Bacchiocchi's, and therefore the SDA church's, theology of Sabbath keeping in that the Sabbath is holy because of relationships with both human beings and God that are nurtured on that day.

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<sup>68</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi is deceased.

## **Chapter 5: The conclusion of the study**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this final chapter, we will conclude the study by summarizing how the theology of Sabbath keeping can be enriched, developed, nuanced, and problematized through a critical theological engagement with the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn. We will also review the research problem, research methodology, research goals, research questions, and the contribution and relevance of the study to assess whether we have achieved what we set for ourselves at the beginning of the study. Moreover, we will also suggest possible areas for further study.

### **5.2 A review of the research problem**

In chapter 1.2 of this thesis, we stated the research problem that this study is meant to address. We indicated that in the light of the SDA church's belief that the Seventh day of the week should be kept as the Sabbath of God as the fourth commandment of the Decalogue instructs; there is a need for continual research in this area of theology. This is specially to develop more theological insight into this doctrinal concept.

### **5.3 A review of the research questions**

Having reviewed the research problem, we now look at the research questions that we asked at the beginning of this study to see the answers that we have to them.

#### **5.3.1 Primary research question**

The primary research question that was posed at the beginning of this study is: How can the theology of Sabbath keeping be enriched, developed, nuanced, and problematized through a

critical and comparative theological engagement with the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn?

What was discovered:

Throughout chapter 3, Dawn has demonstrated that the theology of Sabbath keeping can be enriched by theologically drilling into the benefits of Sabbath keeping, to begin with. In Chapter 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5 she explicates the concepts of ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting to uncover the benefits of Sabbath keeping. In addition, both Dawn (1989:3, 53) and Bacchiocchi (1980:83) as discussed in chapters 2.1.1, 3.2 and 3.3<sup>69</sup>, respectively, trace the meaning of Sabbath from the original language of Hebrew to bring out the richness there is to glean. Interestingly, as we learned in chapter 4.2 Dawn (1989:7) and Bacchiocchi (1999:274) each have a different day in mind even as they define the Sabbath. This problematizes the theology of Sabbath keeping in Bacchiocchi and Dawn. Thus, the doctrinal concept of Sabbath keeping may be developed, nuanced, and even problematized by capitalizing on exegetical studies in the original Biblical languages.

Moreover, in chapters 2.3, 3.2 and 3.3<sup>70</sup>, we see both Bacchiocchi (1984:305;1998: 285,287; 1980:85,87,88,238; 2000:26) and Dawn (1989) building their respective theologies of Sabbath keeping on the doctrine of creation yet reaching different conclusions on which day should be kept as the Sabbath. It would appear, therefore, that the doctrinal concept of Sabbath keeping can be further problematized by tracing the concept in question in the doctrine of creation.

Furthermore, as it became clear in chapter 4.4, the doctrinal concept of Sabbath keeping can be enriched, developed, nuanced, and problematized by considering the holiness of the Sabbath. It is interesting that Bacchiocchi and Dawn find different reasons for the holiness of the Sabbath. Bacchiocchi (1980:122) sees the holiness of the Sabbath in that God set apart this day by resting from his work. This means that Bacchiocchi views the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week and that such a day is appointed by God. On the other hand, Dawn (2006:63) sees the holiness of the Sabbath in that on that day, when we have rested from our works, we have time to form and nurture relationships with other people.

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. chapter 4.2 which is a critical engagement of Bacchiocchi and Dawn, respectively, on the definition of the Sabbath.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. chapter 4.3

### 5.3.2 Secondary research questions

Below follow the secondary research questions that were posed at the beginning of this study. In addition to the questions, the answers per this study are also provided:

i) What are some of the distinctive theological contributions to Sabbath keeping from the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi?

#### What was discovered:

Bacchiocchi (1999:9; 1987a:25) first brings out the importance of the Bible if we are to appreciate the theology of Sabbath keeping. In addition, Bacchiocchi (1980: 83) argues that since Shabbath means ‘ceasing from doing’ and therefore ‘to rest’ the Sabbath day should be on a day on which God ceased from his works and rested. In this way, Samuele Bacchiocchi argues that the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week because God ceased from his works and rested on the seventh day of the creation week.

