

Wirzba, Norman. *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006. 172 pp. Paper, \$19.99.

Norman Wirzba, who holds a Ph.D. from Loyola University, Chicago, is Professor and Chair of Philosophy at Georgetown College in Georgetown, Kentucky. He has also authored *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age*. In the present book, which is part of the *Christian Practice of Everyday Life* Series, Wirzba reminds readers of what he calls “some of this planet’s vital principles, its inherent goodness and its maker’s approval of it, in gratitude for our membership in it”—as Wendell Berry summarizes in the Foreword (12).

The book is divided into two sections: “Setting a Sabbath Context” and “The Sabbath in Practical Context.” Wirzba’s stated goal for the book is that Sabbath-keeping should be the “culmination of habits and days that express gratitude for and joy in the manifold blessings of God” (13), and “that Sabbath teaching contains an inner logic that helps us make some theological and practical sense of God’s revelation” (14).

Only in chapter 3 does Wirzba enter into the important discussion of the Sabbath/Sunday issue. He believes that there is a continuity between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian “feast day,” urging Jürgen Moltmann’s position that “The Christian Sunday neither abolishes Israel’s sabbath, nor supplants it. . . . The Christian feast-day must rather be seen as the messianic extension of Israel’s sabbath” (*God in Creation, A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 294). Wirzba works within the Christian position that the Sunday Sabbath finds its completion within Jesus, citing the early medieval pope Gregory the Great: “For us, the true Sabbath is the person of our Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ” (cited in John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, May 31, 1998, <[www.papalencyclicals.net/all.htm](http://www.papalencyclicals.net/all.htm)>). But his intent is not to substantiate or belabor the correct day for Sabbath. Instead, the rest of the chapter draws out the salvific significance of the Sabbath through Christ’s healing and teaching ministry. For example, Wirzba writes: “Just as the Sabbath represents the climax or fulfillment of creation, so too Jesus reveals what God’s intentions for life to have been all along. What does it mean to be a creature of God, and what are we to do with the life given us? How do we best live the life that will bring delight to God and health and peace to the whole of creation? The life and ministry of Jesus enable us to answer these questions in new ways” (43). Wirzba seeks to instruct that Sabbath observance has the potential to “reform and redirect all our ways of living. It should be the source and goal that inspires and nourishes the best of everything we do” (14).

Wirzba makes a broad case for how the Sabbath is a pervasive element of biblical thought, which undergirds its importance. Thus the Sabbath should inform all of our habits as Christians, affecting even our treatment of the created world itself. Drawing on many contemporary sources, Wirzba instructs the reader as to how Sabbath principles apply to family life, eating, farming, education, economics, and worship. Sabbath-keepers and those interested in ecological issues will appreciate Wirzba’s discussion of the vital linkages in earth’s vast web of life and his insightful pairing of Sabbath observance with “a fuller awareness of the contexts of our living” (100). Sabbath is not just for “keeping,” but also for “living.” However, the vast importance of Sabbath and creation issues might actually be undergirded and enhanced by the seventh day of the weekly cycle, which Wirzba and much of Christian discussion often misses.