

New Explorations of the Sabbath

A Review Essay by J. Paul Stauffer

Wayne Muller. *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*. New York: Bantam Books, 1999.

Donna Schaper. *Sabbath Sense, A Spiritual Antidote for the Overworked*. Philadelphia: Innisfree Press, 1997.

Marva Dawn. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989.

Dorothy C. Bass. *Receiving the Day, Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

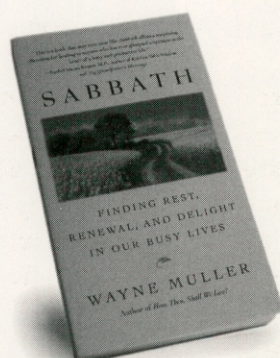
It's not exactly new. A couple of centuries ago William Wordsworth complained:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.

Henry Thoreau, retreating to the shores of Walden pond for an experiment in living deliberately, was motivated in part by his observation that his neighbors in Concord lived lives of "quiet desperation."

Protests against the deadening pressures of our lives, our frenetic busyness, our drive to achieve ever greater social and financial success and its material concomitants, have never been more common, or more strident, than they are now. I do not know whether, despite the promise offered by labor-saving devices, most of us are truly more harried, more frazzled, than in times past, when certainly the hours of labor for most people were much greater than they are today. But one cannot deny the widespread perception that many of us, possibly most of us, live lives in which there is simply not time enough.

An interesting result of the seriousness of a perverse drive to work harder and longer is the appearance of a number of books about Sabbath, Sabbath as a cure or at least a palliative for the hurried pace of contemporary life. These books, at some of which we will be looking, are not by Seventh-day Adventists or Jews but by Christians of disparate background and emphasis who offer insights into the enrichment that Sabbath can bring to the Christian life.



Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives

Wayne Muller, author of *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* explains what he means by Sabbath: Throughout this book I use the word *Sabbath* both as a specific practice and a larger metaphor, a starting point to invoke a conversation about the forgotten necessity of rest. Sabbath is time

for sacred rest; it may be a holy day, the seventh day of the week, as in the Jewish tradition, or the first day of the week, as for Christians. But Sabbath time may also be a Sabbath afternoon, a Sabbath hour, a Sabbath walk—indeed, anything that preserves a visceral experience of life-giving nourishment and rest. (7)

Muller is an ordained minister, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School. He is also a therapist, the founder of Bread for the Journey, an organization dedicated to serving families in need, and a director of The Institute for Engaged Spirituality.

This is a very readable book. Its prose moves effortlessly with a pervasive poetic quality. Its short chapters, usually only about four pages long, are rich in anecdote and allusion, and are grouped under these headings: Rest, Rythm, Time, Happiness, Consecration, A Sabbath Day. Each of the chapters is followed by Practice. The "Practice" sections usually include an illustration or anecdote or poem followed by a specific practice, a sort of warm-up exercise.

For example:

Sabbath time is enriched by some period of intentional silence. Choose a period of time or an activity—such as a walk or hike, alone or with someone you love—when you will refrain from speech. Notice what arises in silence, the impulse to speak, the need to judge or respond to what you see, hear, feel. Notice any discomfort that arises when you are not free to speak. . . . I seek out silences, I delight in them. They seem sweet, safe, a Sabbath, a genuine sanctuary in time. (55, 56)

The introductory chapter, entitled "Remember the Sabbath," introduces the themes that are extensively developed and elaborated in subsequent chapters: the loss of the rhythm between work and rest, the supposition in our time that action and accomplishments are better than rest, the seduction by the promises of more, "more money, more recognition, more satisfaction, more love, more information, more influence, more possessions, more security" (1).

Even in the doing of good works, of seeking peace and healing in the world, attempts to solve problems of human need are too often hurried, frantic, and made less effectual by their being unaccompanied by the gift of time. Muller cites his participation on boards and commissions with generous and compassionate people who are "so tired, overwhelmed, and

overworked that they have neither the time nor the capacity to listen to the deeper voices that speak to the essence of the problems before them" (4).

Muller asks, "How have we allowed this to happen? How did we get so terribly lost in a world saturated with striving and grasping, yet somehow bereft of joy and delight? I suggest that it is this: we have forgotten the Sabbath" (5). Much of what follows plays variations on these two principal themes: the tyranny of our submersion in activity, whether work or play, and the joys and blessings of Sabbath rest.

Repeatedly there are lyrical passages that celebrate Sabbath time.

