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A RENEWED CHRISTIAN SABBATH,
AFTER SUPERSESSIONISM AND
AFTER CHRISTENDOM

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A RENEWED CHRISTIAN SABBATH,
AFTER SUPERSESSIONISM AND
AFTER CHRISTENDOM

A dissertation presented to the graduate faculty of

Dedman College

Southern Methodist University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Religious Studies

with a specialization in

Christian Ethics

by

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May 15, 2021

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A Renewed Christian Sabbath,
After Christendom and
After Supersessionism

Advisor: Professor D. Stephen Long

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This project works toward a contemporary understanding of what the Sabbath commandment can mean for Christians, in light of both the post-supersessionist developments in Christian theology since the Holocaust and a declining (Protestant) Christian hegemony in the United States. It claims that a Christian theology of Sabbath must be developed through a serious engagement with the theology of Jewish-Christian relations. It proposes the Sabbath framework as a model for cultural engagement reminiscent of the “synthesis” type laid out in H. R. Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*, but less susceptible to the alleged pitfalls of that type.

The approach to a Christian theology of Israel that is judged to be most adequate (both for the project of recovering a Christian Sabbath and for the demands of Christian orthodoxy) is neither supersessionism nor a “two covenant” model, but a “fulfillment” model, such as that laid out recently by Jean-Miguel Garrigues. Principles are drawn from Garrigues’s account of Israel and the Church that are then applied to a Christian understanding of the Sabbath. These principles are also applied to a reading of Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel’s *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, with the goal of respecting the text’s Jewish integrity while allowing it to be instructive for Christians. A result of this reading of Heschel is the observation that the Sabbath

provides a “middle way” between single-minded attention to eternity and succumbing to the totalizing demands of “technical civilization.”

This “middle way” understanding of the Sabbath is developed as an approach to a theology of culture in dialogue with H. Richard Niebuhr, Peter Berger, and Charles Taylor. The discussion particularly draws on Taylor’s observation that a society or community that can hold “tensions in equilibrium” can not only hold together disparate forces within society but is also better equipped to sustain a “social imaginary” that includes the transcendent. The Sabbath is considered through the lens of metaphysical realism, linking practical observance with spiritual meanings, which would also provide a fuller context for the economic ethics (developed elsewhere) to which the Sabbath points.

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INTRODUCTION

The Question

It is difficult, today as ever, to discern what it means to be “in the world though not of it.”¹ Christians are humans like anyone else, and we must eat, drink, find shelter, and sustain various ties with others. And yet Christ asks his followers not to be dependent on these apparent necessities in quite the same way we were before our baptism; he says we must be prepared to leave our closest earthly associates behind for him, surrender our belongings, and “store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”² Some have argued that Jesus’s teachings and the behavior of the earliest Christians only make sense if they expected the apocalypse within a matter of a few short years.³ When Paul says that everyone should forget their earthly status (whether married, celebrating, grieving, or owning property) and pursue the Kingdom of God single mindedly,⁴ the tenor certainly contrasts with the instructions Jeremiah gave the Israelites facing exile: they would be in Babylon long enough that they could only survive by making long-term commitments like building houses, cultivating gardens, marrying, and raising children.⁵ So for

¹ The popular phrase is adapted from Jesus’s prayer in John 17.

² Matt. 6:20 NRSV

³ This argument was famously made by Albert Schweitzer in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

⁴ 1 Cor. 7:29-35.

⁵ Jer. 29:5-6.

today's Christians, who realize that we have remained in this world for two millennia after Christ and are likely still to be here for the foreseeable future, what can it mean to take part in time-bound human culture—which is functionally inescapable—but pledge even stronger allegiance to the eternal Kingdom of God?

My mention of Israel's strategy during exile is no accident. The Jewish people have preserved their identity as a people and their knowledge of God throughout various stages of diaspora since the Babylonian exile—roughly 2600 years.⁶ They have had to exist in the tension between living in one place but belonging somewhere else; learning the language and culture of the lands in which they have lived, but simultaneously preserving a distinctive way of life; and trying to maintain harmony with their neighbors, though known (and notorious) for worshipping their own God. And in a time in the U.S. when Christians find themselves living in an increasingly pluralistic society, increasingly recognizing that European Protestants' prevalent sense of entitled possession of the country was misguided, we are in need of an expanded biblical imagination. We need a toolkit for discerning our relationship to this-worldly culture that draws on imagery *other* than Israel in the promised land. We would do well to revisit Peter's exhortation that Christians should think of themselves as exiles.⁷ And from this position, we can ask what help God has already given for living in the world though we are "citizens of heaven."

The chief gift that has sustained the Jews' identity in diaspora is the Sabbath. Ahad Ha'am, the prominent Zionist thinker, famously claimed that "more than the Jews have kept

⁶ Those familiar with biblical history are aware that the "exile" formally ended when the captives returned to Israel from Babylon, roughly 537 BCE, and a new scattering was prompted by the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. But following the lead of N. T. Wright, I link the two time periods, noting that even after the return from Babylon, the spiritual (and even political) sense of the exile never fully ended in the people's literature and self image. N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009), 60.

⁷ 1 Pet. 1:1, 2:11.

Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews.” He seems to have realized that the Sabbath day had come to bear much of the symbolic weight of the Holy Land and the Temple, when the Jewish people could not count on a stable place of belonging. Its laws had kept the Jews in tight-knit, walkable communities, which enabled them to preserve their collective identity. And the distinctive behavior of ceasing work every seventh day, out of step with the pagans or Christians among whom they lived, made them easily recognizable to outsiders.

I wish to propose that the Sabbath “kept the Jews” not only because it is a marker of Jewish distinctiveness (though it is that) but also because it is inherently a strategy for living in tension between this world and the next. It steers a careful path between assimilating with the human culture that we can share in common with all our neighbors, and a divine calling to be set apart.

But Christians have lost much of our access to the Sabbath in questions of Christ and culture, and it is in no small part because of our long alienation from Jews. Chapters 1 and 2 provide more context for this development, describing how Christians’ treatment of the Sabbath gradually shifted—not with the advent of Christ, but with the shift to Gentile dominance in the Church. Christian history has seen a wide variety of interpretations of the Sabbath, but most of them have been constructed with the idea that Christians must be as different as possible from Jews. And when we have determined to be as little like Jews as possible, we are at a loss as to how we can respond coherently to a thoroughly Jewish commandment.

This means that, in order for Christians to recover access to the theology of culture embedded in the Sabbath, we must also face the question of what it means that the fourth commandment is so thoroughly Jewish. How can we think about Judaism in a way that sheds light on how we can relate to the Sabbath?

The question this dissertation aims to answer is: what can the Sabbath mean to Christians? In order to address this, we have to address what the Sabbath is in Christian and Jewish traditions, what Judaism can mean to Christian theology, and what a pious practice can mean for Christians (who too often associate pious practices with Judaism, legalism, and “works-righteousness”). Only then can we begin to discern what the Sabbath has to offer to Christians as a key toward discerning a position in society that allows us to keep our integrity. As we look to the future, the criteria for such a social vision must include both the freedom to relinquish dominance and the freedom from anxiety and fear. It must allow us to trust God’s abundance, and mirror it, even when we are not in control of all aspects of our existence.

The State of the Discourse

Developments in a number of disciplines make this project both possible and needed. I am building upon recent decades’ developments in Jewish-Christian mutual understanding, the sociology of knowledge, and liturgical theology.

As for writing on the Sabbath itself, there appears to be no dearth: despite the diminished popularity of Sabbatarian arguments in a society increasingly hesitant to privilege the practices of one religion over others, the Sabbath has continued to inspire a steady stream of spiritual writing. The ample selection of recent texts on the theme includes Marva Dawn’s *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (1989), Wayne Muller’s *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (2000), Norman Wirzba’s *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (2006), Rob Muthiah’s *The Sabbath Experiment: Spiritual Formation for Living in a Non-Stop World* (2015), Walter Brueggemann’s

Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now (2017), and A.J. Swoboda's *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* (2018).

Their titles betray some common themes: busyness, spiritual health, patience, and even the idea of counter-cultural resistance. The content is mainly focused on individual choices related to prayer and scheduling, though some of them entertain sections that address economic implications. They tend to give less attention to corporate practice, the question of how mandatory Sabbath observance is, and the Sabbath's inherent Jewishness.

The theme of economic ethics as it relates to the Sabbath has been addressed, but not as substantially as I hope we will see in coming years. Ched Myers' *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics* (2001) stands out as the recent book that directly brings the Sabbath to bear on economic ethics. But while it is compelling and displays a vivid Scriptural imagination, its brevity (it is a "pamphlet" meant to be accessible to congregations) leaves many questions to be answered. Furthermore, it is now out of print. Other books focusing primarily on Christian economic ethics do also address how the theme of the Sabbath fits into it. For example, Ron Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (published in 1993 and revised in 2015) applies principles of the Sabbath to contemporary Christians' ethical reasoning around finances and the economy. Other substantive theological engagements of economics have been produced recently, though they do not focus extensively on the Sabbath. These include Steve Long's *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* (2000), Kathryn Tanner's *Economy of Grace* (2005), William Cavanaugh's *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (2008), the collection of essays in *Theology and Economics: A Christian Vision of the Common Good* (2015) edited by Jeremy Kidwell and Sean Doherty, Tanner's *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (2019), and several works by Mary Hirschfeld. The place of the Sabbath in these works,

however, remains underdeveloped, and the current project paves the way to seeing this absence redressed.

Judith Shulevitz's *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (2011) makes a valuable contribution of a different sort. A semi-autobiographical series of observations by a secular (and perhaps sometimes believing) Jew, its observations are wide-ranging and incisive. Shulevitz is interested in the Jewishness of the Sabbath, the struggle with something mandatory that can mean something or nothing, the corporate nature of the observance, and the interplay between functionalism and the irreducible element of holiness. She touches on several themes that are also in the purview of this dissertation. While thoughtful and well researched, the book is not itself a work of scholarship, nor does it address the theological questions pertaining to a Christian Sabbath. I note it here, however, because it both testifies to the persisting challenge and interest the Sabbath poses to contemporary people, and it shows the interplay between several Sabbath themes in a way that creative nonfiction can manage more concisely than today's scholarly works usually can. The present project continues the conversation—for a somewhat different community and in a different mode.

I have noted that a chief lacuna in recent Christian writings on the Sabbath is their absence of engagement with the Jewishness of the Sabbath. A trail of historical research exists on the question of how Christians came to replace the Jewish Sabbath with Sunday worship (by Willy Rordorf, Samuele Bacchiocchi, James D. G. Dunn, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Henry Sturcke, D.A. Carson et al., and Justo González). But when theological, ethical, and spiritual writings on the Sabbath fail to engage the question, the hole that is left gapes noticeably. When we cannot answer the question, “But in what sense does the Sabbath apply to Christians?” it remains unclear what impact the work can have.

This question can and should be addressed, however, and theological resources are available that make such engagement possible. Particularly in the decades since the Holocaust, much work has been done to reconsider the earlier Christian supersessionist theology of Judaism. Some important developments can be seen in ecclesial documents like the 1965 *Nostra Aetate* produced by Vatican II or the 1967 paper “The Church and the Jewish People” produced by the World Council of Churches’ Commission on Faith and Order. Several fruitful interreligious projects have been undertaken, such as *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (1991), *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (2000), *Two Faiths, One Covenant? Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other* (2005), *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today* (2011), and *Covenant and Hope: Christian and Jewish Reflections* (2012).⁸ Investigations in Biblical studies have been undertaken, which have had the result of allowing Christians to interpret the Hebrew Bible and New Testament with a more historically-grounded understanding of ancient Judaism, rather than a caricature created by the accumulation of Christian hostility over the centuries. Notable contributors here include James D. G. Dunn, W. D. Davies, E. P. Sanders, Morna Hooker, and N. T. Wright.⁹ In response to these developments, a number of Christian

⁸ Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, and William H. Shea, eds. *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al., eds., *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); Eugene Korn and John Pawlikowski, eds., *Two Faiths, One Covenant? Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Philip A. Cunningham, Joseph Sievers, Mary C. Boys, Hans Hermann Henrix, and Jesper Svartvik, eds., *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011); Robert W. Jenson and Eugene Korn, eds. *Covenant and Hope: Christian and Jewish Reflections: Essays in Constructive Theology from the Institute for Theological Inquiry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

⁹ Major works include William David Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1948); Davies, *Christian Origins and Judaism*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law : Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990); Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1991); E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1977); Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985); Morna Dorothy Hooker, *Continuity and Discontinuity: Early Christianity in Its Jewish Setting* (London: Epworth Press, 1986); N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

theologians have attempted to construct accounts of the people of Israel and their place in salvation history that are accountable to the New Testament but attempt to eschew traditional supersessionist or anti-Jewish tropes. These include John Howard Yoder, Kendall Soulen, Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger, Jean-Miguel Garrigues, Bruce Marshall, and Robert Jenson.¹⁰ Marshall anticipated that “in accepting this central Jewish belief [in God’s permanent election of Abraham’s children] Christians will find themselves engaged with further Jewish beliefs about God and God’s works; rejecting supersessionism will be likely to involve reassessment in other areas of Christian theology as well.”¹¹ The present work is just such an engagement.

Recent interest has also grown in the area of liturgical theology, which not only functions as commentary on existing Christian liturgies but has begun to provide ways of thinking about liturgical patterns and behaviors in general. While liturgical Christian worship is ancient, there has been a renewed interest in liturgy among Protestants and evangelicals, who, being numerous in American Christianity, have driven an increased interest in the idea and concepts behind liturgy as they have discovered its value. This project is particularly dependent upon the line of thought inaugurated by Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann, taken up by Roman Catholics such as Aidan Kavanagh and David Fagerberg, and continued recently by their Episcopal counterpart, Nathan Jennings.

¹⁰ John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996); Jean-Marie Lustiger, *The Promise*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Jean-Miguel Garrigues, *Le Peuple de la Première Alliance: Approches Chrétiennes du Mystère d’Israël* (Paris: Cerf, 2011); Sang Hoon Lee, *Trinitarian Ontology and Israel in Robert W. Jenson’s Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016).

¹¹ Marshall, Bruce D. “Christ and the Cultures: The Jewish People and Christian Theology.” Chapter. In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, edited by Colin E. Gunton, 81–100. Cambridge Companions to Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 82

I should also comment that much of this project is indebted to a sociological turn in theology. Sociologists like Peter Berger and Clifford Geertz took an interest in religion, and theologians returned the favor. The work of George Lindbeck—while referenced only sparingly in this project—is in the background of my thought, contributing to a postliberal Christianity that prizes Christian ecumenism and has opened doors to Christian rapprochement with Jews.¹² This line of thinking is also interested in the nature of the Church as a people and culture of its own, an intuition that can be seen in John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and contributors to the Radical Orthodoxy project (as much as John Milbank took issue with the atheological proclivities of the social sciences themselves).¹³

While there are those who caution against involving the categories of sociology in theological discourse, I insist on doing so, for reasons that can perhaps be understood from the confluence of voices I have just named. Someone such as Stanley Hauerwas, who wishes the Church to use its own theological language to tell a distinctive story, also speaks of the Church in highly sociological terms, as a people with a culture and a polity of its own: theological distinctiveness leads him *to*, not away from, political and sociological categories. And liturgical theologians such as Alexander Schmemmann and Nathan Jennings, in describing the ritual behaviors of groups of people, see these words and actions not as *merely* communal behaviors but also as participation in divine realities. Not unlike the sacramental insights of the *Nouvelle Theologians*, several of these recent discourses have converged upon the idea that the more a people participate in the divine life, the more they also become a *people*. The more they immerse

¹² See Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

¹³ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980).

themselves in the contemplation of God, that is, the more they learn a new language and set of behaviors, which cannot but be visible in human society as its own kind of culture.

Method and Structure

To discern what a Christian theology of the Sabbath might look like today, I first offer an overview of the meaning of the Sabbath. In the first chapter I draw on the work of Biblical scholars and historians to identify themes that have accumulated around the Sabbath since ancient times. I take note of the process by which Judaism separated from Christianity. I note that the fact that a variety of themes have been highlighted by different groups and at different times in history does not necessarily make these themes at odds with each other. Rather, they could enrich our understanding of it.

The following two chapters address two of the major issues that could serve as defeaters for the idea of a Christian Sabbath. First, if the Sabbath is essentially Jewish, and Christians are not Jews, is it irrelevant for us? And second, if the Sabbath involves practices related to piety, but Christian salvation relies on faith rather than works, is the Sabbath redundant?

Chapter Two attempts to address what I find lacking in most contemporary Christian accounts of the Sabbath: the question of what the Sabbath means for Christians *insofar as it is Jewish*. In the process, I first address the question of whether the Sabbath is essentially tied to the people of Israel through the Mosaic Covenant (as opposed to a universal commandment or principle). I do this by surveying how the Sabbath is handled in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, as well as how recent historians believe the earliest Christians related to the Sabbath. I next address the question of whether Christians should consider themselves part of Israel and what such a claim could mean. I address that question with attention to post-

supersessionist theology developed by Jews and Christians. Using the criteria of both Christian orthodoxy and non-supersessionism, I identify the work of contemporary Jesuit theologian Jean-Miguel Garrigues as worthy of extended engagement. Several principles are drawn from his account of Israel and the Church, and I then consider what it would mean to apply these principles to a Christian account of the Sabbath.

Chapter Three addresses the much-contested question of practices of piety in two parts. First, I examine the meaning of Torah-keeping in the Judaism of the first century. E. P. Sanders and N. T. Wright contribute the most to this part of the project, countering popular (Reformation-influenced) misconstruals of first-century Judaism with evidence drawn from biblical and extrabiblical texts. I also draw from recent historical evidence that shows the earliest Palestinian Christians continuing to observe Torah and keep Sabbath. My goal in this section is to determine whether the spirit behind Torah-keeping is inherently incompatible with the Christian Gospel's claim that Jesus is the Messiah. Second, I move beyond the project of disproving that negative claim to demonstrate several discourses within Christianity that provide a Christian theological framework for understanding the value of practices. I collect the insights of Thomistic theological anthropology, sacramental theology, virtue ethics, and the sociology of knowledge, and briefly narrate the ways in which they draw exterior practices into unity with interiority. Rather than a process of deductive logic, I am creating a cumulative case argument to show that—far from being a matter of rejecting grace—outward practices of piety can (and should) be powerful resources in the formation of interior holiness.

Chapter Four turns away from addressing arguments against Christian Sabbath observance and presents a case for an underexplored way a Christian Sabbath could function—i.e., as an imaginative framework that undergirds a theology of culture. The conviction that led to

this chapter is that, in the absence of a communal imagination strongly shaped by the Sabbath as a fixture, Christians in modernity have easily capitulated to what Charles Taylor calls the “immanent frame.” With a flattened vision of reality, in which all that is real can be measured empirically, all that is valuable can be measured monetarily, and God and humanity compete for space in the world, Christians in the U.S. often struggle with the experience of losing cultural dominance. I present the six-and-one pattern of the Sabbath not only as a practice but also as an imaginative tool for conceiving of the transcendent despite living in an “immanent frame.” The six days of work provide a place for Christians to recognize and cultivate all we hold in common with all other humans, participating in this-worldly culture, while the Sabbath itself is the reminder that we are also called apart to live ultimately with the values of eternity in view.

In making this case, I am continuing the conversation that followed from H. R. Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*. I largely accept his typology, while supplementing it with more recent cultural-philosophical commentary by Charles Taylor. A theme Taylor and Niebuhr both describe, though Taylor does not link his observation with Niebuhr’s, is summarized by Niebuhr’s “Christ Above Culture” type. Taylor gives an account of its strength, both within the functionalist project of understanding how diversity can coexist within society and within the philosophical project of understanding how a social environment can be conducive to belief in the transcendent. I then supply the constructive work of the chapter, arguing that the Sabbath pattern is a quintessential instance of the “Christ Above Culture” synthesis model Niebuhr describes, while sidestepping some of his chief concerns with the model.

Chapter Five brings the foregoing themes together, offering a reading of and response to Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel’s 1951 classic *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. The chapter builds upon Chapter Two by the very exercise in which it engages: the attempt to engage

in a distinctly Christian manner with Heschel's distinctly Jewish work, receiving its gifts as far as possible (which proves to be quite far) without minimizing the differences between the respective religions. It echoes Chapter Three in Heschel's connection between the mind and body in the practice of the Sabbath. The connection to Chapter Four is perhaps clearest, as we find that Heschel himself seems to see the Sabbath as something of a theology of culture, by which Jews can live faithfully in this world and "technical civilization" but with eternity and an alternate system of value always before them.

Audience and Impact

This project has been designed with two main groups in mind. The first group is Christian ethical thinkers, who may still be challenged and interested by the problems posed by H. R. Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, but sense that there is more to be said in light of subsequent developments. This project proposes to continue the conversation that *Christ and Culture* sparked, but with the recognition that social change has changed the stakes of the conversation in the United States. It aims to push back on Niebuhr's apparent preference for the "Christ Transforming Culture" type and propose a modified "Christ Transcending Culture" type. I attempt to do this by drawing on the rich harvest of Jewish-Christian dialogue that has taken place in the intervening years. George Lindbeck developed the belief that Christian ecumenism would not come to fruition without also returning to an understanding of Christianity as part of Israel.¹⁴ This project, a re-presentation of a Sabbath theology for Christians, hopes to contribute to the cause of Christian ecumenism and integrity by inviting Christian ethicists to do just that. I

¹⁴ This trajectory of Lindbeck's work is laid out by Shaun Christopher Brown, "The Israel of God: Scripture, Ecclesiology, and Ecumenism in the Theology of George Lindbeck," PhD diss., (University of Toronto, 2019). The connection between ecumenism and post-supersessionism is also laid out in Ochs' *Another Reformation*.

hope our theologies of culture, and perhaps even some of the intensity of our “culture war” divisions, may be aided by a renewed approach to the Sabbath.

The second group I have in mind in this project is lay Christians. I would like this project, or a repackaged form of it, to be able to offer Christians courage in the midst of social change, wherever they fall in the spectrum of the culture wars. I hope to encourage Christians whose tendency is to wish to maintain a “Christian nation” or “Christian culture” to discover that the Sabbath pattern allows for sincere partnerships and commonality with people who hold a wide range of commitments. I hope that not only an ethics, but also a spirituality, of the Sabbath can offer these Christians a reprieve from the anxiety that is related to an all-or-nothing view of Christian cultural engagement. As for those Christians who are ready to see “Christian America” and its baggage fade quickly, I hope a theology of the Sabbath can encourage a rediscovery of the reasons for Christian distinctiveness. While the desire to say “yes” in love to all people has beauty and power, the irreducible Sabbath call to holiness requires that the space of the Sabbath be preserved by a periodic practice of saying “no.” Christian discernment can learn from that of our neighbors, but it must be willing to part ways, at times, with even the best-intentioned non-Christian discernment.

If Christians of diverging groups all began to practice the Sabbath, and to be challenged by the different ways it stretches us, might we find ourselves being stretched toward each other? I find it hard not to think so.

Finally, while I am not writing this with a Jewish readership in mind, I also harbor hopes that a more widespread Christian engagement of the Sabbath, including its Jewishness, can support a movement toward greater fellowship between Christians and Jews. Not only might Christians and Jews be ever better able to discuss theological differences and commonalities

between us, but we might work to find areas for collaboration in the pursuit of a just society. Such an outcome of my work would be indirect, and would likely come about through the initiative of Christians, who (I hope) would show increased interest in listening to and learning from Jews as a result of the present exercise. It seems likely, as often happens with interreligious projects, that rather than weakening their respective commitments, Jews and Christians can help each other toward greater faithfulness to God.

CHAPTER ONE

THE MEANING OF THE SABBATH

Of the Ten Commandments, the command to observe Sabbath is the one that has remained most opaque to Christians. It has been alternately ignored, interpreted (away) as a “ritual commandment,” spiritualized into a metaphor for Jesus, sinlessness, or eternity, or simply replaced by a teaching to “go to church.” This diverse history of interpretation has much to do with the fact that Sabbath is the commandment that has been most complicated by Christianity’s movement away from Judaism. And yet Sabbath remains a central theme of the Christian Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, and Christians must not simply ignore it. In fact, this dissertation maintains that by minimizing the importance of Sabbath observance, Christians have forfeited an invaluable aid in maintaining our identity and spiritual integrity.

Before the ongoing value of Sabbath to Christians can be made clear, however, we must first come to terms with what we mean when we speak of the Sabbath. This chapter surveys many shades of meaning and variations in practice that have surfaced throughout Jewish and Christian history—a confusion that goes a long way, perhaps, in accounting for the Christian ambivalence toward it. Throughout this overview, we should keep in mind that while we do not need to affirm every interpretive approach equally, neither do we need to see differing interpretations of Sabbath as necessarily at odds with each other. Both Christian and Jewish traditions of interpretation offer precedent for reading a text as having more than one layer of meaning; the theology and practice of Sabbath need be no different. We do well to consider that

as successive generations have wrestled with the Sabbath, they may have uncovered complementary aspects of a theme whose richness has been only more thoroughly unveiled over time.

At the culmination of our historical survey, I will highlight the themes that have surfaced, which I will take as determinative for the remainder of this dissertation. Abraham J. Heschel, whose thought will come into greater focus in subsequent chapters, is a chief resource in identifying these themes.

What we will find is that the observance of Sabbath within history must begin with a resolute “no,” which makes possible an even more important “yes.” In the Sabbath, the people of God abide by limits to certain forces within creation, not to denounce creation as evil, but to recall that there is a Creator. We cease responding to many temporal demands, not because we reject earthly time outright, but to become people who can conceive of eternity. In all this, of course, it should be clear that the love of God (which we could also call the “beatific vision”) is the spiritual end of Sabbath observance. But we fail to take seriously what it means to be creatures when we think we can speed straight to this joyful “yes” of the heart without taking the journey through the humble “no” of practical obedience.

Hebrew Origins

There is no compelling evidence for a Sabbath that predated the Hebrew people, so we may here assume that Sabbath originated with Israel.¹⁵ How it came about among the Hebrews, however, is not at all clear. Even within the biblical accounts, the people appear to have some

¹⁵ Harold H. P. Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 35.

rudimentary knowledge of the Sabbath by the time its observance is commanded on Mt. Sinai.¹⁶ Was it a variation on ancient full moon festivals? Could it have been modeled on a Kenite taboo day, whose focus was on a fire prohibition?¹⁷ These hypotheses are little more than speculation. From an anthropological perspective, then, we must remain in the dark.

What the Bible does give us, however, is a theological explanation of Sabbath's origins. In fact, it offers *two* origin stories, which issue in a productive tension throughout the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures.¹⁸

The first of these origin stories is found in Exodus 20 and focuses on the days of creation. The context in which Sabbath is enjoined here is in the account of the Ten Commandments given through Moses on Mount Sinai. God had brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, and the Israelites had already faced several formative events in the wilderness: the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, God's provision of water and food, military victory over the Amalekites, and the formation of a fledgling system of government. When God introduces the Decalogue in Exodus 20:1, he appeals to this history by naming himself as "the God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." In the specific case of the command to observe Sabbath, however, a different rationale is given. The entire commandment reads:

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien

¹⁶ Ibid., 23. Abraham J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1955), 274.

¹⁷ Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," 22.

¹⁸ Elliot Ginsburg also notes these two origin stories that promote diverging themes in *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 60.

resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.¹⁹

Because God took six days to create but rested on the seventh day, God's people should likewise cease from their labor on every seventh day.²⁰

The second origin story comes from the other record of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5, where the people's history of slavery and their rescue from Egypt is linked, not only to the giving of the law in general as in Exodus, but also to the specific command to observe Sabbath. In this passage, Moses is repeating the Ten Commandments to the people, now that they are at last preparing to enter Canaan after forty years of wandering. The passage begins exactly as did the Exodus Decalogue: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me."²¹ The Sabbath commandment, however, takes a new turn:

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. *Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.*²²

¹⁹ Exod. 20:8-11 NRSV

²⁰ We should note that this is the first time a connection is made between God's rest on the seventh day of creation and human rest on every seventh day. In the Genesis account, God is said to have rested on the seventh day, but there is no indication that this pattern will later be extended to humans. Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," 28.

²¹ Deut. 5:6-7 NRSV

²² Deut. 5:12-15 NRSV

Here, the command is based directly upon the Israelites' memory of rescue from slavery in Egypt. As we will see below, this approach highlights Israel's particular history and relationship to God, as well as the contrast between Sabbath rest and forced labor.

The Meaning of Sabbath in the Old Testament

When it comes to the question of what the Sabbath means, these competing—or complementary—origin stories support a set of themes, which we can see throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. One cluster of meanings centers on the identity of God and the nature of the relationship between God and his people. Another cluster of meanings has more directly to do with social ethics and the relationships between people.

When Sabbath is based on the seventh day of creation, as in the Exodus Decalogue, it lifts up God as Creator and permits universal application. According to Israel's creation story, God is the Creator not only of Israel, but of all peoples, animals, and the earth. If the reason Israel is to observe Sabbath is because they recognize God as Creator, then it follows that *any* people who recognizes God as Creator also ought to rest on every seventh day. In this light it appears particularly fitting that Sabbath observance is explained, even to Israelites themselves, as having broad application. In both Exodus and Deuteronomy passages, Sabbath rest is for slaves and foreigners, along with free and native-born Israelites. It is also for domestic animals, reminding Israel that the wellbeing of even non-human creatures is the concern of the Creator of all.

Perhaps most surprisingly, God even gives rest to the land. While the Sabbath commandment in the Decalogue does not specifically mention allowing the land to rest, the cycle

of rest for land given in Leviticus 25 is closely reminiscent of Sabbath. God commands that fields and orchards be allowed to lie fallow—one year in seven.²³

The spiritual posture that results from observance of Sabbath, when it is explained on the basis of creation, is one of humility. To observe Sabbath by resting is to acknowledge God as Creator and oneself as creature. And because God is the Creator of all, a reasonable conclusion is that such humility before God is available to all peoples. Indeed, we see that this was the case in the first century, when the New Testament speaks of the existence of God-fearing Gentiles.²⁴ One of the chief ways in which these non-Jewish God-fearers expressed their reverence for the God of Israel was through Sabbath observance.²⁵

The second theological theme to which Sabbath observance points is God as redeemer, who has acted decisively in Israel's particular history. While creation was the prominent theme in the Exodus commandment, redemption is the theme most prominent in the Deuteronomy Decalogue. In bringing Israel out of Egypt, God has established a unique relationship with this people. In fact, at Mt. Sinai, God *makes* them a people in a new way, by contracting a covenant (or suzerainty treaty) with them.²⁶

In contrast to the universal application that would follow from a rationale based in creation, an appeal to the exodus makes Sabbath a distinguishing mark of the people of Israel.

²³ Lev. 25:1-7. This rest for the land *is* explicitly called a Sabbath in 2 Chron. 36:21.

²⁴ Acts 13:16, 26, 50; 17:4, 17; 18:7.

²⁵ Max M. B. Turner, "The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts" in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. Carson, 128. Turner focuses on the God-fearers' observance of Sabbath as a consequence of their adherence to Judaism, not as a consequence of their faithfulness to YHWH from outside Judaism. Turner does not see the command to observe Sabbath as binding on all.

²⁶ George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17, no. 3 (September 1954): 49-76. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

We see how important Sabbath is as a sign of Israel's exclusive covenant with God when we note the severity of punishment for those who violated it: they were to be "cut off from their people."²⁷ This sometimes meant the death penalty directly, and sometimes death merely *de facto*. But what this phrasing always highlights is that violators of Sabbath have decisively relinquished an essential mark of belonging to God's people.²⁸ Other nations, too, recognized Sabbath as a sign of Hebrew uniqueness, and this is why the other nations are said to rejoice at its cessation after the destruction of the temple.²⁹ By the first century, Sabbath had become a Jewish distinctive that both Jews and other inhabitants of the Roman Empire took for granted.³⁰

A third theological theme, which unfolds throughout the subsequent narrative of the wilderness wanderings, is God as the one who provides for his people. God's provision of manna in the wilderness is particularly clear here: God provides the heavenly bread anew for each day (it rots if the people attempt to keep it for the future), but on the day before the Sabbath, they must collect and keep twice as much. Those who attempt to collect more manna on the Sabbath are severely reprov^{ed}.³¹ We might also see this theme as inextricably tied up with the previous themes: if God has created the world, God is also the one who expresses commitment to it and has the power to go on sustaining it; and if God has chosen this people, God is personally invested in providing what they need.

²⁷ Exod. 31:14-15; Lev. 23:29-30

²⁸ Exod. 31:12-17; Num. 15:32-36; Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," 30.

²⁹ Lam. 1:7, as rendered in KJV, BRG, DRA

³⁰ Chris Rowland, "A Summary of Sabbath Observance in Judaism at the Beginning of the Christian Era," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. Carson, 45; Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 49, 56.

³¹ Exod. 16.

This theme of provision, too, comes with implications for the human response to God. If God, through Sabbath, asserts his commitment to provide for his people, people must respond to this aspect of God's character with trust. They must refrain from planting their fields every seventh year, refrain from collecting manna on the seventh day, and refrain from harvesting on the Sabbath even during the most demanding season of the agricultural year. They must take the risk of producing less than they could in order to recall that God is their true provider.

Trust in God must also have the effect of banishing tightfistedness among God's people toward each other, particularly those who are vulnerable or dependent. As we saw in the Sabbath commandments of both Exodus and Deuteronomy, when God calls a landowner or tradesperson to cease production on the Sabbath, and to trust in God's provision of enough, it is understood that this gracious provision will be extended to family members, servants, animals, and land. The bounty God provides is not to be centralized in the hands of those who control wealth: all can be provided for and have time left over for rest and worship. On the contrary, when God's people begin to violate the Sabbath, we find that they have also become willing to sell dishonestly and to profit by the desperation of the needy.³²

The final role I find Sabbath playing in the Hebrew Scriptures is as a means of entry for outsiders. Isaiah 56 promises God's faithfulness to those who keep his covenant, in a context that has just identified covenant faithfulness as meaning justice for the weak and poor, *not* mere ritual observance. After what we have seen above, this should be no surprise. Chapter 56 takes an unexpected turn, however. Immediately after stating that God's salvation will come to those who maintain justice and keep the Sabbath, it extends the benefits of the covenant to "outcasts"—namely, eunuchs and non-Jews.

³² Amos 8:4-6.

Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say,
 “The Lord will surely separate me from his people”;
 and do not let the eunuch say,
 “I am just a dry tree.”
 For thus says the Lord:
 To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
 who choose the things that please me
 and hold fast my covenant,
 I will give, in my house and within my walls,
 a monument and a name
 better than sons and daughters;
 I will give them an everlasting name
 that shall not be cut off.
 And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,
 to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,
 and to be his servants,
 all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
 and hold fast my covenant—
 these I will bring to my holy mountain,
 and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
 their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
 will be accepted on my altar;
 for my house shall be called a house of prayer
 for all peoples.
 Thus says the Lord God,
 who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
 I will gather others to them
 besides those already gathered.³³

Note how, for both eunuchs and foreigners, Sabbath observance functions as synecdoche,
 implying a life of holistic covenant faithfulness. Other aspects of piety are mentioned, such as
 “joining themselves to the Lord,” “loving,” and “serving the Lord,” but keeping the Sabbath is
 the only *specific* means this passage gives by which the foreigner might express such

³³ Isa. 56:3-8 NRSV

wholehearted commitment. It appears as if, of all the possible ways to keep God's law, Sabbath observance is the most telling, the best symbol for it all. In harmony with surrounding passages in which Sabbath observance is linked to justice for the oppressed, Sabbath has risen to the surface as the form of obedience in which ceremony and holistic righteousness coalesce.

Most notably for our purposes, it is Sabbath observance that paves the way in this passage for outsiders to be included in God's covenant with Israel. On one hand, this universal accessibility to "all nations" recalls the theological theme of God as Creator of all. On the other hand, it is clear that these others are not ultimately coming to God independent of Israel. Sabbath observance here serves not only as a means of humble recognition of the Creator God, but also a gateway into the people of Israel and God's covenant with this one people. Thus the competing universal and particular meanings of Sabbath come together, perhaps hinting toward a resolution of what has seemed like tension.

Observance

Just as the Hebrew Scriptures point to a cluster of meanings of the Sabbath, Jewish history and literature point to a cluster of ways Sabbath has been observed. Surveying shifts over time will help identify some common threads, placing subsequent Christian observance in a clearer light. We will see that the phrase from Leviticus 23:7 that Sabbath prohibits "servile labor" (*avodah melakah*) is suitably broad and yet sufficiently specific to encompass what Jewish Sabbath observance has looked like.

The earliest texts indicating how Sabbath should be observed specify that daily activities related to economic activity should be suspended. In particular, they name activities relating to farming and herding, as well as the lighting of fires. We see included here the set of basic

activities that sustain the economic life of a nomadic or agricultural people. We can also observe that the list includes the typical activities of males (agriculture and herding) as well as the typical activities of females (such as domestic work, which would depend on fires).³⁴

In later rabbinic tradition, because the command to observe Sabbath is reiterated in the midst of extensive instructions about the construction of the Tabernacle, the activities related to building the Tabernacle are taken as specific guidelines as to which activities should be suspended.³⁵ While activities related to worship did indeed take place on the Sabbath, thirty-nine activities related to the *building* of the Tabernacle were prohibited on Sabbath. Not only did this list become the paradigm of activities that should be avoided—not only in places of worship, but also in villages and homes—but it also came to be understood as showing that the sacredness of the Sabbath day should override the sacredness of a holy place.³⁶

While less explicit, there are also certain activities that are taken up on the Sabbath; Sabbath was not *only* a day of ceasing. Burnt offerings were to be made each Sabbath, consisting of two lambs, a cereal offering, and a drink offering.³⁷ Certain feasts and undertakings were also deemed suitable Sabbath activities, such as weddings, dedications, ritual activities by priests and Levites, and even military campaigns.³⁸

³⁴ Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” 27.

³⁵ Exod. 31, 35; Arthur Green, *The Heart of the Matter: Studies in Jewish Mysticism and Theology* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015), 19-20.

³⁶ Mishnah *Shabbat* 7.2; Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 9-10.

³⁷ Num. 28:9-10

³⁸ Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” 33.

Much as we saw above, in our exploration of the meanings of Sabbath, we find a subtle shift between how Sabbath observance is spoken of in the Pentateuch and how it is described in later prophetic writings. In one aspect of this shift, we see the Sabbath commandment applied to new spheres of economic activity, particularly trade. Where previous ages had been more concerned with the activities surrounding subsistence agriculture and domestic chores, prophets beginning in the sixth century BCE are concerned with people carrying their wares into town or merchants coming and going. Jeremiah warns that security can only be maintained if people stop carrying goods to sell on the Sabbath.³⁹ Nehemiah upbraids merchants who pause for Sabbath perfunctorily, only when forced, eagerly awaiting the sundown so they may resume their business.⁴⁰

A second aspect of this shift of focus in prophetic writings is a stronger emphasis on justice for the poor. While the original commandments explicitly include foreigners, servants, and animals in Sabbath rest, later texts show us (most often in passages decrying violations of Sabbath) how the spirit of Sabbath observance is inseparable from justice and mercy. Like Boaz, who protected Ruth when she was poor, a widow, and a foreigner, those who allow the land to lie fallow one year in seven are those who protect the poor and freely allow them to glean the land's excess. As we see in Amos 8:4-8, merchants who violate or resent the Sabbath are the very people who "bring to ruin the poor of the land," who "practice deceit with false balances," "buy the needy for a pair of sandals," and "sell the sweepings of the wheat"—the remainders that are meant to be given to the poor. Isaiah, similarly, shows that there is an integral unity between Sabbath observance and justice for the vulnerable: if the people do not "seek justice, rescue the

³⁹ Jer. 17:21-22

⁴⁰ Neh. 13:15-22

oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow,” the pious trappings of Sabbath observance are empty.⁴¹

Extrabiblical rabbinic literature shows us that the changing cultural and economic circumstances of Jews have sparked interpretive debates, from ancient times forward. How difficult should Sabbath observance be? How literally should the set of proscribed activities be taken? And are there circumstances that take priority over Sabbath rest? There was a famous divergence between two rabbinic schools, Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel, in which Shammai observes Sabbath commands with the utmost stringency, while Hillel allows “maximum opportunity for economic activity without breaking the Sabbath.”⁴² For instance, if someone’s livelihood included parts of the production process in which the person is passive—such as allowing nets to trap animals, or leaving fabrics to soak in dye—the Shammai school would prohibit allowing these processes to go on during the Sabbath, while Hillel would allow them to go on without the active participation of the tradesperson.⁴³ When reading Jesus’s comments on Sabbath observance in the synoptic Gospels, it is important to recognize that Jesus, too, is a Jewish rabbi, participating in this conversation, which was well underway by the first century A.D. When Jesus mentions that the Pharisees would ordinarily allow the rescue of an animal on the Sabbath, we can gather that a perspective more akin to Beth Hillel had won the day.⁴⁴

Among post-exilic Alexandrian Jews, we see that Sabbath has taken a new character. Philo describes it as a matter of contemplation and Torah study, or “ancestral philosophy.” This

⁴¹ Isa. 1:13-17 NRSV

⁴² Rowland, “A Summary of Sabbath Observance in Judaism,” 48.

⁴³ Mekilta de R. Simeon b. Yohai on Exod. 20:9, cited in Rowland, “A Summary of Sabbath Observance in Judaism,” 48.

⁴⁴ Matt. 12; Luke 14

shift in focus can be attributed to at least two circumstances. In part, Philo places a strong emphasis on study and reflection as a strategy to defend the Jewish Sabbath in a Gentile context. Jewish “idleness” was already commonly reviled; for him to present Sabbath as a matter of study rather than rest was a tactic by which he could demonstrate its value. In continuation of his apologetic efforts, Philo went so far as to recommend this manner of Sabbath observance to non-Jews as well. Additionally, the shift toward Torah study on Sabbath became appealing because the destruction of the Temple and virtual disappearance of the Temple-focused Sadducees meant that Jews relied on Torah study even more heavily than ever to shore up their identity and to ground their Sabbath observance. The bookish turn of Sabbath observance in Alexandria would prove a sign of what was to come in Sabbath observance by many Jews throughout the diaspora.⁴⁵

The Sabbath also took on eschatological meanings in Judaism. These are attested by Origen in the early third century, where he notes a tradition in which the Sabbath symbolized eternal life. Even earlier, Philo noted that the Sabbath represents the world to come, in contrast with the six days of creation which represent the time of this world.⁴⁶ The Babylonian Talmud calls Sabbath a “microcosm of the World-to-Come,” and even supplies a precise proportional relationship: the Sabbath is called “one-sixtieth of the World-to-Come.”⁴⁷ Elsewhere in the Talmud, it is speculated that if all Israel kept the Sabbath correctly for only two Sabbaths

⁴⁵ Rowland, “A Summary of Sabbath Observance in Judaism,” 51-53. Elliot K. Ginsburg also notes that certain rabbis throughout the rabbinic and medieval periods especially prioritized “the Sabbath’s intellectual possibilities” as “an especially efficacious time for Torah-study and intellectual contemplation of God’s ways.” *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 68.

⁴⁶ Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. and ed. John A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), 397.

⁴⁷ Ber. 57b

together, they would be immediately brought to eschatological redemption.⁴⁸ While such metaphysical interpretations of the Sabbath were prioritized sporadically throughout the rabbinic and medieval periods, particularly in Aggadic literature, the Kabbalists of the later Middle Ages developed the Sabbath's sacramental and metaphysical themes extensively.⁴⁹ They called the World-to-Come "an everlasting Sabbath."⁵⁰ The Sabbath gained a multivalent meaning as it became associated with several different "sefirotic rungs," or forces of divine creative energy, but Elliot Ginsburg explains that these different Sabbaths "always direct one's attention beyond the immediate focus to the larger *metaphysical state* of Shabbat, the restored divine Gestalt."⁵¹

While Sabbath has been observed by Jews in various ways over time, we have seen that abstention from "servile labor" serves as a useful benchmark. While this has applied to different types of tasks for different classes of people or in different eras, it describes domestic labor, agricultural labor, and trade equally well. Whatever work is economically necessary, or work that is done for the purpose of serving another end, is out of place on the Sabbath. "Servile labor" can be contrasted, too, with the work of studying Torah, even though the activity certainly involves exertion of a kind. What has tended to define activities appropriate for Sabbath over the years for Jews, then, is not the degree of difficulty or the number of calories burned. The criteria have to do with whether the task is economically productive, devoted toward another practical end, or associated by rabbinic tradition with activities related to building the Tabernacle. When a Jewish man (for instance) ceases all work of this kind on the Sabbath, it can be a sign that he is

⁴⁸ Shab. 118b

⁴⁹ Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah*, 60-69.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

willing to accept the limitation that comes from relying on God's provision, as well as a sign that he is willing to provide more than the bare minimum for those who rely on him. It has even been a way of taking part symbolically in the eschatological fulfillment of all God's earthly work.

Christians and the Sabbath

Much as children and grandchildren often feel awkwardly uncertain what to do with things handed down to them from relatives, Christians have been compelled to find something—though it has been hard to know what—to do with the legacy of Sabbath they have inherited from Judaism. Because Christianity was an offshoot of Judaism but took root mostly among Gentiles, Sabbath can often seem to Christians much like a high-quality china hutch seems to today's young adults: too substantial to ignore, but in present circumstances, really not necessary for the purposes for which it served those to whom it originally belonged. Out of vogue and with little apparent utility, it is too cumbersome to keep on hand merely as a link to the past.

What Christians choose to do with the Sabbath has overwhelmingly depended on our answers to a few questions: Is Sabbath observance a particular mark of belonging to Israel? If so, do Christians have a connection to Israel worth keeping? And if not, does the Sabbath offer today's non-Jewish God-fearers any ongoing spiritual benefit? It is like asking of an heirloom: "Does this have value because of what it is, or value only to members of a particular family? And am I part of that family?"

Subsequent chapters will take a closer look at the answers to these questions for our time. Here, we will survey what Christians have done with Sabbath in the past, finding that while there are common themes, the array of *different* treatments across history is one of the challenges in determining how Sabbath might be kept fittingly today. What we can say is that Christians'

treatment of Sabbath has tended to be closely tied to the nature of their relationship to Jews—most often, hostile. As part of this, Christians’ interpretation of Jewish law has often been characterized by a division between “moral” and “ceremonial” laws—and how Sabbath is kept by Christians depends on which category it belongs to. Also linked to Christians’ relationship to Jews is the debate over the “third use of the law”: is all observance of law inherently a rejection of grace?⁵² And if so, must Sabbath be reinterpreted along purely spiritual lines? There is thus an important tradition of spiritual interpretation related to the Sabbath: sometimes Christ *is* the Sabbath; sometimes Sabbath rest is understood to be merely *spiritual* rest, or moral probity. By this line of thinking, Sabbath rest certainly does not mean ceasing from physical labor. *That* would be “idleness”—or, more pointedly, “Jewish idleness.” In the history of Christian treatments of Sabbath, there are different levels of importance given to the distinction between days at all: sometimes Sunday is revered because it is the day of Christ’s Resurrection, and sometimes it is merely seen as a matter of convenience to have a day to gather and worship. Finally, the origin story associated with the Christian observance of Sunday has something to do with what Christians think about Sabbath: Was Sunday instated as the new Sabbath by Constantine (and therefore a concession to earthly powers)?⁵³ Was it given as the new Sabbath by Jesus himself following the Resurrection (and therefore to be observed carefully)?⁵⁴ Was it chosen by the authority of the Church (which could either support or undermine its legitimacy)?