Moreover, Bacchiocchi (1998: 285,287) clearly grounds his theology of Sabbath keeping in the doctrine of creation. He (1980:88) further argues that the Sabbath helps us to maintain faith in God as the creator of the universe. In fact, he (1980:201) argues that Sabbath keeping is an antidote against idolatry. Bacchiocchi (1980:121) then says that the reason why the Sabbath is holy is that God set it apart by ceasing from his work and resting on the seventh day of the creation week. Because the Sabbath is holy, keeping it is also an antidote against material greediness which is unholy (Bacchiocchi 1980:126). This is because on the Sabbath we pause from our work. Consequently, as Bacchiocchi (1998:285) rightly argues, Sabbath keeping also frees us from restlessness which so much pervades our society.

Furthermore, Bacchiocchi (1980:103) sees the fourth commandment as laying a pattern of six days of work and one of rest on the seventh day of the week. This is peculiar to Bacchiocchi’s theology of Sabbath keeping. This is partly why he believes that work should be performed from the first to the sixth day of the week while on the seventh day of the week we are to keep the Sabbath.

ii) What are some of the distinctive theological contributions to Sabbath keeping from the works of Marva J. Dawn?

What was discovered:

As thoroughly discussed in chapter 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5, Marva Dawn views Sabbath keeping as made up of four concepts, namely, ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting. This is peculiar to Dawn. She (1989:3) argues from Genesis 2:2 that God ceased from his work on the Sabbath to call on us to cease from our works, productivity and accomplishment, anxiety, worry and tension on the Sabbath day.

Dawn (1989:53) uses the same Biblical text mentioned above to argue that God rested on the Sabbath day. As discussed in chapter 3.3 rest is spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, and social. In addition, in chapter 3.4 Dawn ably argues that for the Sabbath to be kept we must embrace it, we must be intentional about keeping the Sabbath. Moreover, in chapter 3.5 we saw that Dawn also sees Sabbath keeping as an act of feasting. It is supposed to be a joyous day when we feast on music, beauty, food, and affection.

iii) What are some of the differences in theological understanding and emphasis between Bacchiocchi and Dawn?

What was discovered:

The difference begins right at the definition of the Sabbath. Bacchiocchi (1999:274) defines the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week on which ceasing from work and resting should happen. On the other hand, Dawn (1989:7) is not concerned about which day one keeps as the Sabbath if they keep one day in a week.

In addition, while both Bacchiocchi and Dawn argue that the Sabbath is a holy day they give different reasons for that holiness of time. Bacchiocchi (1980:121, 122) argues that the Sabbath is holy because God set apart that day by resting on it. With this argument, in Bacchiocchi's works, the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, and it is the Sabbath of God. However, Dawn (2006:63) believes that the Sabbath is holy because on this day we emphasize more on relationships with other people. This partly explains why Marva Dawn seems to be only interested in the rhythm of six days of work and one of rest but not particularly on which day is the Sabbath. As argued in chapter 4.9.1, Dawn prefers her Sabbath on Sunday. Indeed, the

difference in day to be observed as the Sabbath in Bacchiocchi and Dawn, respectively, seems to be at the heart of the differences in emphasis in their respective theologies of Sabbath keeping.

In chapter 4.4.1 it was demonstrated that Bacchiocchi argues that the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath day, and a day for church and worship. In the same chapter, it was further shown that Dawn, on the other hand, argues that the Sabbath is a day for church and worship, but she believes that such a day is Sunday.

iv) What are some of the areas of similarity and harmony in the understanding of Sabbath keeping between Bacchiocchi and Dawn?

What was discovered:

In chapter 4.5 it was shown that both Bacchiocchi and Dawn see the doctrinal concept of Sabbath keeping as an alternative to the busyness and restlessness in society. In chapters 4.5.1 to 4.5.2 we have learned that in both Bacchiocchi and Dawn Sabbath keeping is especially liberating spiritually, physically, and socially.