Like a path through the forest, Sabbath creates a marker for ourselves so, if we are lost, we can find our way back to our center. "Remember the Sabbath" means "Remember that everything you have received is a blessing. Remember to delight in your life, in the fruits of your labor. Remember to stop and offer thanks for the wonder of it." (6)

Again:

We, too, must have a period in which we lie fallow, and restore our souls. In Sabbath time we remember to celebrate what is beautiful and sacred; we light candles, sing songs, tell stories, eat, nap, and make love. It is a time to let our work, our lands, our animals lie fallow, to be nourished and refreshed. Within this sanctuary, we become available to the insights and blessings of deep mindfulness that arise only in stillness and time. (7)

His most scathing critique of our brashly acquisitive society is in a cluster of chapters, "Why Time Is Not Money," "The Gospel of Consumption," and "Selling Unhappiness."

To illustrate the inadequacy of expressing a nation's well-being simply in economic terms he offers this ironic list of examples:

Every time someone gets cancer, the G.D.P. [Gross Domestic Product] goes up. Every time an infant dies, the G.D.P. rises. A drive-by shooting improves the economy by \$20,750. If the victim dies, and there is a murder trial, the benefit to the economy leaps to well over \$100,000. An oil tanker spill can



contribute between five and twenty million dollars of "growth"; the benefits of an airline crash or terrorist bombing can be far greater. And consider the value gained from trade with countries our own State Department has cited for torturing their citizens. In 1995 alone, this boon added an estimated \$400 billion to our national worth. And so it goes: Land mines, civil wars, church burnings—each provides a boost to our bountiful economy. (111)

Now this seems unusually bitter for Muller, but it illustrates the intensity of his concern for the subordination of human values to the drive for economic and material success. All the values associated with the Sabbath stand in opposition to that subordination.

In his chapter entitled "Legalism and the Dreary Sabbath," he notes, though he does not emphasize, the thirty-nine rabbinic prohibitions regarding work on the Sabbath. It has been common among Adventists to think of the Sabbath as observed by Orthodox Jews as encumbered with a deadeningly specific collection of prohibitions.

Of course we have only to look back among our Adventist selves to find many of us who remember their childhood Sabbaths primarily for their don'ts. Except for briefly deploring, with examples, legalistic Sabbath observances, Muller does not dwell on the negative side. He, like the writers of the other books considered here, makes a number of references to Jewish writers, including Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, whose emphasis is not on prohibitions, but on the joys and blessings of the Sabbath.

Interestingly though, after Muller's brief look at the legalistic Sabbath early in the book, he comes back to it in a much later chapter, entitled "The Tyranny of Choice," where he offers a novel justification for Sabbath rules. He cites one Jewish scholar who credits the traditional thirty-nine prohibitions against working on the Jewish Sabbath with giving birth to "the most precious, inestimable pearl" of Sabbath tranquility.

In other words, the prohibitions free us from choice, which, he says, is different from freedom and can be painful because one can suffocate in a "sea of options." The restrictions or prohibitions function as boundaries. Recalling the necessity of surrounding his garden with a small fence to keep out destructive rabbits, he observes that

The Sabbath is a patch of ground secured by a tiny fence, when we withdraw from the endless choices afforded us and listen, uncover what is

ultimately important, remember what is quietly sacred. Sabbath restrictions on work and activity actually create a space of great freedom; without these self-imposed restrictions, we may never be truly free. (143)

Among the practices Muller recommends, I was particularly impressed by statements in a number of places about blessing others as an aspect of experiencing Sabbath. He notes that in the Friday evening meal welcoming the Jewish Sabbath the father blesses his children. A Jewish friend tells him: "The candles and the wine are sweet, but when I put my hand on my daughter's head and bless her, and offer a prayer for her strength and happiness, I can feel all the generations of parents who have blessed their children, everyone who has come before, and who will come after." (46)

Then Muller makes this suggestion for "practice":

There are many ways to offer your blessing. You may bless your children, your lover, your friend, by placing your hand on their head, and offering a prayer for their healing, their well-being, their happiness. Let them feel the truth of your prayer in their bodies. When this happens, many report feeling the physical blessing actually enter their body. It is as precious as it is free—completely gratuitous. . . . Another practice invites us to bless strangers, quietly, secretly. Offer it to people you notice on the street, in the market, on the bus. "May you be happy. May you be at peace." Feel the blessing move through your body as you offer it. Notice how you both receive some benefit from the blessing. Gently, almost without effort, each and every blessing becomes a Sabbath. (46-47)

The idea of blessing others is very attractive. In Paris one Ascension Day, I stood among others in the south aisle of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the church crowded with worshippers. From the apsidal end came the procession of participants, led by the archbishop who would be officiating in the service. As he progressed down the aisle and around through the nave he kept making a sign of blessing over the whole congregation.