⁵² Justo L. González, *A Brief History of Sunday: From the New Testament to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 116.

⁵³ Andreas Fischer used a Constantinian origin as an argument against Sunday Sabbath. González, *A Brief History of Sunday*, 108.

⁵⁴ González, *A Brief History of Sunday*, 121.

Early Christians in Palestine

Perhaps surprisingly to contemporary Christians, evidence indicates that the earliest Christians were Sabbath-observant. By this I mean that they observed Sabbath on Saturday in the manner prescribed by the Torah; they neither transferred Sabbath observance to Sunday nor abolished it altogether. It is of course no surprise that most of the first followers of Christ were Jews, for whom Sabbath observance was simply a way of life and a sign of covenant faithfulness. What may be less obvious, however, is that nothing in Jesus's life or ministry had led his followers to believe that Sabbath keeping had become obsolete. We can see that this is nonetheless the case when we look both at Jesus's direct teachings on Sabbath and at what we can discover about early Christian worship in Palestine.

While Jesus comes into conflict with the agenda of particular Pharisees, a closer look at these conversations shows that his views and conversational tactics do not depart radically from rabbinic tradition. Jesus does make original contributions to the existing discourse on Sabbath, but their effect is not to abolish Sabbath observance. Rather, he makes startling claims about his own identity, and it is in this light that the meaning of Sabbath observance should be understood.⁵⁵

In the first of two famous pericopes pertaining to Sabbath, Jesus met a man with a disabled hand in the synagogue on a Sabbath.⁵⁶ The Pharisees, "looking for a reason to accuse Jesus," asked him whether it was permissible by the law to heal on the Sabbath. Rabbinic interpretation of the law allowed for medical intervention in life-threatening situations, but there

⁵⁵ Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 129.

⁵⁶ Matt. 12:9-14.

is no reason to believe this man's condition was acute.⁵⁷ It served as a perfect opportunity for the Pharisees to catch Jesus in blatant disobedience.⁵⁸

Jesus accepted the challenge and engaged in the debate according to rabbinic custom. He responded to their question with another question: "Who of you, having one sheep, if it falls into a pit on a Sabbath, would not immediately take hold of it and lift it out?" While another interpretive community, the Essenes, forbade such an action, the Pharisees were more lenient.⁵⁹ Their tradition eventually concluded that animal suffering was a reason to override strict observance of the Sabbath.⁶⁰ Recall that, in Deuteronomy 5:14, the Sabbath is described as a day of rest for masters, servants, and even animals. Presumably, the Sabbath is not experienced as a blessing for the sheep if it is trapped, helpless in a pit. How inconsistent it would be, then, to allow an animal's suffering to be relieved but not a man's! Jesus reminds his opponents that a person is much more valuable than a sheep. His conclusion, which he has reached by reasoning *within rabbinic tradition*, is clear: "Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

In the other famous episode dealing with Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples walked through a field with ripening grain.⁶¹ Since his disciples were hungry, they began to pluck kernels of grain. While rabbinic interpretations of Mosaic law permitted "gleaning" on the Sabbath, it seems that the disciples' actions would be strictly classified as "harvesting," which is one of the

⁵⁷ m. Yoma 8:6; Mekilta on Exod. 22.2: 23.13, cited in Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 227.

⁵⁸ R. T. France, *Matthew* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 204.

⁵⁹ Damascus Document 11.13-14, 16-17, cited in Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 121.

⁶⁰ Shab. 128b, cited in France, 205.

⁶¹ Mark 2:23-28.

thirty-nine activities the Mishnah forbids on the Sabbath.⁶² The Pharisees lost no time in taking this occasion to challenge Jesus for allowing his disciples to transgress in this way.

Jesus made an answer, first, by calling their attention to a scriptural precedent, and second, by a pronouncement of his own. He first reminded them of David, another leader who, while on a mission to inaugurate the kingship of God's anointed one, allowed his men to break regulations in order to satisfy their hunger. Jesus chooses not to take issue with the Pharisees' harsh interpretation of "harvesting," but instead implies that his own mission is monumental enough to allow him the authority to interpret God's will in the situation. Cultic regulation is subservient to God's anointed one.⁶³

Next, he adapts one of their own sayings and says, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath."⁶⁴ From this statement he draws the conclusion that "the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." While the logic of this conclusion would be clearer if "son of man" could be interpreted to mean humanity as a whole, Mark regularly uses "the son of Man" as a title for Jesus. This is not a general statement implying that "man is the measure of all things" or that anyone can disregard Sabbath at will; rather, Jesus is asserting his own authority over Sabbath.⁶⁵ As one commentator explains, "He was not annulling the sabbath law

⁶² Robert Goldenberg, "The Place of the Sabbath in Rabbinic Judaism," in Eskenazi, *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, 34.

⁶³ Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 48-49.

⁶⁴ "The Sabbath is handed over to you, not you to it." Mekilta on Exod. 31:14; b. Yoma 85b

⁶⁵ Jesus is not thought ever to have taught his followers to disregard Sabbath. Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 149.

in principle, rather he was interpreting the sabbath law in the light of his ministry.”⁶⁶ He had the authority to do this because he, like David, is God’s anointed.

Seeing Jesus’s teachings not as an abrogation of the Sabbath but as an assertion of his own lordship over it as Messiah, the earliest Christians continued to observe Sabbath in (more or less) the traditional Jewish manner. New Testament texts, both by what they say and by what they do not, indicate that Sabbath remained a normal part of Palestinian Christians’ piety. For one thing, in the communities to whom the Gospels were written, the Sabbath continues to serve as the principal marker of weekly time. Even when things occurred on Sunday—the women’s visit to Jesus’s tomb, a gathering of Christians to break bread, and the day Paul encourages for making offerings—the day is called “the first day after Sabbath.”⁶⁷ Secondly, several passages in Acts point to an ongoing Christian presence in the Jewish synagogues and the Temple, which becomes the ground of possibility not only for Paul’s evangelism, but also for an awareness of Torah shared between Jews and Gentile Christians.⁶⁸ Third, while there are numerous accounts of Christians being persecuted by Jews, nowhere do we see desecration of Sabbath as one of the motivations. If messianic Jews had abandoned Sabbath observance, this offense would certainly have been considered punishable by stoning.⁶⁹ Finally, we know that Jewish Christians maintained a high degree of faithfulness to traditional Jewish practices because of the conflict

⁶⁶ Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 129.

⁶⁷ Matt. 28:1, Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1, John 20:1, Acts 20:7, and 1 Cor. 16:2 González, *A Brief History of Sunday*, 9. The significance of this phrase is debatable, because the Jewish community had traditionally identified the days numerically and used “the sabbath” as a placeholder for “the week.”

⁶⁸ Acts 2:46; 3:1; 13:27, 42, 44; 15:21, 16:13; 17:2; 18:4; 21:27; 22:17-21, as described in Turner, “The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts,” 124-125.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

that ensued on precisely the matter of Torah observance.⁷⁰ If we know that Jewish believers remained observant Jews in most ways, requiring mediation between Jews and Gentiles on this point, it seems unlikely that they would have singled out Sabbath observance as something to give up—particularly since we find no explicit mention of such an exception.⁷¹

The conclusion that the earliest Christians remained Sabbath observant is also logical in light of other historical evidence. First, the pattern of conversion makes this likely. Many Gentile converts to Christianity had previously been the “God-fearers,” mentioned above, who had attached themselves to synagogues and observed many Jewish customs. Judaism was well-known among the nations for its Sabbaths;⁷² because Christianity was closely associated with Judaism from early on, it is natural that even most early Gentile converts would have assumed that Sabbath observance was part of piety. Second, Eusebius mentions two groups of “Ebionites” in Palestine: one that observed the Jewish Sabbath *and* the Lord’s Day, and the other that observed only the Sabbath. While the suggestion gained some traction that the Christian Sunday was introduced by anti-Semites to oppose the Sabbath,⁷³ in light of the evidence presented here, it seems more likely that Christians began to gather on Sunday in part to avoid conflicting with Sabbath observance!⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Acts 15. Peter’s continued observance of Torah is the backdrop to Acts 10:10-16. Turner, “The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts,” 126.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁷² Shemuel Safrai and Menahem Stern, eds., *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 1: 804 and 1150-1151; Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, 49, 56.

⁷³ Samuele Bacciocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1977).

⁷⁴ Richard J. Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 237.

By examining the Gospel passages on Sabbath alongside early Christian observance, we can discover that the Christ-event is not enough to justify ceasing Sabbath observance. In other words, Christianity is not essentially a religion that *avoids* Sabbath observance in the Jewish manner. How can we conclude this from the foregoing evidence? Not because historical example is always equivalent to a logical conclusion or ethical determination, but because the earliest Christians had both an understanding of what Sabbath meant to Jews *and* access to the apostles' earliest interpretations of Jesus's teachings. If they, understanding both the Sabbath and Jesus's teachings on Sabbath, did not believe that being followers of Jesus meant that Sabbath had been superseded, then this is a compelling case. We do not conclude from this that Christians certainly *should* observe a Jewish Sabbath; we merely conclude that the Christ-event alone does not immediately rule it out.

Christianity, a Gentile Religion

The next stage of development in early Christianity helps us understand how Christians have thought about Sabbath observance in a predominantly Gentile Church. Above, we found that Christians were Sabbath-observant as long as most of them were also ethnically Jewish. But as Christianity shifted from being a branch of Judaism to being a predominantly Gentile religion—with Jewish Christians being marginalized, in fact—we find that Christian attitudes toward Sabbath becomes evidence of this troubled relationship.

To paint a clearer picture of Christianity's shift from mainly Jewish to mainly Gentile, it is helpful to recognize that the tension concerns not merely two groups, but three. That is, the changes concern not only "Jews" and "Christians," but the shifting relative positions of non-Messianic Jews, Messianic Jews, and Gentile Christians. It had been, of course, predominantly

Jews who first became followers of Jesus, understanding his ministry in the context of Israel's history. These followers of Jesus naturally came into conflict with Jews who viewed Jesus as a false Messiah. Between these two groups, the contest was not about whether Judaism should be abandoned—far from it—but about who had the more faithful interpretation of the story of Israel: was Jesus its culmination, or not?⁷⁵ But then tension arose in another direction. As the ministry of Jesus was progressively shown to pertain to Gentiles as well, a new debate concerned *just how much* of the story of Israel one needed to adopt in order to receive Jesus as the Messiah. While Jewish Christians were insisting, against non-Messianic Jews, that Jesus *was* the culmination of the Jewish story, they did not want it to be lost on Gentile Christians that Jesus was the culmination of the *Jewish* story. Thus the early Church, while it was still headed by Jews, found itself torn between non-Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians. While leaders like Peter and James could find reasons to fellowship with both of these groups, it would prove impossible to sustain strong connections to both at the same time.

While the rift was not complete during the first century, we can already see evidence in the New Testament that the balance was shifting in favor of Gentiles. It is unsurprising that the early Jewish believers should have been willing to include non-Jews, as first-century Judaism was already somewhat open to non-Jewish converts, and Jesus's ministry had stretched this precedent even farther.⁷⁶ But Christianity took a decisive turn toward Gentiles when the "Jerusalem Council" of Acts 15 determined that conversion to Christ did not need to entail

⁷⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2006), 302.

⁷⁶ Jesus had also stretched this precedent by beginning his ministry in the ethnically diverse region of Galilee (Matthew 4), treating Samaritans with more than the usual respect (Luke 10 and John 4), healing a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15; Mark 7), and even ministering to soldiers of the occupying Roman army (Luke 3; Matthew 8; Luke 7). On the missionary activity of pre-Christian Judaism, see Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, 153.

conversion to Judaism. Pressure to reconsider Christians' loyalties also mounted as Jewish followers of Jesus began to endure persecution at the hands of other Jews. Finally, Paul's missionary journeys around the Mediterranean brought him into contact with Gentiles in areas where it was the Gentiles, not the Jews, who were the dominant people group. A question of identity thus features prominently in many of the Pauline epistles: what is the relative importance of belonging to Israel and belonging to Christ? Paul consistently makes adherence to Christ more important than ethnic Judaism. In light of all this, it is easy to understand how, when the Christian Church had to choose between maintaining ties with non-believing Jews and building ties with prospective Gentile converts, the appeal to the Gentiles was winning.

External conditions also favored the shift toward Gentile dominance of Christianity. While the Palestinian and Jewish origins of the sect had originally made Jerusalem the flagship Christian community, the impoverishment of the Jerusalem church (the cause of which is debated) lessened its prestige. The destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. hastened the dispersal and weakening of the Palestinian Jewish Church. In the following decades, Christians were increasingly expelled from synagogues, which meant not only that Christianity was becoming less and less closely associated with Judaism, but also that the Jewish Christians were losing much of their claim to leadership within the Christian world. At the same time, the conversion of Gentiles to Christianity was gaining speed. Soon Gentile Christians were dominant in both culture and in numbers.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways*, 309-313.

These conditions make sense of the fact that from quite early the Gentile Church seems not to have observed Sabbath.⁷⁸ In the Roman world outside Palestine, Sunday was not considered a day of rest, and so it appears that Gentile Christians worked on Sunday just as their pagan neighbors did. Because more converts came from the servant class, it is highly unlikely that Christians would have been able to argue for a day of rest, when literal Sabbath observance was not a heavily stressed aspect of Christian piety. Christians, who had previously met to worship Jesus on the evening *before* Sunday, seem to have made the shift to meeting early on Sunday morning, possibly for the same reason: servants would have been less likely to be able to attend meetings in the evenings.⁷⁹ In short, Gentile Christians throughout the Roman world would not have been able to observe both Sabbath and Sunday; Sunday was the obvious choice.

Now that Christianity was coming to be dominated by Gentiles, Christian rhetoric began to crop up that was anti-Jewish, including some statements leveled against the Sabbath specifically. Ignatius's letter to the Magnesians prohibits Christians from observing Jewish practices in general and the Sabbath in particular. Ignatius places "sabbatizing" in opposition to "living according to the Lord's Day," as if a Christian must choose between them—and, because the Christian believes in the Resurrection, the clear choice must be the Lord's Day.⁸⁰ The Epistle of Barnabas condemns literal Sabbath observance in the manner of the Jews, which can only be false religion.⁸¹ Justin Martyr, in his *Dialogue with Trypho, the Jew*, sees the requirements of the

⁷⁸ Morna Hooker sees Gentile Christians as a separate community from Jews from quite early on. Hooker, *Continuity and Discontinuity*.

⁷⁹ González, *A Brief History of Sunday*, 20-21.

⁸⁰ *Magn.* 8-10, cited in Richard J. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church" in Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 260.

⁸¹ *Ep. Barn.* 15, in Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church," 262-264.

Mosaic law, such as circumcision and Sabbath, as punitive, given to the Jews because of their hardness of heart. Justin is unimpressed by Trypho's Sabbath observance, because "the new law requires you to keep perpetual sabbath, and you, because you are idle for one day, suppose you are pious."⁸²

What we have by now seen is that where Messianic Jews had once acted as the gatekeepers to Christianity, by the early second century, they had dwindled in prominence and were in danger of becoming a remnant forgotten by the majority Gentile Christians. No longer understood primarily within the context of Judaism, the Christian Gospel increasingly seemed not to need the Sabbath.

The burgeoning Christian religion was not to be quite permitted to abandon its Hebrew origins, however. The Hebrew Scriptures remained an essential part of the Christian canon. Marcion, the lay leader from Pontus who wished to excise all Jewish elements from the Gospel and all Jewish texts from the Christian Scriptures, was excommunicated from the Church of Rome in 144 and declared a heretic. Even Justin Martyr, who had little patience for Jews who persisted unconverted, must still make his arguments for Christ on the basis of the Hebrew Scriptures. Through the influence of St. Augustine, the Ten Commandments, to which Jesus himself had referred, remained as a central part of Christian ethics, and the Sabbath commandment was among them.⁸³ How Christians would reckon with this ongoing legacy is the subject of the following section.

⁸² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, the Jew*, 12:3. On Jewish idleness, see also the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 380), canon 16; Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church," 267.

⁸³ Richard J. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Medieval Church in the West," in Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 300.

The Transition to Sunday as Sabbath

Throughout these early centuries, it was assumed that anyone who was Sabbath-observant observed it on the *last* day of the week. While both Jewish and Gentile Christians met on Sunday to commemorate Jesus’s Resurrection, this gathering was in no way seen as a “Christian Sabbath.” By the late modern era, however, as is well known, Christians who spoke zealously of Sabbath observance—particularly in the English-speaking world—were almost always speaking of a range of practices that took place on Sunday. This development, which took over a millennium, occurred incrementally through an accretion of historical circumstances and theological reasoning, to which we now turn.

One of the first theological moves Christians made around Sabbath was the shift to various kinds of spiritual interpretation. As we saw previously, Christians had determined that they could not reject the Hebrew Scriptures outright. But because so much of the Torah was focused on aspects of Mosaic law, which had been relativized by Jesus’s ministry and was particularly considered passé among Gentile Christians, the texts had to be received somehow other than literally. Drawing on rabbinic tradition, Jewish mysticism, and Platonic thought, a tradition developed of interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures as having layer upon layer of symbolic meaning—often, to the total abandonment of the literal or historical meaning.

One of the chief themes of Christian spiritual interpretations of Sabbath is the cessation, not from work, but from sin. Irenaeus interpreted “servile work,” from which Jews were supposed to cease, and made it equivalent to “sin.”⁸⁴ He says that “he will not be commanded to leave idle one day of rest, who is constantly keeping sabbath, that is, giving homage to God in

⁸⁴ *Adv. Haer.* 4:8:2, in Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Medieval Church in the West,” 308 note 27.

the temple of God, which is man's body, and at all times doing the works of justice."⁸⁵ Justin Martyr calls repentance from perjury, theft, and adultery the "sweet and true sabbath of God."⁸⁶ Ptolemaeus the Valentinian said that Jesus "wants us to keep the Sabbath; for he wishes us to be idle with reference to evil actions."⁸⁷ Pseudo-Barnabas writes of true Sabbath observance as the holy living that will be possible in eternity.⁸⁸ It was through St. Augustine that an interpretation of this kind rose to perpetual prominence in the catholic church. The famous opening line of his *Confessions*—"our hearts are restless until they rest in thee"—points to "what might be called the psychological Sabbath,"⁸⁹ the idea that "our Sabbath is in the heart." While Augustine used the language of rest and Sabbath with many shades of meaning, he was in good patristic company in his teaching that Sabbath keeping means ceasing from sin, not from work.

Another spiritual interpretation of the Sabbath was to see it as referring ultimately to eschatological rest, the conclusion of the "world week" prefigured in creation. As we saw above, the Epistle of Barnabas sees the true Christian Sabbath as the eschaton, at which point—and not before then—believers who have been made holy will be able to honor the Sabbath. Origen equates the six creative days to the whole length of the world's duration, after which will come

⁸⁵ *Epideixis* 96, in Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church," 266.

⁸⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 12:3, in Andrew T. Lincoln, "From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," in Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 395.

⁸⁷ Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church," 266. In Epiphanius, *Pan.* 33:3:5:11-13.

⁸⁸ *Ep. Barn.*, 15. Cf. Bauckham's discussion of Pseudo-Barnabas in "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church," 264.

⁸⁹ Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Medieval Church in the West," 301.

the Sabbath, during which “all those will keep festival with God who have done all *their* works in *their* six days.”⁹⁰ Many other early Christian writers take this approach.⁹¹

While the early writers who spoke of an eschatological Sabbath were not attempting to equate Sunday with the Jewish Sabbath, the eschatological interpretation of Sabbath is where we begin to see the two days (Sabbath and the Lord’s Day) beginning to converge thematically. The Sabbath had always represented the seventh day of creation, and in apocalyptic literature it had come to symbolize the final rest of God in eternity, in which humans would share.⁹² As for Sunday, or the “eighth day,” Christians had already come to think of the Resurrection as the first day of the new creation, and through contact with Gnostic strains of thought, the eighth day of the week had picked up further eschatological meaning. Pseudo-Barnabas draws on these preexisting meanings of both the Sabbath *and* the Lord’s Day and brings them together. In speaking of the end of time, he hardly differentiates between the two metaphors.⁹³ Clement of Alexandria brings the Gnostic theme of the ogdoad together with the eschatological Sabbath to speak of the cosmos’s rest.⁹⁴ St. Augustine speaks of the eschatological Sabbath as the eternal Lord’s Day.⁹⁵ While the eschatological theme sees Sabbath and Sunday filling the same eschatological function, still, in none of these writings is Sunday worship seen as a direct *replacement* for the weekly Sabbath.

⁹⁰ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6:61.

⁹¹ Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,” 297 n 201 and 202.

⁹² *Genesis Rabba*, 17, 5, in Abraham J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 262; Al Nakawa, *Menorat ha-Maor*, ed. Enelow, II, 182, cited in Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 19.

⁹³ *Ep. Barn.* 15.

⁹⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 63.

⁹⁵ *Civitas Dei* XII.30; *Epistula* 55:9:17.

Richard Bauckham observes that from the fourth century to the 9th century and beyond, a disconnect existed between the theology of Sabbath and the practice of Sunday. While Augustine’s spiritualized Sabbath remained the chief theological interpretation, in practice, Sunday began to be enforced as a cessation of “servile labor.” Sunday leisure and widespread churchgoing became possible when Constantine made Sunday a day of rest in 321. He probably did not do this for Christian reasons, as no theologian of the time seems to have thought physical rest was a necessary part of Christian piety. But in response to this change, the Church saw an opportunity to educate and occupy the masses, and as Sabbatarian legislation multiplied, analogies between Sunday and the Old Testament Sabbath began to be improvised retroactively. Isidore of Seville (d. 636) compared Sabbath and the Lord’s Day in a manner that would become the precedent for the next two centuries. The ninth-century monk Rabanus Maurus appears to be the first to claim that “the holy doctors of the Church decreed that all the glory of the Jewish Sabbath-observance should be transferred to [the Lord’s Day].”⁹⁶ It was not until the twelfth century that someone (Peter Comestor) *directly* interpreted the fourth commandment to require Christian observance of Sunday.⁹⁷

St. Thomas Aquinas demonstrates two interpretive moves that justify the shift that had taken place, and which become the precedent for Sunday theology into the modern period. The first is to distinguish between moral and ceremonial laws, paving the way for Christians to hold to each category differently. For Thomas, Sabbath is both moral, to the extent that everyone must set apart *some* time for worshipful rest, and ceremonial, in that seventh-day Sabbath observance signified the first creation. Only the ceremonial aspect of the commandment had to be updated,

⁹⁶ *Homily* 41, cited in Bauckham, “Sunday and Sabbath in the Medieval Church in the West,” 304.

⁹⁷ Bauckham, “Sunday and Sabbath in the Medieval Church in the West,” 302-304.

which is why, for Christians, *new* creation could be signified by Sunday observance.⁹⁸ The second interpretive move is to consider the Decalogue to be God's revelation of natural law. This explained why the moral aspect of the commandment was not only permissible but in fact binding for Christians.⁹⁹

The Reformation did not drastically alter Christians' interpretation of the Sabbath. Luther and Calvin both built on the scholastic foundation by interpreting the Decalogue as God's revelation of natural law and by distinguishing between moral and ceremonial laws. According to both, the natural law enjoined that *some* time should be reserved for rest for worship, and the choice of Sunday was not inherently important. It was a *fitting* choice, however, either because it rejected Jewish traditions or because Jesus had been resurrected on Sunday. What made Sunday observance not merely optional for Christians, however, was that it had been selected by governing authorities as the most convenient time for corporate worship. It was thus the appropriate time for observing the natural law component of the commandment. If the Reformation can be said to have brought about any significant change in Christians' interpretation of the Sabbath, it is in the variety of approaches Protestants began to take in interpreting the text. Some Zwinglians, for instance, took their dependence on Scripture so seriously that they reverted to original Jewish observance of Sabbath.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., 306.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 304-307.

¹⁰⁰ González, *A Brief History of Sunday*, 100-111.

Sunday Sabbatarianism

The strongest movements toward Sunday sabbatarianism arose in the English-speaking world. While the reasons for this are complex, Justo Gonzalez observes that it was uniquely possible for speakers of English to think of Sunday *as* the Sabbath—in fact to refer directly to Sunday as “the Sabbath” on a regular basis. The Latinate languages of Europe had adopted names for Saturday and Sunday that meant, respectively, Sabbath and the Lord’s Day (in Spanish, for instance, they are *sábado* and *domingo*). It would have been nonsensical for Sunday to begin to be called “the Sabbath” in non-Germanic languages, because that would have straightforwardly conflicted with the name of Saturday.¹⁰¹ English-speakers, by contrast, could read the Decalogue, hear strong injunctions to honor the Sabbath, think immediately of the Christian Sunday, and set zealously to work implementing Sabbath laws. With such a direct transfer taken for granted, they hardly even needed to confront the question of what, if anything, had changed between the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai and the Christian church.

This shift in terminology, first attested in the early sixteenth century, coincided with the return of exiled Protestants from Calvinist countries to make possible a new brand of English sabbatarianism. At first, sabbatarianism was an impulse safely within the bounds of episcopal Anglicanism, subject only to controversy regarding *why* Sunday was the proper Christian Sabbath. In the early sixteenth century, however, public opinion came strongly to link sabbatarianism with Puritanism and Presbyterianism. In 1644, Puritans had gained enough power in Parliament that they passed legislation requiring strict observance of the Sunday Sabbath by calling all trade, “worldly labours,” and even sports and pastimes to a halt. In the “Directory”

¹⁰¹ González, *A Brief History of Sunday*, 14-17, 117-118.

that accompanied the laws, Parliament outlined what people should be doing instead: attending church (and *not* arriving late or leaving early!), private prayer and self-evaluation, gathering as a family to discuss the sermon, and in any remaining time, caring for the poor and sick. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, similarly, specifies that Sunday should be observed by “spending the whole time in public and private exercise of God’s worship, except so much as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy.” The idea of rest is conspicuously absent from these instructions. In fact, the Sabbath is “profaned” by “idleness.”¹⁰² It is this kind of Sabbath that Puritan colonists brought to America, complete with all-day church services, hours-long sermons, and a “tithingman” who could poke those who nodded off during them.¹⁰³ The Victorian Sunday became widely known as a dreary time when all forms of recreation and amusement were forbidden.¹⁰⁴

The element of economic justice, which has dropped out of our discussion for some time, eventually returned to prominence during a particularly activist era of English sabbatarianism. Evangelicalism in the tide of the Second Great Awakening uniquely combined social justice concerns with Sabbath observance. We can see this project embodied in the work of Hannah More, who founded hundreds of Sunday schools and whose compelling moral tracts spread among all classes like wildfire. Because of the extent to which she worked for harmony between the classes, More has been sometimes credited with playing a large role in preventing the French Revolution from spreading to England. Today, much of her work is recognized as paternalistic; in 1800, however, her efforts were apparently largely effective. She wrote injunctions to the

¹⁰² *Westminster Shorter Catechism* qq. 60 and 61 (quoted in González, *A Brief History of Sunday*, 126)

¹⁰³ González, *A Brief History of Sunday*, 136-138.

¹⁰⁴ John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 1-3.

wealthy to stop requiring the services of their domestic employees on Sunday, while paying them enough for their six days of work that they could afford the seventh day off. Then, in her wildly popular penny leaflets, she urged the poor to make reverent use of their Sunday “Sabbaths.” For working class children, the Sunday schools she set up were an opportunity, not exactly for rest, but to depart from their weekday labor and receive a basic education. The schools and More’s exhortations to the working class have been criticized as an attempt to keep the poor under control.¹⁰⁵ But despite their possibly checkered motives, these stratagems seem in fact to have had some degree of success. Their combined effect on society was that Sunday did become more widely respected across the classes as a day set apart for worship, acts of mercy, and sobriety—and at the same time, laid the foundation for some parish schools that eventually came under the purview of the state.¹⁰⁶

Many living Americans can remember a version of society-wide Sabbath observance, itself a descendent of English sabbatarianism. The strong role Puritanism played in not only the early history of the United States but also (and perhaps especially) in the reconstructed Christian *memory* of America's origins meant that the Puritan Sabbath could inspire nostalgia among many and serve as a symbol of whether the nation honored God.¹⁰⁷ In the early nineteenth century, all states had laws limiting activities on the Sabbath, and while the expansion of capitalist industry and systems of transportation steadily chipped away at the rights of hourly laborers not to work on Sunday (which women, domestic employees, and slaves had been doing all along), public

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Tomkins, *The Clapham Sect: How Wilberforce’s Circle Transformed Britain* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2010), 75-79.

¹⁰⁶ Ann Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 256.

¹⁰⁷ Alexis McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 34-37.

shifts toward more activity on Sunday often took place only after fraught and long-drawn-out battles.¹⁰⁸ The question of whether Sunday should be for rest, leisure, learning, or culture is deeply embedded in United States history. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, while “blue laws” often remained in place, they became harder to justify as “leisure” activities, now indistinguishable from the “rest” of would-be consumers, demanded the expansion of commercial activities to Sunday. As a result, “between the late nineteenth century and the 1960s, the near complete ban on entertainment, sport, and commerce on Sunday disintegrated.”¹⁰⁹

The Meaning of the Sabbath

It may be supposed, in light of all these earlier forms of observance, that a new Christian argument for Sabbath is either (at best) a call to return to one of these former times or (at worst) entirely superfluous. On the contrary, this work makes a contribution to discourse on Sabbath specifically because of the new time in which we live. In the first place, where most earlier Christian thought on Sabbath arose apart from Jewish thought, I am building on the work of recent decades that reevaluates Christianity’s Jewish roots. In the second place, where earlier Christian sabbatarianisms took for granted a certain cultural hegemony, I now encourage Christians to approach Sabbath knowing that we cannot count on sharing our religious practices with most of our neighbors. We now turn to consider what themes we can retain from historical Christian thought on Sabbath, what we gain from one twentieth-century Jewish thinker, and what Sabbath chiefly means for a people who cannot expect to control the society in which they live.

¹⁰⁸ McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday*, details these. The postal service was a focal point of some of these conflicts (pp. 21 ff.) as was the opening of the Boston Public Library (4).

¹⁰⁹ McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday*, 93.

Let us first name several things that can be retained from Christian history. While I see confusion and limitations in much Christian thought on Sabbath, I do not summarily reject the practical and theological accretions the concept has had attached to it over time. The Church's improvisations throughout history I take to be the heritage of Christians today.¹¹⁰ Besides simply being our story as Christians, many of these developments are theologically profound and spiritually salutary.

First, and most basically, I do not dispute Sunday observance of Sabbath for Christians. While I have shown that Sunday *as Sabbath* is not original, I accept the theological insights that gradually identified sufficient commonalities in meaning between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day that the one can be observed on the other. Furthermore, the historical journey Christians have taken to arrive at Sunday observance of Sabbath cannot—and need not—be swept away. Even if solidarity can be achieved between Christians and Jews around the issue of Sabbath, it must now be done with the recognition that we approach each other with divergent histories, and, perhaps most importantly, conflicting beliefs about the Resurrection of Jesus. Different Sabbath days are an acceptable reminder of this divergence.¹¹¹

Second, while I do not think a literal, Jewish meaning of Sabbath is obsolete, a spiritual interpretation of Sabbath in Christian terms is warranted in addition. This is because Jesus's ministry and teachings did not abolish traditional Sabbath observance, but it did place it in a new light. Jesus's identity as God's anointed one (Messiah) means that the story of Sabbath can now be told with its end in view. Non-Messianic interpretations of Sabbath look *forward* to the

¹¹⁰ On this subject, I take Samuel Wells' *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004) to be instructive regarding the role of Christian history in present Christian identity.

¹¹¹ Jean-Miguel Garrigues, *Le peuple de la première Alliance: Approches chrétiennes du mystère d'Israël* (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 96. Garrigues cautions against premature erasure of division.

Messianic era; if the Messiah has arrived, then the observance of Sabbath as one day each week is valid *relative* to the Messiah himself. I thus welcome interpretations of Sabbath that treat Jesus as its fulfillment, that urge us to look to a final rest in the eschaton, or that insist that we can partake of a perpetual spiritual Sabbath by abiding in Christ. None of these is necessarily exclusive of a once-weekly Sabbath for physical rest.

Having considered what continuity we might wish to maintain with Christian historical interpretations of Sabbath, we turn now to a way in which I will urge us to break from the historical Christian majority. What makes a twenty-first-century look at Sabbath newly fruitful is the invitation to learn from Jewish interpretation of Sabbath. We must do so not only to remedy Christians' historic neglect and demonization of Jewish practice, but also because Christians' cultural hegemony in the West is on the decline. We can learn from the historic Jewish observance of Sabbath, which has more often taken place on the margins of a Christian society. Christians now would do well to make the shift gracefully to practicing our marks of distinctiveness away from the centers of power. As David Novak has observed, "With the demise of the old characterization of Western civilization as Christendom, in either the political or the cultural sense, both Jews and Christians must ask the ancient question, 'How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?'" (Psalms 137:4)¹¹²

Such a transition is not to be undertaken lightly or easily. In the first place, the experience of cultural dominance has allowed Christians to relax our vigilance with regard to faithful Christian existence. Other identities have appeared to coexist easily with Christian commitment, and have in many cases become entangled with Christian identity. Disentangling these

¹¹² David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 9.

commitments is extraordinarily difficult, not least because it can be difficult for Christians who are still comfortable with cultural dominance to see that the entanglement exists at all. In the second place, one of the privileges to which cultural dominance has led is not often recognized as a privilege: the opportunity to splinter into competing factions. The more that dominance within Christianity has also provided access to temporal power, the more tempting it has been for Christian groups to differentiate themselves from each other. As Christian dominance weakens, however, the schisms cannot be instantly healed. Rather, Christian groups are likely to respond independently and competitively to their changing position in society—some fighting for ongoing cultural leadership, some making common cause with forces outside the church, some clinging to privileges, some denouncing the attempt to do so, and in all quarters, some distancing themselves from the others they believe are dragging them down. In the third place, those who are willing to relinquish a specifically Christian cultural dominance are liable to opt, not for consolidating a minority position while bound together as a people, but for dissolving silently into the mainstream. For all these reasons, the prospect of maintaining Christian distinctiveness *outside* of cultural power is a formidable imperative.

In the effort to expand the sources of Christian theological imagination to include Jewish interpretations of the Sabbath, this dissertation turns specifically to Abraham Heschel. Heschel was a Jewish Rabbi and scholar who wrote in the 1950's and '60's, offering philosophical reflections not only to his fellow Jews but to other religious people. His book *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* has become a classic of modern spiritual writing that illuminates the Sabbath in light of rabbinic teaching and Jewish mysticism. His philosophy of Judaism, *God in Search of Man*, also provides insights around the Sabbath that can be instructive for Jews and Christians.

I take several of Heschel's themes surrounding Sabbath to be definitive for this work, as well as a good summary of the central themes this chapter has highlighted so far. The Sabbath Heschel describes is the discipline, first, of saying "no" to certain things: most importantly, the overweening incursions of anxiety, achievement, of "conquering the forces of nature" in "civilization."¹¹³ But Sabbath is not only a practice of abstention. It is also the discipline of saying "yes" to "holiness in time," in which it is possible to imagine eternity.¹¹⁴ The "no" "clears the path" for the "yes" that is an encounter with God.¹¹⁵

Second, this spiritual posture of availability to eternity is not merely spiritual. No true spiritual posture can be *merely* spiritual. It must be supported by practices. "The soul cannot celebrate alone, so the body must be invited to partake in the rejoicing of the Sabbath."¹¹⁶ Heschel, with the ancient Hebrews, sees the practice of Torah as a framework for the spiritual life. He reflects on the "polarity" between the boundaries of the law and the cultivation of the spirit, between regularity and spontaneity, insisting that the two must exist together: "The soul would remain silent if it were not for the summons and reminder of the law."¹¹⁷ The simple act of going to worship, "when done in humility, in simplicity of heart, ... is like a child who, eager to hear a song, spreads out the score before its mother. All the child can do is to open the book."¹¹⁸ While the life of the spirit is indispensable, "the spirit must be fulfilled in the flesh."¹¹⁹

¹¹³ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 15.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-16, 48.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁷ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 343.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 344.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 340.

Third, the Sabbath also offers us a pattern whereby the people of God can live in a relationship—at peace but distinct—with the rest of the world. Heschel warns consistently against bowing to “the idols of technical civilization.”¹²⁰ He also recounts rabbinic stories that caution against disowning the world too strongly: not only is nature God’s creation, but God is not absent from human civilization, either.¹²¹ In contrast to both extremes—bowing to technical civilization or disowning the world—the Sabbath offers a middle way, allowing God’s people to cultivate the earth for six days and rest with eternity in mind for the seventh. It protects a time for particularity as a people, while allowing them to make common cause with all creation during the rest of the time.

Conclusion

This wide-ranging chapter has revealed just how varied the interpretations and practices of Sabbath have been. Each interpretation of Sabbath that has arisen in either Jewish or Christian practice still survives in some form today, which is why it is no surprise that Sabbath observance among Christians is a matter of little agreement and (perhaps partly as a result) low levels of commitment. But here, rather than adjudicating *between* the meanings that have been drawn out of the Sabbath commandment in the past, I wish to affirm a number of simultaneous interpretations. A variety of concurrent meanings is only to be expected from a theme that is central to divine revelation. What we must do, then, is discern what must be adjusted in the Christian interpretation of Sabbath to bring us closer, not only to the Sabbath Jesus gave us, but also to living as the people we are called to be.

¹²⁰ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 28

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 35-41.

In our review of the beginnings of the Sabbath, we have seen a double origin story in Exodus and Deuteronomy. We have seen that the Sabbath commandment says a great deal *both* about Hebrew distinctiveness *and* about the character of God. What this means for Christians is that any adequate respect for the Sabbath must be based in some account of Christians' relationship to Israel. What it means, in addition, is that when we do keep the Sabbath holy, what we are learning and witnessing to is the very character of God.

In our overview of how the Sabbath has been observed by Jews, we have seen that keeping the Sabbath is basically a practical matter of ceasing "servile labor," with the spirit behind the commandment to be explicated in a number of ways. To the extent that we have control over our own economic participation, ceasing work on the Sabbath signifies trust in God rather than our own efforts for provision. To the extent that others depend on us economically, honoring the Sabbath means providing well enough for these others that they not only have their needs for survival met, but their need for rest and refreshment as well. In so doing, we lean even further into God's gracious provision and allow it to extend through us to others. To the extent that the economic activity that marks this-worldly pursuits is simply the water in which we swim, honoring the Sabbath means setting boundaries around the incursions of "technical civilization." Such a boundary not only protects the most vulnerable people, who can be so easily spent to exhaustion by an economy with no margins, but it also protects a space in time for all of us to be able to imagine the values of eternity. We recall that this-worldly values cannot measure everything.

The Christian tradition of Sabbath observance and interpretation has also added a number of layers I believe Christians should retain. We find that the significance of Sabbath goes beyond a day of the week to holiness itself, and to the spiritual discipline of resting in God. What's more,

this Sabbath of holiness and of rest in God is to be ultimately fulfilled when there is no more striving: it is eschatological, the beatific vision, our participation in the eternal rest of God. Christological meanings, too, are central to the Christian interpretation of Sabbath, as Jesus is the one *in whom* Christians have union with God, and the one *through whom* we rest from sin. Finally, even though Sunday was not instituted among Christians as a replacement for the Jewish Sabbath, I think it is appropriate for Christians to see Sabbatical meanings in the day of Christ's Resurrection. This is because the Resurrection brings together the first day of the new creation and the eternal rest of God.

We have also seen some aspects of the Christian tradition of Sabbath that I wish to challenge through this project. First, the Christian Sabbath has often been interpreted explicitly *in contrast to* the Jewish Sabbath, rather than in some form of continuity with it, and has therefore forfeited some of its meaning. This pattern mirrors how Christianity itself has been advanced in hostility toward Judaism, rather than in brotherhood. Second, Christians have often done spiritual interpretation of Sabbath to the exclusion of its literal interpretation and physical observance. This impoverishment of the teaching of Sabbath has left it with little ability to speak to this-worldly issues like social relations and economic ethics. Third, in erasing the difference between how people relate to work and civilization on weekdays and how we relate to them on the Sabbath, Christians have set ourselves up for a perpetual dilemma with regard to our relationship to culture. We have often either affirmed the forces in the world uncritically, rushing headlong into alliances with the centers of power, or we have sensed trouble in the world and fled from it as much as possible. Desert monasticism exploded just as Constantine vaulted Christianity into imperial dominance, and Christians have struggled between these two extremes—dominance and separatism—ever since.

These three critiques of the Christian interpretation of Sabbath will serve as the material for the subsequent three chapters. Chapter Two will look for a constructive way to think about Christians' relationship to Israel that can make sense of Christian Sabbath observance, while neither dismissing nor coopting the Sabbath's Jewish distinctiveness. Chapter Three will examine what Sabbath observance means for Christians as a practical, not merely spiritual, reality. Chapter Four will address the perennial Christian tendency either to embrace this world (and power within it) uncritically or to reject the world as much as possible, offering a reclaimed Sabbath as a way to live faithfully in the world.

CHAPTER TWO

ISRAEL, THE CHURCH, AND THE SABBATH

In the first chapter, we took a broad survey of the concept of Sabbath, from its Hebrew roots to its many Christian adaptations. This survey identified several themes that I believe are at the heart of the way Sabbath-keeping forms people spiritually and theologically. While the Sabbath has clear Hebrew origins, Christians necessarily relate to the Sabbath in their own way because of the coming of Jesus. But this bifurcation of Sabbath experiences presents a problem: if one of the central functions of the Sabbath has been to serve as a sign of Jewish distinctiveness, and Christians are not Jews, is Christian Sabbath observance nonsensical? Is it perhaps even problematic as “religious appropriation”?

This chapter will seek a theological account that adequately treats the relationship between Jews and Christians—or, better, between Israel and the Church—and consider what sense such an account might make of Christian Sabbath observance. First, we will return to examine the minor premise of this argument, that the Sabbath is in fact a marker of Jewish particularity. Second, we will pursue the major premise, that “Christians are not Jews”: is it as simple as that? Third, we will consider what the answers to the first two questions have accomplished toward understanding what the Sabbath can mean for Christians. Additionally, I will focus specifically on the question of whether Christian Sabbath observance amounts to “appropriation” of the Sabbath in a way that disrespects or harms Jews and Judaism. Is there any

chance that, alternatively, Christian Sabbath observance presents an opportunity for solidarity and growth in friendship between Christians and Jews?

Drawing principally from the recent work of Jean-Miguel Garrigues, I develop the claim that Christian Sabbath observance witnesses to the global reach of Israel's own vocation. Whether or not Gentile Christians are harmfully "appropriating" it by observing it depends on whether we remember where it—along with our salvation—came from. It depends on whether we believe that ethnic Israel is still Israel. The verdict to the appropriation question also depends on whether or not the jury believes that the Christ-event is the climax that belongs to the Jewish story.

The Sabbath as a Jewish Distinctive

"More than Jews have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews." This oft-cited observation by Rabbi Ahad Ha'am reflects on the social and spiritual significance of the Sabbath to the Jews *as a people*. Myriad testimonies throughout history, from ancient to modern times, show that Jews have been noted from the outside specifically for their Sabbath-keeping. Internally, too, the practices of Sabbath have created community cohesion, not only by cultivating a common sense of distinctiveness with regard to surrounding peoples, but also because Jews have often remained in tight-knit communities for the very purpose of making Sabbath observance possible.¹²² This is also to say nothing of the spiritual health the Sabbath has doubtless fostered among Jewish people.

¹²² I thank Professor Shira Lander for explaining to me the importance, to Orthodox Jewish communities, of living within a short walking distance of a synagogue. In noting this, however, I do not intend to ignore the extent to which Jews were often forced into ghettos by Christians among whom they have lived.

Simply by recognizing the unique importance of Sabbath-keeping to Jewish communities throughout history, we can come to understand how foolish it would be for Christians to take up a more enthusiastic practice of Sabbath without considering its Jewishness. If the Sabbath has served as spiritual lifeblood and a social lifeline for Jews *precisely by distinguishing them from non-Jews*, it would seem odd for a group of non-Jews to take up the practice. If this group is one that is known for being the main perpetrators of persecution against Jews, it is especially odd. It might even be cruel.

But the Jewishness of the Sabbath is not only a historical and sociological question. If it were, we could simply point to the array of Christian literature that mentions the Sabbath and to the clear historical evidence that Christians have also been honoring something they call the Sabbath. It would show that Christians have a long (if not ancient) social and historical claim to (some kind of) Sabbath as well.

What we are addressing here, however, is the theological question: whether the Sabbath is specifically for Jews. Once we understand this, we can begin to discern whether Christians are also commanded to observe it for some reason. If we find there are clear theological reasons within Christianity for Christians to be observing the Sabbath, then the historical pluralism of Sabbaths observed by Jews and Christians can be abided, despite its potential awkwardness. If not, then it would appear that Christian Sabbath observance is little more than theft from another religious tradition, and the political and cultural awkwardness might as well be seen as prohibitive to a Christian Sabbath.

It is a popular Christian view¹²³ that the Sabbath is a universal commandment, applicable to all God's creation. One reason to believe this is that Exodus 20:11 offers God's rest after creation as the explanation for the Sabbath commandment. The connection between the seven days of creation and the seven days of the week would seem to make the Sabbath commandment universal, because God is the Creator of everyone. As soon as someone recognizes God as the Creator, one would presumably also be bound also to recognize the Sabbath as holy. Furthermore, Exodus 20:11 says that "the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it," suggesting that the obligation to honor the Sabbath has to do with the day itself and less to do with *who* it is to whom God has given the command. The Sabbath simply *is* holy, whether or not one knows it, and as soon as someone learns of its sacredness, one ought to begin treating it so—covenant or no covenant.

A second reason Christians are likely to believe that the Sabbath is a universally applicable commandment, independent of any connection to Israel, is the very fact that it is included in the Decalogue, and Christians have tended to see the Decalogue as universal moral law. The fact that Jesus himself clearly believes that it remains in force in his conversation with the "rich young man" of Matthew 19 and Mark 10 is often cited in support of this universal role of the Decalogue. In Christian ethics, this view of the Decalogue was pioneered by St. Augustine and continued by major Catholic theologians after him, including St. Thomas Aquinas. The Protestant Reformers, including Martin Luther and John Calvin, continued the tradition, seeing no reason to question the categorization of the Decalogue as natural law. With such a deeply ingrained history of seeing the Decalogue as natural law, it is no surprise that Christians have

¹²³ And one I have maintained elsewhere. Abigail Woolley, "'Why Was This Not Given to the Poor?' Art in the Face of Poverty" (master's thesis, Regent College, 2012), 24-27; Woolley, "Art's Claim on Resources: Sabbath Ethics as a Framework for Value," *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 16, no. 1 (June 2017).

found ways to separate the Sabbath from forms of piety proper to Israel. It should also be no surprise that many American Christians continue to support the appearance of the Ten Commandments in public places such as courthouses: when seen this way, the Ten Commandments apply to everyone, regardless of religion.¹²⁴

A third reason Christians may suggest that Sabbath-keeping is a universal law derives from prophetic texts' mention of Sabbath observance by "all the nations." This occurs notably in Isaiah 56, in which God promises to gather in both the exiles of Israel and the foreigners who keep the Sabbath and the covenant. Chapter One addressed these passages briefly, but we will see once again here how they function.