Moreover, in chapter 4.3 we learned that both Bacchiocchi and Dawn find the theological basis for keeping the Sabbath in the doctrine of creation. In addition, in chapter 4.6 both our main conversation partners in this study see as a basis for Sabbath rest the argument that God rested on the Sabbath day after his work.

v) What aspects of this theological dialogue can enrich, texture, and develop the SDA church understanding of Sabbath keeping at the intersection of the work by the previously mentioned theologians?

What was discovered:

Marva Dawn's perspective, in chapters 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5, of seeing Sabbath keeping as ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting especially gives the SDA church's understanding of Sabbath a fresh touch. In the mentioned chapters, Marva Dawn goes at length to explicate theologically how the doctrinal concept of Sabbath keeping may be of benefit to the common person. A look at the official exposition of the doctrine of the Sabbath by the SDA church especially confirms this observation (Cress 2005:281-297).



Moreover, in chapters 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7 Bacchiocchi's argument that the Sabbath is for human restlessness, a renewal, and a rest further enriches, textures, and develops the SDA church understanding of Sabbath keeping. Like Dawn, with fresh insights, Bacchiocchi offers a theological exposition of the benefits of Sabbath keeping for our time. In addition, in chapter 2.8 Bacchiocchi further shows how both work and rest are blessings of God together with a rhythm they are patterned to follow.

#### **5.4 A review of the research methodology, and research goal(s)**

In chapter 1.4 it has been stated that,

A qualitative content analysis of books and articles on Sabbath keeping from both Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn will be used as primary data to study this topic of research. Moreover, other theologians who help us to locate the two authors' contributions within the larger theological discourse on Sabbath keeping will also be studied. These will be studied as secondary data to maximize the critical theological outcome of this study. Finally, the two primary conversation partners chosen for this study will be brought into a conversation with each other to gain a new, more complex, and nuanced understanding of Sabbath keeping because of the research method and processes.

In Chapter 2 we analysed the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi with focus on Sabbath keeping in his works. A wide range of Bacchiocchi's works were engaged to learn how the said theologian does his theology. In the process, other theologians who have written on Sabbath keeping were also engaged. Some of those Theologians include but not limited to: Brueggemann, Kessler, Finley, Barth, and Claassens. The theology of Samuele Bacchiocchi was also tested in the chapter using the following theologians: Barth, Migliore, McGrath, Keck, and Carson.

On the other hand, in Chapter 3 we engaged a wide range of the works of Marva Dawn with an emphasis on Sabbath keeping. Similarly, other theologians who have written on Sabbath keeping were engaged as secondary literature. Some of those theologians include but not limited to Walker, Ellul, Postema, Grade, Tsevat, and Heschel. The theology of Dawn on

Sabbath keeping was also tested in the said chapter using the works of some of the following Theologians: Migliore, McGrath, Blomberg, and Edwards.

Furthermore, in Chapter 4 a critical theological engagement between the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi and Marva J. Dawn on Sabbath keeping was initiated. In that chapter, we critically analysed the areas of similarity and difference in the works of the two main Theologians in this study with emphasis on Sabbath keeping.

### **5.5 A review of the contribution and relevance of the study**

In chapter 1.3 the hoped-for contribution and relevance of this study were laid down. Indeed, this study is beneficial to the SDA Church, to begin with. The said church believe that the Sabbath is to be kept even in our time. In Chapter 3, Dawn has particularly expounded in a fresh way on the benefits of keeping the Sabbath. Chapters 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5 are especially the evidence of the good work that Dawn did on the benefits of the Sabbath for our time. In addition, in chapter 3.3.4 we see Dawn demonstrating that the doctrine of the Trinity runs through her theology of Sabbath keeping. This is particularly interesting because the SDA church also believes the doctrine of the Trinity (Cress 2005:23-33).

Moreover, as pointed out in chapter 5.3.2 above, in chapters 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8 Bacchiocchi's argument that the Sabbath is for human restlessness, a renewal, a rest, and that a rhythm of rest and work are blessings that come with Sabbath keeping further enriches, textures, and develops the SDA church understanding of Sabbath keeping. Like Dawn, Bacchiocchi goes at length in offering a theological exposition of the benefits of Sabbath keeping for our time.