As I watched him, I thought how wonderful it would be to be able to believe that one could effectively confer a blessing on great numbers of people by making that priestly gesture. I was then and continue to be skeptical about the efficacy of a generalized blessing, which seems rather like magic. But I was also envious. I concluded that I cannot confer a blessing on someone else but that

I can breathe a brief prayer to God, who does the blessing, and that appears to be Muller's intent.

The skeptic within me, however, becomes uneasy at Muller's suggestion that the one doing the blessing and the one being blessed may, as in the "practice" quoted above, feel "the physical blessing actually enter their body."

Muller exhibits what one might call an eclectic spirituality, using illustrations and drawing inspiration from a remarkable variety of religious traditions. He says: "I have . . . tried to offer a rich mixture of practices from various traditions, including my own Christian tradition. Some form of Sabbath time is practiced by Jews and Christians, by Buddhists and Muslims, Hindus and native tribes around the world" (12).

It should probably be pointed out that since he treats these religious traditions with apparently equal respect, some Adventist readers may be uncomfortable, for example, when they come upon a juxtaposition of Buddha and Jesus in such a passage as this:

The practice of Sabbath is like the practice of taking refuge. In Buddhism, one takes refuge in the Buddha nature, and in the wisdom of the Buddha and in the family of the Buddha. In so doing, we join the company of all those who have sought healing and liberation, we surrender into that place where Buddha-nature already lives within us, and we align our intention with our innate, natural perfection. Thus, when we sit in meditation, all the saints and ancestors send us loving-kindness, as they accompany our each and every breath. Jesus offered this same beautiful practice to his disciples. Make your home in me, he said, as I make mine in you. The kingdom is within you, he reminded them, alive and miraculous this very moment. I am with you always: When you come to rest, you will feel me. You will remember who you are, that you are the light of the world. (9)

In my first reading of the book I felt that I was more often in touch with the therapist than the minister. I felt that Muller's conception of Sabbath slighted the command to keep it holy, that he was offering Sabbath observance as conducive to good mental health. I discovered, however, that that impression had been

created mostly by the practices, the short "warm-up" exercises that close each chapter. On a second reading I found a reverence for the Sabbath as a spiritual experience. I still think that the therapist comes through more strongly than the minister, but the minister is usually there, especially in the innumerable passages that celebrate the beauty and delight associated with Sabbath.

It is obvious that Muller indeed loves Sabbath. He mentions being introduced to a Jewish congregation as "a Goy who loves Shabbos!" He is attracted to some of the traditional practices of the Jewish Sabbath,

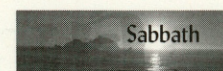
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particularly the Friday evening welcoming of the Sabbath with a special meal with candles, a Sabbath prayer, and blessing of the children.

In the last section of the book he offers examples of practices followed by people he knows, sharing his own family's practice in "Sabbath Morning":

Sunday mornings we gather our children, Sherah and Maxwell, into our bedroom. We sit together in a circle and light a candle, then meditate for about five minutes. We then take turns offering a prayer for someone we are concerned about, and also offer a prayer for something we are thankful for. . . . Finally, we dedicate a certain amount of money from everyone's allowance—usually a few dollars every week—to be given away, and we discuss who we think could most benefit. It is usually up to the children to decide—we merely offer suggestions. The children seem to like this part the best, knowing that someone in the world will receive the blessing of our having sat together for a few moments around a candle in a bedroom. (225)

In Muller's work, I find a writer, himself clearly an acknowledged Christian, whose work about the



Sabbath seems designed to appeal not only to other Christians, but almost equally to readers with little or no religious leanings, who are living strenuously busy lives and who might be attracted to a day of rest for their spirit's sake.