Let us first turn to the argument that the Sabbath is applicable to all because it is a "creation commandment."¹²⁵ We cannot sustain this view on the basis of the Old Testament, for several reasons. First, while Exodus 20 refers to creation when explaining the commandment to keep Sabbath, the Genesis creation narrative makes no move linking God's rest to a perpetual Sabbath, or any aspect of human behavior. The connection is only drawn much later, when God addresses Israel specifically. Second, we should note that Exodus calls the day "a sabbath *to the Lord your God*."¹²⁶ It appears that the day is not merely consecrated in itself, apart from a relationship with God. Rather, in keeping the Sabbath, the people of Israel are recognizing and

¹²⁴ Some have also reasoned that the Ten Commandments should be placed in public places on the grounds that the United States should be considered a Christian nation. That argument is importantly different, because it allows the Ten Commandments to be particular to one religion—one which is thought to be the appropriate authority in the nation—rather than maintaining that the Ten Commandments function as a summary of natural law.

¹²⁵ This term is based on the distinction between "general" and "special calling" in the Dutch Neo-Calvinist tradition. It is useful here because of the specific aspect of the Biblical narrative that is in question. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Making the Best of It: Following Christ in the Real World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 205-215.

¹²⁶ Exod. 20:10. Italics mine.

participating in God's own rest. Even when explained by the days of creation, then, the invitation to join God in rest is predicated on a privileged relationship with God—a relationship sealed by a covenant.

Third, we might then ask: does God not have such a relationship with all the people of the world by virtue of having created them? Indeed, God's relationship with all peoples *does* have a place in Genesis, and that relationship is even sealed by a covenant. But it is not the event of creation which provides the occasion for it or outlines humans' obligations in response. Rather, we find this in the covenant with Noah that is established after the flood. There, God makes a covenant with all peoples, as well as the non-human creation, promising that he will never again destroy the earth with a flood. According to a rabbinic tradition that appears to have been (nascently) in place by the first century A.D. and attested in Acts 15, this covenant also includes a set of laws which had been given to all humanity by the time of Noah.¹²⁷ According to the Noahide laws, *all* peoples are bound by the obligations not to worship idols, not to curse God, to establish courts of justice, not to commit murder, not to commit sexual immorality, not to steal, and not to eat the flesh from a living animal.¹²⁸ Notably, this universal set of laws does *not* include the Sabbath. The Old Testament thus does not support the view that the Sabbath is a commandment universally applicable to all.

¹²⁷ Markus Bockmuehl. "The Noahide Commandments and New Testament Ethics: With Special Reference to Acts 15 and Pauline Halakhah," *Revue Biblique* 102.1 (1995), 80-81. This set of commandments is not attested in Genesis 9 but appears to be gleaned in principle from pre-Sinaitic morality from Genesis 1-11 that was applied to all humans.

¹²⁸ David Berger and Michael Wyschogrod, *Jews and "Jewish Christianity"* (New York: KTAV, 1978) agree the Noahide Covenant is invoked in Acts 15. See also Matthew P. Van Zile, "The Sons of Noah and the Sons of Abraham: The Origins of Noahide Law." *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman period* 48, no.3 (2017): 386–417. Despite disagreement that Noahide Law can be considered natural law per se, Van Zile also sees the concept of Noahide Law attested in Romans 1. David Novak differs by seeing its development somewhat later. Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 27.

We next turn to the second reason for which Christians are likely to consider the Sabbath to be universal: it is in the Decalogue. *Pace* centuries of Christian theology, I believe it is a mistake to consider the Decalogue to be a specific revelation of universal moral law. In the first place, this move takes the Decalogue out of the context in which it was given, which is at the founding of the people of Israel through the law and the covenant at Mt. Sinai. It would seem as if, because the Decalogue stands so prominently in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, Christian theologians realized they could not ignore it. But because the Gentile Church by the time of St. Augustine was so far from the point at which it had considered itself part of Israel, the Decalogue could not be left as “merely” a sign of the Sinai Covenant that established Israel. The Decalogue did appear before Christ, however, so neither could it be understood as specifically Christian. The remaining alternative had to be that it was *natural law*, available to all peoples of the earth. This choice was a mistake. Note that by rejecting the Decalogue as a specific revelation of universal natural law, I am not therefore rejecting the concept of natural law itself or the possibility that natural law appears in Scripture. As I pointed out above, however, the Scriptural precedent to which we should turn for a natural law tradition is not the Decalogue but the Noahide laws.

A reading of the Decalogue as the symbol of the Mosaic Covenant should also frame how we hear Jesus using it in Matthew 19. In the first place, we can see his reference to the Decalogue as reinforcing the fact that Jesus’s ministry is directed primarily to the people of Israel. This is consistent with his statements in Matthew 15:24, that he was sent only to the “lost sheep of Israel,” and Mark 7:26-28, that a Gentile woman, a “dog,” should not expect a share in what was meant for the “children,” the Jews. In the second place, Jesus’s use of the Decalogue reiterates how, in his ministry to Israel, he is not abrogating Torah or the Sinai Covenant. In fact,

he is reinforcing its validity. This is also consistent with Matthew 5:18, in which he declares that “until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.” In the third place, we must recognize that it is specifically with regard to this law and this covenant that Jesus plays his salvific role. As the Jewish Messiah, he saves his people from their transgressions against God’s law, the Torah, and as the Savior of the Gentiles, he grafts people from all the nations into the covenant with Israel. At this point, we can understand why much of Christian tradition would take Jesus’s appeal to the Decalogue as an indication that the Decalogue was not specifically Jewish. For so much of Christian history, Jesus has been (mis)read as rejecting Torah, declaring Judaism to be defunct, and teaching that salvation has nothing to do with Moses. If Jesus encouraged people to keep the Ten Commandments, then, those commandments must *not* be part of the law that has been abrogated. They simply could not be essentially connected to God’s dealings *specifically with Israel*.

Let us take a moment to note what we have accomplished and what we have not. We do not yet know whether Christians do in fact have a claim on the Ten Commandments in general, or the Sabbath in particular. What we *have* discovered is that whenever we claim its authority over us as Christians, what we are doing is claiming to take part specifically *in Israel*.

To address the third argument for the universality of the Sabbath, we turn to the texts in the Old Testament that discuss Sabbath observance by non-Jews. These texts include several places in the Pentateuch where resident aliens among the Israelites are included in both the privileges and obligations of covenant membership;¹²⁹ a prophecy that all the peoples of the earth will stream toward God’s holy mountain and will keep Sabbath;¹³⁰ and the promise that even

¹²⁹ Exod. 12:48-49; 20:10; Lev. 16:29; 19:34; 20:2; 24:22

¹³⁰ Isa. 66:23

eunuchs and foreigners who keep Sabbath will have an honored legacy among God's people.¹³¹ But we cannot avoid noticing that in each of these cases, non-Israelites are observing Sabbath because they have been invited *into* the blessings of Israel. It is never something they were expected to observe by virtue of their original pagan status.

In conclusion to this section, then, we acknowledge that in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Sabbath is a sign of Jewish particularity. It is part of God's covenant with the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai, not part of God's expectations of all humans on the basis of either creation or the Noahide Covenant. And when non-Jews become Sabbath observant, it is by virtue of their sharing *with Israel* in the unique privileges of that people.

Israel and the Church

The question we have been pursuing in this chapter is whether Christian observance of the Jewish Sabbath has any legitimate grounds. If the Sabbath is distinctly Jewish (as I have just argued that it is), and if Christians are not Jews, then there would seem to be no legitimate grounds for Christian observance of the Sabbath. Such practice must be incoherent at best, or harmfully appropriative at worst.

I now turn to scrutinize the major premise of the argument above: Christians are not Jews. If, indeed, the quality that involves Jews in the Sinai Covenant is ethnic or racial, then Gentile Christians would seem to be excluded with no further discussion. The term "Jewish" often implies such a category. But if the classification that involves Jews in the Sinai Covenant is something else, such as God's decisive action to form a new people from a disparate band, then it may still be asked whether Christians have any part in it. To avoid preempting the discussion

¹³¹ Isa. 56:1-8

by the implication that the category by which Jews are involved in the Mosaic Covenant is *ethnically* exclusive, therefore, I will refine the previous conclusion to the following: “The Sabbath is a mark of distinctiveness of the People of Israel, the people formed by the Mosaic Covenant.” Having made this critical refinement, we can now ask a better question: “Is there some way in which the Christian Church rightly claims to be Israel?”

The dominant Christian answer to this question throughout history has been supersessionism: Christians can claim to be Israel because they *replace* the Jews as God’s people. Articulated only after the fellowship between the synagogues and the churches had finally disintegrated, it reflects the vision of a self-satisfied Gentile church that had outgrown its Jewish origins. This model leaned heavily on Scriptures that focused on Jews’ rejection of Jesus, while generally failing to account for God’s promises to bring the people of Israel back from exile, no matter how far they have wandered. Kendall Soulen explains that it took shape in three main forms: 1) economic supersessionism, which holds that God had always intended Israel to be a placeholder for the Church, 2) punitive supersessionism, which holds that God rejected Israel because of its chronic unfaithfulness, and 3) the standard canonical model, in which the story of the Hebrew people in the Old Testament takes a backseat to figural readings that point to Christ and universal salvation.¹³²

Supersessionism has rightly come under critique, especially in the decades since the Holocaust, but we must take careful note of the reasons for this. On one hand, it is appropriate to see a link between theological supersessionism and much Christian anti-Judaism.¹³³ Once this

¹³² Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 28-33.

¹³³ Garrigues, *Le peuple de la première Alliance*, 174; Rosemary Radford Ruether’s *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Antisemitism* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1995) traces a much more detailed history. Her assessment of Christianity is much more devastating than Garrigues’s, however, suggesting that even much of the New Testament is beyond salvage from antisemitism.

link has been identified, it is understandable that much theological ink should be spilt to redress such grievances. But we should be careful not to dismiss a Christian doctrine exclusively because of the evils it has been used to justify. *Abusus non tollit usus*, after all. If the doctrine is a foundational part of Christian teaching, then it must be wrested from the hands of those who would use it for evil, not given up entirely. If it cannot be separated from its evil consequences, however, and if it is still found to be a core part of Christianity, then we cannot but conclude that Christianity itself is evil and give up trying to save it.

But, as we shall see, the doctrine's contribution to anti-Jewish violence is not the only strike against theological supersessionism. In fact, the teaching that God abandoned the people of Israel, whether because this had always been his plan or because the people merited rejection by their infidelity, seems to cast aspersions on God's character, flouting numerous Scriptures that attest to his unfailing love for Israel. This chapter, therefore, treats supersessionism as problematic not mainly because of the harms toward Jews it has allowed and encouraged, but because it arises from a failed reading of Christian Scripture and misrepresents God's character.

As scholars have sought to resolve these problems, numerous attempts at rapprochement have been proposed, which we can only note broadly here. Some define supersessionism so broadly as to be essentially inextricable from catholic Christianity—inherent in claims of Jesus's divinity or Messiahship, for example—with the result that Christianity itself must be largely given up as lost.¹³⁴ Others define supersessionism only a bit less broadly, and, while retaining Christianity, are quite willing to dispense (too quickly, in my view) with the authority of the

¹³⁴ Ruether expresses this view, judging that while Jesus's teachings may be acceptable, those of Paul are certainly not. Bruce Marshall, "Israel" in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, ed. James Joseph Buckley and David S. Yeago (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 232, notes that there are such broad definitions of supersessionism that make orthodox Christian teachings like Jesus's divinity or God's trinitarian identity inherently supersessionist.

Church after it parted ways with Judaism.¹³⁵ Yet others, determined to avoid a version of supersessionism that says that the faith of a Jew today is futile, have proposed a “two covenant” model, by which Jesus is the mediator for the Gentiles but is not necessary for the Jews: Jews’ relationship with God is adequately mediated by Torah.¹³⁶ While this latter approach is worth taking seriously and has real ecumenical potential, I judge that it departs too far from the New Testament’s and the Church’s claims about Jesus for orthodox Christians to be able to accept it.¹³⁷

It seems, instead, that any alternative to supersessionism that is viable for Christians must steer a narrow path. It must not only affirm the ongoing validity of God’s covenant with Israel for Jews, but it must also present Jesus as both the gateway to salvation for Gentiles and the Messiah of the Jews.¹³⁸ In insisting on the latter claim as an essential teaching of Christianity, such a model may be more successful than “two covenant” schemes in producing Jewish-Christian dialogue because it would have the chance of retaining a greater number of catholic Christians as part of the conversation. On the other hand, it is likely to be unacceptable to many

¹³⁵ Soulen, who sees the “standard canonical model,” which interprets the Old Testament in light of the New, as supersessionist, fits this category. John Howard Yoder also departs readily from the catholic history of Christianity, seeming to consider the Church essentially fallen after it lost its strong Jewish contingent and became institutionalized by Constantine.

¹³⁶ Jewish theologian Irving Greenberg has proposed a version of a “two covenants” scheme that is impressively generous to Christians. “Judaism and Christianity: Covenants of Redemption,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, 141-158. Yoder also appears open to a model of this kind.

¹³⁷ See Bruce Marshall, “Christ and the Cultures: The Jewish People and Christian Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 89-90.

¹³⁸ Gavin D’Costa also identifies these two requirements as desirable for a Christian theology of Israel. See “The Mystery of Israel: Jews, Hebrew Catholics, Messianic Judaism, the Catholic Church, and the Mosaic Ceremonial Laws,” *Nova et Vetera* 16, no. 3 (2018): 939-977. What I take to be roughly the same set of two criteria had been previously stated by Bruce Marshall, “Christ and Israel: An Unresolved Problem in Catholic Theology” in *The Call of Abraham: Essays on the Election of Israel in Honor of Jon D. Levenson*, ed. Gary A. Anderson and Joel S. Kaminsky (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 232-234.

Jews, except insofar as Jewish scholars can appreciate the tolerant attitude toward Judaism that such a view could engender among Christians.¹³⁹ But, as much for the authenticity of any interfaith rapprochement as for the sake of Christian commitment, the full success of a proposal in the estimation of Jews themselves is not an ultimate criterion for what Christians can affirm. Partial agreement, accompanied by fuller understanding and friendship, may be the best we can hope for in this age.¹⁴⁰

The model developed recently by Jean-Miguel Garrigues seems to meet—with just a few unanswered questions—both of the necessary criteria: Garrigues asserts, with St. Paul, that God still cherishes *all Israel*, and yet he sees Jesus as both the Messiah of the Jews and the Savior of all people. His articulation of how we might hold these two truths together, which could be described as a “fulfillment” model,¹⁴¹ draws ceaselessly from both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. His is not the only articulation of something along these lines,¹⁴² but because of his systematic thoroughness and marked attention to both Old and New Testaments, I will walk through Garrigues’s vision at some length, as he has laid it out in *Le peuple de la première Alliance*.

¹³⁹ David Novak finds such “tolerance” based on a view of the other that the other cannot accept to be insufficient grounds for “authentic dialogue,” although he affirms that each religious community must nonetheless retain its own “phenomenological integrity” and not aim to dissolve into the other through dialogue. Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 14, 16. By contrast, Novak’s delineation of “What to Seek and What to Avoid in Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, 1-6, appears more tolerant of such divergences, as he defines “triumphalism” more narrowly and asks only that “each side must be willing to see the other side in the best possible light from within its own tradition,” since “true dialogue requires the adherents of each tradition to find justification for the other tradition from within his or her own tradition.” (p. 2) That is a good description of the aim of this project.

¹⁴⁰ Bruce Marshall, similarly, affirms that it is possible to learn meaningfully and productively from another religious group while going beyond what they would themselves affirm in order to remain faithful to one’s own epistemic commitments. *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 169-179.

¹⁴¹ D’Costa, “The Mystery of Israel,” 940.

¹⁴² Other recent thinkers who have articulated a “fulfillment” model include D’Costa and, in a modified form, Bruce Marshall.

In the first place, we must understand Israel, as far back as its origin, as something other than an ethnic nation. Garrigues does not think distinct nations and people groups are essentially bad—in fact, he says they were put in place by God and each is governed by its own angel. (Seen this way, to absolutize national or ethnic loyalty is comparable to angelolatry, making too much of something that was only meant to be a servant of God.) But from its beginning, Israel was called to be a different thing entirely. While the other nations had been given angels who mediated their knowledge of God, Israel was God’s own people.¹⁴³ And while other nations consisted of natural bonds of kinship and were driven by their own ability to assert sovereignty, Israel was “not like the other nations.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, they were *not a nation* in the sense that other nations are nations. In calling Abraham to be the father of this new nation, God tore Abraham away from his natural kin. In making him the progenitor of many offspring, God circumvented natural processes and caused Isaac to be miraculously conceived. God then overturned the laws of primogeniture and repeatedly opted to carry on the line through younger sons or second wives. Furthermore, from the time of the founding of the people of Israel at Sinai onward, we can see that non-Hebrews were routinely brought into the covenant people. Already upon leaving Egypt, the people were an ethnically “mixed band,” whom God made into a single people through the covenant.¹⁴⁵ The Torah then provided a means of ushering future foreigners into the covenant—circumcision— which brought new initiates into full membership, complete with its blessings and obligations. Several such non-Hebrews then become exemplary Israelites through their faithfulness. In sum, when we hear that Israel is the “chosen nation,” we must hear

¹⁴³ Garrigues, *Le peuple*, 25-26.

¹⁴⁴ Garrigues, *Le peuple*, 34-35.

¹⁴⁵ Garrigues, *Le peuple*, 32; 133-135.

it as saying that they are a nation *by virtue of being chosen*; they are not a pre-existing nation that God happened to choose. From the beginning, it is God's election that makes them what they are.¹⁴⁶

If it is God's election that *makes* this nation-that-is-not-a-nation, it is the double covenant at Sinai that keeps them. God gave them the first covenant at Sinai, mediated by Moses, with the Decalogue as the sign of that covenant. But this covenant was originally bilateral, and depended on the people's faithful obedience. Before Moses had even brought the covenant down from the mountain, however—by God's foreknowledge, proving the point—the people had already broken it by idolatry. Hence the second edition of the covenant, which depends on God's unilateral act of forgiveness. This second covenant at Sinai contains not only the law itself, but also provisions for seeking God's forgiveness. We should thus see Torah as consisting of two layers: first, the moral requirements of the law themselves, and second, the system of ritual purification and sacrifice, culminating in the fast of Yom Kippur. The provisions for divine pardon in the second movement of Torah reminded the people that, by the terms of Torah itself, they depended ceaselessly on God's forgiveness.¹⁴⁷

The next move in Garrigues' model is to insist that Jesus's mission was *not* to establish a new religion or a different people. Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." He goes on: "Not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."¹⁴⁸ It is thus natural

¹⁴⁶ A similar observation is made by Heschel in *God in Search of Man*, 425-426.

¹⁴⁷ Garrigues, *Le peuple*, 140-141.

¹⁴⁸ Matt. 5:17-18 NRSV

that Jesus should also invoke the Decalogue, which is the sign of the Mosaic Covenant.¹⁴⁹ One might object that Jesus’s disciples, or the Church, seem to be something like a new people—and this would be correct. But note that such concentrated groupings already existed within Israel, such as the Essenes, and these saw themselves not as *rejecting* Israel, but as witnessing to its purest form. The Church, likewise, was a dedicated group of Israelites living out what they believed to be the true meaning of faithful Israel. Even the word for the group Jesus formed—the church, or *ekklesia*—is a Greek translation of the Hebrew *qahal*, which could also be translated as “synagogue.” The group Jesus inaugurated, in other words, referred directly to Israel. Garrigues even makes the case that Peter’s recognition of Jesus just before Yom Kippur positions him as the High Priest in this new *qahal*.¹⁵⁰

If Jesus does not abolish the law, but fulfills it, in what way does he do this? As Garrigues sees it, the distinction between the two phases of the Sinai Covenant is vital here. The first phase, the moral requirements of Torah, has not been abrogated—in fact, it is reaffirmed, because it is precisely for the violations against the first covenant that Christ atones (Hebrews 9:15).¹⁵¹ “The revelation and the acceptance of the law are the required path for every person who wishes to benefit knowingly from the universal salvation in Jesus Christ.”¹⁵² But Jesus, through his own death and Resurrection, takes the place of the penitential system that formerly provided a mechanism for Jews to trust God for forgiveness. This connection is drawn not only by Hebrews as cited above, but also by the central use of the Name of God by the High Priest at

¹⁴⁹ Matt. 19:16-22

¹⁵⁰ Garrigues, *Le peuple*, 38-42.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 143, citing Heb. 9:15

¹⁵² Ibid. Translation mine.

Yom Kippur. As Jews have always known, it is when the Name of God is invoked that God forgives sins. Jesus himself *is* the Name of God.¹⁵³

Followers of Jesus, then, are part of Israel. Those who were part of Israel already do not cease to belong to Israel when they accept Jesus, but they do participate in the covenant in a new way. They are freed from the ritual requirements of the law, not because the law has been declared invalid, but because its requirements have been finally fulfilled in Jesus.¹⁵⁴ Gentiles who belong to Jesus, for their part, are “grafted in” to the vine of Israel, like a branch from another tree.¹⁵⁵ Recall that Israel was always a people by virtue of God’s election and faithfulness, *not* because of natural descent, so this grafting is not only possible but is also consistent with Israel’s existing identity. It is especially notable that, for Garrigues, when Gentiles are grafted into Israel through Jesus, they are also made part of the Mosaic Covenant. No, they do not need to continue to abide by the ritual requirements of the law any more than believing Jews do, but for them, as for Jews, it is only in reference to the law that Jesus’s work takes effect. We can see by Jesus’s very death that the law still applies, because only by its terms is the forgiveness he provides required.

In response to this work of Jesus, Jews and Gentile Christians have each faced a characteristic temptation. For Jews, the stumbling block is the opening of the covenant to Gentiles, because this underscores how belonging to God’s People and to the covenant has always been a matter of reliance on grace and forgiveness.¹⁵⁶ For Gentile Christians, the

¹⁵³ Garrigues, *Le peuple*, 140-141, 150, 158.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 267-268.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

temptation is toward presumption, as if they are not dependent on the vine, Israel.¹⁵⁷ They have often thought themselves superior to Israel, as if salvation had come to them first, or as if God has abandoned Israel. Not only have they taken the Gospel out of its Hebrew context, but they have often put Israel through all manner of humiliation and persecution. They have presumed that the Church, or some particular “Christian nation,” can be the fully achieved “Kingdom of God,” leaving behind “all Israel.”¹⁵⁸

So what of “unbelieving Israel”? I have claimed that Garrigues’s model is compelling because it not only retains a role in God’s economy for unbelieving Jews but also shows how Jesus is, nonetheless, the means of their salvation. To see how these both can be true, we must turn to the future. Indeed, Garrigues says, God has “cut off” unbelieving Jews, but this is not to be understood as a permanent rejection. Instead, the part of Israel that has been cut off from the vine has been retained and will finally be “grafted back in.”¹⁵⁹ We might think of their present position as one of having been “laid aside”—much like a tool. Indeed, for God’s purposes of mission to the Gentiles, unbelieving Jews are not the ones God is using now. But God has not discarded them, and He will pick them up again in the end of days, when they will play a decisive role in God’s final victory. In the meantime, the fact that they continue to exist as Israel, unconverted and undissolved, is an important message to Gentile Christians: God’s Kingdom is not yet fully achieved, and we must never rest on our laurels or equate any “Christian society” with the “Kingdom of God.” The “Kingdom of God” will not have been achieved until “all

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 63.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 45-47.

Israel” is saved. The present time we must see as the “time of the nations,” in which Christians’ evangelistic work to the Gentiles must go on.¹⁶⁰

“Unbelieving Israel” may not be God’s present avenue for mission to the world, but its continued piety is by no means in vain. If, as Garrigues insists, Jesus has not declared the law invalid but has simply *fulfilled* it for those who are in Christ, the law retains its original validity for those who continue to approach God through it. For them, the moral requirements are in place as ever. And why should the old avenues for seeking God’s forgiveness, such as Yom Kippur, not still have something like sacramental efficacy for them?¹⁶¹

A veil currently prevents Jews from seeing Jesus as the Resurrected One. When we think of this veil, we should understand it not as a veil of blindness (the old, antisemitic trope) but as a veil like that before the Holy of Holies. This veil has been put in place by God’s own mysterious will and awaits Jesus’s coming in glory. In the meantime, however, there is something Jews *can* see. Just as the ongoing existence of unbelieving Israel is an important witness to Gentile Christians, Gentile Christians offer a corresponding witness to Jews. This witness is “the sign of Jonah,” in the sense that the “sign of Jonah” refers to the conversion of pagans to God. While the “sign of Jonah,” inasmuch as it refers to the Resurrection, has *not* been revealed to Jews, the fact is indisputable that through Jesus, many Gentiles have sought Israel’s God.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 53, 94-95.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 143.

¹⁶² Ibid., 94-95, 129.

A time will come when Jesus will appear in unmistakable glory, and it is by then that “all Israel” will be saved.¹⁶³ Garrigues speaks of Jesus’s first and second comings almost as one event in two parts. The first coming is Jesus’s coming as a servant, humble, and not yet vindicated before all eyes. This first coming has accomplished the work of spiritual justification, the removal of sins, but we must await his second coming before we will see all creation—including our physical bodies, the nations, the cosmos, and *all Israel*—restored to God.¹⁶⁴ At that point, it will be appropriate to speak of the realized Kingdom of God. But until then, Christians share “the hope of Israel,” though it is illuminated for Christians in a way it is not for Jews.¹⁶⁵

Garrigues’s approach marginalizes neither Jews nor Jesus. That is to say, it is neither supersessionist nor content to abandon Christian orthodoxy regarding the central role of Jesus in the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles. Furthermore, his interpretation is a truly Scriptural interpretation, taking into account both Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament at every turn.

I continue to have questions for Garrigues, however. First, will Jews convert spontaneously when God has ended their “hardening”? It seems this must be what Garrigues believes, because by his telling, they will convert before—not after—Jesus’s coming in glory.¹⁶⁶ If this were not the case, I would see no more reason to believe that the Jews would be saved than anyone else who failed to call upon Jesus before the Parousia. (Even allowing universalism to be a valid option, this Parousia-induced conversion would place non-Messianic Israel on the

¹⁶³ Ibid., 103, 129. The order of events as Garrigues reads them is not entirely clear: will Christ be revealed, at which point the Jews will be saved, triggering the release of the “Adversary”? Or does the salvation of the Jews occur before Christ’s final manifestation (as p. 102 seems to indicate)?

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 87-88.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 95.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 103-104.

same footing as all other non-believers, which does not seem to express Garrigues's intent.) This question of what will prompt Jews' conversion needs to be answered more clearly, because otherwise Garrigues' model does not specify why Christians should not devote the bulk of their attention to the conversion of Jews (as some do). Garrigues maintains that as long as Israel remains unconverted, Christians should focus on evangelizing the *pagans*, and he also speaks unequivocally against forced conversions of the Jews, so he is clearly certain that the conversion of the Jews is not Christians' task. Why he is so confident that Christians must simply wait for God to convert the Jews is unclear.

Another question that remains unanswered is what Christians' posture must be toward the moral component of the Torah, now that Jesus has accomplished the penitential aspects. Are Christians still governed by all aspects of the moral Torah, even while we can rest secure, knowing that our failures are covered by Jesus's death? Or is there perhaps a sense in which Jesus's life fulfills the moral requirement of the Torah, while his death fulfills the penitential part? Another way to frame the question would be: when Christians make confession, knowing that Christ already atones for our sins, what sins should we be confessing—offenses against the Decalogue alone, or also the ways we have broken even the more minute requirements of Torah?¹⁶⁷

Finally—which may supply an answer to the preceding question—what role does the Holy Spirit play in the Christian's life? Does the Spirit replace or contrast with the law, as Paul seems to claim in Romans 8? Might the Holy Spirit play a role for Christians similar to that of

¹⁶⁷ Markus Bockmuehl's discussion of the importance of the Noahide commandments for early Christian ethics is relevant here. In this case, the Sabbath would be among commandments that are not essentially required of non-Jews. "The Noahide Commandments and New Testament Ethics: With Special Reference to Acts 15 and Pauline Halakhah," *Revue Biblique* 102, no. 1 (1995): 72–101.

rabbinic tradition for Jews—that of interpretation of Torah? If so, does Torah, the Holy Spirit, or some other norm fill the “third use of the law” in guiding Christian moral action?

Despite these remaining questions, however, Garrigues’s account is satisfactory on the whole. He has narrated a Scriptural and rationally plausible account of how it can be that there is ongoing value in non-Messianic Jewish faith, without making Christ irrelevant to either Gentiles or Jews. Jewish interlocutors will surely object to the claim that they must be “grafted back” into their own vine at some future time through Jesus; but in the meantime, Garrigues’s vision teaches Christians that Jews’ faith and practices are efficacious and deserve to be respected. It inspires humility in Christians with regard to Jews both ancient and contemporary.

To answer the question this chapter has proposed: what it means for the Church to be Israel is that Christians have become part of Israel with Jews. While Jews may keep the Mosaic Covenant as if both its moral and penitential requirements are fully in effect, Christians keep it as if it is fulfilled—we keep it *through Christ*. For Christians to think we have ourselves become the whole of Israel would be presumptuously to claim to be “the root that bears the branch.” But if we fail to call ourselves Israel at all, we will have forgotten that God chose a particular tree (Israel) to bear his fruit. We must therefore carry on the mission of Israel to the nations, recognizing that the part God gives us in this mission is not—nor has it ever been—a matter of entitlement but of grace. We look forward with eagerness to the day when our older brother, the first Israel, will join us in completing God’s mission in the world.

Christians as Sabbath Keepers

In light of Garrigues’s theological model of the relationship between Israel and the Church, we can now reflect on what it means, with regard to that relationship, for Christians to

observe the Sabbath. Several of Garrigues's principles, I believe, can and should be directly applied to Christian Sabbath observance. In each case, the link is possible because of what the first section of this chapter has demonstrated—that the Sabbath is a mark of belonging to the Mosaic Covenant with Israel.

The first principle we glean from Garrigues is that *when Christ ushers Gentiles into a relationship with Israel's God, he makes them part of spiritual Israel. Christ's work for us must therefore be interpreted with reference to the Mosaic Covenant*, not merely the Noahide Covenant or natural law. This makes Sabbath observance intelligible for Christians because it is no longer mysterious or troubling that one of the Ten Commandments should seem distinctly Jewish. We can accept that the Decalogue itself is the summary of the moral Torah and the sign of the Sinai Covenant that made Israel a people before God. We need not go to great lengths to distinguish—as Luther and Calvin did—between aspects of the Decalogue that are universal and aspects that are specifically Jewish. We can simply accept that when we claim that Christ's work is efficacious for us, we are accepting that the framework for its efficacy is provided by the Torah of Israel. A distinctly Jewish commandment such as Sabbath thus applies to us to the same degree as any of the other commandments. When we seek to interpret and apply the Sabbath commandment, we need not go to greater lengths than we would to understand and apply the others.

The second principle is that *Christians must recognize that we occupy a dependent position in relation to the first Israel*. We are the branch that has been grafted into the vine and must therefore never presume to be superior to original Israel or to be the source of our own salvation. It is because of Israel that we have access to God in the first place. What this means

for Christian observance of Sabbath is that we must not presume to think that we have taken over the “true Sabbath” and now know better than Jews what it means.

A third principle is that *while Christians participate in the Sinai Covenant along with Jews, we participate in it as fulfilled*. What this tells us about the Sabbath is that whatever the Sabbath looks like in practice for Christians (which will be discussed later), it must have a double layer of meaning. The first layer of meaning should be learned from the Hebrew Scriptures and even from subsequent Jewish theology. The second layer of meaning should be learned from Christ. Neither of these layers of meaning is expendable: On the one hand, we cannot understand what it means for Christ to fulfil the Sabbath unless we understand the Sabbath itself. Put another way, to immerse ourselves in the Sabbath, which Christ fulfills, is to understand Christ more fully. But on the other hand, it would not be adequate for Christians to keep the Sabbath while exactly sharing non-Messianic Jews’ understanding of it. The Sabbath’s inherent messianic and eschatological resonances simply must, for Christians, mean Christ.

A fourth principle is that *the Sinai Covenant is still in effect for non-Messianic Jews*. Christians need not assume that because God has fulfilled his promises to Israel through Jesus, he does not also fulfill his promises to those who do not recognize Jesus but nonetheless remain faithful to the covenant. When this principle is applied to the Sabbath, we reason that while Christians are justified in keeping Sabbath in a manner that is somewhat different from that of the Jews, Christians must not assume that the Jewish Sabbath has lost its original power and worth. We must assume, rather, that Jewish faithfulness to the Torah, and Sabbath, as God gave it to them remains a gift and a means of learning the character of God. We can even trust that, if we believe God will one day reveal Jesus to the Jews as their Messiah, this nascent promise remains there for them in the Sabbath as they now observe it in love of God. Roman Catholics

pray for Jews on Good Friday, asking that God would uphold Jews in their faithfulness to the covenant. For Jews, this means faithfulness to the ongoing covenant that Moses mediated at Sinai—even if, to Christians, the hidden meaning is Jesus.¹⁶⁸ Christians should affirm that God still meets and forms faithful Jews through the observance of their own Sabbath.

The fifth principle is that *Christians, as part of “spiritual Israel,” share in Israel’s calling to be a blessing to the nations.* What this means for Christian Sabbath practice is not difficult to imagine, particularly since the Sabbath commandment is explicitly extended, as a blessing, to “the alien resident in your towns.” In direct covenantal terms, we can understand “alien” to refer to anyone who is neither Jewish nor Christian. Those who do not have a covenantal relationship with the God of Israel should be able to recognize Christians from the outside as people of justice and mercy, who extend their tents and provide liberally for all who depend on them. On a more practical level, the need for this kind of mercy is extended to those who are “aliens” to our earthly lands and in economic or political poverty. But keep in mind that these “aliens” by earthly or political standards may actually be members of the same covenant, or “Israelites” in the same way Christians are. So extending the benefits of the Sabbath to them is more like extending the benefits of the Sabbath to poorer fellow Israelites than it is to extend our tent to foreigners: it is the minimum.

Christian (Mis-)Appropriation of the Jewish Sabbath?

¹⁶⁸ Garrigues, *Le peuple*, 54.

In the present historical moment, in which many racial and cultural grievances are being examined and attempts at redress are being made, the question of whether Christians risk harmfully appropriating the Sabbath from Jews is a natural one. This question departs somewhat from Christian theological exploration of the relationship between Israel and the Church that I have pursued above, but I believe the question of appropriation is at least suggested by the preceding exploration. This is true not only because of how the Jewish Sabbath has functioned throughout history as a sign of Jewish particularity and a means of cultural cohesion, but also because I have claimed that the Sabbath is a sign of belonging to the Mosaic Covenant—not a “creation commandment” or part of natural law. The Sabbath, by both Jewish and Christian reckoning, has a special relationship to the people of Israel.

Cultural appropriation has been defined as “the taking—from a culture that is not one’s own—of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge.”¹⁶⁹ While the term is most often used to describe instances in which harm is believed to have been done, some authors continue to use it descriptively rather than only with negative evaluative meaning. The word “appropriation” itself contains vestiges of the word “proper”—as in, belonging exclusively. *Proprius* means “one’s own” in Latin. So if something is appropriated, it is moved *toward* belonging in a place where it presumably did not originally belong. Appropriation is not merely taking, but taking something and making it one’s own.

It is not difficult to imagine ways in which appropriation of cultural elements can be harmful.¹⁷⁰ Appropriation might be harmful, for instance, when it takes the form of theft, such as

¹⁶⁹ Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao, eds., *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 1. Citing the Resolution of the Writers Union of Canada approved June 1992.

¹⁷⁰ The following three categories are given by James O. Young and Conrad G. Brunk, eds., *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 5.

when the original owners of an artefact are deprived of it, or—not unlike copyright infringement—when one person or group gets credit or monetary gain from an artistic creation, to the exclusion of the person or group that developed it. Appropriation could also harm by contributing to cultural degradation: perhaps a culture is misrepresented in a piece of entertainment, encouraging outsiders to disrespect members of that culture; perhaps elements of a culture are misrepresented even to insiders, creating confusion, division, shame, or apathy. Finally, appropriation can be harmful to members of the culture of origin by creating “profound offense”—the hurt that results when “a person’s core values and sense of self” are treated with disrespect.¹⁷¹

While it is abundantly clear that appropriation can be harmful, there remain many reasons why condemnation is not clearly in order in every instance. In the first place, permission and mutual respect often accompany the transmission of cultural elements from one group to another. This prevalence of intercultural goodwill and sharing seems to indicate that the mere “taking” or even adoption of things from another culture is not always considered harmful. Some other factors in the taking must be in play before appropriation is mis-appropriation.¹⁷² In the second place, cultural appropriation is one of the major ways multiculturalism develops in a society, along with its concomitant innovations and appreciation for diversity. While an apparently good outcome is not justification for something that is clearly wrong, if two dynamics are necessarily and naturally connected (such as cultural appropriation and multiculturalism) we would be short-

¹⁷¹ Ibid. The concept of “profound offense” was developed by philosopher Joel Feinberg.

¹⁷² Young, *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*, 4.

sided if we lauded one while condemning the other.¹⁷³ In the third place, it seems clear that many cultural elements are sharable. Several nations use the colors red, white, and blue on their flags, for example, and bagpipes of various types are claimed as traditional instruments in cultures ranging from Ireland to Turkey. When one cultural element proliferates in new ways, how are we to determine that it should not be considered similarly “sharable”?¹⁷⁴ In the fourth place, boundaries between groups are often contested, leading to ambiguity around who has the right to represent the group or participate in its customs.¹⁷⁵ Finally, especially with regard to the adoption of religious forms, Young and Brunk note the value of freedom of conscience. How can someone be prevented from adopting a religion, or aspects of a religion, when they believe what it teaches?¹⁷⁶

With regard to the appropriation of religious forms specifically, Brunk and Young have proposed a few clear guidelines. They conclude that the real offense occurs not when outsiders choose to believe something taught by an aboriginal cultural group, but when they go beyond this to represent a teaching or practice of that group without authorization. Sometimes this is done for monetary gain, such as when an outsider to the Lakota people hosts a “sweat lodge” experience for paying guests. But Brunk and Young insist that harm is done simply by designating one’s own practice by the name of the people with whom it originated. Even presuming to call one’s personal practice a “Lakota sweat lodge” is to appropriate wrongfully.

¹⁷³ Ziff, *Borrowed Power*, 5-8. Ziff notes the importance of distinguishing the direction of transfer: from a group with less power to a group with more power (appropriation) or from a group with more power to one with less (assimilation)?

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Young, *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*, 94 ff.

Outsiders cannot and should not be prevented from believing—or even practicing—whatever they truly believe. But unless they have been authorized by the proper members of the culture of origin, they should not claim expertise in those beliefs.¹⁷⁷

With this complex discussion in mind, we can proceed to identify a few potential ways in which Christians could observe Sabbath that would justifiably be accused of harmful cultural appropriation. To begin with what is perhaps the most obvious, Christians should surely not claim the right to represent modern Jews in their understanding of Sabbath. This reflects Young and Brunk’s conclusion that, whatever they believe, outsiders to a group should not pose as representatives or instructors of traditions that they attribute to the culture of origin by name. It also respects the incontrovertible fact that Christians and Jews—however much we can claim to be linked spiritually—today constitute different cultural and religious groups.

Just as clearly, Christians should not presume to correct Jews in their forms of Sabbath observance. To do so would not only be to presume to have mastery and control of others’ practices, in the manner warned against by Said in *Orientalism*,¹⁷⁸ but it would also constitute a failure to recognize the Mosaic Covenant with Israel as ongoingly valid for non-Messianic Jews.

Progressing to more complicated territory, it seems that it would often be unjustified for Gentile Christians to adopt aspects of Jewish ritual observance that developed within Jewish communities after Christianity separated from Judaism. While Israel Yuval has noted extensive mutual influence between Judaism and Christianity throughout the Middle Ages,¹⁷⁹ such a

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 103, 111.

¹⁷⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

¹⁷⁹ Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

practice would very likely have derived specifically from the unique experience of Jews within Christendom, to which Christians have no claim. There may be situations in which such an appropriation could come about as a result of a formative relationship or in some similar situation that amounts to an exchange of blessing. But it seems at least as likely that appropriation of these types of objects and practices would occur in cases where Christians merely seek to add novelty or interest to their practice and turn to Jewish traditions as a viable source. Christians doing this would be at risk of failing to appreciate the significance of the object or practice to Jews, and of underestimating their own obstacles to authentic participation.¹⁸⁰ Either way, an element of Jewish tradition that developed after the Jewish-Christian divide necessarily retains its mark of *otherness* for Christians, and the protocol for any transmission must be discerned with this fact in mind.

We can also identify a few critiques of Christian Sabbath appropriation that would be misguided. Chief among these would be any critique that says Jewish Christians have no right to observe the Sabbath with Messianic overtones. While we know from the New Testament that non-Messianic Jews certainly disputed the interpretation of Judaism that Jesus's disciples offered, there is no doubt that what those disciples offered was in fact an *interpretation of Judaism*. Rather than abandoning their ancestral piety, they insisted they were following it through. Contemporary convention may assume there is no overlap between Jews and Christians, but to accept this division without nuance is to discount the claims of Jewish believers in Jesus that they are also authentically Jewish. As Ziff and Rao have pointed out, it is impossible for third parties to decry something as "appropriation" when the boundaries between who is "in" and

¹⁸⁰ David Novak notes the Christian celebration of Passover *seders* as an example of an inauthentic exchange. Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue*, 22.

who is “out” are essentially contested.¹⁸¹ In this case, it seems clear that—to outside judges, at least—Messianic observation of the Jewish Sabbath must be accepted as a possible expression of Judaism.

Another form of Christian Sabbath observance that cannot be accused of harmful appropriation is Sunday piety itself. Sunday worship originated among Christians specifically as a way to honor Jesus’s Resurrection. As Sunday gradually came to be known as the Christian Sabbath, when there is little warrant for this move in the New Testament and certainly no precedent for such a change within Jewish piety, we can ask whether Christians have wrongfully appropriated the Sabbath from Jews by giving Sunday that name. But by now, Sunday as the Christian Sabbath is so long-standing as to constitute a tradition in its own right. Perhaps it is an instance where appropriation occurred once, and then gave rise to a situation—like that of multiple varieties of bagpipes claimed by different nations, or different kinds of kimchi claimed by Korea and Japan—in which something is simply shared across different cultures.

In addition to things that certainly *are* wrongful appropriation, things that certainly are *not* wrongful appropriation, and other niceties that could be teased out in focus groups, a final category exists: things that can only be arbitrated by God, and which will only be fully understood in the eschaton. Perhaps it is surprising that I suggest that the much-politicized issue of “cultural appropriation” could be of divine concern. But that is indeed what I intend to claim. While the language of cultural appropriation is not contained in the Sinai Covenant, the concepts of blasphemy and idolatry are. When we consider whether Gentile Christians are doing something “profoundly offensive” when they claim to observe the Sabbath, then, we must realize that the issues of blasphemy and idolatry are what are at stake. Is Jesus truly the Jewish Messiah,

¹⁸¹ Ziff, *Borrowed Power*, 3.

such that following him is to be faithful to God's covenant with Israel? And are Gentile Christians made part of Israel through belonging to Jesus? Is Jesus truly God incarnate? If not, Christians are blaspheming against God by saying he is, and committing idolatry by giving him the worship due only to God.

Seen this way, we realize that the question is in fact much larger in scope than a question of Christian appropriation of the Jewish Sabbath. If Jesus is not the Messiah of the Jews, then the entirety of Christianity has been nothing but a wrongful appropriation of Judaism itself. Worse, it is one great blasphemy. If Jesus is the Messiah, on the other hand, then to follow him is simply the fitting development of faithful Jewish piety. And Gentile Christians' claim to belong to Israel is quite correct.

These questions call us back to the choice posed during Jesus's trials. It all rests on one thing: is Jesus the hope of Israel? For the Jews considering what to do with Jesus, there were two alternatives. If the answer was "yes, Jesus is the Messiah," then the fitting response was to follow him—even to worship him, because of how closely he had associated himself with the one God. If the answer was "no, he is not the Messiah," the fitting response was to expunge him and his memory from Israel, because he had associated himself far *too* closely with God. As for outsiders such as religious and cultural scholars attempting to judge when Christians should be censured for appropriation from Judaism, the position they find themselves in is much like that of Pontius Pilate. And the fitting response, like Pilate's, must be: "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." These alternatives bring into sharp relief why it still gives "profound offense" to many Jews even to hear Christians claim that they worship the Messiah of Israel. And yet, since that is the central Christian claim, we can see that the dispute that represents the epitome of religious appropriation will remain unresolved until God's final ruling.

Christian Solidarity with Jews?

Despite the “profound offense” that remains at the heart of the Christian claim to worship the Jewish Messiah, amicable Jewish-Christian dialogue does take place. Because of this, there is perhaps another way Christian Sabbath observance could be perceived. Rather than as an instance of harmful appropriation, could it instead offer an occasion for Jewish-Christian solidarity and collaboration?

My project cannot address this question fully, because it concerns the empirical reality of contemporary Jews’ actual responses. To pursue the question fully would require many interviews with Jewish leaders from a number of traditions and localities. Certainly I would not expect a unanimous response. But Jewish scholars with whom I have spoken so far seem to indicate that there may be a door to Jewish-Christian solidarity around issues related to economic justice and spiritual health. For Jews, one category for discussing these issues is Sabbath observance, but another is *tikkun olam*—repairing the world.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to make sense of Christian observance of the Jewish Sabbath. I have said that, since the Sabbath is specifically a sign of belonging to God’s Sinai Covenant with the People of Israel, any Christian Sabbath observance must first account for the relationship of Christians to Israel. Are Christians part of Israel, or do we worship God simply because Jesus has granted universal access to God?

Jean-Miguel Garrigues’s model for understanding the relationship between the Church and Israel is promising, because it shows how Christians can be understood as *part* of Israel

without having *replaced* Israel. God's ongoing faithfulness to non-Messianic Jews is affirmed, without denying that Jesus is the means of salvation for Jews and Gentiles alike. Along the way, Garrigues models how Christians can speak of the Mosaic Covenant as fulfilled but not obsolete.