Indeed, as it had been hoped for in chapter 1.3, this study contributes deep, rich, textured, and scholarly knowledge on Sabbath keeping. Moreover, as will be further elaborated in chapter 5.6 below, this research contribution opens further inquiry, a deeper searching for truth, a greater appreciation for the complexity of this theological concept, and a desire to facilitate deeper and richer dialogues among theologians and Christians about concepts such as the Sabbath and Sabbath keeping.

## 5.6 Possible areas for further research

While this study has engaged the doctrinal concept of Sabbath keeping, it is also noteworthy to appreciate that at the heart of differences in theology between our two main conversation partners in this study has been the day to be kept as the Sabbath. Throughout the study, Bacchiocchi has argued that the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week while Dawn has argued that which day one keeps as the Sabbath does not matter and prefers to keep her Sabbath on Sunday (Cf. chapter 4.9.1). Indeed, while this study has uncovered valuable knowledge on Sabbath keeping it has also brought fresh questions that need to be investigated further. Therefore, the following are some of the possible areas for further study:

- i) How does the SDA church, which keeps the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week, emphasize the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the miracle event? This comes in the light of Dawn's (1989:125) reasoning that Sunday, the first day of the week is to be kept as the Sabbath because to the early Christians that day emphasized the resurrection of Jesus and the miracle event.
- ii) What are the theological and historical reasons for the period in Christian history when the Sabbath was discontinued and Sunday kept as the Sabbath? This is considering Dawn & Peterson's (2000:88) assertion that there was a time when Christians made Sunday their Sabbath so that they may remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This request much greater, careful, theological reflection among theologians and members of the SDA church.
- iii) Can Sunday, the first day of the week, be called holy like the seventh day of the week? This is considering, according to Dawn (2006:63), that the Sabbath<sup>71</sup> is holy because on this day we especially emphasize on relationships with other people.

As can be seen in recommendations for further study above, the theology of Sabbath keeping can still be problematized and nuanced and developed.

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<sup>71</sup> Following her argument closely, as has been done throughout this study, one learns that by 'Sabbath' Marva Dawn is referring to Sunday, the first day of the week.

## 5.7 Conclusion

Having reviewed the research problem, research questions, research methodology, research goals, and the contribution and relevance of this study, as well as touching on possible areas for further study, we now conclude the study.

We do so by firstly summarising what was considered in each chapter. Chapter 1 serves as a general introduction to this study and consist of the research proposal. A general overview of the theme, structure, methodology, background and rationale, research questions as well as the hoped-for contribution of this study are included in that chapter.

In chapter 2 we looked at Sabbath keeping in the works of Samuele Bacchiocchi. The chapter is devoted to studying the distinctive theological contributions to Sabbath keeping by Samuele Bacchiocchi. We learned in that chapter that Sabbath keeping is deeply rooted in the doctrine of creation. We also learned that Sabbath keeping is the antidote for human restlessness because it renews us. This is because Sabbath keeping interrupts our work to give us the much-needed rhythm of work and rest. In Bacchiocchi the Bible is central to doing his theology.

In chapter 3, we looked at Sabbath keeping in the works of Marva Dawn. Our aim was to find the distinctive theological contributions to Sabbath keeping in the works of Marva Dawn. Dawn sees Sabbath keeping as ceasing, resting, embracing, and feasting.

Next, in chapter 4, we initiated a critical theological engagement between Bacchiocchi and Dawn on Sabbath keeping. Our aim was to find some of the areas of difference between the two theologians on Sabbath keeping. Similarly, we wished to find some of the areas of similarity and harmony on Sabbath keeping between the two theologians. At the end of the engagement, we set to find out what aspects of this theological dialogue can enrich, texture, and develop the SDA church understanding of Sabbath keeping.

In conclusion, we have learned through this conversation that both Bacchiocchi and Dawn's perspectives can enrich and deepen our theological understandings of Sabbath keeping, and that each adds value and insight to both belief and practice. However, the one unresolved

tension that exists between their perspectives, which is a crucial point for members of the SDA church, is their different perspectives on the day on which the Sabbath is to be observed.

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