We leave Muller with this quotation:

So let us remember the Sabbath. Let us breathe deeply in the rhythms of life, of the earth, of action and rest. Traditionally, Sabbath is honored by lighting candles, gathering in worship and prayer, blessing children, singing songs, keeping silence, walking, reading scripture, making love, sharing a meal. Just as we must wait until the darkness falls before we can see the stars, so does the Sabbath quietly wait for us. As darkness falls, as the light of the world fades and disappears, we light the inner lights, the lights of home and refuge. Our steps take us home, and the light draws us in. (11)

Sabbath Sense, A Spiritual Antidote for the Overworked

Sabbath Sense begins with this sentence: "The idea for this book came to me when I realized that my husband and I and our three children had more fun than other people" (13). Donna Schaper, the author, goes on to explain that her husband is Jewish and that she is a United Church of Christ minister, in fact an "area minister" with oversight of a hundred churches. Their family practice with regard to Sabbath is celebrating "Sabbath on Friday nights with Hebrew prayers and the lighting of the candles, and celebrating the Christian Sabbath on Sundays." She adds that they also "celebrate Sabbath moment to moment by intentionally breaking from work in various ways to honor Spirit" (13).

And it is that part of Sabbath celebration, what she calls "Sabbath Sense," that this book is about. Granting that the practice of former times, when stores were closed and families came together to worship and to renew their relationship with God, is largely lost in our culture, she declares that the "sense of Sabbath as spiritual leisure is still very much needed in our time-starved world. . . . Sabbath," she says "is a state of mind, not a day of the week (14, 19).

Whereas on the one hand she dissociates Sabbath sense and Sabbath, on the other she remembers.

When I was a parish pastor and conducted my own

Sunday services, I got a taste of what good Sabbaths are about. They are times to remember the ancient texts and to think about them in a contemporary context. They are a time to sing. They are a time to forget about ourselves. A time to be quiet together. A time for filtered light. A time for lit candles. A time for preludes and postludes, marked beginnings and endings. Sabbath is a time to let go of the past, to receive a blessing, to be reminded that it is possible to go on. Sabbath is a time to learn more about the core of the universe. It is a time to be in sanctuary, safe space, to look out the windows and know we are safe inside. (29)

Having become an Area Minister (equivalent to a bishop) she finds less "Sunday Sabbath" in her life. She says she has learned to be less "churchy," realizing that "Neither God nor Sabbath is caged in the church" (30). It was this change in Sabbath experience that led to the writing of the book. She has, she says, "a lust for Sabbath" (34). She likes "its interruption of ordinary time with sacred time," and shares her private rituals, which, she says, are quite physical (36).

Sabbath Sense is the strategy for any spiritual fitness plan. . . . My personal Sabbath strategies are my garden and my writing. . . . They give me a simple enough story about which to effervesce. Formal religion has not done that for me for a long time. . . . I do not find God so much in religion but rather outside and under religion. In religion I am a doer; outside I have the space for being. In Sabbath Sense, we have a chance to play, to be. (111, 112)

Like Muller, Schaper has much to say about the frantic pace of our work-driven lives, a motif incessantly present throughout the book. The first chapter trumpets that theme under the title "Sabbath, the New Play Ethic, Dethroning the Idol of Work."

Insisting that the work ethic does not work, Schaper proposes instead a play ethic in which the connection between work and happiness is restored. It is never entirely clear how one switches from the work ethic to the play ethic, though the implication is that it is by developing Sabbath sense, by deliberately setting aside time and withdrawing periodically, even if briefly, from the obligations of duty. "Sabbath as a new ethic of play separates 'must' from 'may,' duties from desires, obligation from freedom." (25)

Sabbath can be anything it wants to be . . . secret . . . subversive . . . surprising . . . serendipitous [ellipses hers]. Working but not working. Playing at work. Connecting your inner self to your outer self. Tuning out in order to tune back in. Spontaneous pre-vacationing. Planning a little unplanning. (69)

That piling up of a series of catchy and often clever phrases, which I take to be a sermonic device, occurs often. The thoughts seem to go by so rapidly that one can be somehow impressed without having time to consider whether they are just or not. Schaper likes opposing pairs, urging play rather than work; being rather than doing, desire rather than duty. "Doing," she says, "is a false idol."

And I paused for a while on this one: "Duty does not produce. Grace does" (53). I find myself unpersuaded; many of her observations may stimulate attention for a few moments but on reflection seem half-truths. I did not find "the play ethic" a meaningful metaphor for the spiritual experience she recommends.

Before I had reached the middle of the book I realized that I was not the right reader for *Sabbath Sense*. Finishing it and going through it a second time did little to change my mind. Although I am entirely sympathetic with her principal thrust—the importance of making time for spiritual rest by withdrawing from work or other involvements that are so engrossing—much of the time I found myself put off by what seemed to me overstatement, and her addiction to the catchy phrase. Frequently, I found myself going back to reread a turbid paragraph that failed to communicate to me. More and more I was arguing with the author.