Once we have understood Garrigues's theological model for the relationship between the Church and Israel, we can proceed to reason about what this means for a Christian observance of Sabbath. Specifically, we can posit the following: 1) Because the Torah of Israel is the framework by which Christ's work is efficacious for Christians, we need not distinguish between the Sabbath commandment and the other commandments in the Decalogue, as if the Sabbath commandment applies to us less than the other commandments do. 2) Because Christians are soteriologically dependent on Israel, we must recognize that our claim on the Sabbath is also a dependent one. Christian Sabbath observance, until Christ's final revelation to all, is not the authority for all Sabbath observance. 3) Because Christians participate in the Sinai Covenant, but its status for us is that of having been fulfilled, we should expect our observance of the Sabbath to have overtones of Messianic fulfillment. It will have a double layer of meaning and thus cannot be identical to the Jewish Sabbath. 4) Because the Sinai Covenant remains in effect for non-Messianic Jews, albeit in its unfulfilled status, Christians must recognize and respect the ongoing validity of the Jewish Sabbath for Jews. 5) Because Christians share in the vocation of Israel to be a blessing to all the nations, and because the Sabbath explicitly pertains to foreigners, Christian Sabbath observance must include ministry to outsiders—whether this means political outsiders, who are in a vulnerable position as immigrants, or whether it means spiritual outsiders who do not yet take part in a covenantal relationship with Israel's God.

We then turned to examine what these principles might mean for Christians' relationship to contemporary Jews. Indeed, some aspects of Christian Sabbath observance could be

“profoundly offensive” to Jews, but the foundations for this offense will almost certainly go deeper than the Sabbath itself: to Christians’ foundational claim that we worship the Messiah of Israel, who has identified himself as God. If some Christians and Jews can abide with this essential contest, however—knowing it can only be resolved by the God of Israel at the end of days—then we might even dare to hope that the Sabbath could be an opportunity for solidarity between us.

CHAPTER THREE

IS CEASING WORK ACTUALLY WORKS-RIGHTEOUSNESS? ADDRESSING THE OBJECTION TO SABBATH OBSERVANCE AS RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

So far, we have examined what we mean when we speak of the Sabbath, and we have considered what the Sabbath's inherent Jewishness means for Christians. We have said that Christians cannot consider Sabbath to be a *sine qua non* of belonging to the people of God, nor should we claim that its Jewish meanings have been superseded. Rather, by recognizing our soteriological dependence on the people of Israel, we can observe Sabbath humbly as Christians and find in it a pathway to greater solidarity with Jews. Our understanding of Jesus as the fulfillment of Sabbath should be built on the foundation of the Jewish Sabbath—not be seen as a replacement for it.

In this chapter, we turn to address another consideration that cannot be overlooked in a Christian—especially Protestant—context: Is the practice of Sabbath, as many aspects of religious observance have been thought in the past, at heart an attempt by people to merit God's favor? This objection—which implies that Jews, by observing Sabbath and other requirements of Torah, are “under the law” rather than “under grace”—is closely linked to the persistent troubled attitude toward Jews that Christians have exhibited throughout history. Much of the Christian arrogance vis-a-vis Jews has arisen from the idea that the Jews' relationship with God, as governed by Torah, is defunct. The reverse causal relationship is also true: when Christians begin with disdain for the Jewish people, they are more likely to eschew anything that might remind

them of Judaism, such as religious practices. So the two issues of antisemitism and fear of legalism are related—yes; but they are not inseparable. The place of religious practices *as such* in Christian piety is an important theological question in its own right.

I argue that observance of the Sabbath is *highly* compatible with a Christian reliance on God's grace. We can see both why this is the case, and why many have come to believe it is not, when we undertake the two explorations that constitute this chapter. The first looks at the theological meaning of Torah-keeping in the literature of first-century Judaism, with the help of historians and Biblical scholars of recent decades, and finds that Torah-keeping is far more a matter of reliance on grace than the influence of the Reformation would have us believe. In accepting Christ as savior by God's grace, in other words, first-century Jewish Christians faced no stark theological conflict between their faith in Christ and their existing religious practices such as Sabbath. The second exploration looks at Christian philosophical and theological accounts of the tension between the clusters of exteriority/body/action and interiority/soul/faith. I consider several discourses in which the tension between these poles is deemed to be generative, rather than competitive. I glean from theological anthropology, the virtue ethics tradition, liturgical theology, and the sociology of knowledge in the search to understand how exteriority and interiority can be reconciled in Sabbath observance. Against a prevalent line of thinking inspired by Luther, which sees obedient actions as merely *symptomatic* of faith, we will find that practices can be *formative* as well. We will see how a vision of humans as unities of body and soul justifies a robust set of practices—especially the Sabbath—for the growth of faith and virtue.

This chapter does not insist that practices of piety are not sometimes misunderstood or misused, but that they should be welcomed and encouraged as *part* of a multidimensional life of

faith. Practices of piety are *not* an aspect of Judaism that Christians need to abandon; much to the contrary, a Christianity that encourages a practice as theologically rich and spiritually salutary as Sabbath is better equipped to form Christians holistically than one that relies solely on changes of heart.

Keeping Torah: Divine Grace or Human Merit?

A common belief among Christians, particularly evangelical Protestants, is that the Jewish commitment to Torah observance displays a felt need to earn God’s favor by good works. Because a classic feature of Christian orthodoxy has been the teaching that the grace of God, and not our own merit, saves us, the belief that Jewish Torah-keeping is an attempt at “works-righteousness” naturally casts Torah in a negative light for Christians. Any practices related to it, including Sabbath observance, may therefore be held suspect. If such-and-such a practice is part of the Jewish system of meriting God’s favor, we may reason, it cannot be compatible with Christian reliance on God’s grace.

Much of modern Christians’ understanding of Judaism—particularly the first-century Judaism that provides the context for the New Testament—was bequeathed to us by the Protestant Reformers. Martin Luther, especially, inveighed against the human drive to earn God’s salvation by good works. He saw this impulse encouraged by Roman Catholic preachers of his day, and he believed this was the same impulse against which St. Paul had preached in *his* day. He ascribed to the Jews who were Paul’s contemporaries the very spiritual malady he identified among sixteenth-century Catholics: a vain endeavor to earn God’s favor, plagued by

pride and the fear of condemnation.¹⁸² This interpretation by Luther of humans' fundamental spiritual problem gained such ascendancy that, even today, it is common for Protestants to react strongly against both religious rituals and exhortations to great moral efforts. For many, moral and liturgical exertions can mean nothing but rejection of God's grace.¹⁸³

If Luther's understanding of Jewish law was correct, then there is little hope of commending Sabbath observance to Christians.¹⁸⁴ A practice that is deeply embedded in Jewish spiritual identity, a mainstay of Mosaic law, and not strictly reducible to love of God and neighbor can hardly escape the charge of works-righteousness. But if it turns out that Luther is mistaken about the essence of Torah, then Christians must reconsider whether this aspect of Judaism is incompatible with faith in Jesus, after all.

Luther and the Law

Luther refers to law frequently, and this is unsurprising, because he devotes a great deal of attention to the writings of St. Paul, who also writes about the theological place of law. But where Paul speaks of *Torah*, what Luther has in mind—even when he is referring to a Pauline

¹⁸² Martin Luther, "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans" in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961), 20, 26; "The Freedom of a Christian" in *Martin Luther: Selections*, 82; "The Bondage of the Will" in *Martin Luther: Selections*, 203.

¹⁸³ Bockmuehl, "The Noachide Commandments," 75-76.

¹⁸⁴ Luther's own views have become a subject of greater contention in recent decades, due in particular to the rise in prominence of the Finnish school of Luther studies. I am not currently convinced by the Helsinki Circle's arguments, chiefly noting the objection raised by Carl Trueman, "Luther and the Finnish School: Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of the Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 65, no. 2 (2003): 231-244, that their interpretations of Luther's soteriology would distance him from his confessional legacy. Regardless, whether or not Luther himself intended to make the case I am presenting, his heirs have certainly held widely to these views. See for instance, Gerhard O. Forde, "Radical Lutheranism" in *Lutheran Quarterly* (1987): 1-16, or John Piper, *The Future of Justification* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007). H. Richard Niebuhr also reads Paul through Lutheran eyes, as presenting a sharp conflict between divine and human agency, as if the problem Paul is fighting in the New Testament is human attempts at righteousness, with Torah observance a prime instance of this. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 159-168.

passage about Mosaic law—is something more universal: he is interested in “moral law,” which can be natural or revealed. This moral law is in no way the exclusive property of Israel.

Moral law has two clear functions for Luther, and a less explicit “third use of the law” is debated by Luther scholars. The law’s first use is to “bridle civil transgressions,” and is needed for peace and stability in society. This aspect of the law can be applied, to sinner and saint alike, at the discretion of civil authorities. The second use, which is Luther’s principal theological use, is “to reveal and to increase spiritual transgressions.”¹⁸⁵ The commandments of God are operating in this second use when they “show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it.”¹⁸⁶ When a person “has learned through the commandments to recognize his helplessness and is distressed about how he might satisfy the law...then, being truly humbled and reduced to nothing in his own eyes,” he is freed to rely entirely on the gracious promises of God.¹⁸⁷

The third use of the law, which is found clearly in Calvin but only passingly in Luther, is to serve as a positive moral guide for those who have already come under the domain of grace. Luther emphasizes that Christians must realize they are not earning salvation through their own efforts, but they should nonetheless take up gratuitous good works. “Insofar as he is free he does no works, but insofar as he is a servant he does all kinds of works.”¹⁸⁸ These works are done “solely for the purpose of keeping the body under control or of serving one’s neighbor.”¹⁸⁹ The

¹⁸⁵ Martin Luther, “A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians,” in *Martin Luther: Selections*, 144.

¹⁸⁶ Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” 57.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

laws of God can be used as a guide for acts done in this spirit, but the good deeds are done “out of pure liberty and freely.”¹⁹⁰

Note that in Luther’s vision, good deeds can only arise *from* an internal disposition of faith and gratitude; they cannot *create* a disposition. He says that, whether it is sacred robes, holy places, fasts, or good deeds, “it is evident that no external thing has any influence in producing Christian righteousness or freedom, or in producing unrighteousness or servitude.”¹⁹¹ And when there is a link between good character and good works, the movement is always from the interior to the exterior: “Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works....Consequently it is always necessary that the substance or person himself be good before there can be any good works, and that good works follow and proceed from the good person.” He supports this ordering with Jesus’s pronouncement about trees bearing the fruit that befits them.¹⁹² The good deeds are to arise from faith and love; but Luther acknowledges that even when we are reconciled to God, “we are not wholly recreated, and our faith and love are not yet perfect.” How can faith and love be increased, then? The answer, which falls short of explanation, is: “not by external works, but of themselves.”¹⁹³

Although when Luther writes of the law, he is thinking primarily of moral law and its uses, he does also have things to say about Torah. Moral law is universal and plays a role in salvation; not so the law of Moses. “Moses is dead,” he says, and “Not one iota of Moses

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 70.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 54.

¹⁹² Ibid., 69-70, referencing Matt. 7:18.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 69. This unidirectional connection between the condition of the heart and righteous actions is echoed in the Augsburg Confession Art. 6 and 20, and the Westminster Confession Ch. 11.

concerns us.”¹⁹⁴ This is because Jesus has come, and the law, which was merely a “shadow” of the Christ that was to come, has passed away. But Mosaic law is not only obsolete for Christians: it has lost all usefulness to Jews as well, as Luther makes clear in a letter entitled “Against the Sabbatarians.” Taking for granted that the law of Moses cannot endure after the destruction of the temple and the possibility of fulfilling many ceremonial requirements of Torah, Luther says that the law “has lain in ashes for fifteen hundred years, together with priesthood, temple, kingdom, and worship.”¹⁹⁵ God could not have broken his promise to Israel by leaving them bereft so long. Instead, the length of time the Jews have been dispersed from the land, which is unprecedented in Scripture, indicates that the law “is entirely abrogated through the Messiah, not only among us Gentiles, to whom this law of Moses was never issued and commanded and on whom it never was imposed, but also among the true Jews and posterity of David.” God is evidently “not interested in obedience or service to such a law. Otherwise he would never have let it collapse.”¹⁹⁶

But faithful Jews have not given up their allegiance to the Torah—a fact Luther interprets as meaning that their allegiance to the law of any kind (Mosaic or moral) is misguided. He attributes to Jews, both ancient and contemporary, a perpetual reliance on works to earn God’s favor. He calls “the Jews of old” “unyielding, stubborn ceremonialists who like deaf adders are not willing to hear the truth of liberty [Ps. 58:4] but, having no faith, boast of, prescribe, and

¹⁹⁴ Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 124-125, cited in Richard J. Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 313.

¹⁹⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 47, *The Christian in Society IV* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 80

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

insist upon their ceremonies as means of justification.”¹⁹⁷ Of Jews who are his contemporaries, he says that “they are lying when they claim that our Jesus was referring to the law of Moses when he said that the law will not pass away; for, as everyone may read, our Lord Christ is here not at all speaking of circumcision or of the law or ordinance of Moses, but rather is speaking of the Ten Commandments.”¹⁹⁸ The Decalogue is universal and eternal; Torah is abrogated.

What this means for Christians’ understanding of Sabbath is that it is imperative to distinguish between moral law and (Jewish) ceremonial law. For each of the Ten Commandments, according to Luther, there is a component that is universal—revealed natural law—and a component that is ceremonial. This has come about because God gave Moses particular ways for the people of Israel to relate to universal natural law, just as he would give similarly specific points of connection to the leader of any nation. The people of Israel were to recall their own rescue from Egypt as the reason to keep God’s commandments, but we are not to understand from this that God belongs to Israel any more than to any other nation. The commandment to obey parents would apply *specifically* to Israel “so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you,”¹⁹⁹ but the promise could just as easily be adapted to the people of another nation in the form of a promise of stability and prosperity.

Adapting the Sabbath commandment for universal application demands even greater ingenuity from Luther than the other commandments did. In this case, what he deems to be universal is the principle that humans need to cease their labors in order to hear the Word of God. The time for this need not be every *seventh* day, but “on whatever day or at whatever hour

¹⁹⁷ Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” in *Martin Luther: Selections*, 82.

¹⁹⁸ Martin Luther, “Ein Brieff,” in *Luther’s Works* 47:88.

¹⁹⁹ Exod. 20:12 NRSV

God's word is preached."²⁰⁰ Sabbath rest is not to be given to cessation of work itself (that would be "idleness"), but is exclusively for the sake of worship.²⁰¹ The day and time for worship matters not a bit, except where civil and religious authorities have established a norm for practice. Since the Church has established Sunday as the day for Christian worship, Luther's conclusion is that Christians keep the natural law component of the Sabbath commandment by worshiping on Sunday.²⁰²

More important to Luther is the Christian theological meaning of Sabbath observance, which is not restricted to one day. "The spiritual rest which God especially intends in this commandment is 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."²⁰³ This spiritual understanding of Sabbath returns to Luther's central theological insight: we must rely on God alone. "This is what it means to observe the day of rest and keep it holy. It is then that a man ceases to rule his own life, then that he desires nothing for himself, then that nothing disturbs him: God himself leads him."²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ "Ein Briefff," in *Luther's Works* 47:93. In his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther does seem to make a conflicting statement, namely, that Adam would have observed one day in seven as a day of worship even in Eden. *Luther's Works* 1:79-82, This is pointed out by Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition," 335.

²⁰¹ Following in this line of thinking, Calvin and his followers were sometimes very strict about outlining the types of activities that could be pursued on Sunday. People could expend a great deal of effort—such as attending eight hours of religious meetings and going about "works of charity"—but often could not pursue recreation. Luther and his followers often followed this line of thinking in a different direction, concluding that if worship was *not* in progress, there was no harm in returning to business. Sources.

²⁰² *Treatise on Good Works*, in *Luther's Works* 44:72.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

While Luther's reading of "law" set the tone for Protestant theology (and especially popular opinion) since the fifteen hundreds, a growing body of research beginning in the mid-twentieth century has painted a very different picture of Jewish Torah-keeping. In the decades after the Holocaust, when the world had seen the horrors to which antisemitism could give rise, a wave of Christian church leaders, theologians, and Biblical scholars began to wonder whether their own traditions had given Judaism a fair hearing. The times called for a renewed study of Judaism, its history, its theology, its relationship to Christianity, and the ways Christian theology had fostered antisemitism. Could Christian theology do justice to the Jewish people? Or is Christianity essentially anti-Jewish?

While some scholars (generally accepting Luther's reading of Paul) concluded that antisemitism was ingrained in Christianity as deeply as its Pauline roots,²⁰⁵ a movement simultaneously arose that found a much more positive view of Judaism in the pages of the New Testament. Chiefly drawing on historical-critical methods of Biblical study, these scholars approached the texts of the New Testament with the awareness that they were written by people deeply immersed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Along with their authors, most of the New Testament's first hearers were intimately familiar with the Scriptures, and so would understand the gospels and epistles in light of them. Understanding the theological and cultural makeup of first-century Judaism, therefore, was of paramount importance.

Reading the Christian Scriptures as texts written *by* and largely *for* Jews seems to be quite effective in helping Christians see them as something other than a wholesale repudiation of

²⁰⁵ For instance, Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*.

Judaism. In the first place, when late modern readers recognize themselves as outsiders to texts from another time and place, they can see that they need to do more than the ordinary amount of work to enter the imaginative world of the authors to understand them.²⁰⁶ In the second place, when we recognize that there were an array of *Jewish accounts of Judaism* in the first century, and that these were sometimes locked in virulent competition with each other, we can see the polemics in the New Testament in a different light. These need not be taken as rejections of Judaism or even of Torah. Jesus, St. Paul, and others can be seen—and indeed appear to have been understood by their contemporaries—as laying out what they believed to be the truest interpretations of Judaism and Torah.

While E. P. Sanders was not the earliest of these post-War biblical scholars to renew the study of first-century Judaism, it is his contributions in this area that have been the most epoch-altering. He presents evidence that first-century Palestinian Judaism was *not* characterized by vain and fear-filled efforts to earn God’s favor, as many Christians have tended to believe. He says that Christians have received this interpretation of Judaism from Paul, who in fact had a unique interpretation of Judaism. When Paul presents Jesus’s Gospel as the solution to Judaism’s problem of attempting to earn salvation through good works, this is not a view of Judaism that many of his contemporaries would recognize. But the variance in interpretation of Judaism between Paul and his contemporaries is not terribly surprising, Sanders says, because there were already multiple interpretations of Judaism that were current in Paul’s day. Sanders brings these

²⁰⁶ I affirm this without claiming that historical-critical methods, or even readings for authorial intent, are the only way to approach Scripture study. They may not even be the most spiritually fruitful for believing readers. With Origen, however, I affirm that the place to begin is with the literal meaning of the text. I agree with Sr. Mary Margaret Funk, *Lectio Matters: Before the Burning Bush*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), that, for readers of today, the “literal” stage of Origen’s fourfold schema should include any relevant historical information that elucidates the literal meaning of the text.

differences to light, making particular use of the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which had been recently discovered and published.²⁰⁷

According to Sanders, what virtually all Jews—except Paul—held in common was a view of the law that he calls “covenantal nomism.” Rather than using the law to *obtain* God’s favor, they tended to see the law as a sign that they belonged to the people God had *already chosen*. This means that the law was a sign of grace from the beginning. Keeping the law, then, was the way to *remain* within the covenant people and affirm that they believe in God’s faithfulness.²⁰⁸

What Sanders’ studies accomplish for us is that they help us avoid a mischaracterization of the Judaism of Paul’s day. We need not read the New Testament as if first-century Jews were caught in the hamster wheel of “works righteousness,” a view that oversimplifies for us today what Torah-keeping—and all pious actions—can mean. We can hear Paul’s voice as unique among his contemporaries and hear more strongly the Jewish undertones of the Christian Gospel. But if, under Sanders’ influence, we still hear Paul as denigrating his fellow Jews’ faith, we are still left with the conundrum that Paul’s Christianity may be antisemitic or antinomian. We are left wondering how he sees Jesus as fulfilling Torah in a manner that is consistent with the good plan of God that has been in place all along.

N. T. Wright, who is the leading voice today in the quest to read Paul as a Jew (which he and D. G. Dunn dubbed “the New Perspective on Paul”²⁰⁹), helps us answer these questions

²⁰⁷ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

²⁰⁸ This view of the law is not far from what John Calvin had promulgated, but which was overpowered in subsequent Protestant thinking by Luther’s more negative view of Torah. Wright, *Justification*, 71-72.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

where he differs from Sanders slightly but significantly. While he affirms and adopts Sanders' account of first-century "covenantal nomism" and the diversity of Jewish groups, he argues that Paul held much the same view of the law as his contemporaries. Paul is not to blame for today's prevailing misunderstanding of Judaism, he says. Instead, Wright attributes modern Christians' mischaracterization of Torah-keeping as a project of works-righteousness to the popularity of Martin Luther's reading of the law—which takes the concept of law almost entirely out of its Jewish context.

Where Luther gets Paul wrong, says Wright, is chiefly with regard to his understanding of what Paul means by "law." Where Paul speaks of the Jewish Torah, Luther frequently reads the text as if he is speaking of the moral law in general, whether natural or revealed. Much Christian, and especially Protestant, theology has adopted this assumption. What this means is that many Christians think that the central human problem, to which Christianity is the solution, is a problem of guilt: humans cannot live up to God's righteous requirements. Any attempt toward goodness is futile, and the demands of moral perfection should lead an individual to recognize her own helplessness and cast herself on God's grace. As described above, revealing humans' need for God's grace is Luther's second—but most important—use of the law.

Wright insists, to the contrary, that whenever Paul speaks of "law" (*nomos*), he is referring to the Hebrew Torah.²¹⁰ This is important because it guarantees that we will not read a passage such as Galatians 2:16 ("yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ...") as focused on a supposed opposition between interior faith and moral "good works." Rather, since the context is a discussion of Jews joining in table fellowship with Gentiles, the phrase "works of the law" refers to specific markers of ethnic

²¹⁰ Wright, *Justification*, 116.

membership such as circumcision and kosher eating—yes, perhaps even Sabbath keeping. The status of membership in God’s people is not defined by ethnic markers of behavior but by belonging to Christ. While such ethnically-defining “works of the law” are not the basis of vindication, Torah itself is extremely important in Paul’s conceit. It is the entire background against which God is vindicated, the covenant to which God is faithful—and which Jesus, as the “faithful Israelite,” fulfills for all who are “in him.”²¹¹

Wright has shown that Torah itself is not the problem.²¹² To say that it is, would be to cast aspersions on the form of obedience that God asked of Israel. It would imply either that God had intentionally given Israel a faulty form of piety, or that the plan God had hoped would work, actually didn’t.²¹³ It would cast Jesus’s mission merely as an infralapsarian solution to a problem—not only the supposed failure of creation at the Fall, but also the failure of Israel after the covenant with Moses. Wright’s reading of Paul, however, describes Jesus as bringing to completion God’s original plan for Israel and the world. The reason it seemed as if Jesus was going head-to-head with the Jewish leaders was not because he wished to render Judaism obsolete or to declare the Mosaic covenant null and void, but because these leaders had forgotten one particular aspect of their calling as Israel: to be the gateway into God’s grace for the whole world. Their problem was not that they thought they could earn God’s favor by keeping Torah perfectly, but that they had come to believe that they uniquely *deserved* to be God’s chosen people.

²¹¹ Wright, *Justification*, 116-117.

²¹² Torah, meaning the Mosaic Covenant, provides the background against which God’s righteousness is vindicated. The specific phrase “works of Torah,” above, is used in a slightly different way.

²¹³ Wright, *Justification*, 73.

What Paul offers newly is not a rejection of Torah or a repudiation of Judaism, but the announcement that the long-awaited renewal of the covenant has arrived, and that this has taken place in a way that was at once foretold in Scripture *and* quite unexpected. Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, had come to make good on the part *Israel* was to play in God's grand plans for the renewal of the world. In so doing, however, he had also redrawn the lines of belonging to Israel. Union with Christ was now the way all followers of Jesus could come to play an active role, as part of Israel, in God's plan to redeem the world through Israel.

What use is Wright's argument for Christians' understanding of Jewish Torah keeping? In agreement with Sanders' scholarship, it helps us recognize that orthodox Christianity is not in any way anti-Torah. Indeed, many of the first Christians appear to have held together faith in Jesus with most aspects of Torah-keeping, though it had become clearer what purposes Torah did and did not serve for them. But Wright's argument also goes beyond Sanders in helping us see that even Paul did not see Torah-keeping as bound up with the project of trying to earn God's favor. Paul was countering what he saw as a *perversion* of Judaism, not what he saw as Judaism itself.

Covenantal Nomism and the Sabbath

If we understand the law within the framework of "covenantal nomism," then there could be no better example than Sabbath-keeping of Israel's belief that faithfulness to Torah was a matter of grace, and not of earning one's own way to God. This is, first, because of the way the commandment functioned socially to signify belonging. Secondly, it is because of the theological significance behind the commandment itself.

The first indicator that Sabbath-keeping is a matter of grace, and not “works-righteousness,” is that it is one of the most visible markers of belonging to the covenant people. As we saw in Chapter One, both Jews and non-Jews recognized Sabbath observance as a Jewish distinctive. Of all aspects of Torah keeping, the Sabbath functioned most powerfully to underscore how Jews were different from other peoples—and from the Jews’ perspective at least, that God had set them apart for a unique purpose. This ability of Sabbath to mark the Jewish people’s chosenness makes Sabbath an excellent illustration of the “covenantal nomism” view of Torah. If Jews keep Torah more as a sign of belonging to a people already chosen by God’s grace than as a sign of personal faith or as a way each person must earn God’s favor, the Sabbath’s corporate nature is bound to make it one of the most iconic commandments. And indeed, it has functioned in just that way.

The second indicator that not only Torah in general, but Sabbath-keeping in particular, is a matter of grace and not “works” is the nature of the commandment itself. It is defined by the *cessation* of work. And why were the people told to stop working on the Sabbath? Because of who God is and what God has done for them. The day is not meant to render the people entirely passive, but it puts limits around what they do just enough to underscore the fact that they would be nothing without what they receive from God. They have not created themselves; they have not rescued themselves from slavery or inaugurated themselves as a people. Surely they can trust God for sustenance, because they owe their very existence to God.

It is odd that while Martin Luther believed that the spiritual meaning of Sabbath was death to one’s own sense of sufficiency achieved by works, he cannot see this theological principle embedded in Judaism. He ascribes to the most faithful observers of Sabbath the exact

opposite: a reliance on their own deeds to earn God’s favor.²¹⁴ If the commandments of Mosaic Torah signify belonging in a community that *already recognizes its dependence on God’s grace*, then, exactly contrary to trying to merit God’s favor, keeping Sabbath is a way to reaffirm that dependence on grace. It is a way to abide in God.

Faith Alone or Faith and Works?

Now that we have addressed the question of whether the religious practices of Torah are necessarily “works-righteousness”—and concluded that they are not—the second exploration this chapter undertakes is the more direct question of whether religious practices are in fact an integral part of the Christian life. Is it perhaps better to form the Christian life from the inside out, focusing first and foremost on faith? Another way to put the present task is this: we have concluded that to engage in religious practices derived from Torah is not to reject grace. Now, we want to determine whether there are positive Christian theological reasons to undertake religious practices. What I intend to demonstrate is that the spiritually formative nature of bodily practices is deeply rooted in historic Christian teaching, and it has also been fruitfully explored in recent discourses. We will explore how this has been the case in several discourses, each of which suggests reasons that observing the Sabbath is likely to be spiritually salutary for Christians.

Before we begin a tour through several discourses that link spirit/interiority/faith with body/exteriority/action, we will begin by noting two historical influences on Christianity that

²¹⁴ John Calvin, even more explicitly than Luther, believed that the spiritual meaning of Sabbath consists of death to self: he called it mortification. And yet Calvin, too, taught that the spiritual disposition Sabbath was meant to inculcate could be achieved *without* literal Torah observance. Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition,” 315-317.

contribute to the idea, held by many today, that the body is not meaningfully involved in the spiritual life. Then we will turn to the ontology that I see as the orthodox alternative, as well as an anthropology, liturgical theology, ethics, and sociology that correspond to it.

The Matter-Spirit Divide in Christian History

While Christian orthodoxy insists on the proper valuation of bodies—the bodily resurrection, bodily healing, and bodily holiness, for instance—throughout its history it has had to grapple with various movements that would dislodge the physical from spiritual meaning. On the one hand is the idea, with which early Christianity in particular had to contend, that matter itself is evil. On the other hand, there is the vision of reality, which gained ascendancy in the Middle Ages and has never disappeared, that purports to elevate the physical by detaching it from the spiritual. Whether the physical is robbed of the dignity due God’s good creation, or whether it is allowed to break free of its grounding in God’s being—either outlook will make it impossible to celebrate physical actions as part of Christian piety. This section will attempt to place both of these corruptions of Christian teaching in historical perspective. Doing so is useful because it will help us understand why it became so common, particularly among Protestants, to believe that embodied religious practices such as Sabbath observance are not part of Christian faithfulness. Naming the problems and understanding their historical developments should also help us recognize that there is another way.

Gnosticism

The first pitfall, which we can generalize by naming it “Gnosticism,” holds that matter itself is evil. In most conceits, matter itself is the source of sin and corruption and is something

from which we are to be saved. This contrasts sharply with the vision of the earliest Christians, who had inherited their outlook from the Jews. The Hebrew Scriptures are famously rife with stories of earth and blood, war and marriage—and surprisingly devoid of abstract systems of thought. The Scriptures began to lend themselves to allegorical readings through Jewish mystical movements, and then more famously by the Platonist Philo. But this does not mean that Christians or Jews held negative views of the physical world itself. Their teachings always included the creation of the material world by the good God of Scripture.

But as the Christian Gospel encountered the pagan world of the Greeks and Romans, it was laid open to a host of readings that denied the goodness or relevance of the physical world. A set of teachings circulated that are now referred to under the generic term “Gnosticism,” although the usage of this word was never purely descriptive and sometimes gives a false impression that the movements that comprised it were unified. We need to be careful about flinging the word “Gnostic” about too freely or using it to refer to anyone whose views are not as immanentist as is on-trend.²¹⁵

What the ancient groups that we can usefully call “Gnostic” held in common was the belief that the material world had come into being through the actions of a foolish or malevolent demiurge. One group, whose views are accounted for in the *Apocryphon of John*, held that God the Father had emanated a feminine deity (technically, an *aeon*) named Barbelo, and that other *aeons* had resulted from their union. One of these, Sophia, rebelled and tried to create without the help of a male consort. It is her male offspring, named Yaldabaoth, who created the inferior world of matter based on his memories of the divine realm. A second group, led by the teacher Valentinus, ascribed to a similar creation story, in which ineffable fatherhood is the origin of all

²¹⁵ Mark J. Edwards, *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 13.

things, and from whom emanates the feminine spirit Silence. From their coupling spring various emanations, including the *aeon* Sophia. Similar to the *Apocryphon of John*, Sophia rises above her rank and attempts to create without her male consort, Thelema (divine will), and succeeds in producing a malformed offspring, who attempts to reproduce an image of the divine fullness (*pleroma*), which becomes the material creation. Although Sophia repents, a boundary (called *stauros*—the cross) is fixed between the *pleroma* and creation, and she cannot cross it. In her penitence, however, she impregnates the material world with her spirit, which becomes—for a few elect souls who learn the truth—the means of rescue from their imprisonment in matter. As may be apparent, Valentinus’s system has borrowed passages from both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament and elaborated them into a complex cosmogony.

A third influence who is sometimes included under the umbrella of “Gnosticism” is Marcion, who taught more explicitly about the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. His scheme eliminates Sophia as an intermediary in creation, casting a single, short-sighted demiurge as the antithesis of the benevolent higher deity. The demiurge has created the material world. Although nothing material can be redeemed, the higher deity sent his son, Jesus Christ, to save souls *out of* the world. Jesus did not actually come in the flesh, however, and merely *appeared* to the souls he came to save. For our purposes, it is significant that Marcion drew heavily on (select) material from Paul, while excluding portions of Scripture, including the entire Old Testament, that dignify the law of Moses. To him, the Old Testament is all “vain laws and tyrannical impositions which the Gospel came to undo.”²¹⁶

As Christian orthodoxy was codified in the creedal era, the Church denounced the bulk of these Gnostics’ teachings. The creeds affirmed that God the Father was both the creator of the

²¹⁶ Edwards, *Catholicity and Heresy*, 29-30.

world and its redeemer. Jesus had been physically born of a woman, lived a human life within history, and was resurrected bodily. The Hebrew Scriptures were part of God's plan, were authored by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and foretold Jesus's coming.

Gnostic elements of thought have had continuing influence, however. Many Christians continue to believe that salvation by Christ entails salvation *from* the physical world rather than the redemption *of* creation. They envision life after death to be exclusively other-worldly, focusing more on the immortality of the soul than on resurrection of the body. The destiny of Christians is spiritual life in a heavenly realm, detached from creation, rather than ruling with Christ in a renewed creation. This means that the chief calling of Christians during this life is evangelism, for the purpose of saving other *souls* from the world. This view has ethical consequences, in that stewardship of the world and obedient interaction with it become incidental, at best. To Christians who hold this outlook, the material goods of creation, including soil, water, air, plants, and non-human animals, are of little consequence. Even caring for the physical needs of other humans becomes more difficult to justify: medical care or food may be given with little conviction of their value apart from as a tool for evangelism, a means of reaching souls. Those whose professions are devoted to meeting earthly needs, such as medicine or agriculture or construction, thus find little relationship between their livelihood and what they believe is their higher, spiritual calling as Christians.

Gnostic thinking has consequences for worship as well. If the things of this world are of merely passing interest—necessary to sustain us while we wait to be lifted out of them—then physical practices are of little consequence in worship. Worship might intentionally exclude most elements of ritual or symbolism, with sermons occupying the bulk of a service. Art and architecture may be as sparing as possible because these things can only distract. Alternatively,

where material elements of worship are not shunned, they are often treated as if they have only utilitarian value: lacking inherent spiritual meaning, visual and auditory elements of worship are selected for novelty, practicality, or crowd appeal. Because physical aspects of worship are *merely* tools, there can be no objection to them for reasons of quality or theological import. Innovations are welcomed, because they are supposed to be too meaningless to be harmful. Practices associated with tradition, however, are viewed suspiciously because they make pretensions to meaning.

While Gnosticism is not the only thinking contributing to the highly individualistic view of salvation and the Christian life held by many contemporaries, it certainly supports it. If what really concerns God is people's disembodied souls, then physical realities like the congregations in which people worship in or the communities they belong to are merely the setting in which the soul can meet God, and not a primary theological concern. Since corporate bodies are formed largely by material realities—economic exchange, shared meals, mutual service—if the priority is the salvation of the soul and these activities are secondary, then it is easy for the existence of a corporate body to escape the notice of many Christians. We are very likely to be formed through our behaviors and the flow of our goods to belong unreflectively to whatever body (economy and culture) we fall into accidentally, rather than seeing ourselves as members of a body of Christ in any materially real sense.

To those who tend toward Gnosticism, the literal practice of Sabbath by ceasing work appears to make far too much of this-worldly things. Work and rest can have little meaning when the heart is seen to be unaffected by them; a practice that has bearing on our economic participation can seem like a needless distraction; and if the Sabbath is a pattern that is most

powerful when kept by a community *together*, it is likely to chafe against the desire to preserve spiritual autonomy and individual authenticity.

The Independence of Creation

The other pitfall, the belief in the independence of creation, at first glance appears to be the opposite of Gnosticism, because it seeks to elevate the material world. But as it liberates the material from subordination to the spiritual, it also disconnects the material world from what had been the guarantor of its value. While I am using “Gnosticism” to refer to an outlook that was introduced by ancient myths about the world’s beginning and end, the belief in creation’s independence seems to have been given its most important boost in legitimacy by developments in medieval philosophy. While many historical developments contributed to the rise of this belief, I will concentrate here on the cluster of philosophical shifts represented by nominalism, voluntarism, and univocity of being.

Later in the chapter, I will provide more detail about the Platonism-influenced ontology that had prevailed before the late Middle Ages, and we will see better what is at stake in the belief creation’s independence by contrast with the outlook that had dominated before. Here, however, it shall suffice to say that categories of Platonic thought had made it fairly easy for Christians to imagine how individual things and persons participated in much larger realities: how humans all had a share in Adam’s fall and could share in Christ’s redeeming work, how the host of the Eucharist participated in Christ, how physical sacraments conferred grace, and how the clergy participated in the spiritual reality of the Church.

Hans Boersma describes the progressive cultural and philosophical changes that made it possible to imagine creation as independent from spiritual realities, which occurred subtly over

many centuries. Boersma agrees with Yves Congar that the Gregorian reforms of the eleventh century, in expanding the reach of the ecclesial hierarchy, undermined ordinary people's ability to imagine that God and the Church were working seamlessly together. With Henri de Lubac, he links the debate over real presence in the Eucharist, which also began in the eleventh century, with a growing tendency to conceive of physical mysteries and divine realities separately. With Chenu, he finds that the rediscovery of Aristotle in the thirteenth century led to an increased interest in the natural world apart from the supernatural. Again drawing on Congar, he points to fourteenth and fifteenth century debates that began to set the authority of Scripture and the authority of the Church in competition with each other. And with de Lubac, he finds that the Catholic Counter-Reformation went too far in responding to the Reformation when its scholars introduced the concept of "pure nature" and began to question everyone's "natural desire" for God.²¹⁷ These developments laid the foundations for privatizing the supernatural and establishing public and social life on the basis of "goods associated solely with the 'natural' order."²¹⁸

These shifts in medieval thought and culture, then, laid the groundwork for certain subtle developments in philosophy to be decisive. John Duns Scotus introduced the idea of univocity of being, in which all that exists, whether God or creation, must be said to exist in the same way. God is not the ground of being for creation; "being" is a category that is logically prior to God or creation and can thus be predicated of both God and creation. This belief then leads to the idea that, when God lays out moral laws, it is by his *will* and not by the natural harmony with divine reason. What is good is good not because it participates in God's goodness, but because God

²¹⁷ Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Ontology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 65.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

has—rather arbitrarily—decided that it should be so (voluntarism).²¹⁹ Next, it was only natural that, following Duns Scotus’s line of thinking, William of Ockham should conclude that individual members of a class (such as Peter, James, and John) resemble each other merely because God has declared that they should—not because they participate in a common universal, like humanity. The link between individual persons, individual chairs, or individual rabbits, is nothing other than an arbitrary resemblance, for which reason we assign the members of the class the same name (*nomen*). This position is called “nominalism.”²²⁰

Based on this history as I have represented it, located within Roman Catholicism, it may appear as if Protestants have escaped this pitfall of considering creation to be independent from God. Far from it. Because most of the developments Boersma recounted occurred *before* the Reformation, they had already taken deep root in the thought patterns of the late medieval world. This means that when Luther felt a deep disconnect between the practices the Church had enjoined upon him and the grace of God as described in the Scriptures, he was himself suffering under the strain of the disconnect. Works and grace, Church and Scripture, matter and spirit—they were pulling him in opposite directions. And he took his stand with grace, Scripture, and the spirit—rather than challenging the basis for the divide in the first place. Thus the parting of the ways between Protestants and Catholics was partly a result—though not a resolution—of the sacramental divide that had been growing for centuries. Both Luther and Calvin inherited this strained relationship.²²¹

²¹⁹ Ibid., 76-79. I am here representing Boersma’s interpretation of the relationships between these ideas, which are examined in greater detail by others.

²²⁰ Ibid., 79-83.

²²¹ Heiko Augustinus Oberman’s *The Harvest of Medieval Theology and Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) show the extent to which this is true of Luther. As for John Calvin, we can more clearly see the influence of voluntarism, though this does not necessarily mean that Calvin has rejected

These developments—and surely many others²²²—made it possible to conceive of a world in which creation has its own high value apart from any link to the divine. If we think this way, it is possible to imagine that human action *per se* is in competition with divine action (not only rebellious human action). If we undertake moral efforts, our very efforts can be seen as evil rather than good, simply because it is we who are doing them.²²³ If good comes as a result, many Christians feel the need to deny that they have had any agency in it: “I wasn’t me; it was God.” Where humans take the independence of the material world for granted, areas that might appear unspiritual (such as in the workings of the economy) set up their own authority, and idolatry *does* result. But in areas of life that are undeniably spiritual—such as in worship and the spiritual life—physical acts are eradicated, because idolatry is the only thing that it could mean. We lose the ability to anchor the physical in spiritual meaning.

The practice of the Sabbath, for those convinced of creation’s independence, is likely to seem an unnecessary incursion upon domains of life that do not need to be spiritualized. Why should work and rest signify anything beyond themselves? Isn’t each person the best judge of when s/he needs them? Doesn’t the economy have its own laws, which resist theologizing? In setting individuals, time, and the economy free from the dictates of divine patterns like the Sabbath, this outlook would seem to create an added level of freedom—while also removing the shield over our worth that we have through participating in God’s life.

a sacramental ontology. This dual commitment is discussed in Neil Daniel Arner, “Theological Voluntarism and the Natural Law: The Integrated Moral Theories of John Duns Scotus, John Calvin, and Samuel Pufendorf” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012).

²²² Charles Taylor attempts to convey the vast network of historical, cultural, philosophical, and even seismic events that result in changing winds of thought.

²²³ Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 174-175. Herdt sees this conflict as part of Luther’s legacy.

Practices and Piety

In what follows, I lay out several ways in which practices are thought to be positively involved with Christian piety. We have noted a chronic tension between interiority, spirit, and faith, on the one hand, and exteriority, matter, and obedience, on the other. In this section, we are exploring resources for drawing these two clusters back together.

I draw from a range of disciplines, well aware that the diversity of resources here may raise eyebrows. But this selection is on purpose, because the Sabbath belongs to the categories of both ritual and morality, and it operates on both the individual and society. While I do not intend to conflate the findings of the traditions I bring together here—they are in fact quite diverse—I hope nevertheless that they can be mutually reinforcing. Insofar as they make parallel observations, I hope their diversity only serves to underscore the truths they share; where their arenas diverge, I hope they lay the groundwork for us to appreciate the multivalent power of Sabbath practice. In all these areas, work has been done to show how practices are not only beneficial to, but are often inseparable from, piety.

I take the relationship between these areas to be as follows: 1) We must first consider the nature of reality itself: what is the relationship between earthly and heavenly realities? 2) Next, in order to make sense of the role of practices within Christian piety, we must turn to an account of the human person. What kind of creature are humans, such that what we do might be intimately related to who we are? Theological anthropology is the discipline that addresses this question, and I take St. Thomas Aquinas to be the chief authority on the matter. 3) We can then address the question of how we encounter God. God is spirit; do we encounter God, then, with our spirits only? Liturgical theology, drawing on both sacramental ontology and a theological anthropology like that of Thomas's, illuminates how it can be that a spiritual God comes to us in

physical ways. This account also makes it clear that the ways to respond to God in worship also involve both matter and spirit. 4) Another way to respond to God is through virtuous action. The virtue ethics tradition holds practices—and, for that matter, *practice*—to be a vital part of formation in virtue. While not all practice of virtue is bodily (I note how Aquinas sees the potential for virtue in all the human faculties, including the intellect and will), the acquired virtues can be increased by exercise. Even if it does not involve the literal “body,” it often involves obedience before a disposition is formed. That is why I group the practice of virtue—even where it is not physical—with other disciplines that give the material an honored place in Christian piety. 5) So far, each of these explorations has addressed the link between interiority and exteriority that exists within discreet persons, without considering sociality. But since the rise of the social sciences have prompted special interest, in all disciplines, in how people are powerfully formed by and within social groups, we turn to sociology here. I recognize that sociology and metaphysics are sometimes considered to be at odds—both by theologians and by social scientists. But if creation does indeed reflect heavenly realities, then must it not be true that social patterns, too, participate somehow in the divine life?

Earthly and Heavenly Realities: Sacramental Ontology

We have just seen the twin pitfalls of Gnosticism and the belief in creation’s independence, two ways creation and the body can be dislodged from spiritual significance in Christians’ imagination. We have briefly visited the origins of “univocity of being” and nominalism, but we have only hinted at the ontology *from which* they were a departure. This section, which expounds that older vision, will not only serve to clarify what was at stake with

the rising independence of creation from God, but will lay the groundwork for the subsequent discourses that present a Christian vision of harmony between body and soul, matter and spirit.

The term “sacramental ontology” has been coined by Hans Boersma and comes out of his engagement with the *nouvelle theologians* of the early twentieth century. But what it refers to is not a discovery unique to him or a concept hidden in only a few pockets of Christian thought. Rather, the *nouvelle theologians* were doing the work of *ressourcement*, returning to premodern systems of thought in their effort to revitalize the spiritual and sacramental life of the Roman Catholic Church; Boersma sees their insights as a key to how Protestants, too, can revisit the spiritual ills that contributed to the crisis of the Reformation (and were not solved by it). If both Protestants and Catholics can retrace these steps, perhaps both can become more deeply Christian, and draw from the deep wells of our shared past in ecumenical dialog. But since the insights a “sacramental ontology” retrieves are ancient and catholic, I adopt Boersma’s term for it without restricting myself to his account.

Christians have traditionally taught that God’s “being” is of an entirely other kind than the “being” that can be predicated of creation (i.e., there is an ontological difference). As Brad Gregory usefully points out, the foundations of this ontology are discernible across the Scriptures, where God is both intimately involved in creation and “unsearchable,” unattainable, “[dwelling] in approachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see’ (1 Tm 6:16).” God is so radically *other* than creation that, while “there is no ‘outside’ to creation, spatially or temporally,” God is everywhere, but “[no] part of creation [is] independent of God or capable of

existing independently of God.”²²⁴ Similar expressions are contained in the writings of ancient and medieval saints, from Augustine to Anselm to Hildegard.²²⁵

This ontology is most memorably interpreted by St. Thomas Aquinas, in the principle of *analogia entis*, which holds that God’s being and creaturely being are not a single thing, “existence,” that is predicated of both God and creation. Rather, creatures, because created by God, have an imperfect share in God’s being. Finite creaturely existence is of such a comparatively limited sort that it has only an analogous relationship to God’s existence. When we speak of God’s goodness, truth, or beauty, we may be speaking truthfully, but our creaturely language and frame of reference nonetheless limits us to saying such things by analogy.²²⁶

Long before Thomas, however, Christians had imagined physical matter as having a participatory relationship to spiritual realities. As Boersma tells it, early Christians employed Platonic tools of thought because—with some exceptions they were careful to avoid—these categories effectively articulated the view of God and creation they had received from the apostles. For instance, Irenaeus described how all humans were implicated in Adam’s fall, and could also be implicated in Christ’s redeeming work, by drawing on a Platonic concept of unity. Particular members of a group participated in a real relationship with the whole: thus, when Christ becomes the head of the new creation through his Incarnation, he is able to save all who are *in* him. Irenaeus thus introduced the concept of “recapitulation” to Christian orthodoxy. Athanasius carried this work further, describing in various ways how Christ identifies with

²²⁴ Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 30.

²²⁵ Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 30.

²²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia* 7.7; *Summa contra gentiles* I.34; Philip A. Rolnick, “Analogy,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*.

human nature and is thereby able to save humanity. Gregory of Nyssa, too, drew on Platonic categories to articulate the relationship of the Persons of the Trinity. In sum, the possibility of individual humans and individual physical elements to *participate* in heavenly realities, which Platonism helped articulate, is a foundation of many Christian doctrines.²²⁷

By this participatory construction, the ontology, or level of being, of created matter is “sacramental” because it can be seen as symbolic—and more than symbolic—of divine life. According to a nominalist ontology, the created world in general does not have symbolic *or* sacramental meaning. It simply *is*, although there are certain things (words, religious imagery, and so on) that take on symbolic meaning through use. But created things per se do not refer to God, and material things do not necessarily refer to anything spiritual. Now if we see the entire world as symbolic, then it is not only things like words or images that can refer to other things: everything can be a symbol of spiritual realities, as in a metaphor. Most Christians can agree with this when they say that created things “point” to their Creator. But a sacramental ontology goes one step farther: not only do created things *point* to their Creator, but they *participate* in the life of the Creator. As Boersma puts it, “sacraments actually *participate* in the mysterious reality to which they point.”²²⁸ This means that Christians generally saw the physical world as a window to the spiritual world. Things that occurred in the visible world could be seen without great difficulty as symbols of spiritual things, and these symbols did not merely *refer* to the reality they represented. They actually took part in them. This means that when people received the

²²⁷ Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 51.