Sometimes, the troublesome passages involve deliberate paradox, a device of which Schaper asserts she is very fond. This sample from the chapter, "Clutter-Free Living," I find undecipherable:

The problem isn't the chaos of modern houses so much as it is the sense of *defeated chaos*. Spring cleaning doesn't abolish chaos but rather liberates it from defeat, something like the French poet's concept in "Le Bateau Ivre": "Peninsulas washed adrift from their moorings never experienced a more triumphant chaos." Spring cleaning lets drifting moorings live a more triumphant chaos. That is the only goal it dares. Sabbath is not compulsive order; it is creative order. As such, it can include all the chaos it needs to include. Still,

it triumphs, chaos and all. (104)

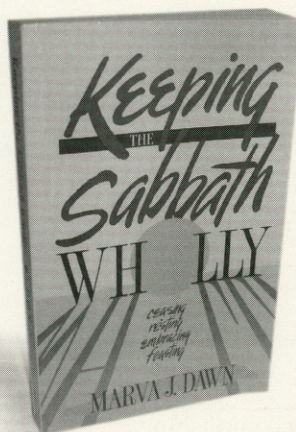
By the time I reached "defeated chaos" my left brain was at sea and never recovered from the ambiguities and non sequiturs of the rest of the paragraph.

Before I leave *Sabbath Sense*, I have a final quibble. Schaper says: "As Elizabeth Barrett Browning said, 'All that I had Hoped to Be and Was not / Comforts Me'" (113).

That, of course, is an inaccurate and overcapitalized quotation not from Elizabeth but from Robert Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

All that I aspired to be and was not
Comforts me.

I realize that I'm sounding like a crochety English teacher, unredeemed by the slightest tinge of postmodernism. That being so, I am sure I am not able to be fair to this book. Donna Schaper has splendid credentials. She is a graduate of the University of Chicago Divinity School, one of the first women to be ordained, cofounder of Women Organized against Rape, formerly associate chaplain at Yale University. She has written extensively and I am sure has found many sympathetic readers.

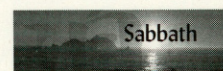


Keeping the Sabbath Wholly

Turning from Muller and Schaper to Marva Dawn's *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, one senses immediately an overtly religious spirit. The book breathes the devout piety of someone earnestly seeking the presence of God, who sees the Sabbath as a time in which to experi-

ence that presence most completely, who also acknowledges the Sabbath commandment as the basis for her observance.

At the outset, she tells us what she means by Sabbath:



I will not enter into the debate about whether the Sabbath should be observed on Saturday, the true seventh day of Jewish custom, or on Sunday, set apart by the earliest Christians as the Lord's Day. There are many reasons for emphasizing either choice. It has worked best for my own understanding of my faith to observe a Sabbath day (thus thankfully appreciating the roots of my faith in the insights, practices, and disciplines of the Hebrew people and responding to the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy), but to practice my Sabbath customs on Sunday (to recognize the Resurrection as the decisive event for Christian faith and life). (xi)

To Adventist readers, this book will seem clearly more "religious" than Muller's and, except for treating Sunday as Sabbath, more "orthodox." While also stressing the idea of delight, it more explicitly sees Sabbath observance as a sacred requirement established by God himself, though the author is at pains to say, "To keep Sabbath is not a legalistic duty. Rather, living in accordance with our natural rhythms gives freedom, the delight of one whole day in every seven set apart as holy" (xii).

Dawn is an author, a teacher, and a theologian. She has what I take to be a rather new doctorate in Christian Ethics and Scriptures and makes numerous references in this book to the work on her dissertation. In fact, I sense in the rigorous organization of *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* the influence of the discipline involved in writing the dissertation.

Her chapters are organized under four heads: "Ceasing," "Resting," "Embracing," and "Feasting." Each of these sections, as she explicitly points out, is composed of seven chapters.

To illustrate the clarity of her outline, these are the chapter titles in "Ceasing":

- Ceasing Work
- Ceasing Productivity and Accomplishment
- Ceasing Anxiety and Worry and Tension
- Ceasing Our Possessiveness
- Ceasing Trying to Be God
- Ceasing our Enculturation
- Ceasing the Humdrum and Meaninglessness

Each of the other three major headings has similar divisions.