²²⁸ Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 23.

Eucharist, they imagined they were receiving Christ. When they were baptized, they were truly joined with Christ in his death and Resurrection.

By recovering a sacramental ontology, it becomes possible for us moderns to imagine how observing a concrete practice such as a day of rest can be a *participation* in God's own eschatological rest. It may already be easy to conceive of a day of earthly rest as *symbolic* of God's rest at the completion of creation, but this is likely to fall flat as inspiration for us to practice it: if all the Sabbath does is "refer" to the consummation of the world or our reliance on God's grace conferred through Jesus, why should we not content ourselves with propositional knowledge of the real thing and dispense with the (highly inconvenient) object lesson? If, on the other hand, we see earthly realities as not only referring to, but also *joined* to, heavenly realities, then it can matter a great deal what we take part in. The pattern of the Sabbath, given by God, becomes conceivable as a way in which we are ourselves brought into a way of life that reflects God's.

Body and Soul: Thomas Aquinas's Hylomorphic Structure of the Person:

A view of the human person that is common among Christians is that what is essential about us is our souls, while our bodies are merely a covering, or even a "possession," which can bring nothing but temptation, and which we will shuffle off for good when we die. (We noted something like this above in the discussion of Gnosticism.) This anthropology often accompanies and supports the idea that what distinguishes Christianity from Judaism is an exclusive focus on the state of the heart, while Jewish Torah concerns itself with (comparatively trivial) matters of the body. If such an anthropology were indeed central to Christian teaching, it would be difficult to justify any religious practices—particularly if they call for bodily actions that do not simply

flow spontaneously from the state of the heart. It would be difficult to imagine that the body could be involved in the process of discipleship, an avenue by which a whole person might come to reflect God's holiness.

But such a teaching about human souls and bodies does *not* represent Christian orthodoxy. From the first centuries of the Church, we find the value of the material world and the human body—including the bodily Resurrection of Jesus—defended against heresies. As one expression of an orthodox Christian anthropology, I now turn to St. Thomas Aquinas, who does not hold a level of authority equal to the creeds but whose view of body and soul has been accepted as standard by Roman Catholics and most Protestants. Furthermore, his view corresponds well to the formula of the Incarnation that is given in the Chalcedonian definition, in which Jesus is stated to have assumed all aspects of a human—body and soul.²²⁹ Because of St. Thomas's status as a Doctor of the Church and an ecumenical authority, and because it is impossible to consider all the alternatives, I will accept Thomas's authority for the purposes of this discussion, supplementing his view with others as needed.

The most basic thing that can be said of humans is that they are composed of body and soul. This is in contrast to Plato's view, which held that humans were essentially souls, and that they merely used bodies. As Thomas explained, while the body exists for the sake of the soul and is subordinate to it, the soul is not enough on its own. The human soul is of a kind that it *needs* the body in order to perform its operations. To illustrate the relationship between the soul and body, he draws upon the Aristotelian relationship between form and matter: just as the shape of a wax candle does not need to be attached to the wax by means of something else, so the soul does

²²⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus famously argued along these lines that “what he has not assumed he has not healed,” referring to both soul and body of humans, who need to be wholly redeemed. In *To Cledonius the Priest Against Apollinarius*.

not need anything else to attach it to the body. The relationship is direct: the soul is the body's "form."

While this relationship between body and soul is foundational to many aspects of Thomas's thought, it is perhaps easiest to see the place it has in his epistemology. As Thomas puts it, the soul has various powers, ranging from the highest level—those of the intellect—to the lowest—the vegetative powers that regulate basic physiology. The powers of the senses are somewhere in the middle, comprising the five external senses (hearing, seeing, etc.) and four internal senses. These internal senses, which are common sense, memory, cogitation, and imagination, may seem to a modern reader to be more closely related to the intellect than to the senses. But for Thomas, sense impressions (phantasms) are the main content of these four functions. Even animals use these internal sensory powers, because they must be able to call up the image of a thing (like food) even when they are not present to it. I noted above that the soul is *dependent* on the body: the principal way in which this is true is that the intellect receives all its material from the senses. Even something as apparently interior and intellectual as knowledge is directly related to sense impressions, and while such an observation may seem to be a hallmark of modernity, we can see that St. Thomas took the body seriously enough in the thirteenth century to recognize it as well.

The hylomorphic structure of the human is also foundational to Thomas's explanation of the sacraments. Physical sacraments are appropriate to humans as a means of grace precisely because of the composition of human nature: both bodily and spiritual. We are in fact "led by things corporeal and sensible to things spiritual and intelligible," and God provides for us as our condition requires. Despite the objection that "bodily exercise is profitable to little" (1 Timothy

4:8), Thomas points out that the sacraments are both bodily and spiritual. This union is possible because of both human nature and God's grace in meeting us in our need as physical creatures.²³⁰

The soul-body unity also has a great deal to do with Thomas's explanation of humans' moral formation. He describes the virtues as a category of habit, or a disposition toward a type of action (in the case of virtues, toward the good).²³¹ And as such, they are developed either by much-repeated actions and through the infusion by God²³²—some virtues must be developed through repeated actions, but others can only be bestowed by God.²³³ We will look more closely below at the Christian virtue ethics tradition, and particularly at the question of the interaction between human and divine agency.

From what we have seen so far in Thomas Aquinas, it is clear that not only does the human body have an honored and essential place alongside the soul in Christian anthropology, but that it plays an essential part in Christian formation. It is involved in knowledge, the growth of virtue, and even in receiving God's grace through the sacraments. Subsequent sections will visit these areas in greater detail, as other thinkers have expounded them.

Our interest in practically observing the Sabbath is undoubtedly influenced by what we think humans essentially are. If humans were merely souls who happened to have bodies, and for whom bodies could only serve as corruption, it would be easy to make a virtue of ignoring the needs of the body. It would be easy to assume that our souls need no help from bodily practices in experiencing grace or trusting in God. But if our souls rely on the body for knowledge,

²³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* III.61.1

²³¹ Aquinas, *ST* I-II.56.1; I-II.63.2

²³² Aquinas, *ST* I-II.51.2-4

²³³ Aquinas, *ST* I-II.63.4

formation in virtue, and to encounter God, then practically shaping our lives around a weekly pattern of work and rest—no trivial matter for the body—is likely to set the stage for a profound spiritual encounter.

Liturgical Theology

The two preceding discourses—sacramental ontology and hylomorphic anthropology—are both foundational for the following exploration of liturgical theology. In some senses, liturgical theology is just as ancient as the previous two, but as an academic discourse, it has been inaugurated by Alexander Schmemmann in the 1960’s and 1970’s and expanded through the eager reception of his work in the West. What concerns us here is neither a mere history of the development of liturgy nor a mere anthropological description of how people behave in the rituals of worship, but—largely because of what we have seen above in sacramental ontology—how it can be that human liturgies can be the nexus of a divine encounter.

Boersma has helped us understand a connection between matter and spirit, the creaturely and the divine, in terms of “sacramental ontology;” building on these ideas, Nathan Jennings goes one step farther to explicate the variegated meaning of liturgical theology.²³⁴ It is because of the participatory relationship between earthly and heavenly realities that we can see human liturgies as connecting us to God in a real way. Once we understand Jennings’s vision, we will not only have seen one more example of Christian discourse connecting body/exteriority/action and soul/interiority/faith, but we will also have a further key to understanding how the Sabbath itself has a place in the spiritual life.

²³⁴ Nathan G. Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology: Economy and Reality* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

So far, we have seen that sacramental ontology is rooted in an analogy of being, which tells us that physical, earthly realities “participate” in divine reality. But because God is infinite and creatures are finite, creaturely language is insufficient to describe God; when we use it, we are bound by the “apophatic imperative,” which tells us that we are *only* speaking analogically. Whatever we are saying of God—since we must speak of God—we are saying by analogy.

Jennings, however, offers a view of liturgical theology that is a bit bolder about the connection between divine and creaturely realities. If we invert the way we think about our language, so that we imagine that our primary referent *is* God, and that creaturely realities are the ones to which we are speaking only analogically, then we can speak more positively of the divine life. As I understand it, this means we must accept that even our primary referent is beyond our conception. This inverted way of speaking of the relationship between God and creation is “anagogy.”

As I have hinted, however, no matter how much we bracket our speech with the assumption of God’s “beyond-ness,” we are still limited to human language and imagination, so we must proceed with caution. Even though all that exists participates *in some way* in the being of God, the gaps of both ontology and sin mean that we cannot assume that all creaturely reality directly teaches us truths about the life of God. With this in mind, Jennings has limited his project to liturgy, which he defines as human responses to God’s economic action—and not just any response: a response *in kind*, which is also analogous to God’s action. Only this kind of action is held to be apocalyptic, or revelatory of the life of God. And in order to discern true from false liturgies, we are reliant upon revelation, guided by what is given to us by the Church through the Holy Spirit’s providence, and dependent on the disciplines of prayer and

contemplation to make us more attuned to recognizing the patterns that reflect God's character.²³⁵

Because creaturely realities do, in fact, participate in divine realities, when we participate in authentic liturgies, what we are taking part in is the very patterns of the life of God. The dynamics of God's own household are reflected at multiple levels of reality, and human liturgies are just one of them. With this in mind, liturgical theology can be thought of as "divine pattern recognition."

Before we look more closely at any of the several "levels of reality" in which Jennings explicates liturgical theology, we can consider the nature of the pattern in itself. What kind of pattern could it be that is reflected on all these levels of reality? As Jennings sees it, the gift cycle (as understood both by theologians and anthropologists) is at the heart of God's economy on every level. A gift economy is naturally set in motion by a founding gift from a chief or other superior person, and the recipients of lower status are enabled to pass the gift along perpetually. It is also natural and fitting for them to respond to the high-status original giver through some kind of sacrifice. This cycle never need falter, unless someone hoards what they have received and takes it out of circulation or treats it as a commodity instead of a gift. All this activity is what comprises the nature of the relationships within a household (or economy), but households always have physical structures that accrue around those dynamics (the house). Both the activity and the material culture that results are included in what Jennings means by "liturgies."

²³⁵ It does not appear that Jennings treats liturgies as sources *in themselves* of any particular content that does not appear in Scripture, but they do make it possible for us to experience and contemplate them—contemplate God—with our whole beings, including our bodies. They initiate us into the rhythms of participation in the household of God, as we will see below. "Human rites are liturgy only insofar as they manifest this fundamental reality, this fundamental divine service, this fundamental liturgy." Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 93.

We know just enough now to begin to see how this divine economy plays out on multiple “levels of reality,” as I have promised. Jennings begins with the very core of reality, with the Triune life of God, which is itself a life of contemplation. When we contemplate God (which is what we do in any theology), it is this life of God (the very truest theology) in which we participate.

The household of God, then, consists of the mutual relations of God and “God’s children,” who are finite persons created through the overflow of Trinitarian love. These children of God are called several things in Scripture: the “Sons of God,” the “*elohim*,” the “council of the gods,” or “elders,” and we can think of them as the glorious creatures who were assigned to govern the nations (but also gave rise to idolatry).²³⁶ God provides for them gloriously through the creation of the cosmos itself, their table fellowship is that of the eschatological banquet, and their response of gratitude is what sets in place the structure and motion of the cosmos. We thus have the gift economy of God’s household, and a material culture (the house) that results from it and testifies to it. And when we think of this household, we must not merely think of “heaven” or “the heavens,” but all of creation: “The tradition teaches that the rest of creation joins this liturgy, hymning with it as it echoes down levels of scale, ‘unto ages of ages,’ and crosses through many media, ‘heaven and earth are full of your glory,’ before any human person ever engages it.”²³⁷ This vision re-situates “liturgy” as we know it on a vast scale: “It is, in fact, over this liturgy that Christ the high priest presides, and in him, Christians find their priesthood.”²³⁸

²³⁶ Ibid., 37, 45.

²³⁷ Ibid., 42.

²³⁸ Ibid., 42.

The second level of reality at which liturgical theology can be discerned is in the relations between God and humanity, which is the context of Jesus's sacrifice. Here, too, a gift economy is the natural and original state of affairs, with God providing all of creation and our very lives, and humans intuitively responding with gratitude and sacrifice.²³⁹ While traditional gift economies are led by a chief or king, however, God is infinite, and the gift is life itself. This being the case, what could possibly constitute an appropriate human response to the divine founding donation? Jennings reasons:

Before the fall we must presume that full sacrifice would not mean death, but rather self-sublimation in the ecstasy, the 'standing outside oneself' of perfect union with God, perfect grounding of 'self' outside the self in the only self-grounded One. After the fall, however, full sacrifice would come to mean annihilation of the individual human instance. Hence the Old Testament system of substitution constitutes a form of grace.²⁴⁰

(The sacrificial system in the Old Testament, in other words, is not fundamentally a response to sin, but a modification of the gift-cycle dynamic that would *always* have been natural between God and humans.)

Sin does cause tremendous damage, however, and necessitates Christ's sacrifice. When humans choose to pull back from dependence upon God, gratitude for his provision, and the continued giving of gifts to others, sin has disrupted the gift cycle between God and humans. Jesus's sacrifice, then, "does not end but rather re-starts God's gracious gift-cycle economy with his creation."²⁴¹ This happens because "Jesus, as fully human and yet fully divine, fulfills the

²³⁹ Ibid., 55-56. Jennings takes the existence of sacrificial systems in most ancient cultures as support for this view. He gives anthropological observations an honored place, as long as they are received with a post-critical mindset in which they might in fact reflect *real*—not merely humanly projected or constructed—patterns of divine life.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 65.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 66.

originary demand of total self-oblation to the infinite One and, in the face of the death inherent to the fall, he is able to do so because he is the Living One.”²⁴² Participating in this renewed gift cycle, Christians are joined to Christ and now become themselves “a living sacrifice” rather than relying on the substitutions that were necessary in the Old Testament.²⁴³ And rather than ending in the death of persons who offer themselves to God sacrificially, the destiny of those who are in Christ is resurrection.²⁴⁴ When we participate in the human “liturgy” of the Eucharist, it is this cosmic liturgy of Christ’s sacrifice in which we take part.

The third level of reality on which liturgical theology can be discerned has to do with how it is that humans engage in contemplation of God, both individually and corporately. To explain this, Jennings returns to the “psychosomatic unity of human nature” that we have seen earlier in this chapter.²⁴⁵ Because humans are unities of soul and body, it is through bodily actions that we participate in the contemplation of God, that we come to learn the rhythm of life in God’s household. Where a corporate body engages in liturgical behaviors and is thereby tuned toward contemplation of God, a corporate body of an individual person is similarly tuned toward contemplation of God through asceticism. “The formation of the soul by the body is what makes a sacramental economy not only fitting, but necessary to the nature of our somatic therapy.”²⁴⁶ Human liturgies, particularly baptism and the Eucharist, initiate us into contemplation of and participation in the mystery of Christ.

²⁴² Ibid., 65.

²⁴³ Ibid., 66.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 67.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 78.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

The final level of reality on which Jennings explores the meaning of “liturgical theology” is that of the figural interpretation of Scripture. Scripture, just one part of reality, exists within the context of the cosmic divine liturgy. Human liturgy, then, which participates in and initiates us into the divine liturgy, serves as an interpretive lens for Scripture. When we seek to understand how to relate all the parts of Scripture to the whole (not only of Scripture, but of the entire divine economy), it is the liturgy that can serve as a preliminary “glimpse” into the whole. On this level, “Liturgical theology names and contemplates the whole *as liturgy* in order to expound both rite, on the one hand (mystagogical catechesis), and Scripture, on the other (figuration), as parts of the one reality they manifest: the divine service of Jesus Christ. Liturgical theology articulates the ritual pattern, the enacted figure that *is* the ritual we call the service of the Word.”²⁴⁷

While more could be said, the point that concerns us here should be clear: with a realist metaphysic and the corresponding conception of human liturgies as revelatory of divine realities, we find that human liturgies allow us to contemplate God by participating in the patterns of the divine economy. These patterns bear themselves out on many levels of reality, from the Trinitarian life of God, to the heavenly household of God, to the restoration of the gift cycle between God and humans through Jesus’s sacrifice, to the human actions of liturgy and asceticism by which we join in contemplation of God, to the manner in which our liturgies (because they participate in the divine economy) shed light on the whole of Scripture.

While the chapter purported to approach the topic of sacramental ontology and liturgical theology for the (mere) purpose of presenting evidence that Christian practices (like the Sabbath) are not opposed to grace, we can go farther in this case. Not only does the metaphysical realism

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 97.

that grounds liturgical theology make sense of holy actions in general, but Jennings' account of the nested continua within which liturgical theology can be discerned also sheds significant light on how we might understand the Sabbath in particular. The Sabbath is, most straightforwardly, a day of rest (a human liturgy). It is also God's eschatological rest at the consummation of the world (theology proper). The fact that God has invited humans to participate weekly in his own rest is a sign of God's own manner of relating to humans, which calls forth an analogous human response (economic theology). It should also set in motion certain dynamics of grace and inclusion within human economies (political economics). As both a command and a gift, it speaks powerfully of what ought to be non-negotiable in defense of the thriving of human persons in society (anthropology and sociology).²⁴⁸ It has a bearing on individual and corporate spiritual lives and how we experience God's grace (contemplation/spiritual theology). As we have seen in the previous chapter, it lies very near the fulcrum of Jewish-Christian relations. And, as only future work can treat adequately, it may also be a hinge that opens a door for Christian ecumenism.

Unless we mean Christ as the Sabbath, the Sabbath is not the central thread around which all reality hangs together. But when we consider it as a liturgy within the context of a metaphysical realism such as Jennings has demonstrated, it certainly appears to be one profoundly revealing cross-section. (And after all, maybe we do mean Christ as the Sabbath.) Furthermore, the areas in which it sheds light, and the manner in which it does so, seem to indicate that the cross-section of the Sabbath uniquely supplies a piece that is missing—and in dire need—across many of the dimensions of life in modernity. The manner in which the modern

²⁴⁸ The felt need for a point of defense for the human fragility, often in retreat against the onslaught of the totalizing economy, is attested recently by Jerry Useem, "Bring Back the Nervous Breakdown," *The Atlantic* (March 2021): 22-24.

economy—including the academy—draws sharp boundary lines between levels of reality is surely itself an obstacle to our retrieval of the Sabbath imagined this way. But this project, and others to fill in the gaps (which are by now probably quite apparent), may be a small step toward doing just that.

Faith and Works, According to Virtue Ethics

One form the objection to Sabbath observance could take is this: “Trust in God’s creation and provision is all very well and good; and I can see how the principle of Sabbath is meant to get at the virtues of justice toward fellow humans and trust in God. But my problem with the weekly practice of Sabbath is that it is so fixed, as if one size fits all. Some people’s faith might not have brought them to the point where they can do that authentically, and if they begin to rest regularly on a Christian Sabbath, their practice would be empty—merely for show.”

What this type of objection betrays is a conviction (on the part of the objector) that authenticity is of supreme importance, and that it is inauthentic to do something that does not fully originate from the heart. It assumes that change must begin interiorly, and only afterward can work its way out in behavior. For Christians, this sequence is often a result of a myopic focus on justification by faith, resisting any possibility that human works could be salvific. And if the appropriate attitude is not already in place, it is better not to undertake virtuous actions, because this would be deceptive and hypocritical. People who hold a viewpoint like this will face understandable problems accepting the value of Sabbath observance, because the Sabbath comes each week, and it comes for everyone, “ready or not.”

The virtue ethics tradition has a long history of exploring the value of actions and their relationship to the character of the moral agent. Sometimes virtue ethicists have been accused of

championing hypocrisy, and they have had to delve into the resources of their tradition in order to evaluate and respond to these critiques. The central question this project brings to the resources of virtue ethics has to do with the relationship between interiority and exteriority, and whether right action is still right even when it is not fully matched by purity of intention. This could take two forms: First, if someone undertakes a virtuous act without feeling virtuous, is the action wrong or deceptive? Second, if someone consciously exerts effort toward virtue, is that a sign that s/he thinks s/he can attain holiness apart from God's grace? (Is it Pelagian?)

We can address the first question—whether action that is not fully backed up by pure intention is deceptive—by explaining the process by which the virtue tradition believes virtues are acquired. For Aristotle, the godfather of virtue ethics, virtues are not simply isolated descriptors, whether of acts or agents. Rather, they refer to a character trait that has been developed over time and that proves consistent. Time after time, a courageous person will act in accordance with courage, and a temperate person will be reliably self-controlled. But the virtue goes deeper, even, than a string of actions, by pervading the person's desires. A truly courageous person could hardly consider being cowardly, because courage is so deeply embedded in her bones, and the person of temperance is not fighting against inner demons whenever he chooses to resist temptations. The virtuous person is saturated with virtue.²⁴⁹

This standard of virtue may seem like a tall order—as if one is either virtuous or vicious, with no middle ground. But the situation is not hopeless for someone who embodies virtues only partially or not at all. Aristotle is also interested in the *process* of virtue acquisition, which involves practice and repetition. A beginner in the virtuous life—it's best if it is a young child—is not likely to desire the virtues for their own sake, not realizing that the virtues are the path to

²⁴⁹ Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11.

the ultimate happiness that befits humans. A teacher must thus draw the pupil on using proximate goals and rewards. The pupil becomes gradually accustomed to living well, and as she becomes more familiar with the virtuous acts she practices, she develops a taste for them. Her desire shifts away from the rewards that had served as placeholders, toward the virtues themselves. She begins to aim toward the higher happiness of a truly good life. The actions that originally were a mere semblance of virtue come more and more to line up with the inner character of the person, such that her emotions, motives, desires, and actions flow seamlessly together.²⁵⁰

Such a process for growing in virtue, which begins with practices, means that action will probably need to run ahead of perfected motives. Rather than being intentionally deceitful, such asymmetrical development seems to be necessary along the way.²⁵¹

While this theory of how virtue is acquired *does* give a good reason for beginning with action and hoping that interior virtue follows, it does not exactly refute the idea that action alone is *not* hypocrisy. Thomas Aquinas, carrying the Aristotelian tradition forward, helps us here. He agrees with Aristotle that many virtues can be developed through actions designed to form habits. But he makes it clear that even imperfect virtue *can be* virtue already.²⁵² The first act in the process of building a virtuous habit was already supported by fledging virtue, given by God's grace. Secondly, Thomas helps us put the sin of hypocrisy into perspective by distinguishing between two levels of it. Hypocrisy that is a mortal sin is not tied with any intention of becoming virtuous, because it is undertaken solely for the purpose of appearing virtuous. Hypocrisy that is

²⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I-III.

²⁵¹ This tension is what Herdt calls the "habituation gap" in Herdt, *Putting On Virtue*, 1.

²⁵² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II.65.2

a venial sin, however, may be a misguided effort to grow in virtue, but it is motivated by a desire to be actually virtuous.²⁵³

The second question I listed above was whether working to develop virtue betrays an overconfidence on the part of humans. Does the practice of virtue toward the goal of acquiring greater virtue smack of Pelagianism? Here again, Thomas Aquinas provides help through his Christian adaptation of Aristotle's virtue ethics.

For Thomas, human effort counts for quite a bit, but it is incomplete alone. In fact, divine grace is ubiquitous in the process of growth in virtue. This means that while some virtues can be acquired by habituation, there are some that cannot; and even those virtues that can be acquired through habituation (the acquired virtues) cannot be perfected *merely* by human effort.

Thomas's famous dictum that "grace completes nature" is apparent everywhere in his writing on the virtues. Most clear is his distinction between the acquired and the infused virtues. While Aristotle was only concerned with acquired virtues (which would indeed be heretical for a Christian to affirm exclusively), Thomas affirmed that some virtues—faith, hope, and charity—must be directly infused by God. This means that while a Christian (or non-Christian) can make genuine progress toward virtue through undertaking habitual virtuous action, it is impossible to reach perfection in virtue, and humans' true end, without a gift of God. Now when we take a closer look at the acquired virtues, we can see the workings of grace even there. For in each of the acquired virtues, as much as human participation is indispensable to them, there remains a level of perfection that humans cannot reach without God's grace. This difference has to do with the difference between human reason and "the divine rule." For example, even in the virtue of temperance, which can be largely acquired by the repeated exercise of temperate actions

²⁵³ Aquinas, *ST II-II.3.4.*, cited in Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, 81.

according to human reason, there is a deeper virtue to be gained by a divine gift, which cannot be supplied by purely human reasoning.²⁵⁴

Even after seeing how “grace perfects nature” in Thomas’s virtue ethics, someone may yet spy signs of Pelagianism. If grace is said to *complete* nature, does this mean that human agency is supposed to be sufficient to *begin* the journey toward God? Are virtue ethicists really claiming that humans can set out on the path of virtue with *quod in se est*, intending to meet God halfway? Recall that Pelagius did not speak of human growth of holiness without reference to God at all, but he did teach that we are perfectly well equipped to take the initiative ourselves.²⁵⁵ If Thomas truly believed humans could set out toward God, with their own nature but without God, and then wait for God to meet them on the road, that would indeed be Pelagian, and a heresy of the Church.

Thomas addresses this objection, as well. That is, even when humans appear to take the initiative toward the acquired virtues, they are already dependent on grace. This discussion happens principally through Thomas’s distinction between primary and secondary causation. Humans can indeed undertake voluntary actions, and Thomas devotes great attention to the mechanisms that are at work in a human person when this is happening. But because God is the first mover, human agency is always secondary.²⁵⁶

Through this discussion, what we have seen is that for Thomas, while humans (and human bodies) play an active role in the growth of virtue, this process is always dependent upon

²⁵⁴ Aquinas, *ST I-II.63.4*

²⁵⁵ Mark W. Elliott, “Pelagianism,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Iain R. Torrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 377-378.

²⁵⁶ Aquinas, *ST I-II.6.1*

God's grace. We have seen this principle in play on multiple levels: while virtues apparent to human reason are authentic virtues (the cardinal virtues) and can be developed through habituation, some virtues exist (the theological virtues) that can only be attained as a gift of God. Even the cardinal virtues, which can be attained through habituation, are only perfected when they are infused by God. And finally, even in the human action that is taken along the way to develop virtuous habits, we see God working first. Human action is real and necessary in the life of virtue, but at every point along the way, it is insufficient without God's grace. It is in this framework that we can understand a practice such as Sabbath observance to be both a matter of meaningful human action and dependent upon—not a rejection of—God's grace.

Social Groups: The Body Outside the Self

Because of the corporate nature of Sabbath observance, I would be remiss not to include this element here. Readers who are dubious about the importance of the body to the soul, or of created matter to sacramental meaning, or of habitual action to authentic virtue, are likely to be even more skeptical of actions that extend even farther out from the individual soul: to the point of involving an entire social group. The insights I draw on here have been developed in late modernity, with the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, but they have ancient resonances (such as, notably, with St. Augustine, who was fully aware of the corporate nature of the people of God).

We have so far examined several angles of the polarity between interiority/spirit/faith and exteriority/body/obedience, and here we will look at how social groups play a role in the formation of identity and belief. In the matter of the relationship of the human body to soul, we have seen that the body is indispensable to the essence of a human. In the relationship between

created matter and spiritual meaning, we have seen that tangible things can participate in and even reveal God's economy. And in the relationship between grace and human action, we have seen that these two forces can work together to increase a Christian's virtue. Now, as we explore the formation of identity and beliefs, the ground we have already covered should make it easy to anticipate what we will find: it should already be clear that a mental process of atomized, rational individuals evaluating and accepting propositions is *not* the whole story.

This section aims to show the role of corporate practices in the formation of both identity and belief. We have already clearly discussed the role of Sabbath in creating and preserving the identity of the people of Israel, and we have less explicitly touched on its role in forming belief. This section will show how important the corporate aspect of Sabbath observance is to both of these functions of Sabbath observance.

Before we talk extensively about the role of groups in shaping belief, I wish to interrogate the very idea of "belief." We will continue to see the word in this discussion, but I wish to lift up some of its connotations and shy away from others. In particular, when we talk about belief, what we most often mean is the acceptance of a logical proposition. It involves the mind, much in the same way as it is a mental exercise to agree with a mathematical statement. One "believes" the same type of propositions that one can "know" based on empirical observation; the difference is that we use the word "belief" when empirical verification happens not to be available. Increasingly, types of "belief" have been explored and discussed that affect people in more holistic ways. George Lindbeck and Charles Taylor have each tried to describe what it is about beliefs that prompt the involvement and devotion of whole persons, and how that helps us understand how they are formed.

When George Lindbeck writes about how beliefs—in his case, specifically, “doctrines”—function, he draws upon the conventions of the social sciences to advance a “cultural-linguistic” theory for understanding not only religion as a phenomenon but theology itself. This means that, rather than being merely statements of what is and is not true, or held to be true by Christians, doctrines outline the “grammar” of Christian belief.²⁵⁷ In other words, within the group of people who are Christians, what kinds of things can be said intelligibly? Doctrines lay out the boundaries within which Christian speech and worship make sense. Christian belief is not merely a set of intellectual or spiritual commitments: it is a repertoire of language and behaviors that mark out the community of the faithful. Critics have been incredulous of his apparent claim that doctrine does *not* make some first-order statements of truth (and only lays out second-order rules for the kinds of statements that could be made).²⁵⁸ I do not read him as claiming, strictly, that doctrines do not take the *form* of propositional statements,²⁵⁹ but as advocating that we consider primarily how they *function* to delineate a community of faith, replete with a set of characteristic speech and actions.

²⁵⁷ George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 32-41; 79-84.

²⁵⁸ Brian A. Gerrish, “The Nature of Doctrine: George A. Lindbeck, ‘The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age’ (Book Review)” *Journal of Religion* 68, no. 1 (1988): 87–92; S. Mark Heim, “George A. Lindbeck, ‘The Nature of Doctrine’ (Book Review)” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 14, no. 4 (1985): 393–394.

²⁵⁹ And when they do, they must be accountable as truth claims with an ontological referent, such that we are interested not only in describing Christianity but also in naming truth. See this concern also in Mark Corner, “George A. Lindbeck: ‘The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age’ (Book Review),” *Modern Theology* 3, no. 1 (1986): 110–113, and Robert Charles Greer, “Lindbeck on the Catholicity of the Church: The Problem of Foundationalism and Antirealism in George A. Lindbeck’s Ecumenical Methodology,” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2000). This objection has been addressed by Bruce D. Marshall, “Aquinas as Postliberal Theologian,” *The Thomist* 53, no. 3 (1989): 353–402, arguing that Lindbeck’s criterion of coherence within a belief system is compatible with a Thomist articulation of ontological truth.

Charles Taylor, too, insists that we look beyond propositional “belief,” arguing that what is more powerful in shaping our intellectual and spiritual commitments than logical propositions is the imaginative landscape in which we live. Our beliefs are less connected to our acceptance or rejection of philosophical arguments or logical statements, and more closely connected to “images, stories, legends.” Furthermore, the way we *imagine* our world tends to be held by a wider swath of people than the “small minority” who trade in theoretical descriptions of reality. Finally, it is our imagination that, when shared, “makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.”²⁶⁰

Both of these conceptions of “belief” depend on the idea that people’s intellectual commitments are intimately dependent upon and influenced by their social situations and communal belongings. Lindbeck and Taylor wrote in the decades after Peter Berger, whose *The Social Construction of Reality* and *The Sacred Canopy* did much to establish the view that knowledge is social. Berger’s description of the relationship between individuals’ knowledge and the society to which they belong will help us place Lindbeck’s “socio-linguistic” theory of doctrine, and Charles Taylor’s “imagination” in context.

As Berger puts it, individuals are in a dialectical relationship with society: we work together as humans to create culture, which is the human world that constitutes our habitat but that is not given to us, ready-made, through our biology.²⁶¹ People contribute to the creation of culture, but when it becomes aggregated, shared, and accepted as external reality, it is “objectivated.” At this point in the dialectic, the culture we have constructed comes back to affect each of us in the form of the external reality we must face. We both make it and are made

²⁶⁰ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008), 172.

²⁶¹ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 6.

by it. And because the human habitat is only complete when we live in these cultures we have built, we can talk about the action of creating culture dialectically as “world-building.”

While every human generation needs culture and actively participates in world-building, no single “world” is a fixed part of the human landscape. The worlds depend on specific social processes and thus take a great deal of effort to perpetuate themselves. There is no guarantee that a world will survive intact from one generation to the next. “Thus each world requires a social ‘base’ for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings. This ‘base’ may be called its plausibility structure.”²⁶² The concept of “plausibility structures” helps us recognize that certain social apparatus must be in place in order for certain realities—earthly or spiritual—to be believable by most members of society. He shows us that the range of possibilities from which individuals can choose when they make their intellectual commitments is closely dependent on their ability to participate in a community that validates those commitments—that lives as if they are true.

While Berger’s “plausibility structures” goes a long way in helping us see the connection between individuals’ beliefs and the communities in which they live, Charles Taylor’s concept of the “social imaginary” takes this work a few steps farther. Berger, a sociologist, is interested in what it takes for members of a society to continue to believe in the “world” their society has constructed. Taylor, a philosopher, does not limit himself to the socially constructed world. Indeed, his “social imaginary” is much like a plausibility structure in that it is “the way [people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and

²⁶² Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 45.

images which underlie these expectations.”²⁶³ But for him, the social imaginary can be “porous,” with a high degree of connectedness to the transcendent, or it can consist of an exclusively “immanent frame.” Notably, the social imaginary is not merely the set of things believed. It is the “conditions of belief” that contemporaries share, and to which we may respond in a variety of ways. It can be shaped by things such as the role of science in society, the natural disasters that shake our sense of stability, the institutions that have power and the way they operate, and the typical structures of people’s relationships with each other. Taylor depicts in great detail a “porous” social imaginary that existed in 1500, which would have made it all but impossible to disbelieve in God’s existence, even if one had wanted to, and then narrates how it gradually shifted into the modern social imaginary of the year 2000, in which belief in God requires a great deal of effort to maintain. It is not as if logical propositions have disproved God’s existence, and Taylor knows that many people continue to believe in God. What interests him is the social conditions of belief in the West in the early 21st century that make it an uphill battle to conceive of God and the transcendent.

If communities and societies themselves play such a powerful role in shaping what is plausible or conceivable, corporate *practices* play an intensified role in shaping belief. James K. A. Smith, drawing on both Charles Taylor’s conception of “social imaginaries” and an Augustinian concern for the loves that collectively define a people, writes of how repeated actions such as liturgies orient us toward the world.²⁶⁴ What rituals do we engage in together?

²⁶³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171.

²⁶⁴ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014). St. Augustine’s attention to the corporate nature of both the City of God and the earthly city, and how each can be characterized by its respective loves, reveals that the effect of social groups on humans’ beliefs, identities, and loves is not an observation unique to the twentieth century.

And if we continue in them uncritically (such as the ritual of visiting a shopping mall, the ritual of singing a national anthem at a sports event, or the ritual of corporate confession in church), how do they shape not only what we believe to be true, but the kinds of things we love and desire? How do these patterns give us a vision of “the good life?” Embedded in these questions is an eye for how our corporate practices make it possible for us to *imagine* a way of life, and by repeated exposure, to *desire* what we have been shaped to imagine.

Because social sciences and theology have had a strained relationship,²⁶⁵ a word about the possibilities for their interaction is warranted here. The majority of the (short) history of social scientific study of religion has assumed an exclusively immanent context for the development of human religion, creating in many cases an awkwardly forced set of explanations for why religious behavior has taken on the patterns it has.²⁶⁶ But anthropologists have, nonetheless, provided a great wealth of observations of these patterns themselves, as well as the narratives and inner logic that religious insiders use to account for them. It is these patterns and perceptions themselves that must be taken seriously within a metaphysical realist scheme, since a theology that attempts to concern itself with the transcendent *and* its reflection in the immanent can be neither restricted to *nor heedless of* recurring patterns of human behavior. While we must recognize that the ontological distance between creation and the Creator, as well as corruption

²⁶⁵ Displayed in Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* and John Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory*.

²⁶⁶ Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 55-56, 111. An exception to this exclusively immanentist approach to social scientists is, admittedly, created by the move of Wilfred Cantwell Smith and others to describe religious experiences in terms that make sense to religious insiders. This is only a partial remedy, of course, leaving the scholarly community interested *merely* in the language games of a community. Such an approach has, however, been picked up by Lindbeck in a way that Bruce Marshall argued *is* open to the transcendent (but can only be evaluated from within the community of faith). See note 263, above. Allowing for the possibility that a Wittgensteinian account of religion as language games does not *necessarily* exclude the transcendent, it has nonetheless not been the concern of the social sciences to include “real” transcendent causality in the range of its explanations for phenomena, instead limiting itself to the social effects of the human *perception* of transcendent causality.

due to the fall, mean that human behavior patterns apart from revelation are not a reliable source of “anagogical” revelation, they must nonetheless make sense *as* a corruption of human attempts to relate fittingly to God. Seen through the lens of revelation and then acknowledged as participating, imperfectly, in the life of God, they can help back fill, as it were, the dynamics that really exist between God and humans.

Once we take seriously the behaviors of communities and societies in shaping imagination, identity, and the plausibility of beliefs about the transcendent, we can understand the importance of Sabbath practice on one more level. It is one thing for individuals to assent intellectually to the claims that God has created them, liberated them, provides for them, and expects them to trust him while providing liberally for each other; it is quite another to live in a community or society whose life patterns and even economy accommodate these truths as givens of their environment. If God’s action is understood to be a real enough part of the “ecology” of a community to affect the manner in which the community pursues its thriving, this is a powerful structure in which not only does God’s existence become plausible but the people, through ongoing interaction, become acquainted with and formed by the character of this *particular* God.

Conclusion

The project we have been pursuing has been the question of whether adopting the practice of the Sabbath, because it is a practice, is incompatible with Christian reliance on God’s grace. The first portion of the chapter has addressed the question of Christianity’s inheritance of Judaism: was the practice of Torah, for the Jews who later received the Gospel, a matter of “works righteousness” and fundamentally at odds with the Gospel? I presented the case that such an understanding of the Torah is a faulty view of ancient Judaism that was enabled by a

longstanding history of Christian antisemitism and popularized by Luther's misreading of Paul. A better view of Torah is expressed by E. P. Sanders' term "covenantal nomism," which refers to Torah as an expression of faithful response to the grace that God had already extended to the people of Israel; the people reaffirmed their belonging in the people of the covenant by keeping Torah. What Jesus then represented, as Paul proclaimed and N. T. Wright has expounded, was the fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel by being *himself* the faithful Israelite. He then called Israel back to the global scale of their mission, while at the same time redrawing the lines of membership to the covenant and that very calling. It was not, then, Torah or any particular command of Torah that Jesus or Paul confronted, but the mistakenly narrow scope of his contemporaries' idea of their calling. The Sabbath, with all of Torah, is *fulfilled* in Christ, but it is not thereby incompatible with a life of reliance on God's grace.

The second stage of this chapter looked at distinctly Christian teachings, ancient, medieval, and modern, that show the integral connections between the material world and practices, on the one hand, and the soul and spiritual realities, on the other. A mainstay of catholic Christianity since ancient times, in contrast to the Scylla of Gnosticism and the Charybdis of nominalism, a sacramental ontology holds that God is radically *other* than creation but that creation's very being *participates* in God, preserving both the value of creation *and* its ends that are not independent of God's purposes for it. Human persons have been understood as comprising both body *and* soul, with the body playing several essential roles in Christian formation. One of these roles is the development of virtue through the formation of habits by practice. Another is as a means by which we participate in the contemplation of God through liturgies that participate in the patterns of God's own life. Finally, we have seen how the

corporate bodies shape not only the *corporal* bodies of individual persons but also our identity, loves, and belief.

While the treatment of each of these discourses has been cursory and surely inadequate, the contribution I intend to offer is to show the cooperation and, indeed, correspondence, between them. While no one part of this apparatus has single-handedly laid to rest the worries about the value of a practice such as the Sabbath to a life of faith, my hope is that together, they create a vision by which such a practice is understood as instrumental in a life toward faith in and love of God. It should also demonstrate that this vision is not only possible but also deeply rooted in orthodox teachings of Christianity. Furthermore, when we survey the set of discourses that are involved in a Christian discussion of a practice such as the Sabbath, we may notice an affinity between the relationships they have to each other and the relationship Jennings proposed between his liturgical-theological “levels of reality.” If each of these sub-disciplines within theology does indeed reveal implications for and unfold the meaning of the Sabbath, then perhaps this very realization is the most valuable fruit of this exercise. It is the realization that by conforming ourselves to the pattern of the Sabbath, we are also joining in a rhythm that calls *many* dimensions of our life into closer conformity to the life of God.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SABBATH AS A THEOLOGY OF CULTURE

In building the case against the Sabbath's obsolescence for Christians, so far we have considered a few aspects of the question. We have explored the meaning of the Sabbath in Jewish and Christian traditions, recognizing a number of overlapping themes that have unfolded over time. We have proposed a Christian theology of Judaism that opens the door for Christians to embrace the Sabbath even though, in a particular form, it is also a core practice of Jewish piety. And we have considered why Christians should embrace the *practice* of Sabbath, rather than a theological construct that renders the Sabbath exclusively spiritual. In this chapter, we will take a look at an underexplored but far-reaching effect of Sabbath practice—not on the spiritual lives of individuals, as recent writers on the Sabbath have tended to emphasize, but on the position vis-a-vis their society of those who practice it.

The problem to which the Sabbath presents a surprising solution could be expressed this way: Christians have often experienced a tension between affirming the world and rejecting the world. On the one hand, we could focus on the goodness of God's creation and the resulting worth of all its inhabitants; we can aim to participate in a wide range of cultural activities, making common cause with other people, regardless of whether they are also part of the Church; we can become quite interested in our investment in this-worldly time. On the other hand, we could note the sinfulness of the world and focus on God's calling to Israel and Christ's calling to his followers to dedicate themselves to a path set apart; thinking this way, we might spend more

time in pursuits that are explicitly religious or that are among fellow Christians; we might be more rigorously critical of activities outside the Church; through a careful adherence to the group of people who are “set apart,” there is often a strong focus on eternity and less of a focus on this-worldly time.

While we could envision this tension as a sharp dichotomy, as a stark choice each Christian or Christian group must make, the choice between these two extremes is not the most important set of alternatives in this chapter. Rather, what interests me is whether we would choose to resolve the tension by selecting just one impulse or the other, or whether we would find some account by which we can live in tension. We must also be careful to note that no person or Christian group lives purely by one pattern or another.²⁶⁷ What is often illuminating, however, is the language a group or individual uses to describe their commitments, whether or not an outside observer would agree. (A community might, for instance, be deeply embedded in the economy and power structures of the larger society in which it exists, while thinking of itself as a persecuted minority.) The way they perceive themselves is clearly not the only important thing, but the theological language and imagery they select is likely to be the aspect of their actual relationship to society over which they have most control. Whether they guide our behavior, inform our understanding of the Gospel, or shape our attitudes toward people inside and outside our communities, models for expressing relationships matter. This chapter is interested in whether Christians choose a model that focuses on affirmation of the world, a model

²⁶⁷ Niebuhr was also careful to note this in *Christ and Culture*, which outlines these two extreme poles and three intermediate positions. The “options” are intended as “types”—largely logically coherent clusters of commitments, to which real people rarely adhere consistently, meant to serve as *one* cross-section by which their commitments can be understood. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 40, 43-44.

that focuses on distancing ourselves from it, or some other that lets us live in the tension between them.

My concern is that when Christians have chosen one or the other of these two extremes, rather than opting for a model that allows both poles to influence us in productive tension, our imagination has been impoverished. This takes place through a process Charles Taylor has described, referring to the imaginative world in which most modern people live as “the immanent frame.” Inhabiting the Sabbath is one of the gifts I believe works against such a flattening of the imagination. In this chapter, I will consider the Sabbath as a theology of culture, ultimately arguing that a six-and-one pattern alternating between the workweek and the Sabbath creates a productive tension between the impulses to deny and affirm the world. In doing so, the Sabbath not only opens up possibilities for living with integrity in an increasingly pluralistic society, but it also salvages our ability to imagine the Transcendent despite the “immanent frame” characteristic of modernity within which we live.

In this process, we will first explore what might fruitfully be meant by “culture,” a term rendered controversial especially in light of critiques of H.R. Niebuhr’s classic *Christ and Culture*. Helping to develop this idea are the overlapping accounts of a sociologist, Peter Berger; a philosopher, Charles Taylor; a Christian theologian, H.R. Niebuhr; and a Jewish theologian, Abraham Heschel. Second, we will return to the tension between the impulses to identify with and celebrate “culture,” on the one hand, and to stand apart from and critique “culture,” on the other. What is at stake here is famously laid out by H.R. Niebuhr, but Niebuhr’s observations can be heard anew and enriched as we attend to some insights of Charles Taylor’s in *A Secular Age*. Third, we will devote attention to Taylor’s theme of “tensions in equilibrium,” which is made possible in part by a pattern of alternating between “higher times” and “low times.” I will argue

that the Sabbath is an ideal instance of such “tensions in equilibrium.” Furthermore, by being grounded in cyclical time rather than spatial and social hierarchies, it sidesteps some critiques that have been appropriately levied against such a synthetic system. Finally, we will see what the contemporary promise might be of adopting the Sabbath as a theology of culture: both for Western Christians’ ability to thrive with integrity in an increasingly pluralistic society, and for our ability to imagine the Transcendent.

Culture

Before we examine a set of ways Christians might relate to “culture,” it behooves us to examine the meaning of the word itself. While the word “culture” can indeed be used in many conflicting and misleading ways, I choose to retain it here because I believe the word still manages to convey a concept little else can capture. But clarification is in order. We must rule out a few meanings of the word that can only distract from this project, such as, first, the way it is sometimes used to refer to “high culture,” or the art, thought, and manners of the elites in a given society. A second thing I do not mean is something that is very nearly at the opposite end of the spectrum to the first: “authentic culture,” or the gritty, local habits and manners one finds the *farther* one gets from the elites. A third thing I do *not* mean is “popular culture,” which might be derived from the second type of culture, but has been commercialized and marketed on such a large scale that it is popular less because it is “of the people” than because it is what can be sold to the people. The fourth thing I do *not* mean is the particular manners and behaviors of one place as opposed to another place, such as Moroccan vs. French culture.