In the first section and throughout much of the

work it is clear from the chapter titles that she has concerns similar to those of Muller about the extreme busyness, the drive to achieve, the preoccupation with accumulating things. But it is clear from other titles, such as "Ceasing Trying to be God" and "Ceasing our Acculturation," that she is urging a more explicitly Christian style of life. In "Ceasing Trying to be God" she observes that ceasing work on Sabbath signifies our reliance on God for our future. We acknowledge that we are not in control of our lives.

On that day we do nothing to create our own way. We abstain from work, from our incessant need to produce and accomplish, from all the anxieties about how we can be successful in all that we have to do to get ahead. The result is that we can let God be God in our lives. (29)

In her chapter entitled "Ceasing Our Enculturation" Dawn notes that as the Sabbath has been a means of setting the Jewish community apart from the world, so also keeping a Sabbath is a declaration that one is a member of Christian community, that is, "an alternative society," standing in contrast to the values of the pervasive culture in which we live. That sense pervades the book and is further elaborated in the third section with "Embracing the Values of the Christian Community." The result is that

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 behavior consistent with the character of the God who is the focus of our Sabbath keeping. (97)

Such a statement clearly reveals the essential difference between Dawn's and Muller's rationale for Sabbath keeping. Although Muller personally might agree that God is the focus of our Sabbath keeping, that is not the emphasis of his work.

In "Spiritual Rest" Dawn says:

The greatest result of Sabbath resting is the opportunity to know the presence of God, no matter what our present circumstances might be. . . . In our Sabbath prayers, then, we request the profound rest of God. We ask him to embrace us within the tent of his peace, the very dwelling of his presence. (61, 64)

In "Intellectual Rest" she comments on a question frequently asked when she speaks about Sabbath keeping: What about ministers, Sabbath School teachers, organists, and choir members? She responds:

For me teaching a [Sunday School] class is utter delight and usually the setting for a new experience of the Holy Spirit's empowering. (I feel the same way whenever I play the organ, direct or sing in a choir, or give a sermon on a Sunday morning.) However, I do not do any studying or practicing for those tasks on Sabbath morning!

All my studying must be done in the days or weeks beforehand. Then, when it is time for me to teach, the Spirit can bring to mind what I have learned and also give me new insights as I speak. . . . The Sabbath is a day for intellectual rest, so I want to be sure that I have done my homework before I lie down to sleep on Saturday night. (81)

Like Muller, Dawn is acutely sensitive to the problems of the poor and the troubled, and for her the values she finds in the Sabbath are closely intertwined with her social concerns. She says: "Both the intensity of my commitment to Sabbath keeping and the fervency of my desire to care about the hungry and to build peace in the world have been growing side by side over the last several years" (88).

My prayer has been that this book will reawaken a desire among Christians to keep the Sabbath. That prayer is extended by the petition that our Sabbath keeping in the church will also issue in justice keeping and peace keeping in the world. (94)

The "Embracing" section relates Sabbath keeping to our roles as Christians throughout the week, on keeping the Sabbath wholly, in that it focuses (1) on people rather than things, (2) on giving rather than acquiring, (3) on clarifying our "mission" through contemplating God's love, and (4) on working for peace and the relief of hunger.

Dawn begins with "Embracing Intentionality," that is, deliberately espousing and practicing what is

understood to be God's will in the life.

Sabbath keeping says clearly that we are not going to do what everybody else does. We are going to be deliberate about our choices in order to live truly as we want to live in response to the grace of God. We are committed to certain values and, therefore, live in accordance with them as fully as we can. Everybody else catches up on yard work on Sundays, but we have chosen to rest from work on our Sabbath day. Everyone else goes window-

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shopping at the mall on that day, but we have chosen to cease the American hankering after possessions. We embrace the Sabbath day as a holy time for carefulness. (104)

Throughout the book I detect a tension between the danger of reducing Sabbath keeping to a legalistic duty and establishing certain restrictions that seem necessary to guard the Sabbath from the intrusion of the demands of over busy lives. She takes quite seriously the restrictions she has adopted for her Sabbath keeping. For example, after she observes that intimacy with God cannot be rushed, she says:

That is why keeping the Sabbath is so important—because on that day we never wear our watches at all. Except for attending certain specific hours of worship and Bible class, we have



the whole day long to move as the Spirit leads us. . . I can promise you that if you develop a lifestyle in which you spend one day as a Sabbath day without wearing a watch, you will be more able to accomplish all that you have to do on the days that you wear one. (xii)