None of these specific meanings captures the totality of what concerns us in this chapter. Rather, the meaning of “culture” that I believe is at once the most general and also the most

precise can be discerned when we consider the word's etymology.²⁶⁸ The Latin verb *colere* (with a past participle *cultum*) means to tend or cultivate, and the usual object is land. The closely related word *excolo* (*excultum*) extended the concept of care and improvement to other things, including courting the favor of the gods. In the barest meaning of this word, then, we find something given or naturally occurring, which humans proceed to foster, shape, enhance, and control. The contemporary use of the word "culture" in biology still allows us to focus on this core meaning: when researchers create a "culture" of cells, they "maintain them in conditions suitable for growth"—always, of course, under their own watchful eye and for controlled purposes. The distinction between the noun and the verb I do not find significant: the verbal meaning of the root "cult-" can be understood as "to grow, develop, or enhance (something natural or given)," while the noun "culture" can simply refer to "the act or process of humans growing, developing, or enhancing something natural or given."

We can see why culture is such an apt term for describing human behavior and social life when we listen to Peter Berger's account of culture in *The Sacred Canopy*. As we saw in the previous chapter, Berger pointed out that while other animals receive all or most of the behaviors they need for survival through their biologically hard-wired set of instincts, humans are born "unfinished." We have biological givens, indeed, but comparatively little of our actual behavior in our environment is predetermined. That is, as animals we have the drives to eat, socialize,

²⁶⁸ What is in view here is something like the common center of a cluster of meanings, to which I do think the word's etymology is a useful clue in this case as in many others, and in light of which the development of the set of more differentiated meanings is understandable. Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), has helpfully traced the development of the modern anthropological meaning of "culture" through a variety of usages. As a "splitter" rather than a "lumper," however, she is more interested in the variety of usages than in noting any central meaning that is developed differently in each of these particular instances. The core sense I identify, however, has been understandably applied in a variety of ways: from evaluative to non-evaluative, universal to group-specific, holistic or restricted to a certain domain, or entailing either self-conscious cultivation (as in the *Bildung* tradition) or unselfconscious formation by a social environment (as in the modern anthropological usage).

mate, and raise offspring, but how we do these things can vary almost infinitely. While we are born with the instincts to suckle and respond to touch, and with the desire to communicate, most of our subsequent behavioral development, without which we will not become mature humans, must be learned from others. Culture—in its most basic sense, the human development of something natural or given—is thus biologically essential to the human animal.²⁶⁹

The process by which human culture is carried out is what Berger calls “world-building.” Even though a person—like other animals—encounters the world at birth as a given over which she has no control, *unlike* the environments of other animals, the human social and material habitat has still been “fashioned by man’s own activity.”²⁷⁰ Over the course of her life, furthermore, this human will participate in the dialectical process of culture making: she must accept as given and learn to accommodate (“objectivate” and “internalize”) the human world she encounters, but she will also “externalize” by living out her own drives in the midst of it. With her contemporaries, she will shape the human-world the next generation will inherit. Societies depend on a high degree of stability, but because “the subjective reality of the world hangs on the thin thread of conversation,”²⁷¹ social structures are “inherently precarious and predestined to change.”²⁷² Whether a society manages to maintain its “world” depends on whether it successfully “socializes” the next generation: whether it has established “symmetry between the objective world of society and the subjective world of the individual.”²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: The Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 4-5.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 15.

It should be apparent that this entire process is a social one. It must be so, perhaps most practically, because we all enter a world that has been built by others and we must learn to navigate it before we can contribute to it. But on a deeper level, as Berger sees it, it is because of the “inherent sociality of man.”²⁷⁴ Humans strongly desire meaning and order, and these needs are largely met as we see that the world we have objectivated is the same as that of our neighbors. What we are even able to perceive as reality is limited by what is recognized collectively. “To be in culture means to share in a particular world of objectivities with others.”²⁷⁵

Berger has thus connected the dots between the biological and agricultural meaning of culture (what I am calling its most basic definition) and human culture. In human culture, society begins with something given (the “unfinished” human) and fosters and shapes it into something quite different from what it might have become if left to its own biological devices. And because this is *precisely* what occurs when farmers grow crops or researchers manipulate the contents of a petri dish, I think we must refrain from calling the relationship between these meanings a metaphorical one.²⁷⁶ Rather, the social formation of humans beyond what is biologically predetermined is, simply, culture.

One further observation here will be useful throughout the chapter. On one level, Berger’s sociological definition of culture echoes the age-old contrast between nature and culture, in that culture is something human-made that is not biologically predetermined and that

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 7.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 10.

²⁷⁶ *Pace* Steve Long, *Theology and Culture: A Guide to the Discussion* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 7 ff. Raymond Williams first suggested that “culture” is used metaphorically when it refers to human culture. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 87.

transcends nature. Seen another way, however, Berger's idea of culture is quite closely aligned with nature. This is because culture is essential to humans by virtue of our "open" biological constitution. While culture can come in an infinite variety of forms and is always susceptible to change, some form of it is inevitable in any human group, it is rooted in our "essential sociality," and it is merely the completion of the human habitat.

This chapter will interact with H. R. Niebuhr's classic *Christ and Culture*, and so it behooves us now to turn to his use of "culture." While Niebuhr's 1951 book predates Berger's by some sixteen years and could therefore not have been based on Berger's account, there is a surprising amount of continuity between the two. While Berger's "culture" is described in terms of the social sciences, and Niebuhr's "culture" is set up for theological evaluation, I do not think we read Niebuhr unfairly if we allow Berger's "culture" to make Niebuhr's account more vivid. First, however, we will listen to Niebuhr in his own words.

Niebuhr is careful to tell us that when he speaks of culture, he does not have in view any of the narrow phenomena I listed at the start of the section: he does not mean a particular aspect of culture (like the arts) that might qualify someone as "cultured," nor does he mean the particular culture of any one people or age.²⁷⁷ Rather, he is thinking of something much more all-encompassing, something closer to "civilization" itself. Culture is the "'artificial secondary environment' which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values." It is a "social heritage;" it is a "human achievement;" and cultivating and maintaining it is a laborious process.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 31.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

The similarities to Berger are already striking. Like Berger, Niebuhr speaks of a humanly created “environment” that goes beyond what is innate; he recognizes that particular cultures are merely specific instantiations of this universal phenomenon; he sees culture as essentially a social project; he realizes that we all participate in creating and perpetuating culture; and he recognizes that the prospect of maintaining specific cultural forms from generation to generation is a precarious one. What Niebuhr does not offer, which Berger does, is a more thorough explanation of why these things are the case.

Conversely, what Niebuhr offers that Berger does not is a set of resources for thinking about culture theologically. In the first place, he identifies culture as that which “the New Testament writers frequently had in mind when they spoke of ‘the world.’”²⁷⁹ He notes that the world is represented in the New Testament in various ways—sometimes positively, and sometimes negatively—but that, because it is part of all humans’ environment, it is nonetheless something “to which Christians like other men are inevitably subject.”²⁸⁰ He attempts to establish its meaning as neutrally as possible, but as soon as we read this New Testament allusion, we sense that culture will not always appear so benign. On one hand, if culture is inseparable from human life, which God created and called good, then it must not be inherently evil. If it is essentially bound up with human sociality, perhaps culture can be read as an aspect of love for one’s neighbors or even as a feature of the Church. But on the other hand, if Christ says of his disciples that “they are not of the world” (John 17:16) and if Paul exhorts the Romans, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world” (Rom 12:2), culture must somehow be bound up with evil. These tensions will be drawn out in greater detail in the following section.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 6, 32.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 32.

Since the following chapter treats the work of Rabbi Abraham Heschel, with the view that Heschel also addresses these questions of a theology of culture, it is appropriate here to see how Heschel's *The Sabbath* shares or diverges from the concept of culture we have developed so far. Unlike Niebuhr and Berger, Heschel speaks not simply of "culture" but of "technical civilization." Niebuhr has already told us that the word "civilization" conveys much of what he means when he says "culture," but Heschel's phrase does something more. What is "technical civilization?"

For Heschel, "technical civilization is the product of labor, of man's exertion of power for the sake of gain, for the sake of producing goods. It begins when man, dissatisfied with what is available in nature, becomes engaged in a struggle with the forces of nature in order to enhance his safety and to increase his comfort."²⁸¹ It is a near relative of the concept of culture in Berger and Niebuhr, because it has to do with the human manipulation and development of what is naturally occurring. "Mastery" is Heschel's recurring term. But what Heschel has in mind seems to be a more specific stage in the process—perhaps everything after the transition away from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Heschel also seems to focus somewhat more on the human manipulation of the non-human environment: he is less interested in the aspect of culture that consists of humans' own behavioral and social development, and more interested in how humans' tendency to develop nature extends to all of material creation. The civilization he has in view is specifically "technical," which alludes to the endlessly unfolding ways humans marshal the elements of creation to aid in expanding their mastery. It is as if he has picked up Berger and Niebuhr's vision of culture, identified its core element, and then narrowed his attention to the aspects of culture that amplify that element. Culture always implies some degree of human

²⁸¹ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 27.

mastery over nature; with “technical civilization,” mastery has become self-perpetuating, an end in itself.

Heschel tries to maintain a degree of neutrality toward technical civilization. He insists that “our intention here is not to deprecate the world of space” (the realm of technical civilization), because it contains all the rich and wonderful things in human society.²⁸² Furthermore, there is a place for “wringing profit from the earth;” human labor cannot be abandoned.²⁸³ He is thus true to his claim that technical civilization is not simply evil when he says that “the faith of the Jew is not a way out of this world.”²⁸⁴ We can already anticipate, however, that Heschel does not see technical civilization as an unmitigated good. The reasons Heschel has an ambivalent relationship with “technical civilization,” we will see in the following chapter, are not exactly the same as the reasons Niebuhr believes Christians live in tension with “culture.” There is, however, a kinship. Enough of a kinship, in fact, that I will propose Heschel’s *Sabbath* as a refreshing answer to the questions Niebuhr poses in *Christ and Culture*.

The Problem with Culture

Numerous thinkers have wrestled with the sense that culture presents some kind of problem for Christians (or, in Heschel’s case, Jews). As Niebuhr puts it:

A many-sided debate about the relations of Christianity and civilization is being carried on in our time. Historians and theologians, statesmen and churchmen, Catholics and Protestants, Christians and anti-Christians participate in it. It is carried on publicly by opposing parties and privately in the conflicts of conscience. Sometimes it is concentrated on special issues, such as those of the place of Christian faith in general

²⁸² Ibid., 6.

²⁸³ Ibid., 13.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 27.

education or of Christian ethics in economic life. Sometimes it deals with broad questions of the church's responsibility for social order or of the need for a new separation of Christ's followers from the world.²⁸⁵

But it is not only a contemporary problem:

It appears in many forms as well as in all ages; as the problem of reason and revelation, of religion and science, of natural and divine law, of state and church, of nonresistance and coercion. It has come to view in such specific studies as those of the relations of Protestantism and capitalism, of Pietism and nationalism, of Puritanism and democracy, of Catholicism or Romanism or Anglicanism, of Christianity and progress.²⁸⁶

If we are to begin with a basic definition of culture such as we have derived from Berger and found confirmed in Niebuhr, how are we to understand why it might present these kinds of problems for Christians? Or by the time we arrive at an apparent tension between Christ and culture, has "culture" taken on some other, highly specific meaning unrelated to what we have previously established? In other words, is it only with culture's specialized by-products that Christians might wrestle, or is there something already present in its essence that might produce such a struggle?

If we revisit culture's foundational elements, we can begin to see why Christians encounter difficulties. But it first bears pointing out that Christians bring to their view of culture a theology that assumes the world is not perfect. For one thing, Christians affirm a stark ontological gap between God and creation, such that created things are not their own ground of being or their own source of goodness. All their being, and all their goodness, derives from God. This gap does not disparage creation; on the contrary, to exist as contingent, reflecting God's

²⁸⁵ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

goodness, is creation's highest good. And humans can look forward to intimate knowledge of God, an ecstatic vision of God that transforms the person into God's likeness. But the mere difference in being between God and creation turns into distance and alienation with the introduction of sin, the failure of the creature to worship the Creator. In seeking to be their own ground of being and their own end, creatures have withdrawn themselves from their own source of goodness and become distorted.

In light of this distortion due to sin, it is understandable that Christians should find reason to suspect any created thing of being corrupt, but culture's unique features make it especially vulnerable to suspicion. Human culture shapes much of our environment, including realities we take for granted, through the power of our "essential sociality."²⁸⁷ While harmonious relationships with others are prized throughout Scripture, and sociality is certainly a good, there is also the chance that the more uncritically we trust human culture, the more we may be swayed by falsehoods. Both the Old and New Testaments frequently draw a sharp line between the trustworthy revelation of God and the fallible influence of humans.²⁸⁸ The Christian belief is that God has intervened in creation through special revelation (the law, the prophets, the Incarnation of his Son, and the Holy Spirit) to restore humans to trust in God and God's truth; if the essence of culture is humanly constructed reality, it is little wonder that Christians are often wary of it.

Another feature of culture that interacts with the distortion of sin is its essential character as human achievement. Whether it is the "world-building" that constructs a human social reality, or whether it is the "mastery" of other parts of creation, culture is a matter of human initiative

²⁸⁷ Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 7.

²⁸⁸ A few examples are Ps. 56:11 NRSV ("In God I trust; I am not afraid. What can a mere mortal do to me?") Cf. Ps. 118:6; 1 Cor. 1:25 NRSV ("For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength"); and much of 1 Cor. 2.

and progress. The Old and New Testaments are replete with God's calls for humans to take meaningful action—so we know there must be good in human agency—but there are also numerous instances of humans choosing to take initiative or exercise their own judgment *without* God's authorization—and they are condemned for it. The nature of culture as human achievement understandably makes many Christians tread carefully. Too much—or the wrong kind—of human achievement can seem to set up humans as alternative gods to God.²⁸⁹

To make sense of the ambivalence Christians feel with regard to culture, the contrast between nature and culture is less useful than the *alignment* between nature and culture. As Berger helps us to do, we can recognize that culture is a deeply embedded feature of human biological and social life, and therefore part of creation. We can see that, for Christians who think of creation in terms of its ontological distinction from God, human culture will be on the side of nature—part of creation, intended for good ends, yet distorted by sin.

What human culture is more meaningfully contrasted with, then, is divine transformation. Niebuhr calls this, its opposite, the claims of Christ. We could also adopt the Reformed summary of the Gospel (creation, fall, redemption) and call it the way of redemption. Calling it “the way of redemption” also has the merit of including God's calling on Israel through the law and the prophets, since we realize that it is not only Christianity that presents people with a call to pursue something other than what is most “natural” to humans. Alternatively, if we wish to focus on the element of a sociology of knowledge in Berger's model, we could speak of human culture in contrast with Revelation. What we find, in any case, is that a vision of human culture that sees culture as naturally good but insufficient and everywhere fallible is likely to be based on a

²⁸⁹ It is this concern that animates Abraham Heschel's comments on technical civilization.

worldview that includes a sharp ontological distinction between God and creation. There is a significant disjunction between what is available humanly and what is available divinely.

So far, I have attempted to identify how the basic features of culture, as Berger and Niebuhr define it, interact with Christian doctrine to produce tension. But Niebuhr has his own account of why the tension exists, and we will listen briefly to his account. And to further clarify what is at stake, I will then turn to the contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor (whom we also encountered in the previous chapter), whose *A Secular Age* notes a similar tension, but in quite different terms.

For Niebuhr, the “enduring problem” of the relationship between Christianity and human culture is a result of Christians’ being (as Gibbon summarized what so deeply offended the Romans) ““animated by a contempt for present existence and by confidence in immortality.””²⁹⁰ Jesus himself declined to focus his attention on the cultural and civilizational interests of his contemporaries, rather downplaying the importance of food and drink, family ties, and earthly authorities. He thus engendered among his followers a unique detachment with regard to cultural projects, a “certain equanimity” at the prospect of civilization’s destruction. In light of the descriptions of culture offered by both Niebuhr and Berger, such a detachment ought to be appreciated as highly unnatural, certainly not accounted for by the natural dynamics Berger describes or Taylor’s “immanent frame.”²⁹¹ To non-Christians who belong to the culture Christians seem to reject, such detachment can appear quite antisocial. Culture and society are shared projects, and to hold them in high regard would indicate a commitment to belonging,

²⁹⁰ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 5.

²⁹¹ The “immanent frame” will be unpacked when we turn to Charles Taylor.

contentment to identify with other people. To reject them seems to be a rejection of the entire community.²⁹²

Imagining Possibilities: H. R. Niebuhr

Acknowledging that such a tension has been widely felt throughout Christian (though not only Christian) history, we turn now to the question of what options exist for individuals, communities, and societies that must live in light of it. H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* offers a classic typology that lays out several options. We can consider how these options may be helpful as an aid to thought and Christian life. Charles Taylor's more recent *A Secular Age* also discusses some possibilities, in a way that overlaps with but differs somewhat from Niebuhr's types. Abraham Heschel, to whose presentation of the "culture question" I have already alluded in this chapter, will be the focus of the following chapter. We now turn to the possibilities laid out by Niebuhr and Taylor.

Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* presents five models Christians have tended to adopt when discerning the relationship between their belonging to Christ and their belonging to human culture. The typology includes two extreme poles and three intermediary positions. In the first type, some Christians tend to consider the dichotomy between Christ and culture as absolute: one cannot follow Christ while belonging (in any meaningful sense) to the world. While we could expect that the most extreme poles would be to choose Christ at the rejection of the world and to choose the world at the rejection of Christ, Niebuhr's typology is not meant to include those who reject Christ outright. So for those who see Christ as *opposed* to culture, there is only one

²⁹² Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 7-8.

Christian option: to adopt a stance that is as detached as possible from the natural claims of culture and society, its customs, and its centers of power.

This type does not come without its limitations. When we consider the ubiquity of “culture” as we have defined it, we realize that as long as we exist as creatures and among others, humans can never abandon culture entirely. Even if we renounce the bonds of humanity or nationality that could give us common cause with non-Christian strangers on the street, the tasks of eating and drinking, building homes, and raising children usually require communities of Christians to form new, if set-apart, societies among themselves. Christians “against culture” thus create new forms of fallible culture in the very moment of rejecting the old ones. Furthermore, the commands of Christ were given in the cultural context of ancient Palestine, and the very task of obeying them demands followers to engage with a culture difference: whether it be by adapting the commands for a new context, or by attempting to modify one’s own culture so that they can be followed more nearly. Finally, it makes little sense to attempt to “love one’s neighbor” without also attempting to know and understand that neighbor and his or her needs in cultural context.²⁹³ It may thus be tempting to conclude that the “Christ against culture” position is contradictory and simply impossible to maintain.

The temptation to reject this type outright diminishes somewhat, however, when we recall the purpose of Niebuhr’s project. He does not attempt to represent a vast swath of Christians in their own terms; such an attempt would be futile and false. He is identifying *impulses*, which may take any number of specific forms, be articulated in a variety of ways, or be tempered with other impulses. When Niebuhr identifies the weaknesses of a type, then, he is not necessarily attempting to critique or defeat any particular Christian or group that he believes

²⁹³ Ibid., 69-78.

conforms to the type; rather, he is identifying the outer limits of the type, the places where an impulse can become self-defeating.²⁹⁴ I recommend, therefore, that we not conclude that the “Christ *against* culture” type is inherently contradictory. Rather, the type is most helpful if we recognize it as the attempt to transcend humans’ basic animality and “essential sociality” *as much as possible*. We have found the “exclusivist” impulse when we encounter those who attempt to organize their lives with eternity in view, *rather than* this-worldly time.

For the purposes of this chapter, we must also note that the exclusivist position—the “Christ *against* culture” type—is one in which the felt tension between the demands of culture and the demands of Christ is held to be a problem. The tension is eliminated as far as possible when its proponents sever worldly ties and declare sole allegiance to Christ. These Christians attempt to live their lives with only one focal point.

At the opposite pole, Niebuhr tells us of Christians who worship the “Christ *of* culture.” While the first extreme type resolves the tension between the claims of Christ and those of culture by accepting the dichotomy as absolute and choosing between them, “Christ *of* culture” Christians resolve the tension in the opposite way: by finding no serious conflict. For them, Christ represents not a call away from human culture but the very *pinnacle* of human culture. Indeed, these Christians would hardly suggest that Christ sanctions *everything* in culture; rather, they identify as most “real” those aspects of culture that can harmonize best with Christ’s teaching. Likewise, Christ is interpreted in a way that highlights his cultural contributions and his universality, while the “historical and accidental” aspects of Christ’s teachings are downplayed.²⁹⁵ Niebuhr sees in this group a tendency to interpret Christ in continuity with

²⁹⁴ This style of analysis also appears in Charles Taylor.

²⁹⁵ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 84. This theme is applied specifically to Albrecht Ritschl on p. 99.

human culture: Abelard, for instance, saw Christ as “doing in a higher degree what Socrates and Plato had done before him.”²⁹⁶ Numerous voices of the Enlightenment and later modernity

all repeat the same theme; Jesus Christ is the great enlightener, the great teacher, the one who directs all men in culture to the attainment of wisdom, moral perfection, and peace. Sometimes he is hailed as the great utilitarian, sometimes as the great idealist, sometimes as the man of reason, sometimes as the man of sentiment. But whatever the categories are by means of which he is understood, the things for which he stands are fundamentally the same—a peaceful, co-operative society achieved by moral training.²⁹⁷

“Christ of culture” Christians are often sharply criticized by other Christians, but Niebuhr urges a fair treatment. Indeed, this type is susceptible to its own particular problems. In attempting to live at peace with both Christ and culture, it may fail in both directions, by retaining too much of the “offense of Christ” to be fully trusted by non-Christians, while excising too much from Scripture to recall Christ’s particularity, so that “the resultant portrait of Christ is little more than the personification of an abstraction.”²⁹⁸ Christians of this type may also *think* they are being supremely rational, while failing to notice that the Lordship of Christ is a suprarational claim around which their reasoning has been formed.²⁹⁹ They may furthermore treat Christian spiritual practices and a belief in God’s grace as mere means to some other end.³⁰⁰ Finally, they may struggle to accept Trinitarian orthodoxy for a number of reasons.³⁰¹

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 90.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 92.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 108-109.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 111.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 113.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 114-115.

In addition to its unique difficulties, some of the struggles encountered by this type are shared with others. For instance, while liberal Protestantism may be the easiest Christian movement to associate with “culture Christianity,” Niebuhr deftly points out that liberal Protestants’ fiercest opponents are often animated by an equally impassioned commitment to culture—but merely culture in different forms. Referring to those who argued for a literal interpretation of Scripture, he says “Not all though many of these antiliberals show a greater concern for conserving the cosmological and biological notions of older cultures than for the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”³⁰² Secondly, Niebuhr observes that “cultural Christians” share with another group, the “exclusivists,” an incomplete notion of total depravity. Both groups believe that *some* parts of human life and culture are corrupted. “Yet both are inclined to posit a realm free from sin; in the one case the holy community, in the other a citadel of righteousness in the high place of the personal spirit.”³⁰³ Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, this second type shares with the first the tendency to collapse the tension between Christ and culture, to represent their own aspirations as if they can and must live with only one focus.

The third type, that of “synthesis,” sees Christ as “*above* culture” but not as essentially at odds with it. This type is what Niebuhr sees as the position of the “center” of the Church. This centrism apparently refers to the effort to retain catholicity by holding firmly to the implications of creedal orthodoxy. In the first place, “synthesis” Christians recognize that the created world has God as its ground of being, and that Christ is one with the Father. Therefore, “Christ and the world cannot be simply opposed to each other.”³⁰⁴ Furthermore, obedience to Christ must be

³⁰² Ibid., 102.

³⁰³ Ibid., 113.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 117.

lived out concretely within history and society, such that “culture is itself a divine requirement.”³⁰⁵ But because creation is tainted by sin and “men cannot find in themselves...a holiness which can be possessed,”³⁰⁶ attaining to humans’ highest purpose in God requires transcending human nature with the help of grace. This type affirms an ontological distinction between God and creation, as well as Christ’s two natures, divine and human. In this way, “the synthesist affirms both Christ and culture, as one who confesses a Lord who is both of this world and of the other.”³⁰⁷

This is the first type that admits the possibility of more than one focus of the Christian life. While this type largely agrees with the others about Christianity’s teachings, the “distinction from them arises as he analyzes the nature of the duality in Christian life, and combines in a single structure of thought and conduct the distinctly different elements.”³⁰⁸ “There is in the synthesist’s view a gap between Christ and culture that accommodation Christianity never takes seriously enough, and that radicalism does not try to overcome.”³⁰⁹ In other words, while “cultural Christians” also affirm both Christ and culture, they don’t see the two as presenting a challenging divergence, and while “exclusivist Christians” see the gap, they try to live only on one side of it. “Christians of the center,” by contrast, recognize a gap between God and creation,

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 118.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 118.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 120. While it remains for another work to draw out the Christological grounding of a theology of culture guided by the Sabbath pattern, we should note that the hypostatic union of Christ is essential to understanding Niebuhr’s “synthesis” view. It is this doctrine that is explored more fully by Rowan Williams as a means of understanding “the ‘grammar’ of createdness,” particularly understood as the relationship of finite and infinite. In *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 6. On the same theme, see also Robert Jenson, “Creator and Creature,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4, no. 2 (July 2002): 216-221. Accessed 3/18/21. DOI: <https://doi-org.proxy.libraries.smu.edu/10.1111/1463-1652.00082>.

³⁰⁸ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 122.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 121.

between Christ and culture, but they know that the gap is a created, ontological one, before it is a result of sin. Christ, both God and human, is Lord of both. His demands both pertain to *and transcend* the demands of culture.

Niebuhr's two chosen exponents of the "synthesis" type both envision more than one "stage" (logical more than chronological) of the Christian life. They assume that much that is of value can be learned from non-Christian teachers, and that great effort is required in the life of holiness, but that ultimate attainment of human ends depends on God's grace given as a transcending gift. Clement of Alexandria, who painstakingly instructs fellow Christians in the manners and decorum of his day for the sake of Christ, believes that the teachings of his contemporaries line up significantly with the way of life that honors Christ. But his teachings culminate in an emphasis on the transformative grace of God. In Niebuhr's words, "Christ is not against culture, but uses its best products as instruments in his work of bestowing on men what they cannot achieve by their own efforts."³¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, in a much more extensive and systematic project that we visited briefly in Chapter Three, treats pre-Christian Greek philosophers as venerable authorities. In another affirmation of cultural goods, he follows Aristotle's lead in explicating the cardinal virtues that humans must cultivate effortfully. Anything humans do that directs them toward their proper ends is virtuous. But the contemplation of God is humans' highest end. Because that end can only be achieved by a gift of God, we can understand Thomas's vision—not so unlike Clement's—as involving two stages. The first stage consists of all the best of natural human life, in which God's grace is still active, but which Christians can readily hold in common with others; the second consists of all that can *only* be acquired by the grace of God through the work of Christ and the ministries of the

³¹⁰ Ibid., 127.

Church. As it was with Clement, the culmination of what is proper to humans, including all of culture and virtue, can only be achieved by a gift from *outside* culture and humanity.³¹¹

Niebuhr finds the synthesis type appealing. In its favor, Niebuhr finds that Christians must necessarily be attracted to this type, because it shows continuity between the character of God as Creator and Redeemer, and God is not divided.³¹² Additionally, “The synthesist alone seems to provide for willing and intelligent co-operation of Christians with nonbelievers in carrying on the work of the world, while yet maintaining the distinctiveness of Christian faith and life.”³¹³ And while the synthesist may be committed to earthly work, “there is always the *more* and the *other*; there is always ‘all this and heaven too.’”³¹⁴ For these reasons, “Even when [Christians] must reject the form in which [the synthetic answer] is offered they will see it as a symbol of the ultimate answer.”³¹⁵

Niebuhr’s critiques of this type are, however, equally emphatic. He worries that as soon as the vision of harmony becomes fleshed out with the concrete details of any real society, it will make a culturally conditioned vision of law or culture appear to be ultimate and authoritative. Any synthesis must thus be a synthesis of Christ with a *particular* culture, lending the cultural status quo an aura of perfection.³¹⁶ In a related critique, he says Thomas and his contemporaries “lacked historical understanding.”³¹⁷ This would be why, when Pope Leo XIII attempted to

³¹¹ Ibid., 131-132.

³¹² Ibid., 143.

³¹³ Ibid., 143-144.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 144.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 142.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 145-146.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 146.

develop a synthetic vision of Christ and culture in the late 19th century, he failed (by Niebuhr's standards): he neglected to engage with the philosophy of his own day, instead relying on 13th century scholastic thought. Niebuhr therefore assigns Leo XIII's attempt at synthesis to the cultural Christianity category instead, believing it belies greater dedication to 13th century cultural forms than to a true synthesis between Christ and culture.³¹⁸ Finally, because the synthesis model emphasizes the ontological separation between God and humanity, Christ and culture, Niebuhr worries that it does not take the separation due to sin seriously enough.³¹⁹ I do not believe all these critiques stand, but I will elaborate on this later in the chapter rather than here.

Christians of the fourth type live with the highest degree of tension—and unlike the synthesis Christians, “paradox” Christians do not experience this as a productive tension. This type sees both Christ and culture as representing absolute claims on the Christian; Christians are both humans embedded in the natural and social world, *and* followers of Christ bound to eternity. But since these two claims are admitted to be at odds, Christians are “subject to two moralities, and...citizen[s] of two world that are not only discontinuous with each other but largely opposed.”³²⁰ Christ is “in paradox with culture.”

Niebuhr recognizes that this type represents well the conflicted experience of many Christians anticipating Christ's final return. They feel torn between multiple allegiances and yet expected by God to keep up their loyalties. But this strength also gives rise to weaknesses. Christians who seem to live their lives in paradox can be prone to moral passivity, as if the

³¹⁸ Ibid., 138.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 148.

³²⁰ Ibid., 44-45.

absence of one clear “right” answer renders futile any effort toward righteous living. This outlook can also promote a default position of social conservatism, since a change from one human custom to another is, all things considered, merely a shift from one assertion of human competency to another—and equally in need of God’s grace.³²¹ Finally, in what appears to be the precise opposite of a critique Niebuhr offered to the third type, it seems as if an essential sinfulness of humanity becomes such a focus for Christians of the fourth type that the difference between creation and Fall is obscured. The type can tend toward a form of dualism that denigrates creation itself.³²² Another way to frame this critique is that the gap between Christ and culture can be seen as so exclusively a result of sin that the ontological distance between God and God’s (good) creation is forgotten.

The fifth type resolves the present tension between Christ and culture by expecting future change. While the world may be broken and alienated from God, Christians can expect it to become part of God’s kingdom in time—and they can play a part in making this happen. This type sees Christ as “the transformer of culture.” As a result of this transformation, Niebuhr refers to it as the “universalist” type, meaning that there is no sector of culture that must be left outside of God’s rule. Not only can individuals be saved, but whole societies and nations can also be brought into the kingdom of God. Interestingly, Niebuhr offers no critiques of this type, leading many commentators to conclude that he intends (perhaps less than straightforwardly) to influence readers toward this type. We must now turn to insights from Charles Taylor in order to identify drawbacks associated with it.

³²¹ Ibid., 164, 187-188.

³²² Ibid., 187-189.

Taylor notes—like Niebuhr—that some communities have attempted to resolve the tension between opposing impulses to flourish in society and to transcend the self, while other communities have sought ways to hold the two in tension. One direction—perhaps reminiscent of the “culture Christianity” type—is to insist on radical equality of ordinary people, such that no one must (or even should) rise above others or aspire to transcend the self, whether on a spiritual or another plane. Luther ruled out monastic vocations, for instance, insisting on marriage for all.

The other way a community or movement could try to eliminate the opposition between these impulses in the social realm is by insisting that everyone reach a nearly uniform level of self-transcendence—what Taylor calls the impulse to “Reform.” Taylor says it is uniquely characteristic of modernity. It is powerfully exemplified in various movements of the Reformation, but it is not limited to the Reformation. The zeal for Reform can show up in religious communities, as well as in political movements like revolutions, or even wings of progressivism. To plot this impulse along Niebuhr’s typology, we could identify this strategy in the “exclusive Christianity” type, such as in early Puritan or Mennonite communities, in which all members of the group set-apart were expected to be fully converted. Remnants of the secular world should be rooted out, and so when failings crop up, the responsible parties can be excommunicated or pressured to return fully to the fold. But exclusivist Christian communities can only extend their zeal for Reform so far. The fact that they remain minority communities and stand apart from the powers in mainstream society shows that they know this clearly.

A better home for Taylor’s Reform impulse in Niebuhr’s typology is the model of “Christ, the transformer of culture.” Christians of the fifth type believe that while society, its culture, and its institutions may not *now* be entirely under the authority of Christ, they *can be*. Much of their work is dedicated to making it so. And for them, no part of society, no person, no

institution, and no center of power need be left to its own devices and to this-worldly ends.

Conversionist Christianity is Taylor's Reform impulse writ large.

The problem with the impulse to Reform, as Taylor observes, is that whenever a society attempts to resolve once and for all the tension between ordinary flourishing and self-transcendence, it falters. If a society is overtaken by the zeal of Reform, calling everyone to self-transcendence, the community must either dwindle in size as members defect or are excommunicated, or it must resort to coercive and totalitarian tactics to keep up standards. If, at the other extreme, a society makes room only for what is common to all, it must likewise impose a totalitarianism of mediocrity. Even a society-wide commitment to the ordinary "flourishing" of the majority, if imposed too uniformly, can be appropriately understood as a totalizing structure. If it makes no room for an "anti-structure" of self-transcendence, its social order must break apart.³²³

But social cohesion is not the only reason a society should be wary of leaning too heavily toward Reform. There are Christian theological reasons for it, too. For if all of creation is to be made into heaven, the result is little different from flattening heaven into earth. Is there not a place for creation to be what it is—beautifully, but merely, creation? Is Christ not more than an earthly Reformer? Is God not more, and other, than the best that is possible on earth and in culture? The Reform impulse (perhaps not by coincidence) succumbs to the ontological collapse we saw first in "paradox" Christianity, Niebuhr's fourth type, which recognizes a difference between sin and redemption but forgets the prior, and more essential, difference in being

³²³ Structure and anti-structure, a theory Taylor incorporates from Victor Turner, is discussed in *A Secular Age*, 47-49. We will also look more closely at this below.

between God and creation.³²⁴ In conversionist Christianity, sin must be rooted out everywhere, so the whole world must be converted; but because there is no place for creation and culture to be healed as *mere* creation, the world must be made into heaven. And when heaven is brought to earth, there is no place left for the Transcendent.

Tensions in Equilibrium: Charles Taylor

As we have seen, Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* uses different language but also recognizes the tension between "Christ" and "culture" that concerns Niebuhr. We can gain insight into the tension, as well as the range of ways individuals, groups, and societies can respond to it, if we attend to Taylor's philosophical-historical observations. He indicates that the sense of urgency many late-modern religious people feel to recommend a single, consistent "Christian" position within and in relation to society has not always been operative. The tensions certainly existed, but Taylor explains how the pre-modern world was often marked by "tensions in equilibrium." This feature not only sustained the fabric of society but also enriched the imaginations of its inhabitants.

One of the persisting tensions societies have had to deal with is that between those who are content with the goal of ordinary human flourishing, and those who pursue something beyond flourishing.

On the one hand, the Christian faith pointed towards a self-transcendence, a turning of life towards something beyond ordinary human flourishing.... On the other, the institutions and practices of medieval society, as with all human societies, were at least partly attuned to foster at least some human flourishing. This sets up a tension, between

³²⁴ Brad Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation* notes the collapse of the *analogia entis* that is in the background of both modernity and much of Reformation thinking.

the demands of the total transformation which the faith calls to, and the requirements of ordinary human life.³²⁵

A classic example of this tension is the division into lay and religious vocations, particularly the celibate vocations. Procreation and family life have been conventional parts of human flourishing in society, while by contrast “celibacy enabled a total turning of the heart to God.” In the first place, Christians have reasoned that the continuation of human life is certainly God’s will, and this is done through the formation of families, the accumulation of property, and even warfare when it appears necessary. But the religious vocations are born of the observation that some of Christ’s own injunctions (the “counsels of perfection”) seem at odds with natural means and ends: he commanded various followers to “leave your nets” (or livelihood), to “sell all you have and give it to the poor,” to leave their parents and “let the dead bury the dead,” and to avoid taking vengeance or even resorting to violent self-defense. Various groups have sought to resolve this tension by requiring everyone to seek total religious devotion—even, as with the Shakers, expecting celibacy of everyone. Others have sought to resolve the tension by rejecting the idea that celibacy or a set-apart “religious vocation” is laudable at all.³²⁶

When reading Taylor’s discussion of these tensions, one thinks also of the ancient discussion surrounding the relationship between the active and contemplative lives. Greg Peters is careful to note that while the contemplative life is more often associated with monastic vocations, the distinction between active and contemplative does not line up perfectly with the distinction between lay and monastic. Much ancient and medieval precedent exists for describing different monastic lives as more active, more contemplative, or a careful balance between the

³²⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 44.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

two. While any monastic vocation would be thought to call for some dedicated contemplation, within a monastery, some monks might have been more dedicated to action, and some to contemplation.³²⁷

Contemplation has been usefully defined as both a state of prayer and a state of theological reflection.³²⁸ Contemplation of God has often been seen as a foretaste of heaven, and the life of virtue is what guides a Christian toward contemplation of God, which is ultimately a gift of grace.³²⁹ Action, its counterpart, can consist either of ordinary human activity in society, or of focused Christian ministry designed to serve God in the world. Such action could include everything from preaching, to ministry to the poor, or other practical goods. While much of Christian tradition has attempted to find ways to balance the active and contemplative lives (for instance, the Benedictine motto *Ora et labora*), disparate branches of Christianity have often had their favorite emphasis for the Christian life. It has been remarked that “the Greek saint is normally a contemplative; the Western saint, an activist.”³³⁰ While this is certainly a broad characterization, it may apply more often and more accurately to Protestants, who are commonly held to typify the Western preference for action over contemplation.³³¹

³²⁷ Greg Peters, *The Story of Monasticism: Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 15.

³²⁸ Mark A. McIntosh, “Contemplation,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Ian McFarland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 114.

³²⁹ Keith Egan, “Contemplation,” in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Philip Sheldrake (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 211, cited in Greg Peters, *The Story of Monasticism*, 5.

³³⁰ Lynn Townsend White, Jr., *Medieval Religion and Technology: Collected Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 238.

³³¹ For example, Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003).

The long history of interpretation of the sisters Mary and Martha in the Gospels can serve as a guide to understanding how the dyad of action and contemplation have been understood. While Martha was actively devoted to the tasks of hospitality and ministry, her younger sister Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying.”³³² Because Jesus defended Mary when Martha asked him to compel Mary to work rather than listen to Jesus, the interpretive tradition has usually privileged contemplation over action. But this has taken many forms: Cassian judged that while both action and contemplation were good and worthy, contemplation was superior. Marbod of Rennes also lauded both but took the opposite (and minority) position of holding up the active life as the culmination of a life that had been formed by contemplation.³³³ Augustine, followed later by Isidore of Seville, saw both positions as the calling of the Church, but separated by time: Martha’s active life of service represented the Church in the present, while Mary’s contemplative life represented the life of the Church in the age to come, “ceasing from all work and reposing in the sole contemplation of the wisdom of Christ.”³³⁴ Notably, “monastic authors were particularly attracted to the view of Mary and Martha as two contrasting but complementary, and not necessarily mutually exclusive, types of life or of people.”³³⁵ Some interpreters saw the dyad as representing monastic versus lay Christianity; some took them for two parts of monastic life; some saw them as mutually exclusive, but complementary, types of life; others saw them as representing two parts of one life. We see, then, a dichotomy that has produced tension throughout much of Christian history.

³³² Luke 10:39 NRSV

³³³ Peters, *The Story of Monasticism*, 16.

³³⁴ Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 15.

³³⁵ Constable, *Three Studies*, 16.

The approaches to interpretation to which it has given rise foreshadow the pattern of holding apparent opposites together that Taylor finds uniquely promising about premodern society.

Another theme we can uncover as we read Taylor's discussion of spiritual tensions in society is the choice between eternity and this-worldly time as the focus of a human life. Ordinary human flourishing is more likely to be at home in time, with its periodic demands for food, property, sex, family ties, security, and authority structures. Self-transcendence, by contrast, is more likely to be oriented toward eternity, causing a person to live as if the demands of natural life have no claim on one's life. Taylor turns to the temporal origin of the word "secular" to make this clear: "People who are in the saeculum, are embedded in ordinary time, they are living the life of ordinary time; as against those who have turned away from this in order to live closer to eternity....A parallel distinction is temporal/spiritual. One is concerned with things in ordinary time, the other with the affairs of eternity."³³⁶ Following Peter Brown, Taylor highlights this difference in temporal allegiance as it relates to celibacy: "Procreation is our answer to the Fall, and the death which it introduces into the world. By procreating, we go on perpetuating the species in fallen time. But through celibacy we can attempt to leap out of fallen time, and return to God's eternity."³³⁷

Along with these competing stances with regard to culture or "human flourishing" come competing pitfalls, and Christianity has been criticized for making mistakes on both ends. At one pole, there is the criticism that Christianity expects too much self-transcendence of people and thus undermines basic human flourishing. At the other pole, there is the criticism that

³³⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 55.

³³⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 44, citing Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), chapters 4, 7.

Christianity is too rosy and naïve in its outlook, as if humans are perfectly adequate and have no need to “transcend” themselves. Taylor observes that, while the two views could perhaps be harmonized, these objections actually seem to be attacking different branches of the religion. Calvin is not likely to have been accused of painting too rosy a view of human nature, for instance, nor could the liberal, Deist versions of Christianity be accused of seeking to subvert basic human flourishing.

A better way of formulating things would be to say, not that Christianity falls under both these criticisms, but rather that it is the scene of an internal struggle of interpretations, whereby some seek to avoid one, but thereby fall more directly under the other, and others do the reverse. The problem for Christian faith seems to be more like a dilemma, that it seems hard to avoid one of these criticisms without impaling oneself on the other—granted, that is, that one wants to avoid both.

But then one suspects that something similar may be true of unbelief.³³⁸

Indeed, religion is not alone in wrestling with these tensions. Versions of atheism have also felt the difficulty of calling people to excellence without undermining their basic flourishing, and of celebrating flourishing without defeating higher aspirations.³³⁹

What interests Taylor more than the mere existence of such tensions, however, is the question of whether a society attempts to resolve the tension by selecting only one or the other pole as its unifying principle, or whether the society manages to hold the opposing poles of the tension together somehow. Taylor believes that, in contrast with modernity, the pre-modern West was characterized by the existence of “tensions in equilibrium.” What is *not* meant by this is a situation of sheer diversity of coexisting thought systems and life patterns; in such mere diversity late modernity certainly far exceeds pre-modernity. Rather, Taylor notes how important societal

³³⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 624.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 627 ff. Taylor observes this difficulty among unbelievers, as well.

cohesion tended to be in pre-modern Europe, along with a common vision of how the parts of society connected to the whole. Thus when he speaks of “tensions in equilibrium” he means, in part, that society as a whole could imagine more than one valid life pattern and still account for them within the same organizing vision.

While it is certain that not all tension was justly and harmoniously resolved, “we can read mediaeval Catholicism in one way as incorporating a kind of equilibrium based on hierarchical complementarity.”³⁴⁰ In contrast with the groups, especially in the wake of the Reformation, that have insisted on a one-tier ethic—whether the total transformation for all, or the rejection of higher spiritual callings, or both at once—the medieval Catholic church made a place for both married and celibate, lay and monastic, patterns of life. “Moreover, with time, the distinction begins to grow into a complementarity. So that in the Latin Church a (in theory) celibate clergy prays and fulfills priestly and pastoral functions for a married laity, which in turn supports the clergy. On a broader scale, monks pray for all, mendicant orders preach; others provide alms, hospitals, etc. Over time, the tension is overlaid with an equilibrium, based on a complementarity of functions.”³⁴¹ The equilibrium does not mean equality: the complementarity is hierarchical, after all. But what Taylor finds important about this model, as opposed to the number of Reform movements in which modernity has specialized, “there is in principle a place for something less than the highest vocation and aspirations.”³⁴² Multiple paths, each considered necessary and valid, are able to exist in a coherent relationship to each other.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 44.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid., 45.

Another way in which tensions can exist in equilibrium is through the organization of time. While “higher times” might be more clearly oriented toward the sacred, “lower times” are for the resumption of ordinary life. Lower times could be identified with the saeculum, with the goals of basic human flourishing, while higher times could be identified with eternity and the goals that transcend flourishing. But while some groups’ entire lives are devoted to this-worldly flourishing, and other group’s lives are oriented toward eternity, the common passage from higher to lower times together as a society allows everyone to experience a complementarity of goals. Seen one way, festal times and holy days are the more spiritually demanding times for ordinary people, while the lower times allow them to resume the patterns of work and necessity that govern their lives—low times correlates to relaxed expectations. Seen another way, however, the routines of daily life are the times that are filled with constraints, and it is during the “higher times” that people have an opportunity to throw them off.

Taylor illuminates such tensions in equilibrium between flourishing and self-transcending by turning to Victor Turner’s functionalist theory of structure vs. anti-structure. Festival times, especially times like Carnival that mock the normal order, exist for the wellbeing of the society and the inclusion of all its members. “All structure needs anti-structure.” Structure includes “the code of behavior in a society, in which are defined the different roles and statuses, and their rights, duties, powers, vulnerabilities.”³⁴³ But even (and perhaps especially) in societies where a structure is highly uniform and strictly enforced, Turner finds “rituals of reversal” to be widespread. A tribal king may be kicked and mocked just before he is enthroned; a boy may be enthroned as bishop for a day; a madman may be revered; a conquered people may be thought to have mystical power. Turner also notes that “rites of passage,” called a time of “liminality” by

³⁴³ Ibid., 47.

Arnold van Gennep, can function as another kind of anti-structure, “because it’s a condition in which the markers of the ordinary code, with its rights, duties and status criteria, have been temporarily wiped away.”³⁴⁴

What makes all these situations essential to the survival of society is the way anti-structure interacts with structure. “It’s as though there were a felt need to complement the structure of power with its opposite.”³⁴⁵ And it is not merely to “let off steam,” though the “safety valve” impulse is surely important. Rather, there is a further observation “that the code relentlessly applied would drain us of all energy; that the code needs to recapture some of the untamed force of the contrary principle.”³⁴⁶ In Turner’s words, “Every opposition is overcome or transcended in a recovered unity, a unity that, moreover, is reinforced by the very potencies which endanger it. One aspect of the ritual is shown by these rites to be a means of putting at the service of the social order the very forces of disorder that inhere in man’s mammalian constitution.”³⁴⁷ The relation of structure to anti-structure not only makes possible the survival of society, but also reminds the members of society that they belong to the “*communitas*,” a bond between persons that does indeed transcend social structure.

With Turner’s theory in mind, then,

It would be legitimate to see the first tension I mentioned above, that between ordinary flourishing and the higher, renunciative vocations, as another example of structure versus anti-structure. The structures of power, property, warrior dominance, are challenged by a

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 48.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 49.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 93, cited on Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 49.

life which claims to be higher, and yet which couldn't simply replace the established order. They are forced into co-existence, and hence some kind of complementarity.³⁴⁸

The dualities of monastics and laity, and higher and lower times, can both be understood as examples of tensions in equilibrium and as a productive alternation between structure and anti-structure.

For Turner, the stability of society was the chief lens through which to understand such dynamics; for Taylor, however, as well as for this dissertation, the purpose of noting how a people holds “tensions in equilibrium” is somewhat different. Taylor introduces the concept of tensions in equilibrium in the first chapter of his vast *A Secular Age*, which is devoted to explaining why it could be quite difficult for a Westerner to believe in God in the year 2000, whereas in 1500, it was nearly impossible not to. He spends the first portion of the book attempting to describe what would have felt different about living in the pre-modern West, in particular with regard to how a pre-modern person would have imagined the universe and his or her place in it. Taylor makes the case that prior to, and more important than, philosophical arguments is the social and cultural environment where the concepts to which they refer can even be conceived of. More fundamental than propositions, then, is the *imagination*—and not merely the imagination of a few individuals, but the vision of reality that is privileged by society as a whole. He talks a great deal about the “conditions of belief”—such as whether society is organized around communities or individuals; whether people consider themselves to be discreet, irreducible, “buffered” units or whether they see themselves as “porous,” essentially connected to each other and the divine; whether time is experienced mainly as a cycle of meaning, or whether it is an endless stream of identical, measurable units; whether the cosmos is contained

³⁴⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 49.

and orderly, or vast and unfathomable. He also makes it clear that these ways of imagining reality, which form the conditions of belief, are shared across society. Taken together, they form the “social imaginary.”

While the existence of “tensions in equilibrium” is not the only component of the pre-modern social imaginary as he depicts it, Taylor believes this feature was instrumental in creating “conditions of belief” that allowed people to imagine the transcendent. That is to say, when we want to know why it is so easy to live in the 21st century as if God does not exist, and as if nothing exists that cannot be measured in money or some unit of scientific measurement, one of the things we should be thinking about is the effect of higher and lower times, laypeople and monastics, temporal and eternal concerns, and structure and anti-structure on the breadth of our imaginations. And not merely the existence of difference, either; it is the interplay between poles that, I believe, suggests multiple dimensions to the imagination.

What connection might “tensions in equilibrium”—as opposed to, say, a Reform zeal or a trend for a wholly immanent vision of thriving—have to the ease with which people can imagine the Transcendent? While this question deserves much more extensive treatment, here I will focus on two dynamics, one introduced by Taylor, and one that I believe can be deduced from his work.

The dynamic introduced by Taylor has to do at its core with the question of the highest human good. We have already addressed the tension between flourishing and beyond flourishing. Taylor sees this as reflecting to a degree the Axial shift from sacralized bodily rituals to religion that is more exclusively spiritual and “heady.” Axial religions, however, while feeling the tension between the two, have often tried to avoid total “excarnation.” Pre-modern Latin Christendom did this through

Christian celebration of the Mass, the rituals of the liturgical year, like Candlemas, and ‘creeping to the Cross’ on Good Friday; the Christian rites of passage; a new sexual ethic; an ambivalent attitude to war; a definition of the ‘corporal works of mercy’ institutionalized in the life of certain religious orders. And then, of course, there were a whole host of ceremonies and rituals which bespoke a pre-Christian origin, albeit somewhat transformed and integrated into Church practice...³⁴⁹

The body, including the ordinary activities of daily life, could be caught up into a spiritual life and could be blessed by God. And even when significant groups opted for a lifestyle oriented toward a vision of sacrificial self-transcendence *rather* than ordinary human flourishing, there could still exist a mystical connection between these two projects and these two groups. Perhaps at the height of such a “synthesis” is the Thomistic idea, restated by Basil Mitchell, that self-transcendence as a divine gift is *intrinsic* to human flourishing.³⁵⁰ The human is affirmed in the very moment it is declared insufficient on its own.

But in a society in which the goal of human wholeness is largely divorced from spiritual transcendence—in the West, caused in part by a Reforming zeal that too often denigrated the ordinary—more people’s lives feel farther from God. This is not only because there is little invitation for people with unremarkable spiritual aspirations to imagine their lives as having spiritual significance, though that is quite true. It is also because people sense an apparent conflict between goods: whether one prefers the human or the divine, it begins to seem as if the cultivation of one means a threat to the other. A humanist is likely to see aspirations toward spiritual transcendence as an enemy of human flourishing and bodily wholeness, while a religious aspirer may see embodied life as an enemy of spiritual fulfillment. Both—along with

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 614.

³⁵⁰ Basil Mitchell, *Morality: Religious and Secular: The Dilemma of the Traditional Conscience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 143-145, 155-156, 161.

those who look for compromises in the face of such conflicting “cross pressures”—will find it difficult to conceive of a Transcendent unity that brings such competing pressures into harmony in some way.

A second way in which “tensions in equilibrium” links to humans’ ability to imagine the Transcendent has to do, I believe, with a more fundamental ability and willingness of people to imagine “something more.” We may suspect it is linked to the Platonism that much of Christianity disseminated, but since this dissertation rests on finding similar elements in Jewish practice, the claim that it is Platonism alone would seem suspect. My claim is that when a pattern in society offers a model of “this” and “something more,” even when the “something more” truly succeeds only as a placeholder and a symbol, we learn to see the Transcendent as making incursions into the immanent. We could not imagine the Transcendent if the Transcendent did not become immanent; it would be completely irrelevant to us.

While I am arguing that a society- or community-wide pattern of “tensions in equilibrium” makes it possible to imagine the Transcendent (which could still be merely an anthropological or socio-linguistic claim), Nathan Jennings’ *Liturgy and Theology* argues for a metaphysical realism that would serve as the basis for such a link. Using a definition of liturgy that includes but is not limited to the words and actions performed in a church, he says “the ritual of the liturgy is not arbitrary, but is rather an organic analogue of reality.”³⁵¹ Taking seriously the theological truism that human language about God works analogically, he examines the positive implication of this belief: that patterns in human language and liturgical behavior can be apocalyptic, or revelatory of divine realities. This reverse dynamic he calls “anagogy.” To understand what he means and how it could be possible, we might imagine the very same

³⁵¹ Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 20.

physical patterns working themselves out in multiple dimensions that are analogs of each other: sound waves (one medium) become vibrations (another medium) and produce rings of sand on a sound table (a third medium).³⁵² When we think analogically, lower levels of reality, which we can access (such as liturgy, Scripture, theological language, and even, at times, anthropological observations), can be truly revelatory because they reflect and participate in divine realities. Theology is thus a search for pattern recognition, because the dynamics of God's own trinitarian life are reflected at other levels of reality.

Here we embark upon dangerous territory, with the possibility of distorted human systems being interpreted to make positive statements about the nature of God. To indulge such a possibility without restraint would be quite the opposite of "remaining clearly within the bounds of the apophatic imperative."³⁵³ But the possibility of such danger derives, it seems, not from an *overactive* metaphysical realism, but from the ease with which human imagination is compelled by such a connection. Rather than prompting us to avoid all linkages between human economic behavior and divine reality, the intuition that finds it easy to infer things about the nature of God from human behavior and patterns should cause us to discern ever more seriously the importance of our liturgical behavior. We do not wander in the dark.

If we take Jennings' lead, this would mean viewing human actions in response to God's gifts as both our "economy" and our "liturgy." The visible and tangible infrastructure of our community dynamics, as well as that of our worship, is the liturgy that witnesses to our "economic" action as part of God's household. And since patterns are reflected on all levels of reality, this suggests that we can begin with what is most clearly central to the dynamics of

³⁵² Ibid., 4-5.

³⁵³ Ibid., 21.

God's household and discern patterns moving outward. Jennings begins with the gift economy of God and the angels and proceeds to how the same gift economy is expressed in Christ's sacrifice; but if we humans are shaped most immediately by the economy that is present before us in *human* liturgy, this would mean that our communal response to God should be patterned most centrally on the dynamics present in the Eucharist.³⁵⁴

The Eucharist is not the only pattern given by God for human liturgical and economic action, however. I introduce Jennings' work, which explores the multiple resonances of a divine economy discovered through the Eucharist, as an illustration of what I believe can also be learned from the liturgy—and economy—of Sabbath observance. But we shall entertain this concept more fully below. For now, I note that some patterns of human behavior, such as liturgical actions, are structured in such a way that they allude to both a difference *and a connection* between earthly and heavenly realities.

The pre-modern social imaginary, in which such links appear to have been common, certainly does not describe the world of the twenty-first century.

I have been drawing a portrait of the world we have lost, one in which spiritual forces impinged on porous agents, in which the social was grounded in the sacred and secular time in higher times, a society moreover in which the play of structure and anti-structure was held in equilibrium; and this human drama unfolded within a cosmos. All this has been dismantled and replaced by something quite different in the transformation we often roughly call disenchantment.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁴ This idea that the gift economy of the Eucharist offers a liturgical pattern for the household (economic) dynamics of the Church is also present in Jean-Marie-Roger Tillard, *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

³⁵⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 61.

The present ease with which Westerners can live without thoughts of God (although Taylor is careful to say religion itself has not disappeared) came about through a long series of gradual, incremental changes to Westerners' social imaginary. To dissolve the respectful relationship between ordinary human flourishing and self-transcendence, as well as that between structure and anti-structure, came the spirit of Reform. To dissolve the interplay between higher times and secular time came the totalizing onslaught of Chronos. When all public reality could be arbitrated scientifically, when ethics was a matter of competing codes of uniformity, all time could be measured by a clock, and goodness and worth could be settled by the market, what else could follow but a divorce of eternal and temporal concerns in our imaginations?

Equilibrium and Synthesis

To map Charles Taylor's "tensions in equilibrium" onto Niebuhr's typology, we see that what Taylor describes is largely translatable to Niebuhr's "synthesis" type. The most significant difference consists of the fact that Niebuhr's types are meant to describe individuals, communities, or societies, while Taylor's "tensions in equilibrium" refers to a reality shared across certain societies as a whole, whether or not all individuals agree to it. Taylor is trying to capture a feature of a society's shared experience, even if much of the matrix he describes would be held inarticulately by most members of society. For him, the presence of tensions in a complementary equilibrium is a functional compromise that results in certain bonds in society, and not (like Niebuhr's types) an assertion about the way Christ and culture *ought* to relate. This is not to say, however, that Taylor's tensions in equilibrium are not also reflected in specific thinkers' views or articulately adopted by many groups within medieval society.

Perhaps the clearest sign that Taylor's "tensions in equilibrium" is reflecting essentially the same vision as Niebuhr's "synthesis" is the simultaneous possibility of pursuing two goals with dignity: what is common to all humans, and what is distinctively Christian or salvific. Laypeople and monastics can each pursue their distinctive goals; a life of flourishing and a life "beyond flourishing" can both be commended; higher and lower times can be held in the imagination together. It is a system in which two levels of reality are co-existing: what Niebuhr calls "two stages" of the ethical life, Taylor acknowledges as a "two-tiered religion" or a system of multiple "speeds."³⁵⁶

But essential to this relationship is that the two levels do not merely co-exist: they exist together within one vision of reality. Niebuhr's "synthesis" type relies on the doctrines 1) that Christ is both God and human and 2) that God is both Creator and Redeemer. While a great difference exists between Creator and creature, creatures are dignified both by their creation by God and by Christ's Incarnation. "Merely" creaturely ends can be good, while the highest human end is the transformation that makes possible the vision of God, all through a gift of grace beyond what is creaturely. Taylor's "tensions in equilibrium," then, is how such a theological vision can be mirrored in society. Just as a continuity can be imagined to exist between the proximate and ultimate ends in one human life, a spiritual connection may be imagined to exist between the people primarily pursuing human flourishing and those pursuing something "beyond flourishing."

A third feature of Taylor's "tensions in equilibrium" that easily overlays Niebuhr's "synthesis" model is the element of "hierarchical complementarity." Space in earthly society is made for two coexisting goals or foci, but one of them refers more explicitly to things "above."

³⁵⁶ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 124, 127, 147-148; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 62-63.

Both goals are good—Taylor notes the value of “human wholeness,” which protesters against religious ascetic zeal have often sought to protect—but the goal of spiritual self-transcendence, with eternity in view, is “higher.” A purpose it serves is that of helping all members of society, including the “ordinary,” to imagine the Transcendent and to remember eternity.

We can also link Taylor’s “tensions in equilibrium” with Niebuhr’s “synthesis” model by noting how starkly it contrasts with other types. The “Christ against culture” type acknowledges two distinct goals, one higher and one lower, but rather than seeing tension between them as a positive thing, it rejects the lower goals of merely human culture as far as possible. No “equilibrium” can or should be attained. The “Christ of culture” type attempts to foster an individual life or society in which the claims of Christ and culture are harmonized, but it does this without fully appreciating the tension that is likely to arise between them. In Taylor’s terms, “Christ of culture” Christians celebrate human wholeness, without entertaining the possibility that Christ may call his followers at times to renounce aspects of human flourishing. Niebuhr’s “Christ in paradox with culture” Christians, or dualists, feel an allegiance to both the claims of Christ and those of culture, but this can produce a sense of defeat. It seems likely that the reason they do not manage to locate each of these claims in relation to each other (or hold the “tensions in equilibrium”) is because Christ’s claims and those of human culture are seen to exist on the same ontological plane and must therefore remain in competition. Sin, not an ontological distinction, keeps Christ apart from culture. Similarly, the Christians who follow “Christ, the transformer of culture” also see the claims of Christ and those of culture as existing on a plane: a sense of competition between them remains, and the only way it can be resolved is through transforming every aspect of the world to pursue the goals of eternity.

After complementing Niebuhr's commentary with Taylor's insights, I find something like the synthesis model the most promising for reconciling the (apparently) competing claims of Christ and culture, both because of its faithfulness to Christian orthodoxy and because of the possibilities it offers for setting the stage for tolerance in society. But we must also take seriously the problematic tendencies of this vision, if we are searching for some version of it to recommend to Christians today. First, Niebuhr believes that the synthesis type tends to be nostalgic for the thirteenth century. When we realize that Charles Taylor refers to "tensions in equilibrium" as a feature of society that distinguishes it sharply from modernity, we cannot simply dismiss Niebuhr's complaint. But it is less clear whether the complaint has the force of a true objection: if Niebuhr is simply observing that the pre-modern world was a time in which the synthesis model seemed to prevail, I am not certain this can be taken as a strike against the model itself. When Niebuhr points to Pope Leo XIII, who drew heavily on scholastic philosophy in the late nineteenth century, as an example of this model's boundedness to the thirteenth century, it is not clear why he concludes Leo XIII was more attached to the thirteenth century than to a true synthesis between Christ and culture.³⁵⁷ But we can certainly take Niebuhr's critique as a challenge: if, as appears to be the case, the best-known synthetic models of Christ and culture are also tied to features of thirteenth century Christendom that do not (and probably should not) apply today, is there another way to do it?

Second, and perhaps ironically, Niebuhr finds the synthesis position ahistorical. It seems to represent a cosmos of enchanted verticality, frozen in time. While it may present a compelling cross-section of the nature of heaven and earth, it does not allow for a dynamic depiction of how

³⁵⁷ This line of reasoning seems to indicate that Niebuhr thinks that any true synthesis between Christ and culture will involve a given person's *contemporary* culture. But this seems to contradict Niebuhr's own earlier interest in the broader meaning of "culture" rather than the culture of a particular time and place.

things *happen*. It seems to lack a chronology, without space either for the acts of God or of humans to be decisive in the history of their relationship. This criticism seems to be more powerful than the first, since such a flaw would hold true of a synthesis vision no matter when or by whom it is espoused. Again, however, we must ask: is this criticism true of all versions of the synthesis model? Or is *that* a feature that is bounded by the thirteenth century's preferred form of synthesis?

Niebuhr's third and most salient criticism of the synthesis model is related to the dangers I expressed above that would be inherent in applying too boldly the analogical method Jennings described. If heaven and earth are joined, then there is a very real possibility that we can take highly provisional earthly patterns and assume that they reflect heavenly realities *as they are*. In the thirteenth century, this might have meant drawing inferences about God's character from the character of kingship or the conventions of a feudal society. In the modern world, it could mean judging from patterns of social stratification that God intends a fixed hierarchy of peoples. (This has been done extensively.) Niebuhr notes that the "synthesis" view, with its static treatment of history and its over-satisfaction that earthly reality reflects heavenly reality, has been aligned with the social and political status quo and against those who would challenge it. Niebuhr notes that while the synthesis view must always be a symbol of the truth Christians wish to find, earthly realities can only ever be provisional, placeholders for what is truly good. With this I wholeheartedly agree. But he then concludes that *if* earthly realities are held to be only symbols or placeholders, what we are dealing with is not really the synthetic type.³⁵⁸ But I find no reason for this assertion.

³⁵⁸ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 147.

What responses are possible to this third criticism? We could, on one hand, give up on the synthesis model entirely, concluding that it is bound to elevate some people beyond what they are meant to bear. If anyone (like a priest) represents Christ, if anyone (like a monk) aspires to live their lives uniquely oriented toward eternity, then they are bound to acquire too much power and misrepresent the divine. On the other hand, we could be loath to give up the ability to imagine the Transcendent that is offered when we find an elaborate, layered ontology represented in tangible, human symbols. We might counter that we *can* indeed work toward good and beautiful earthly realities while realizing that they are always penultimate. We might insist that, because abuses of power are always possible, it is all the more important to be guided in our human relations by the gift economy laid out in the Eucharist, which levels all human pretensions. Finally, we might keep on the lookout for examples of synthesis—ways to hold “tensions in equilibrium”—that maintain the classic ontological distinction between God and creation, and that are patterned on God’s own economy, but are *not* as wedded to a system of human hierarchies as the synthesis of the thirteenth century.

The Sabbath Equilibrium

Here I propose that the Sabbath should be understood, among other things, as a response to the question of Christ and culture. I argue that it meets the central criteria for a “synthesis” model, but it escapes Niebuhr’s most salient critiques of the synthesis type.

The idea that the Sabbath may be an approach to the Christ and culture question is perhaps surprising, especially when we consider the ways it is often handled. We are accustomed to thinking of Sabbath observance as a cornerstone of Jewish identity and piety. It might also be addressed in Christian circles, especially Seventh Day Adventist communities, as a matter of

obedience to God's commands. And a number of books in recent decades view it as a piece of divine wisdom that can be applied on an individual basis as a pathway toward spiritual health and reduced stress. Along with this growth in interest in the Sabbath among those who note the increasingly frenetic pace of society and the economy, there *sometimes* comes an interest in the Sabbath as a means of considering the shape of economic or environmental justice.

I do not wish to oppose any of these approaches; like Jennings, I am convinced that where a divine pattern exists, it translates to many arenas or levels of reality. But I recognize that much of the social and ethical power of Sabbath observance is contained in the practices of communities and societies. The manner in which the Sabbath should be observed in Christian communities is both highly contested *and* given low priority, however, and the possibility of reinvigorating a public Sabbath in American (or more broadly, Western) society is both old-fashioned and religiously controversial. The force of my project is thus *not* devoted to urging specific communal practices.

What I propose is at once more modest and more ambitious. Whether or not our communities can embody the practice of the Sabbath through ceasing work for one day each week, I would like to encourage us to begin imagining our place in the world through the lens of a Sabbath pattern. Surely Sabbath observance, like the Eucharist, is not *merely* an isolated action that takes place once a week. Rather, it must reveal something about God's own economy and how God invites us to participate in it. The Sabbath has been theologized extensively as a foretaste of eternity, rest in Christ, and the conclusion of the Church's striving; why should we not also ask whether it can be an aid for us in navigating the tension between the claims of Christ and culture, "flourishing" and rising "beyond flourishing," and even the tension between "exclusive Christianity" and the impulse to find solidarity with all other humans?

What we find in the Sabbath from its beginning is, indeed, a pattern that invites an imaginative interplay between spiritual aspirations and earthly necessity, a dynamic that both Charles Taylor and H. R. Niebuhr discussed. The six days of work affirm and make space for earthly striving toward creaturely goals, toward ordinary human “flourishing.” On these days, humans are both part of creation as creatures—with the need to eat, secure shelter, and order their common lives—and reflecting the Creator by shaping their world far beyond the other animals’ capacities. Both of these aspects of human culture—both our embeddedness in nature and our activity to manipulate nature—place us in solidarity and commonality with all other humans, regardless of their spiritual aspirations or relationship to God. By contrast, the day of rest announces that creaturely goals are not all there is; humans exist not only in relation to each other as partakers in society, but also in relation to God, our Creator and Provider. Work must pause because the contemplation of God sustains us in ways our own hands cannot. The Sabbath day calls humans “beyond flourishing” in the ways that are common to all humans, toward holiness to God. If the six days of work come nearest to affirming “cultural Christianity” (Niebuhr’s second type), the Sabbath day comes nearest to affirming “exclusive Christianity” (his first).

While the idea of the Sabbath as a holy day for a people called to be holy is familiar to Jews, the alignment of the day with Niebuhr’s “Christ” label should be even clearer for Christians. This can be attributed to the fact that where the Sabbath’s practical implications have been minimized among Christians, its spiritual meanings have flourished. Many of these interpretations essentially replace the Sabbath with the person of Christ. As we saw in Chapter One, Christians have often been exhorted to observe the Sabbath commandment by resting in the knowledge of Christ, by trusting in his salvation rather than their own works of righteousness, or

by ceasing from sin through Christ. These interpretations need not exhaust the meaning of the Sabbath in order to serve Christians by enabling us to see Christ as the fulfillment of the Sabbath. This figural reading of Christ as the Sabbath only adds to other reasons we might already identify the Sabbath with the call of Christ, such as his counter-cultural injunctions to his disciples to put down the sword or to cease their striving because God will provide.

So far, I have argued for the pattern of Sabbath to be understood as a response to the Christ and culture question. More specifically, it offers a model that fits most of Niebuhr's criteria for a model within the "synthesis" type. Since Niebuhr calls the synthesis model "Christ *transcending* culture," we can tell that he came to this type envisioning a model with a high degree of verticality: indeed, his critique that the type tends to be ahistorical is built into the imagery of the type as he described it (and as its medieval proponents constructed it). But the pattern of one Sabbath alternating with six weekdays is a synthesis built from time rather than (primarily) space, and without a sense that one of the days is physically "higher" than the others. Another way the Sabbath pattern differs from the medieval synthesis as both Niebuhr and Taylor describe it is that it does not rely on a stark differentiation between kinds of people. While the medieval synthesis relied on a "complementary hierarchy" of rulers and people, monastics and laypeople, and so on, the Sabbath involves everyone (however imperfectly) in the days of work and rest. The complementary hierarchy is built into time instead of into the relations between people.

Far more compelling, however, are the similarities. Like Niebuhr's synthetic type and Taylor's "tensions in equilibrium," the aspirations to ordinary cultural activity and those to transcendent spiritual heights both receive a dignified place in the pattern of the Sabbath and weekdays. And more than merely coexisting, the two types of aspirations are placed in relation

to one another in a coherent vision. Furthermore, while the two poles in tension are both “good,” they are not equal: it is the Sabbath that gives meaning and direction to the other days, and not the other way around.

The pattern of the Sabbath alternating with weekdays also shapes the imagination. While the earthly Sabbath clearly falls short of actually completing earthly striving, actually being eternity, or delivering the vision of God, its presence within time issues an invitation to humans to remember God and to await the fulfillment of God’s promises. The presence of a differentiated category, a holy time, within this-worldly reality, makes it possible for humans to conceive of something quite “other” and “more” than this world and this time.

Charles Taylor’s description of “tensions in equilibrium”—without mentioning the Sabbath at all—perhaps goes farthest to demonstrate that the Sabbath does the work of a synthesis model. First, Taylor speaks of the goals of time and eternity as existing in harmonious tension within society; tradition has long associated the Sabbath with eternity and the workdays with secular time, and the alternation between them keeps them in tight, but organized, tension. Second, Taylor addresses the contrast between the goals of flourishing and those of renunciative self-transcendence; the Sabbath and the weekdays put these goals into a complementary, but inclusive, relationship. Third, Taylor refers to the interplay between structure and anti-structure; the Sabbath is not only a weekly break from the structured, purposive work that addresses all “necessity” within society, but it has also been prized as a periodic rediscovery of equality between people.³⁵⁹ Fourth, and relatedly, Taylor speaks of higher times and lower times in complementarity; more than only alluding to eternity, the existence of the Sabbath requires a

³⁵⁹ Bonnie Honig, “Is Man a ‘Sabbatical Animal’? Agamben, Rosenzweig, Heschel, Arendt,” *Political Theology* 20:1 (2019), 1-23, DOI: 10.1080/1462317X.2018.1518766.

different approach to time altogether. As “anti-structure,” it requires a less rigid treatment of time, an attention to the meaning of events within time, rather than the measurement of time. Fifth, the pattern of Sabbath and weekdays holds together the tension between active and contemplative lives, which were not included in but correspond well with Taylor’s “tensions”: the workdays are a quintessential example of activity, while the Sabbath is perfectly designed for contemplation of God and the Scriptures (traditionally, Torah) while at physical rest. Finally, all these dynamics are meant to be shared within a society that, together, creates the “plausibility structures” (Berger’s term) for belief in God. As Taylor puts it, the social imaginary of a society that holds such tensions in equilibrium is one that offers “conditions for belief” by which it is nearly impossible not to imagine the Transcendent.

While the Sabbath is a form of synthesis that has often depended on adoption by a whole community or society, I still argue that it can be a theoretical resource for Christians to discern the relationship between the claims of Christ and culture *even when* we do not live in Sabbath-observant communities. To separate a principle from the actions that ground it is always risky, however, so the more we try to live with this resource for discernment, the more we may find ourselves submitting our time to the ancient pattern; and the more we treat the Sabbath differently from other days, the more ethical clarity we may discover with regard to how we position ourselves in society.

At the heart of the Sabbath synthesis, if it is to be used for ethical discernment within culture, is the two-part recognition: “A) I am a human like all humans, a creature among God’s creation. As such, I have my place in human culture, working together for creaturely wholeness.

B) *And* I am a Christian, united to God through Christ in the Church. As such, I look forward to final restoration from sin and the transforming vision of God.”³⁶⁰

The weekdays serve as both a symbol and a training ground for the first claim and are most likely to be the times when solidarity with all people is called for. If we extend ourselves into this category to see what we can learn from it and how it might stretch us, some may find ourselves challenged to break out of exclusive Christian subcultures, or habits of life in which we rarely encounter people who do not share our religious belonging. If we take seriously the idea that *all* our necessary labor should be considered within the category of the weekdays (rather than shoved to the weekend), we may learn to take a more inclusive view of “work,” both domestic and public. And many of us, particularly those Christians who devote their time in public to the special interests of Christian communities, may find ourselves called to devote more attention to pursuing goals common to the entire community, including the health, social harmony, and economic thriving of our neighbors.

The Sabbath (which, yes, Christians may interpret as Sunday) will serve as a symbol and training ground for the second claim. If we place ourselves wholly in the mindset of the Sabbath, we may be prompted to discover more clearly what it means to be united to Christ in the Church. We may wonder in what ways the Eucharist is more than food, and how the sharing we are

³⁶⁰ While it is appropriate to see Christ as the truest manifestation of humanity (“Gloria enim Dei vivens homo; vita autem hominis visio Dei,” in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* IV.34.7), it is nonetheless useful to think of the two claims presented here as logically distinct—one grounded by creation and the other grounded by the Christ-event. I see the preservation of these two stages in theological-ethical thinking as comparable to the position, following Philip Rolnick, that Barth’s *analogia fidei* need not rule out the *analogia entis*, but may rather be an intensification of it. Philip A. Rolnick, “Analogy,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, 10-12. Or, to adopt Nathan Jennings’s term (see Ch. 4 of this work), in the context of a participatory ontology the two may exist as “nested continua.”

called to within the Church is quite different from an ordinary social circle.³⁶¹ If we try to stand apart for a time, we may begin to recognize the ways in which we seem to be inextricably and uncritically linked with the habits, systems, and powers of our world. While we do not expect to remain apart from our society and fellow humans forever, we may gain a greater ability to discern where we must and must not celebrate what is shared in society. We may become better attuned to what would constitute the human wholeness we are pursuing on the weekdays with our neighbors.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the Sabbath as a theology of culture. I have complicated Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* with materials from Peter Berger, Abraham Heschel, and Charles Taylor, but I find Niebuhr's overarching question to be still ubiquitous and still pressing. This question is: How should Christians, followers of Christ, position themselves within and in relation to human culture (ordinary human flourishing), since it seems that Christ asks his followers to focus on the kingdom of God to the point of renouncing the claim that ordinary pursuits would seem to place on them? Niebuhr's five "types" are meant to illuminate the foundational beliefs that explain different responses Christians have taken to the "Christ and culture" question. While Niebuhr does not explicitly argue for one "type" over the others, his presentation makes the "transformation" type appear most compelling. In this vision, Christians can reconcile the calling of Christ with the claims of human culture by hoping and working for a

³⁶¹ Recall Bonhoeffer's distinction between the community of the Spirit and the human community in *Life Together* (New York: Harper, 2009), 31.

time when all aspects of human culture—including its centers of power—will be aligned with the demands of Christ.

Charles Taylor speaks to a variant of the same question: what is a community to do when it senses two competing impulses—the impulse to carry on a flourishing human life attending to basic necessities, and the impulse to transcend one’s natural inclinations and live wholly devoted to the priorities of eternity? What if some of its members are compelled to respond to one calling while others are compelled to respond to the other? Taylor does not represent one approach as inherently better or worse—particularly since the “Christ and culture question” is not the focus of his book—but he does observe that a situation of complementary hierarchy between them has been more conducive to making room for the transcendent in a people’s “social imaginary.” This amalgam holds tensions in equilibrium through a shared, society-wide vision that allows multiple impulses to exist in a complementary relationship. This pre-modern social imaginary, with its ability to hold tensions in equilibrium, is essentially what Niebuhr has in mind when he describes the third of his five types, the “synthesis” model.

What I find unique, and uniquely promising, about the “synthesis” model—particularly as we flesh it out through Charles Taylor’s discussion of tensions in equilibrium and Abraham Heschel’s meditations on the Sabbath—is that it does not have the need to collapse the tension between basic human flourishing and the self-transcendence involved in Christian holiness. It also does not see the tension between Christ and culture as an insurmountable obstacle. Where the “cultural Christian” model collapses the tension by minimizing any call to true transcendence, the exclusivist model collapses the tension by rejecting the goodness in, and need for, human culture, the conversion model assumes the tension will disappear in some future time, and the paradox model keeps the tension but makes Christians largely helpless in the face of it,

the synthesis model is the only one that sees value in the tension itself. It recognizes an ontological difference between God and creation, and a similarly insurmountable leap between ordinary human aspirations and humans' ultimate calling, but it sees creation and human aspirations as imbued with an inherent (though tainted) goodness.

It is as a synthesis between the claims of Christ and culture that the Sabbath makes a contribution to the culture question. It holds tensions in equilibrium, though not, as in Taylor's model, between groups of people such as the laity and monastics. It reflects the alternation between higher and lower times, and the need for anti-structure in fruitful relationship with structure. We have arrived at the possibility that, although medieval Christendom is the focus of Taylor's story and seems to dominate Niebuhr's third type, it may not be the pinnacle of "synthesis" after all.

The Sabbath form of synthesis is at once more ancient than the spatial model, built on time rather than space, and yet more adaptable to a variety of social structures *outside* medieval Europe. The Sabbath preserves a distinction between God and creation; between humans in relationship to God, and humans among the creatures; between activity and contemplation; between commonality with other humans and the status of being set apart for God's purposes; between the world as we know it and the world of eternity we are told to expect.

If Christians in late modernity feel a particularly pressing need to resolve a tension between the call of Christ and the claims of human culture on our lives, it may be (in part) because we have come to see the fourth commandment as elective. This is not to say that the more complicated stories of authors such as Brad Gregory and Charles Taylor are wrong. But it is to say that the pre-Reformation outlook for which they seem to be nostalgic also fell short. The "medieval synthesis" supplied a widespread sense of transcendence, but it did so in a prevailing

mood of antisemitism and while buttressing rigid social stratification. Its preferred model for holding tensions in equilibrium—the natural and the supernatural, God and creation, lay and monastic, flourishing and self-transcendence—was a largely spatial model rather than a temporal or narrative model. An imagination shaped by the Sabbath is quite different.

Let me limit my ambitions. This dissertation does not attempt to arbitrate most issues of Sabbath practice, though I will make some modest recommendations. It recognizes that the conditions of twenty-first century life—not only the demands of the market that might make it impossible to rest on the same day each week, but also the fragmentation of communities to the point that most of our spiritual practices are privately selected, as from a menu—make widespread adoption of a new Sabbath practice unlikely. So for the purposes of this chapter, I am recommending that the Sabbath—the *idea* of regular Sabbath observance—should be reintroduced to our imaginations. And that this framework would begin to supply a set of tools for addressing a number of issues, not only related to the existence of God and our ability to imagine the transcendent, but also issues related to Christians’ ethical position in society.

For instance: whereas many Christians divide over whether we can see ourselves as sharing common goals with non-Christians³⁶² or whether we must stand apart and reject “the world,” a theology of culture that is shaped around the pattern of Sabbath would see the two callings as complementary. On the one hand, because God created all people, and Christians remain creatures with the need to participate in society, we can find commonality with non-Christians. But on the other hand, Christ has inaugurated a new people, the Church, which has a

³⁶² While I make this contrast between Christians and non-Christians, I realize that Christians themselves have widely divergent goals. But the value of asking whether Christians can share generally human goals in common with non-Christians still applies when each person is permitted to read “Christian” however s/he wishes. The question is not one of defining insiders versus outsiders; it is one of asking whether goals can be found in common with those who are considered outsiders.

different set of norms. Christ has called us apart to follow him, and what it means to follow Christ (though it is not always clear what it will entail) is guaranteed to differ at times from any set of prevailing norms. Thinking along the lines that the Sabbath gives us, we can draw from the meaning of the six days of work to make common cause with fellow humans, solving problems, developing the world, doing the “work” of existence. And we can draw from the meaning of the Sabbath to think of ourselves as set apart—for a time—to become more closely shaped by the values of eternity, to be re-formed into the Church, to rest in Christ. Which should inform the other? It is the Sabbath encounter with God, with the Church, with eternity, that gives meaning and new life to the work we do in the arena of the six workdays. The demands and constraints of the six workdays must not determine or limit our vision of God’s kingdom.

I do hope we can discover what it looks like to participate in the concrete liturgy of Sabbath observance. But I suggest that the reality the Sabbath pattern points to is much larger than *merely* a practice. In much the way Nathan Jennings speaks of the liturgy of the Eucharist, I suggest that the Sabbath points to a pattern that exists in God’s economy. To participate in it is to participate in reality. So I hope this dissertation can be a recommendation of a practice, but also an invitation to think about the world (in particular, the Christ and culture question) in terms of the Sabbath.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CHRISTIAN READING OF ABRAHAM HESCHEL'S *THE SABBATH*

Abraham Heschel's 1951 classic on the Sabbath has been something of an elephant in the room of Christian Sabbath studies. Christians have taken sporadic interest in the Sabbath over the last several decades, publishing a number of books in popular spirituality or even light ethical reasoning on the subject. They tend to pay lip service to Heschel or cite him briefly. But rarely do they engage with his work substantially or at length. Some of this neglect may be due to the "in-between-ness" of the work, which Maria Carson notes (since it is too long for a sermon, and too short for a standard book; too poetic for most scholarship, but too full of Talmudic footnotes for the casual reader). Scholars of Heschel themselves have often sidelined *The Sabbath*.

But I suspect that the chief reason Christian books on the Sabbath have declined to fully engage with, though they note the importance of, Heschel's *Sabbath* is that the book is so inescapably *Jewish*. It draws extensively from rabbinic discourses and recounts the rabbis' disagreements; it spins spiritual lessons out of legends; and it engages in flights of mystical ecstasy, the specific language and imagery of which is foreign to most Christians. While Christians might like to think they have a great deal in common with the people of the Hebrew Scriptures, this text draws from the long tradition of post-Biblical Judaism as well. As we discovered in Chapter Two, Christian-Jewish relations have made significant strides since the Holocaust; but this progress has not usually made its way to Christian studies of the fourth commandment. So even as Christians have aimed to rediscover the spiritual riches of the

Sabbath, they may have been awkwardly ill-equipped to discover the riches in Heschel's *Sabbath*.

This dissertation, however, attempts to take seriously the Jewishness of the Sabbath, and therefore also dares to engage in a Christian manner with Heschel's very Jewish book *The Sabbath*. So far, Chapter One has developed a cumulative definition of the Sabbath drawn from Hebrew Scripture and Christian tradition. Chapter Two has argued that the fulfillment of something does not equate to its obsolescence, whether we mean Judaism as a whole or the Sabbath in particular. Christians can thus appreciate and learn from elements of Judaism, even while we may see these elements with Christ-tinted eyes. Chapter Three has argued that, while Christians have often preferred to recast the Sabbath as exclusively spiritual, *practices* such as Sabbath observance are also spiritually salutary and theologically valid. Chapter Four has made the case that the Sabbath has often functioned—and could function again—as an imaginative tool for addressing the question of Christ and culture, helping Christians discern how to live distinctively but without inordinate anxiety in an increasingly pluralistic society. This chapter will undertake an exploration of several themes in Heschel's *The Sabbath*, asking how and what Christians can learn from it, and why such an exercise might be important.

The structure for accomplishing this has three parts. I will first discuss seven themes in *The Sabbath* that merit attention, using the help of Heschel's other writings, along with secondary literature on his sources and influences, to understand these themes on their own (Jewish) terms. Next, I will adopt a different posture, engaging in a response to the same themes from my own (Christian) perspective. Some of Heschel's concepts and language will strike me as entirely compatible with Christian teachings, though they are formulated afresh; some I will not be able to accept fully, for Christian theological reasons; and some will strike unexpected

resonances with themes in Christian Scriptures or subsequent theological interpretation. In the third phase, I will take stock of what this reading of Heschel has gained for the cause of Christian understanding and faithfulness.

When responding to Heschel's themes with insights drawn from Christian tradition, I will apply the principles developed in Chapter Two regarding Christians' engagement with Judaism. While there is a place for receiving insights from Judaism (as much of the Christian faith is just that), the distinctiveness of Judaism and Christianity must be respected. I aspire to learn as a Christian from Heschel's Jewish thought with neither pretension nor imposition. That is, in the first place, when Heschel may offer something that is compatible with Christian tradition, I aim to note what is distinctive before what is similar, noting where a theme is original to Heschel and his community rather than claiming it as already Christian or "nothing new." In the second place, when Christian resonances sound in response, I do not then assume that those Christian-tinged ideas are already located within Heschel's text. At no point do I suggest that Heschel *really* meant something in a Christological sense without knowing it, or that he *should* have meant it that way.

The outcome of this exercise strengthens the cases made in the preceding chapters, at once laying out the richness the Sabbath offers to Christians and doing so by engagement with modern Jewish thought. What is at stake includes something as political as how we see ourselves in relation to the forces of culture and civilization, and something as personal as our spiritual integrity. But since, in many ways, "the personal is political," is it any surprise God gave his people one gift that cares for both society and the soul? We come once again to the possibility that many of the difficulties Christians face today, whether external or internal, can be fruitfully addressed by careful reengagement with the Sabbath and rapprochement with Jews and Judaism.

Seven Themes in Heschel's *The Sabbath*

Time and Space

The key distinction that defines Heschel's concept of the Sabbath is that between the realms of time and space. Which of the two we prioritize is a central question in the book: while it is appropriate to "gain control of the world of space" to some extent, "time is at the heart of existence."³⁶³ Heschel associates space with material objects and the corresponding human power to acquire, possess, and control them, while by contrast, "There is a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to give, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord."³⁶⁴ Time is the realm of the spirit, and it is there that God's presence is encountered.³⁶⁵ It is the Sabbath, a space of time, that was declared holy before anything else.³⁶⁶ In fact, having been established before either the Tabernacle or the Temple, the Sabbath is given the significance of a physical space, called by Heschel "a *palace in time*."³⁶⁷ "The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to *holiness in time*."³⁶⁸

Not only is the Sabbath uniquely aligned with the realm of time, but so is Judaism itself. Heschel describes Jewish ritual as "*architecture of time*," and he ascribes great importance to the

³⁶³ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 3.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 312.

³⁶⁶ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 9.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

fact that all objects and places—even the people of Israel—that are called holy are called so *after* the Sabbath.³⁶⁹ In a sense, it is time, with the Sabbath as its pinnacle, that situates and relativizes the holiness of any material objects. In *God in Search of Man*, his philosophy of Judaism, Heschel contrasts Judaism with Greek philosophy: “It was the glory of Greece to have discovered the idea of cosmos, the world of space; it was the achievement of Israel to have experienced history, the world of time.... Biblical history is the triumph of time over space.”³⁷⁰ While philosophical speculation “starts with concepts, Biblical religion starts with events,” which happen in time.³⁷¹

This dichotomy has raised questions among many readers and commentators. Surely time and space cannot be so neatly separated; what can it possibly mean to prioritize the realm of time over the realm of space? Maria Carson has suggested that a way to understand Heschel’s use of the dichotomy is by using the term “orientation.” Of course, she says, things in space are experienced within time, and for embodied humans, time cannot be experienced apart from space; but “this matter of orientation is not *only* spatial; there is a part of the concept of orientation which is interior and affective. ‘Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance.’”³⁷² When Heschel’s critics point out the obvious inescapability of the realm of space, they are missing that Heschel is urging a particular *orientation* toward holy objects within time. Carson’s explanation seems true to Heschel’s comments elsewhere, though Heschel adds more specificity: we tend to relate to things

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 9-10.

³⁷⁰ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 206.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 16.

³⁷² Maria Carson, “Gender and the Realms of Time and Space in Heschel’s *The Sabbath*,” *Religion Compass* 13, no. 3 (2019): e12296–n/a, 3-4, quoting Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham, 2006), 3.

as their masters, measuring success through our ability to control them, whereas it is in the realm of time that we find ourselves unseated and vulnerable. “The intentions we are unable to carry out we deposit in space; possessions become the symbols of our repressions, jubilees of frustrations....Is the joy of possession an antidote to the terror of time which grows to be a dread of inevitable death?”³⁷³ The orientation to which Heschel calls us when he urges us to prioritize time over space is an orientation toward awe, an openness to the series of events we cannot control, toward an encounter with God.

Another question pertains to whether the characterization of Judaism as rooted in time rather than space is accurate. This is certainly a common conception in the mid-20th century, shared by anthropologist Mircea Eliade and Christian theologian Reinhold Niebuhr.³⁷⁴ Both see Judaism as the rise of a religion of history, in which God’s relations to humanity are understood in terms of unprecedented events rather than repeating cycles of seasons or static principles. Catholic Christianity is held to return to a more spatial orientation, while Protestantism recovers some of the narrative quality of Judaism. But not all interpreters of Judaism would agree with this characterization of Judaism as being primarily historical, and Heschel’s claim was a major point of contention for the book’s earliest Jewish reviewers.³⁷⁵

We can begin to understand the origins of Heschel’s emphasis, however, when we consider the place of his thought in Jewish history. While the Sabbath had always been an important, even an identifying, institution for Jews, the exile and the final destruction of the

³⁷³ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 5-6.

³⁷⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), 25-34.

³⁷⁵ Ira Eisenstein, “Of Time and the Sabbath,” *The Reconstructionist* (Feb. 22, 1952): 23–24; Shlomo Balter, “The Sabbath,” *The New York Jewish Week* (1975), 25.

Temple forced the Sabbath to bear more weight in rabbinic Judaism. Holy space, whether the land of Israel or the Temple itself, had always played a central role in organizing Jewish identity; but throughout the centuries when consistent access to holy space was denied, the observance of holy time and holy deeds gained even greater significance.³⁷⁶ “What has remained untouched by the conqueror...and, moreover, what remains consistently portable for a wandering community, is the realm of time.”³⁷⁷ While it was Heschel who first “called the attention of modern Jews to the Temple-like quality of Jewish Sabbath,” the subconscious shift from a spatial to a temporal orientation had been many centuries in the making.³⁷⁸ Green’s contention is that while time, particularly the Sabbath, had always been important, it was only after the destruction of the Temple that it became the *central* defining feature of Judaism.³⁷⁹ At the time of *The Sabbath’s* writing, many Jews had settled in the United States and were experiencing greater comfort and prosperity than ever before, even drifting toward secularism. Ken Koltun-Fromm sees this as a strong motivator for Heschel’s *Sabbath*. These American Jews may have been in the process of being lulled into comfortable consumerism, the “thinginess” that results from at last having some control in the realm of space. Heschel thus urges them to rediscover their love for the realm of time, *despite* losing some of the immediacy of the *galut* (exile) experience.³⁸⁰

In conclusion, we can understand the priority of time over space to be an imaginative tool for Jews to experience God’s presence when the spatial “nearness” to God was often lacking.

³⁷⁶ Arthur Green, *The Heart of the Matter*, 15 ff.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁸⁰ Ken Koltun-Fromm, “Vision and Authenticity in Heschel’s *The Sabbath*,” *Modern Judaism* 31, no. 2 (2011): 142.

Heschel did not mean to assert that material things were not important for holy observances, and the critics are right to point out that Heschel has—perhaps due to the poetic nature of his writing—stated overly broadly the identification of Judaism with time rather than space. Heschel is calling his readers to the freedom from material possessions and control that invites an encounter with God.

Technical Civilization

Closely associated with the “realm of space” is technical civilization, another recurring theme in *The Sabbath*. Technical civilization is what results when a community or society collaborates in their activity within the realm of space. It includes not only the grand infrastructure of an empire like Rome but also simpler achievements like the tools of subsistence agriculture. It has a positive sense, because “to gain control of the world of space is certainly one of our tasks.”³⁸¹ “Adam was placed in the Garden of Eden ‘to dress it and to keep it’ (Genesis 2:15). Labor is not only the destiny of man; it is endowed with divine dignity.”³⁸²

But more often, Heschel speaks of its risks. Indeed, many read him to disparage the world of space, though Heschel claims not to do so, because of how much attention he devotes to the troublesome allure of technical civilization.³⁸³ Language of aggression marks his discussion of it: “Technical civilization is man’s conquest of space.” “Nothing is more useful than power, nothing more frightful.” “Technical civilization stems primarily from the desire of man to subdue and

³⁸¹ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 3.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁸³ Green, *The Heart of the Matter*, 17; Carson, “Gender and the Realms of Time and Space,” 4.

manage the forces of nature.”³⁸⁴ And while he assures us that is a place for such activities, “the danger begins when in gaining power in the realm of space we forfeit all aspirations in the realm of time.”³⁸⁵ The risk of this is quite significant, he says. Through avid participation in technical civilization, we begin to think of ourselves as masters of the world. “Yet our victories have come to resemble defeats. In spite of our triumphs, we have fallen victims to the work of our hands; it is as if the forces we had conquered have conquered us.”³⁸⁶ We are not content with the dignity and joy of our work, but we become addicted to ever greater control. We begin to think there is nothing that evades our grasp.