She is very strict in interpreting "ceasing" of work on Sabbath, mentioning an occasion when after a Sabbath dinner a guest immediately began clearing dishes. "I had to ask her not to do that. Since I try to keep the Sabbath by not working, I wanted her to feel free to join me in that celebration." (103)

Citing the observation of Rabbi Abraham Heschel that whereas technological civilization is man's conquest of space, Judaism is "a religion of time, aiming at the sanctification of time rather than space," Dawn gives a chapter to "Embracing Time Instead of Space," declaring that "when we take the day to assess our use of time, we learn what is important . . . so that we aren't overcome by the tyranny of the urgent" (119).

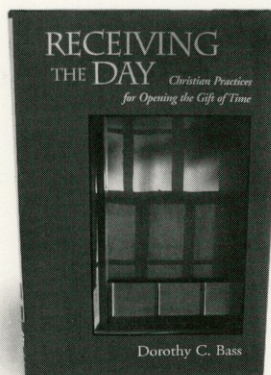
She extends the notion to investing in persons rather than things or status:

If we are cherishing time rather than space, we know that Sabbath keeping means an investment in individuals instead of in possessions and accomplishments. . . In our society it is difficult to embrace people instead of things, to cherish time rather than space. So much of our technologically efficient and materially exploitative culture militates against these values. . . Moreover, if we keep the Sabbath by embracing persons, that practice invites us to carry those same values into the other six days of the week. (122-23)

The final section is "Feasting." Dawn considers feasting on the eternal, with music, with beauty, with food, and with affection, and concludes that

All the great motifs of our Christian faith are underscored in our Sabbath keeping. Its Ceasing deepens our repentance for the many ways that we fail to trust God and try to create our own future. Its Resting strengthens our faith in the totality of his grace. Its Embracing invites us to take the truths of our faith and apply them practically in our values and lifestyles. Its Feasting heightens our sense of eschatological hope—the Joy of our present experience of God's love and its foretaste of the joy to come. (203)

This is an earnest and thoughtful book and I found in it much to admire. I must admit, however, that my admiration was tempered somewhat by its repetitiveness. The same good thoughts keep coming up in varying contexts. The author is to some degree the victim of her predetermined outline, which requires her to develop each section in seven chapters. Certainly the ideas in each section do not fall unforced into seven divisions. I puzzled about that, concluding that it had something to do with Sabbath as a seventh day, and found some support for that thought in a brief excursus into numerology toward the end of the book, which cited Samuele Bacchiocchi as its source (139).



Receiving the Day

The fourth book, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time*, by Dorothy C. Bass, is similar to *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly* in its recognition of the sacredness of the day and in its author's earnest consideration of Sabbath values.

When I picked up the book, I assumed, wrongly, that the "Day" in the title was the Sabbath. I found, however, that the writer's main focus is on time, the gift of time, the opportunities offered us in that gift, the possibility and necessity of employing it for spiritual growth.

Bass concedes that

Numerous helpful works by economists, sociologists, historians, and management consultants have analyzed the shape of time in our society. However, almost no attention has been given to the deepest and most urgent dimension of our problem with time: the spiritual dimension. (xii)

In *Receiving the Day*, Bass provides an account of Sabbath keeping, but she also considers other practices "by which Christian people have sought to live faithfully in time." Following an eloquent opening chapter, "The Fullness of Time," the book is organized about time in the day, the week [Sabbath] and the Christian year. Thus, only the middle third of the book is devoted to the Sabbath, which is our concern here.

Bass opens the Sabbath chapters by recounting this experience:

I remember very clearly the moment when I first glimpsed the possibility that my Christian faith might be a source of guidance through the time crunch that was my life. It was a Saturday night, and a few teachers were sitting around a dinner table. Tomorrow, we complained, would not be a happy day. Great piles of papers needed grading, and we had promised our students that we would return them on Monday. And so we whined, and as we whined our complaints gradually shaded into boasts. Someone listening in might have thought that we were competing to see who had to grade the most, who worked hardest, and who was most put upon by the demands of his or her job.

Is our appreciation for the beauty of the Sabbath and its possibilities for spiritual enrichment as keenly alive as it might be?

That's when it hit me. "Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy." This was a commandment, one of the ten laws in the basic moral code of Christianity, Judaism, and Western civilization, and here we were, hatching plans to violate it. . . . It is the commandment that caught my attention. But what drew me in is the music of sabbath, which sings of God, creation, and humanity in rhythms, tones, and words that help us know each more truly. Those who know, love, and keep sabbath can join the song, however haltingly we may do so. (45-46)

The first of the two chapters devoted to the Sabbath "sets forth the central affirmations about the contours and meaning of the day" (xiv) as expressed in the Bible and as illustrated in the lives of those who faithfully practice it. It also addresses the difficulties of observing Sabbath in contemporary life, especially as the extreme busyness and the multitude of competing interests have largely crowded out Sabbath observance from the lives even of those who are aspiring Christians. The second chapter offers guidance for those who wish to accept the practice, illustrated by the experience of those who are doing so.

Bass first looks at the beginning of the Sabbath as

the climax of creation, then visits what she calls the "Two Songs of the Sabbath" (46) the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20 and that in Deuteronomy 5, concluding that

The two songs that resonate in the sabbath commandment call sabbath keepers into a dance that embodies fundamental affirmations about God's relationship to humanity: God is the generous creator who sanctifies time and the liberator who requires human beings to deal mercifully with one another. One song emphasizes the goodness of God's creation, the other social justice. (49)

Turning to Christian observance, Bass speaks of the sense of community and of a special sense of the coming together of time past, present, and future, in the Sabbath gathering of worshippers.

When these gatherings are graced by the presence of God's Spirit, something hap-

pens to time itself. In the present, in an hour or two of measurable time, those who worship plant their feet in a distant past and stretch their arms toward the future for which they yearn. Somehow, these three times blend together: the time of Jesus, the time of today, and the time of the great banquet God has promised will take place at the end of the ages. Holding hands in a cathedral and singing *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done*, we are in all three times at once. (55)

But faithfully observing Sabbath is not easy in our time. Here, though very much more briefly than in the other three works at which we are looking, Bass speaks of the competing demands of our society and of the fact that we feel we simply do not have enough time, and concludes with these words:

Just as society challenges sabbath, so sabbath challenges society. Ironically, the same forces that make it difficult to keep sabbath also make it a prophetic and relevant practice for our time. Exploring it anew is worth the effort. This exploration will be fruitful, however, only if we resolve to help one another, in



God's grace, to develop fresh forms of the practice of keeping sabbath that make sense within the complicated circumstances of our lives. (61)

Not surprisingly, Bass proposes rest from commerce, from worry, from work. She also suggests rest for creation, taking a cue from Jürgen Moltmann, a German theologian, who proposes a day without pollution of the environment.

As the earth grows fragile under the pressure of human misuse, we need to consider how we can spend our sabbaths practicing a way of life that is good for creation. . . . Keeping sabbath not only brings us closer to the earth but also begins the process of healing it. (67)

Bass has a suggestion for those for whom Sabbath rest and worship are impossible, citing the example of a nurse who had to work every other Sunday, but who took particular pains on those days to do something special for each of her patients so that those days might be marked as Sabbaths for them.

These two chapters, only a small part of a larger work concerned with the relationship of time to spiritual growth, are a mini-treatment of Sabbath as compared with the much more fully developed works of Dawn and Muller. They are, however, gracious invitations and, to some degree, encouraging exemplars for those seekers who have not yet made Sabbath keeping a meaningful practice in their lives. Bass makes many thoughtful and appreciative observations about Sabbath values. She closes that section of her work thus:

The Christian practice of keeping sabbath is also the gift of God. It offers welcome, not condemnation, losing its power if it is imposed on the unwilling or grasped self-righteously by those whose circumstances make it easy for them to keep sabbath. . . . Receiving this day means joining in a worldwide song of liberation, a song whose vibrations cut through our own forms of bondage and awaken us to the need of all people for freedom and justice. Receiving this day means singing Alleluia and being renewed in faith, hope, and love. . . . No other days can be the same, after this one. (77)

Do these books have something valuable to say to Adventist readers? Or are we likely to be deaf to their message because their authors are observing the "wrong" day? Is our appreciation for the beauty of the Sabbath and its possibilities for spiritual enrichment as keenly alive as it might be? Are we possibly so preoccupied with the "rightness" of our understanding of the importance of keeping the seventh day that we fail to experience the Sabbath as celebration and allow it to become routine?

I came away from these books appreciating the eloquently expressed sense of the serenity and the profound joy we may experience in our Sabbath keeping. Whether as a result of our careful observance we Adventists live less hurried and less harried lives, as these books promise, I do not know.

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