Such a habit of mastery of space becomes a pattern of thought—an orientation of its own. This is because our imagination is changed to the point that we become blind “to all reality that fails to identify itself as a thing, as a matter of fact.”³⁸⁷ *God in Search of Man* dwells more extensively on this attitudinal shift, this basic change in perceiving everything. “There are three ways we may relate ourselves to the world—we may exploit it, we may enjoy it, we may accept it in awe.... Our age is one in which usefulness is thought to be the chief merit of nature; in which the attainment of power, the utilization of its resources is taken to be the chief purpose of man in God’s creation. Man has indeed become primarily a tool-making animal, and the world is now a gigantic tool box for the satisfaction of his needs.”³⁸⁸ The result impoverishes us deeply: “As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines.... Mankind will not perish for want of

³⁸⁴ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 3-4.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁸⁸ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 33-34.

information; but only for want of appreciation.” Finally, not only does the value of humans’ own life diminish when this happens, but we also cease to be able to conceive of God, because “Awareness of the divine begins with wonder.”³⁸⁹ In *Who Is Man*, he similarly concludes that “A life of manipulation is the death of transcendence.”³⁹⁰

Eternity

If Heschel’s readers forgo their attachment to technical civilization and the realm of space, instead reveling in the realm of time, what they gain is access to eternity. “That the Sabbath and eternity are one—or of the same essence—is an ancient idea.” Heschel relates a legend that God promised Israel that if they would observe Torah, he would give them a precious treasure: the world to come. When they asked for an example of that world within *this* world, he declared, “The Sabbath is an example of the world to come.”³⁹¹ He cites several other Mishnaic and Talmudic sources that link eternity with the Sabbath and concludes: “Unless one learns how to relish the taste of Sabbath while still in this world, unless one is initiated in the appreciation of eternal life, one will be unable to enjoy the taste of eternity in the world to come.”³⁹²

There is some ambiguity in Heschel’s use of eternity. This is perhaps not surprising, since Heschel himself says that “Jewish tradition offers us no definition of the concept of eternity.”³⁹³ On the one hand, as we have already seen, he associates eternity with the eschaton, the world to

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 46.

³⁹⁰ Abraham J. Heschel, *Who Is Man?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 82.

³⁹¹ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 73.

³⁹² Ibid., 74.

³⁹³ Ibid.

come, and the completion of all things. On the other hand, eternity seems to be a constantly available alternative realm, the realm of the spirit, in which God dwells. Eternal life “is ‘planted within us,’ growing beyond us,” and we participate in a foretaste of it each Sabbath.³⁹⁴ To many, it may seem as if eternity is only entered posthumously, “Yet those who realize that God is at least as great as the known universe, that the spirit is an endless process of which we humbly partake, will understand and experience what it means that the spirit is disclosed at certain moments of time. One must be overawed by the marvel of time to be ready to perceive the presence of eternity in a single moment.”³⁹⁵

Let us not overlook the remarkable way in which the Sabbath serves as the link between time and eternity. In much philosophy and theology, we find time sharply contrasted with eternity, as if eternity (though incomprehensible) can be defined as whatever time is not. The concepts are stark opposites. But for Heschel, the opposition is between time and space, and there is great continuity between time and eternity. Perhaps it is not that time is not contrasted with eternity in some sense, but that when we begin to think in terms of time, we get closer to understanding eternity (because of the direct contrast between the two). Eternity at least *refers* to time. And with this relationship, the Sabbath is such that it can serve as a portal *within* time to eternity, which is outside time.

A Middle Way

While, as I have noted, Heschel certainly prizes the realm of time over the realm of space, he does not completely disavow achievements within the realm of space. Instead, he

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 76.

represents Judaism as a religion that has practices that can circumscribe space to reserve the attention due to the realm of time. In Chapter Four, I quoted Heschel as saying that “The faith of a Jew is not a way out of this world.” I did not then complete Heschel’s thought. A Jew does not seek a way *out* of this world “...but a way of being within and above this world; not to reject but to surpass civilization.”³⁹⁶ One must neither reject civilization completely nor be controlled by it: the course Heschel recommends is a “middle way,” and the pattern of Sabbath observance makes this possible.³⁹⁷

The legend of the second-century Rabbi Shimeon, which is the focus of a central portion of *The Sabbath*, illustrates this idea beautifully. Three rabbis were discussing the glories of Rome—its roads, bridges, marketplaces, and bathhouses. One rabbi praised these accomplishments, the second stayed silent, and Rabbi Shimeon objected: all these grand accomplishments are perverted by the pursuit of glory, gain, and immoral pleasures. When word spread that Rabbi Shimeon had condemned Rome’s proudest achievements, the government decreed Shimeon’s death. Shimeon went into hiding with his son, Rabbi Eleazar, and the two of them spent twelve years in solitude in a cave, where their zeal for holiness grew. When they learned that it was safe to emerge from hiding, they found that they now saw *all* the trappings of civilization—not merely the vain glories of Rome—as thoroughly corrupt. Even the simple work of agriculture incensed their anger, and consuming fire from their eyes enveloped whatever they saw. For this, God rebuked them, and they returned for one more penitent year in the cave. When they returned to the world, Rabbi Eleazar’s gaze still rained fire upon the works of civilization, but Rabbi Shimeon could now repair the damage Eleazar wreaked. What finally gave Rabbi

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 27.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 45-46.

Eleazar peace was the moment when the two of them encountered an old man carrying myrtle “having the perfume of paradise” to show his joy on the eve of the Sabbath. They both realized that God’s commands were still being cherished, and they arrived at a “reconciliation with this world.”³⁹⁸

For Heschel, the journey of Rabbi Shimeon and his son shows a growth in wisdom. Shimeon began with an admirable zeal for eternity and “a sense of horror at seeing how people were wasting their lives in the pursuit of *temporary life*.” But this singular focus detracted from him: “In his boundless thirst, he saw no middle way, no ground for compromise. The duty to study Torah—which was the way to attain eternity—had an exclusive claim on all of life....Hence Rabbi Shimeon could not but regard any secular activity as iniquity.”³⁹⁹ This is precisely the opposite of Rabbi Shimeon’s contemporary, “the distinguished heretic Alisha ben Abuyah,” who could not abide seeing people devote their Sabbaths to Torah study rather than a more practical occupation. But both of these positions, Shimeon’s “renunciation of this world and Alisha’s infatuation with this world,” were extreme positions. The wisest position was that of Rabbi Judah ben Ilai, who said that “the ideal path lay midway.”⁴⁰⁰ Rabbi Shimeon had to overcome his “world-negation” to learn that “there is heaven and everything else.”⁴⁰¹

It is the encounter with the old man (representing Israel) who had gone out to meet the Sabbath with myrtle (as one would greet a bride) that brought about Rabbi Shimeon’s and Rabbi Eleazar’s final reconciliation. While, to be sure, it was wrong of the Romans to idolize technical

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 35-37.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 47.

civilization, and time truly was “for the sake of eternity,” Shimeon at last realized that Israel could be at peace among temporal things because of their commitment to the Sabbath. “This, then, is the answer to the problem of civilization: not to flee from the realm of space; to work with things of space but to be in love with eternity. Things are our tools; eternity, the Sabbath, is our mate. Israel is engaged to eternity. Even if they dedicate six days of the week to worldly pursuits, their soul is claimed by the seventh day.”⁴⁰²

Heschel echoes elsewhere the idea that abandoning the created realm in pursuit of spiritual goals is not humans’ calling. In *Who Is Man?* he says it is not for humans to presume to make a decision between God and the world, or between the body and the soul. Rather, “it is upon us to strive for a share in the world to come, as well as to let God have a share in this world.”⁴⁰³ In reading him, we get the sense that God is gracious enough to make an appearance within the world, to allow the works of the body to shape the soul, and—in the Sabbath—to allow eternity to enter into a moment in time.

The Sabbath as Queen and Bride

The image of the Sabbath as a bride or queen, which appeared in the story of Rabbi Shimeon, is important and recurring. The old man Rabbi Shimeon met was greeting the Sabbath as a bride, because “eternity, the Sabbath, is our mate. Israel is engaged to eternity.”⁴⁰⁴ Heschel’s subsequent two chapters develop the nuptial theme extensively, telling an allegory of how the days of the week were each wedded to a realm of creation, while the Sabbath was left lonely,

⁴⁰² Ibid., 48.

⁴⁰³ Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 93.

⁴⁰⁴ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 48.

destined to be wedded to “the Community of Israel.” We also hear that when Israel is told to “sanctify” the Sabbath, the meaning is the same as the Talmudic concept of consecrating a woman—setting her apart for marriage, betrothing her. Israel’s “destiny is to be the groom of the sacred day.”⁴⁰⁵ By the third century, there are stories of rabbis going out (like Rabbi Shimeon’s old man) to greet the Sabbath as a bride, or even as a queen at her wedding.⁴⁰⁶ The idea appears in Sabbath prayers, through imagery Heschel finds in the evening and morning prayers, in the *Lechah Dodi* prayed Friday at dusk, and in the recitation of a portion of the *Song of Songs*.⁴⁰⁷ Heschel even finds the double theme of queen and bride in the very meaning of the *kabbalat Shabbat* prayer, whose name refers both to a joyful greeting and to the acceptance of an obligation: the Sabbath has both a beloved presence and a sovereignty.⁴⁰⁸

An aspect of this imagery that should be striking to readers outside Heschel’s tradition is that the Sabbath is personified at all. It is not *merely* a span of holy time; it merits the kind of joyful reception one would give a much-anticipated lover. Heschel is cautious when he describes the kind of personification that is taking place: for the rabbis, “the metaphoric concept of the Sabbath held no danger of deification of the seventh day, of conceiving it to be an angel or a spiritual person. Nothing stands between God and man, not even a day.” He denies that the symbol carried a “mental image” with it, but it instead “[alludes] to the fact that its spirit is a

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 51-52.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 55, 61, 67.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 61-62. Green, *The Heart of the Matter*, 32-34. Green discusses the history of these two understandings of *kabbalat*.

reality we meet rather than an empty span of time which we choose to set aside for comfort or recuperation.”⁴⁰⁹ It refers to “the presence of God in the world, open to the soul of man.”⁴¹⁰

There has been, however, a stronger Jewish tradition of personifying the Sabbath than Heschel may wish to admit. He himself mentions the concept of *neshamah yeterah*, the Talmudic concept of the “additional soul” that is added to a person on the Sabbath, and which the Kabbalists developed into the tradition of a literal second soul descending upon each person during the Sabbath.⁴¹¹ The Kabbalists have also seen the Sabbath, wedded to Israel, as a representation of one aspect of God. The Sabbath has been considered to be both the bride of God and, as a feminine emanation of God, the bride of Israel.⁴¹²

Besides the bare fact of the personification that is taking place, another striking quality of the Sabbath’s identification as a queen and bride is the specifically feminine nature of the symbolism. Heschel does not elaborate on this aspect of the Sabbath and only briefly refers to gender: “It is the woman who ushers in the joy and sets up the most exquisite symbol, light, to dominate the atmosphere of the home,” perhaps stressing the domesticity of Sabbath observance.⁴¹³ His conventional way of referring to humanity, the groom of Sabbath, is “man”—but this would hardly have been noteworthy in 1951. It takes on added meaning, however, when

⁴⁰⁹ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 59.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 87-88. Green, *The Heart of the Matter*, 35 ff. provides historical background to this theme. See also Elliot K. Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1989), 121-136.

⁴¹² Green, *The Heart of the Matter*, 81-85.

⁴¹³ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 66. This is discussed in Carson, “Gender and the Realms of Time and Space,” 6.

Heschel drifts back and forth between “man” and “Israel,” who is to be the masculine “groom” to the feminine Sabbath.

Seen in the larger context of the book, however, and the other themes with which the Sabbath is identified, it is not surprising that the Sabbath is linked with femininity. It stands for the realm of spirit, the presence of God to the human spirit (and the human spirit to God), in contrast to space and activity. It is the alternative to, and the antidote for, excessive control and the drive for mastery—often considered specifically masculine excesses.⁴¹⁴ So the superiority of the Sabbath could be interpreted as the need for humans’ “masculine” acquisitiveness to be balanced by a “feminine” attention to the health of the spirit. It seems to glorify the feminine. On a practical level, however, the benefit to women is unclear. We do not find out whether women’s typical role as caregivers allows *human* women (as opposed to the abstract feminine) to participate in Sabbath rest, since rabbinic tradition allows essential caregiving tasks to continue on the Sabbath.

The Mystical “More”

To be sure, the Sabbath is a time of ceasing work, but Heschel’s discussion and its tone draws more attention to what is *added* than to what is subtracted. Linked with the idea that the Sabbath gives a foretaste of eternity is the consistent idea that Sabbath observers become the recipients of something mysteriously more than they can touch on other days. The *neshamah yeterah*, the extra soul, that descends upon Jews during the Sabbath may be the clearest instance of it. But a mystical sense of Sabbath abundance pervades Heschel’s entire work.

It is indeed the subtraction of pedestrian concerns that creates space for this added glow.

⁴¹⁴ Carson, “Gender and the Realms of Time and Space,” 7.

Labor is a craft, but perfect rest is an art. It is the result of an accord of body, mind and imagination. To attain a degree of excellence in art, one must accept its discipline, one must adjure slothfulness. The seventh day is a *palace in time* which we build. It is made of soul, of joy and reticence. In its atmosphere, a discipline is a reminder of adjacency to eternity. Indeed, the splendor of the day is expressed in terms of *abstentions*, just as the mystery of God is more adequately conveyed *via negationis*, in the categories of *negative theology* which claims that we can never say what He is, we can only say what He is not. We often feel how poor the edifice would be were it built exclusively of our rituals and deeds which are so awkward and often so obtrusive. How else express glory in the presence of eternity, if not by the silence of abstaining from noisy acts? These restrictions utter songs to those who know how to stay at a palace with a queen.⁴¹⁵

The various abstentions are complemented by feasting and a feeling of festivity. “To sanctify the seventh day does not mean: Thou shalt mortify thyself, but, on the contrary: Thou shalt sanctify it with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy senses. ‘Sanctify the Sabbath by choice meals, by beautiful garments; delight your soul with pleasure and I will reward you for this very pleasure.’”⁴¹⁶ On the Sabbath “it is as if the appearance of all things somehow changed...the air of the day surrounds us like spring which spreads over the land without our aid or notice.”⁴¹⁷ Dressed in celebratory clothes, prepared with candles and appropriate food, “people assemble to welcome the wonder of the seventh day, while the Sabbath sends out its presence over the fields, into our homes, into our hearts. It is a moment of resurrection of the dormant spirit in our souls.”⁴¹⁸

We also often hear mention of beauty, which transcends utility. While other days need our activity to lend significance to the time, Heschel says, “The hours of the seventh day are

⁴¹⁵ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 14-15.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

significant in themselves; their significance and beauty do not depend on any work, profit or progress we may achieve. They have the beauty of grandeur.” There is “a perfect rest *with which Thou art pleased*.”⁴¹⁹ This way of speaking of beauty is reminiscent of Hans Küng, a contemporary of Heschel’s, who spoke mystically about art: “It gives more than it has,” and it “is more than it is.” In *God in Search of Man*, Heschel notes that “sublimity is a peculiar quality of the Hebrew Bible” and argues (disagreeing with Kant) that “the sublime is not opposed to the beautiful.” It is, rather, the sense of “that which we see and are unable to convey. It is the silent allusion of things to a meaning greater than themselves. It is that which all things ultimately stand for.”⁴²⁰ While the Romantics associated the sublime with a feeling of horror, “the Biblical man in sensing the sublime is carried away by his eagerness to exalt and to praise the Maker of the world.”⁴²¹

This language reveals something of Heschel’s ontology: he sees the world as an icon of the divine. “What then, is reality? To the Western man, it is *a thing in itself*” (Taylor’s “immanent frame”). But “to the Biblical Man, it is *a thing through God*.”⁴²² Elsewhere, “The world is a gate, not a wall.”⁴²³ Things “stand...for something supreme,” and we must see “the world as an allusion to God.”⁴²⁴ Seeing parallels between Heschel’s language and that of Jean-Luc Marion, Ken Koltun-Fromm writes that Heschel wishes Jews to adopt “a mode of seeing

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁴²⁰ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 39.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 41.

⁴²² Ibid., 97.

⁴²³ Ibid., 98.

⁴²⁴ Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 88-89.

through rather than at objects.”⁴²⁵ While such an ontology certainly underlies *The Sabbath, God In Search of Man* and *Who Is Man?* make this element in Heschel’s thought even more explicit. The kind of mystery Heschel wishes to keep alive is not the kind of mystery that can be solved but the belief that hiddenness lurks even in things we can see: “the world of the known is a world unknown;”⁴²⁶ “The perceptibility of things is not the end of their being. Their surface is available to our tools, their depth is immune to our inquisitiveness.”⁴²⁷

Even when Heschel does not directly invoke the concept of the Sabbath, we can begin to understand what is at stake in the keeping of the Sabbath. Heschel tells us that “as civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines.”⁴²⁸ Recall how technical civilization, for Heschel, is not merely a set of accomplishments, but it brings with it a shift in perception: while it is possible to accept the world in awe, ours is an age in which we primarily seek to exploit the world. “The modern man learns in order to use.... ‘*Knowledge is power.*’”⁴²⁹ Today, “man’s very existence devours all transcendence. Instead of facing the grandeur of the cosmos, he explains it away; instead of beholding, he takes a picture; instead of hearing a voice, he tapes it. He does not see what he is able to face.”⁴³⁰ In this kind of world, it may only be in the space carved out by the Sabbath that we keep a chance of seeing the world as mysterious, beyond our mastery, alluding to God’s grandeur.

⁴²⁵ Koltun-Fromm, “Vision and Authenticity,” 144.

⁴²⁶ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 56.

⁴²⁷ Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 84-85.

⁴²⁸ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 46.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴³⁰ Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, 84.

Related to the unfathomability of reality is its inexpressibility. Even religious dogmas attempt to express what is ineffable, and we must accept that language cannot adequately capture God.⁴³¹ If we keep silent, however, this does not mean we have abandoned faith. Echoing the way Heschel has described the Sabbath, absence can actually signal an overflow of presence. “The ineffable, then, is a synonym for hidden meaning rather than for absence of meaning. It stands for a dimension which in the Bible is called glory.”⁴³² If this is the case, we should not be surprised to find that Heschel is less interested in the doctrinal statements of religion. Instead, “Religion is the result of what man does with his ultimate wonder, with the moments of awe, with the sense of mystery.”⁴³³ *God in Search of Man* says little about the Sabbath explicitly before the final few pages, but the entire book provides the background that *The Sabbath* brings into context. And even the final pages of *God in Search of Man* reveal that it is in the Sabbath that this essential posture of the faith of the Jew is expressed. When the people of God create a place of absence, choosing not to attempt to explain away either God or creation, they are given the gift of awe and can return to the mystery that should never be lost.

Heschel’s mystical awareness may be partly due to how his Hasidic origins put him in close conversation with the tradition of Kabbalah within Judaism. It is the literature of the Kabbalah that is the origin of the most elaborate imagery surrounding the *neshemah yeterah*. He draws from its foundational text, the Zohar, the idea that “supernal souls leave their heavenly sphere to enter for a day the lives of mortal men.” Each soul must be joined to a human during the Sabbath in order to gain spiritual insights and report them back to God. Another legend links

⁴³¹ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 102-103.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 111.

the “additional soul” of the Sabbath with the light of the splendor of creation—too glorious for humans to enjoy, except, in part, on the Sabbath. Other legends tell of the splendor that was added to the appearance of holy rabbis on the Sabbath: one appeared much taller, while another had a rose upon his cheek. “An effulgence of Sabbath-holiness illumines his face. So resplendent is his countenance that one almost hesitates to come close to him.”⁴³⁴

The Holy and the Good

While many Protestant writings on the Sabbath have celebrated the ethical implications of Sabbath practice, focusing on it as a labor law or statement of economic justice, Heschel frustrates those who would seek to use his authority to these ends. For him, ethics is a category *within* worship, as the good is a category *within* the holy. In *The Sabbath*, he says, “To the philosopher the idea of the good is the most exalted idea. But to the Bible the idea of the good is penultimate; it cannot exist without the holy.”⁴³⁵ In *God in Search of Man*, he elaborates: “Plato lets Socrates ask: What is good? But Moses’ question was: What does God require of thee?”⁴³⁶

We cannot understand the Sabbath apart from holiness. “Holy” is “one of the most distinguished words in the Bible..., which more than any other is representative of the mystery and majesty of the divine.” And before God named any place or object holy, he called the Sabbath day holy. The Sabbath is “*holiness in time*.”⁴³⁷ Philo of Alexandria, perhaps to defend Jews’ reputation against accusations of idleness, preferred to speak of the Sabbath as having a

⁴³⁴ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 88-89. Quoting Rabbi Chaim of Tchernowitz, *Sidduro Shel Shabbat* (Warsaw, 1872), 8c.

⁴³⁵ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 75; This is repeated verbatim in *God in Search of Man*, 17.

⁴³⁶ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 99.

⁴³⁷ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 9.

practical value. It was “to send them out renewed to their old activities” and allow them to “collect their strength with a stronger force behind them.” But to Heschel (and most Jewish tradition) this utilitarian Sabbath misses the point. “The Sabbath is not for the sake of the weekdays; the weekdays are for the sake of Sabbath. It is not an interlude but the climax of living.”⁴³⁸

What sets it apart? It is “a dimension in which the human is at home with the divine; a dimension in which man aspires to approach the likeness of the divine.” And “the likeness of God can be found in time, which is eternity in disguise.” Heschel notes an added dimension of holiness: quoting the Zohar, “According to some it is the name of the Holy One. Since the word *Shabbat* is a name of God, one should not mention it in unclean places, where words of Torah should not be spoken. Some people were careful not to take it in vain.”⁴³⁹

If Heschel believes the holy situates the good, how does the holiness of the Sabbath have a bearing on ethics? Heschel is frequently enigmatic on this point, but we can find clues. First, in *God in Search of Man*, he dwells on the openness to mystery inherent in Jewish faith. When the people of Israel came into close contact with God at Sinai, what did they hear but “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.... Honor thy father and thy mother....” (ellipses Heschel’s)? And when Moses asked God to identify himself further, God’s only answer was, “I am full of love and compassion.” The Sabbath is made parallel with God’s compassion. In the absence of explanations, this aspect of God’s character is revealed.

A second clue is that, throughout *The Sabbath*, we discover a growing sense that the attitude and spirituality cultivated through Sabbath observance is meant to infiltrate the other

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 14.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 20-21.

days. “All days of the week must be spiritually consistent with the Day of Days.”⁴⁴⁰ All days are not meant to *become* the Sabbath, but the Sabbath reveals things that are always true of God, humanity, and creation. Just as God is compassionate, and reality is mysterious, all humans are endowed with remarkable dignity and freedom, even with royalty. If on the Sabbath people are freed from their social conditions, from the constraints imposed by the success of their labor and its value within civilization, we must come to recognize that the essence of a person is independent of these things.⁴⁴¹

From the knowledge that all humans have an inherent dignity we may learn one lesson in two directions. For those with possessions, the Sabbath may inculcate a kind of detachment (the kind we saw earlier recommended by Clement of Alexandria): “In regard to external gifts, to outward possessions, there is only one proper attitude—to have them and to be able to do without them.”⁴⁴² For those who have managed to acquire possessions, there is the hope of discovering freedom, an antidote to the paradoxical way Heschel finds that the things we seem to master come to control us.⁴⁴³ But on the other hand, for those who lack conventional status and wealth, the lesson is *also* one of freedom. Because on the Sabbath, everyone is free of the control of possessions and independent of status, we are reminded that—ineluctable though they may be—these attributes of a person are not ultimate. The lack of status or property does not seep down to the person’s essence.⁴⁴⁴ While Heschel eschews talk of how the Sabbath might influence

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 89.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 30: “It is a day of independence of social conditions.”

⁴⁴² Ibid., 28.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 89-90.

⁴⁴⁴ Bonnie Honig, “Is Man a ‘Sabbatical Animal’? Agamben, Rosenzweig, Heschel, Arendt,” in *Political Theology* 20:1 (2019), 1-23. Honig finds the “Sabbath of equality,” her own preferred way to understand the

a political or economic system, a reader (and future research projects) might reflect on the extent to which we would alter the social order if we took human worth as seriously as the Sabbath teaches.

Observance

As I noted above, Heschel devotes more attention to the spirituality, festivity, and nearness to God and eternity that the Sabbath represents than he gives to what it means to observe halakhic requirements of the Sabbath. But the question does not go entirely unanswered. To a small extent in *The Sabbath*, and even more in *God in Search of Man*, Heschel connects exterior deeds with one's interior spiritual state.

When reading *The Sabbath*, one could be carried off on flights of mystical fantasy, forgetting the letter of the law entirely, but—almost as if he anticipates this temptation—Heschel denies that that would be a legitimate possibility.

For all the idealization, there is no danger of the idea of the Sabbath becoming a fairy-tale. With all the romantic idealization, the Sabbath remains a concrete fact, a legal institution and a social order. There is no danger of its becoming a disembodied spirit, for the spirit of the Sabbath must always be in accord with actual deeds, with definite actions and abstentions. The real and the spiritual are one, like body and soul in a living man. It is for the law to clear the path; it is for the soul to sense the spirit.⁴⁴⁵

According to Ken Koltun-Fromm, Heschel was writing to a Jewish community who had arrived at new level comfort in the United States and who were in danger of becoming secularized.

Sabbath, to be a trajectory of Heschel's thought. While her eagerness to select the social justice "payoff" of Heschel's spirituality seems to lead her to rush hastily past the themes Heschel himself emphasizes, she is correct to highlight this theme.

⁴⁴⁵ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 16-17.

Rather than scold them about the dangers of giving up the practices of the Torah, however, he sought to enchant them with the beauty of the Sabbath. Yet such an emphasis must still be heard within a context in which it is clear that Sabbath *observance* is what Heschel means. Heschel may not be elaborating in great detail upon what Jews must do or must not do (though he mentions the ceremonies, prayers, and ceasing labor), but his Jewish audience would have enough of a background in the keeping of Sabbath to understand that he meant them to connect the two.

What Heschel is after when he speaks of practical observance is far from mindless obedience, and in both *The Sabbath* and *God in Search of Man* he attempts to show how holy deeds are inseparable from the spirit that corresponds to them. As we saw above, he sees the basic requirements of the law as creating space, making the person available to God, while the real goal of obedience is a spiritual encounter. He acknowledges that the ancient rabbis did not always make this connection clear: “law and love, discipline and delight, were not always fused” (as they should have been). But even so, the rabbis realized that “the Sabbath is given unto you, not you unto the Sabbath.”⁴⁴⁶

The importance of holy acts (*mitzvot*) is made clearer when Heschel describes the close connection between the body and the soul. In reference to the feasting enjoined on the Sabbath, he says, “The soul cannot celebrate alone, so the body must be invited to partake in the rejoicing of the Sabbath.”⁴⁴⁷ This point is explored more fully in *God in Search of Man*, where Heschel describes the relationship between *halacha* (the legal requirements of Torah) and *agada* (the spiritual heights to which Torah calls people to aspire). Because it is the actions of the body that

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 17, quoting *Mekilta* 31:13.

⁴⁴⁷ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 19.

can be more easily governed, he associates halacha with the role the body must play in faithfulness, while agada invokes the soul. Heschel notes that in Jewish history agada “became subservient to halacha,” but “halacha is ultimately dependent upon agada.” Neither can be separated from the other: “The body without the spirit is a corpse; the spirit without the body is a ghost. Thus a mitzvah is both a discipline and an inspiration, an act of obedience and an experience of joy, a yoke and a prerogative. Our task is to learn how to maintain a harmony between the demands of halacha and the spirit of agada.”⁴⁴⁸

Heschel discusses the difficulty of maintaining the two together. He notes that “the pole of regularity” (halacha) “is stronger than the pole of spontaneity” (agada), and, as a result, there is a perpetual danger of our observance and worship becoming mere habit, a mechanical performance.” One option to address the problem would be to “abrogate the principle of regularity” by worshipping *only* when we are spontaneously moved to do so and to observe only the *mitzvot* that strike us as particularly inspiring. But this would be self-defeating, since “in abrogating regularity we deplete spontaneity. Our spiritual resources are not inexhaustible. What may seem to be spontaneous is in truth a response to an occasion. The soul would remain silent if it were not for the summons and reminder of the law.”⁴⁴⁹ There is no guarantee that in following the law an observer will always experience a transformation of the soul, “but abiding at the threshold of the holy we are unconsciously affected by its power.”⁴⁵⁰

When we bring these principles back to apply directly to the Sabbath, we can better understand the connection between the spirituality and practice of the Sabbath. It should be no

⁴⁴⁸ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 341.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 344.

surprise if, for weeks or even years on end, an observant Jew experiences the rituals of the Sabbath as drudgery or burdens foisted on her by her family or religious obligation. But it need not always be this way; with instruction in how to perceive the Sabbath, and perhaps with a divine gift of encounter, the outward structure of the time can make way for illumination. When one makes oneself consistently available, one may unexpectedly find the presence of God. “The spirit rests not only on our achievement, on our goal, but also on our effort, on our way. This is why the very act of going to the house of worship, every day or every seventh day, is a song without words. When done in humility, in simplicity of heart, it is like a child who, eager to hear a song, spreads out the score before its mother. All the child can do is open the book.”⁴⁵¹

Responding to Heschel’s Themes with Christian Eyes

Time and Space

While the orientation of Judaism toward time rather than space has become a popular, if contested, trope, the very discourses that characterize Judaism this way are divided with regard to Christianity’s relationship to time. For some, Catholic Christianity resurrected the earlier, pagan orientation toward sacred space, while Protestantism returned to a historical orientation much like the Hebrews. To others, Catholic Christianity is understood to be highly organized around sacred time, while Protestants have largely abandoned the sacredness of both time and space.⁴⁵² But no matter which branch of Christianity one examines, both time and space are likely to garner significant attention, in different ways, in religious sensibility and observance.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Robert Webber has been a leading voice among Protestants attempting to rediscover the sacredness of time by drawing on catholic forms of worship. For instance, Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Time: Forming*

The fact that Heschel's opening premise consists of the primacy of the realm of time over space may give a Christian pause, and for good reason. Does not the Old Testament place a heavy emphasis on the monuments of places where God acted on behalf of his people? Does not the New Testament offer spatial imagery for eternity in the new heavens, new earth, and New Jerusalem? Does not Christian reverence toward the places and items used in worship have its origins in Jewish Temple worship? And does not Christian worship frequently invoke the *presence* of God in earthly space, whether in charismatic environments or highly sacramental ones? It is quite appropriate to ask whether we must fully agree with Heschel's identification of time *rather than space* with holiness before we can gain anything from the rest of his thought.

My view is that Heschel's most important insights can be understood in a way that retains their instructive power even if we might wish to take a looser understanding of what he means when he speaks of the realm of time. Maria Carson's application of the term "orientation," along with the case Ken Koltun-Fromm makes that Heschel wishes his readers to perceive even physical objects in a certain light, are helpful for any readers of Heschel, whether Jews, Christians, or others. But if we take seriously, as I have already attempted to do above, what is most at stake for Heschel in writing on time versus space, we can accept the terms "time" and "space" as shorthand for the particular spiritual struggle Heschel has in mind. We need not dwell on over-arbitrated generalizations that implicate *all* "time" and *all* "space."

When Heschel speaks of time and space, what is at stake is whether humans believe we can independently control our situation or whether we are in some way dependent upon another

Spirituality through the Christian Year (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004); *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008); *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church*. Rev. ed. (New York: Morehouse Pub., 2012). See also Mark Galli, *Beyond Smells & Bells: The Wonder and Power of Christian Liturgy* (Brewster, Mass: Paraclete Press, 2008).

presence, namely God. Space, and the material things that occupy it, are symbolic of the human drive to control and master our situation. This is a natural connection because things made out of matter—which conform to the laws of physics, such that a good safe reliably contains diamonds—are the easiest for us to name, manipulate, and guard. Physical space and resources can be taken by force. Time, by contrast, is symbolic of human vulnerability and of our openness to the things of the spirit, including an encounter with God. While the reason for the use of time to mean these things is a bit less obvious (why not simply use spirit as the opposite of matter?), we can still come to terms with the unique suitedness of “time” to the idea of spiritual presence. While we can predict the stable behavior of impersonal physical objects across time, the behavior of personal agents is not guaranteed from moment to moment. For instance, someone who has been present in the past could be absent in the future; someone can change a pattern of behavior. And the moment we forget the fragility of personal relationships, imagining that an encounter or connection we have experienced at one time will always be what it was, we are more likely than ever to overlook the opportunity for encounter that is only possible in the present. While moments certainly build on each other to form a person’s character and history, there is a sense in which each moment, each encounter, stands on its own. To maintain a living relationship with another person or with God, our attention must be always renewed. Perhaps what Heschel has in mind when he speaks of the contrasting realms of time and space, then, is comparable to the “I-it” versus “I-thou” orientations that Martin Buber described. For Heschel, it is only by attending to the vicissitudes of time that we are available to authentic spiritual encounters.

Another way we can understand the importance for Heschel of selecting “time” versus “space” to represent these contrasting postures is by considering the particular vulnerability of

the Jewish people since ancient times. Not only were things of space—the holy land of Israel and the sacred Temple—a powerful image of what could be lost, but over the course of time—the centuries of diaspora living, with periodic expulsions, pogroms, and changes in Jews’ legal status—the vulnerability of holding onto life in any location was repeatedly reinforced. While historical events made the Jewish people vulnerable, there is, nevertheless, a paradoxical way in which time could be understood to give them the upper hand: it was no more in the control of the oppressors than it was of the Jews. And if the Jews could sanctify time as they once had their land, they would have transferred their homeland to a realm that would always be out of destroyers’ reach.

While Christians around the world have occupied every conceivable social status, from royalty to displaced minority, enough geopolitical power has been in Christians’ hands that spatial imagery has not often been a problem for Christian theology. The idea of Christendom, for instance, referred not to the spiritual reign of Christ but to the triumph of Christ’s reign in the physical world. Partaking of physical sacraments could be seen as critical to one’s spiritual salvation. And imagining the world this way, it was quite natural for someone like Dante to depict earth, heaven, and hell as having a geographical relationship. A cathedral could serve quite naturally as a miniature of that kind of cosmos. In other words, when the Christian imagination has expressed itself primarily through spatial imagery and physical objects, this may indeed be a sign that Christians took their worldly security for granted, their confidence of having arrived in the Kingdom of God. And with this in mind, Heschel’s call to prioritize time over space can appropriately be heard by Christians as a humbling reminder of how often throughout history we have relied on power to render our existence secure. Perhaps we can meet

changing times and the decline of Christendom with an attitude that would have been more becoming in the past as well.

When Christians have been in especially vulnerable situations, however, the language and imagery to which they have turned has still not been heavily influenced by the sacredness of time. When the security of place and possessions is lacking—as well as when it is not—Christians have often preferred to rely on the presence of the person of Christ. Arthur Green pointedly contrasts this move with rabbinic Judaism: “Classical Christianity took the clear and unambiguous step that the rabbis declined to take: the old Temple has been replaced.” While Jews came to rely on Torah and Sabbath-keeping as the stand-in for the Temple, for Christians, “Christ has become the center; sacred space has been recast into Christ the Temple. Sacred person completely dominates the cosmological stage; as Jesus the Christ is Torah enfleshed, so he is God’s house reestablished.” And here is where Green sees the sacred spaces of Christendom having their origin: “His body, through its presence in the Eucharist, is able thus to consecrate real sacred space over and over again.”⁴⁵³

With this in mind, a Christian reader of Heschel might reasonably say, “What is truly sacred is not space *or* time, but the person of Christ.” And I would grant that the person of Christ must, for a Christian, be the central focus of worship. The question remains, however, *how* we are to meet this Person. Is it through a physical sacrament? (Indeed.) But if we recall the nuance we have attempted to see in what Heschel means by the contrast between time and space, we discover the suggestion that if our orientation toward Christ—including in the Eucharist—is that of mastery, as if we fully understand what we have in our hands and imagine it does not render us vulnerable, what we are relating to is not a Person, and what we are bringing is not our spirits.

⁴⁵³ Green, *The Heart of the Matter*, 16.

When we hear Heschel speak of the realms of time and space, then, we should understand him as cautioning against measuring either our security or our spiritual vitality by the physical items we have arrayed around us. An encounter with God, like an encounter with another person, is not captured and maintained but must be sought anew from moment to moment.

Technical Civilization

Technical civilization is a concept Christians can wholeheartedly accept as a diagnosis of disordered human culture: it is what results when stewardship turns into possessiveness and exploitation.⁴⁵⁴ While most of us cannot abjure it but must carry on with our human calling to cultivate and steward creation in the *context* of technical civilization, we must recognize that the system in which we participate has taken on distorted goals. Particular actions may have integrity and coherence according to the goods for which humans were created, but as a whole, technical civilization has an internal logic that tends toward the goal of ever-increasing mastery. It is the aggravated condition of the aspect of human control in what Niebuhr and Berger call culture, although participating in it is likely to be one aspect of what Charles Taylor means by “flourishing”—particularly when we uncritically adopt contemporary standards by which we think of ourselves as “flourishing.” It is what results when humans’ calling to steward and

⁴⁵⁴ See Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003); Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Knopf, 1964); *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); *Théologie et Technique: Pour une Éthique de la Non-Puissance* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2014); Craig M. Gay, *Modern Technology and the Human Future: A Christian Appraisal* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

cultivate creation has come to resemble the enterprise of building Babel: a testament to human mastery and our independence from the God who called us to cultivate anything at all.⁴⁵⁵

For Christians seeking to understand Heschel in light of Christian theological tradition, Heschel's use of ancient Rome as a quintessential example of technical civilization invites a comparison with St. Augustine. In Heschel's story from the Talmud, three rabbis had conflicting views of the value of Rome's achievements: one was ready to praise them wholeheartedly, while another withheld judgment, and a third saw through their splendor to how they enabled Rome's underlying tendency to self-aggrandizement. St. Augustine's *The City of God* also recognizes Rome as a pinnacle of human culture and achievement, and he does not deny the impressiveness of its contributions. Perhaps a bit like the rabbi who defended Rome, Augustine even notes the considerable goodness embedded in their virtues. But, on Rabbi Shimeon's side, he draws a sharp distinction between the virtues that drive Rome and the virtues that must please God. The greatest flaw he sees in Roman culture is its hubris, and the virtue he finds pointedly lacking is charity. Augustine displays a deep appreciation, even a fondness, for the advanced Roman civilization, but he is quite ready to say that at its core, it is animated by distorted loves. Christians may participate and even make a kind of home in a sophisticated earthly society, but if their true love is for God and they are oriented toward God's ends, there will be traits and virtues of their earthly cities they cannot share. Their true home, where they can at last come to rest, is in the life of God.

That St. Augustine is one of the most influential early Christian exponents of the Sabbath should not be lost on us here, because the way he invokes the theme of the Sabbath is also part of

⁴⁵⁵ Soon after the publication of Heschel's *The Sabbath*, Jacques Ellul would go on to explore the internal logic of technical civilization (in his terms, "technique") at much greater depth and complexity than Heschel does here. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964).

his response to Roman civilization. His *City of God* culminates in a description of what it means for God's people to participate in God's rest. Renouncing earthly hubris, God's people rest by attributing all their good deeds to God; as long as they take credit for it themselves, any good work qualifies as "servile labor."⁴⁵⁶ The Sabbath is given "that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctify them."⁴⁵⁷ They will finally "Be still and know that I am God." Necessity will not drive anything, since joy will already be in everyone's grasp, and there will be no cause for envy.⁴⁵⁸ Augustine also identifies Sabbath rest with authentic peace, since no one will any longer resist the will of God.⁴⁵⁹ The Sabbath is tied both to the completion of all things (when "that which is perfect is come") and with the vision of God (when we shall see "face to face"), with 1 Corinthians 13 drawing these themes together under the overarching virtue of charity.⁴⁶⁰

Augustine's vision of the Sabbath, while departing from Heschel's in some ways, is remarkably similar in other ways. He differs from Heschel by making the eternal and spiritual Sabbath *replace* the weekly one, where Heschel sees them as its fulfillment. In wishing the spiritual Sabbath to become all-encompassing, Augustine also curtails human agency much more than Heschel does. But the fact that Augustine, like Heschel, turns to the Sabbath as the symbol of human restoration to our proper place as creatures before God is illuminating. Particularly when they found themselves faced with the allure of a totalizing political power (explicitly

⁴⁵⁶ Augustine, *Civitas Dei* XII.30

⁴⁵⁷ *C.D.* XII.30, quoting Ezek. 20:12.

⁴⁵⁸ *C.D.* XII.30

⁴⁵⁹ *C.D.* XII.30

⁴⁶⁰ *C.D.* XII.29; XI.31.

Rome, but for Heschel, less explicitly, the United States), both saw the Sabbath as the theologically and spiritually appropriate symbol of resistance.

Christian readers of Heschel can note with appreciation the similarities between Heschel's Sabbath and Augustine's, while reserving the possibility that Augustine's vision is incomplete. (It does not follow that Heschel's vision is necessarily complete.) The reason for this caution with regard to Augustine is that, if a goal of this dissertation is to form a Christian account of the Sabbath that is based on a more fitting Christian account of Judaism, it bears remembering that Augustine's treatment of Judaism was far from what we have aspired to here. Augustine's Sabbath theology is doubtless influenced by his theology of Judaism. That is to say, it is *entirely dislodged* from his writings on Judaism. While he is prepared to dismiss the faith of the Jews, he remains enamored of the concept of the Sabbath; his Sabbath has thus been completely recast into a form unrecognizable to Jews.

Christians can be encouraged to see the Sabbath expounded by both Heschel and St. Augustine as a spiritual antidote to hubristic human overreach. We can accept Augustine's help in understanding Christ's role in allowing us to rest in God's salvation. But at the same time, we can remain open to the possibility that Augustine's exclusively spiritual and exclusively eschatological Sabbath gives us less of a gift than the Scriptures do themselves. Perhaps the spiritual health taught by the Sabbath is supported (not threatened) by the body's participation in it.

Eternity

Heschel's vision of eternity seems largely compatible with a Christian view. Its meaning includes the completion of all the work in creation, the fulfillment of all God's promises,

nearness of God's people to God himself, and the participation of God's people in his rest. In both Christianity and Judaism, eternal consummation is prefigured by the Sabbath.

A point at which Christian visions of eternity may diverge from Heschel's is where they entertain the theme of "new creation." Several early Christian visions of the eschaton included a seventh millennium of rest, *followed by* a "new creation" on the eighth day, so it may simply be that the Christian imagination has added a level of complexity to eternity, preceded by an intervening "Sabbath."⁴⁶¹

The philosopher Giorgio Agamben interacted with the Sabbath as an ideal instance of his "inoperativity" (all instances in which things' utilitarian "use" value is suspended), but the Sabbath also became a symbol of "new use" (the transformation of a thing that is discovered *beyond* inoperativity).⁴⁶² Heschel's Sabbath *does* contain both themes, inasmuch as it includes the cessation of ordinary activities and makes space for feasting and for a renewed, festive way of seeing reality. There is something new that is added to the Sabbath. But the Christian idea of "new creation" goes beyond it. In this discussion, the arrival of the eschaton does not merely represent the end of time and the completion of creation, but it brings with it an entirely renewed heaven and earth. Christ's Resurrection is a foretaste of the whole creation's renewal. The end of things is also an entirely new beginning. Even Augustine's final page of *The City of God*, which dwells extensively on the Sabbath as the completion of all things, does not stop there: it goes on to say that the eschatological Sabbath itself has an end. And what brings to a close that eschatological Sabbath is "the Lord's day, as an eighth and eternal day, consecrated by the

⁴⁶¹ Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 397-403.

⁴⁶² Honig, "Is Man a 'Sabbatical Animal,'" 1-2.

resurrection of Christ.”⁴⁶³ For Heschel, the added joy that is meant to mark each Sabbath day is not clearly paralleled by something new and joyful in eternity; the aspect of eternity we hear expounded most clearly is rest and completion. But for (much of) Christian theology, at any rate, Agamben’s “new use” seems more completely to saturate the idea of eternity.

It is here that I believe we find the strongest justification for Christian observance of Sunday as the Sabbath. If the Sabbath is a symbol of eternity for both Christians and Jews, but the Christian idea of eternity has been reshaped by Christ’s Resurrection, it is quite reasonable that the Christian Sabbath should retain a significant mark of difference. If the Jewish Sabbath means the completion of all things, it is appropriate that the Christian Sabbath should follow, as a response. “Yes, and…” God is making all things new.⁴⁶⁴

The Middle Way

Christian communities and discourse, by and large, have a dire need for Heschel’s Sabbath pattern as a way by which technical civilization can be made to respect its limits. Christian theology and spirituality have much to say about how we should not allow ourselves to be controlled by the things we acquire, by our own feeling of prowess, by too many commitments, by the values of “this world,” and so on. But we have no reliable tool, central to widespread Christian identity and practice, by which such limits can be achieved. The task of

⁴⁶³ *C.D.*, XII.30. The idea of an eschatological Sabbath *followed* by an eighth and eternal day is a development from earlier Gnostic (Valentinian) numerology, incorporated into mainstream Christian thought by Clement of Alexandria. Richard J. Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,” 276, citing Clement, *Str.* 6:16. As for Augustine, he elsewhere harmonized “the two traditions of eschatological numerical symbolism by observing that in the Genesis creation account, the sun that rises on the morning of the seventh day never sets; eschatological Sabbath becomes eternal Lord’s Day.” Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Medieval Church in the West,” 301, citing *Ep.* 55:17, 23.

⁴⁶⁴ Rev. 21:5.

growing in spiritual freedom is too often made exclusively spiritual, while our bodies, calendars, and even our imaginations are left to the mercy of external pressures like employers' requests and the demands of the market. So Heschel's claim that the Sabbath is actually a gift by which we can push back against the things that keep us from being free is compelling.

By showing how the single Sabbath pattern designates a place for the pursuits of both space and time, for participating in the world and for standing apart from it, Heschel has made it easy to see how the model fits Niebuhr's vision of a synthesis approach or Taylor's depiction of "tensions in equilibrium." Two opposing impulses, seeming opposites but hardly viable without each other, are juxtaposed in a productive tension. Charles Taylor describes the division between ordinary human flourishing and spiritual virtuosity as being represented most clearly by different groups of people: laity and monastics. Niebuhr, similarly, worried that a synthesis model could only crystalize a hierarchy among different groups of people. But Heschel's Sabbath surprises, perhaps, by meeting the criteria of a "Christ and culture" synthesis through a hierarchy of days rather than of groups of people. Everyone in a community, from the youngest to the oldest and from the richest to the poorest, can participate in this differentiation of times. Far from some people representing holiness in contrast to everyone else's ordinariness, all people—by acting apart from necessity on one day each week—learn to conceive of their own worth that transcends utility. The Sabbath creates a "plausibility structure" (Berger) and a "social imaginary" (Taylor) that renders the transcendent believable, but unlike the usual spatial models, it does so without sanctifying social hierarchies.

A difficulty remains for Christians: How can optional Sabbath-keeping retain the kind of power it had for Heschel? As a Jew, Heschel could rhapsodize about the spiritual gift of the Sabbath while taking for granted that its practice was obligatory. The New Testament, however,

even as it leaves the door open to continued observance, does not allow Christians to think of Sabbath observance as essential to our salvation. Jesus reminds his followers that the Sabbath is made *for the good of people* (and Christians have often taken this to mean that the Sabbath can take a back seat to whatever a person wishes). But consider that the Sabbath, even when it is doing its work in us, does not always feel like a gift—such as, for instance, a business owner who would like to continue to profit seven days a week, an employee who cannot afford to take a day off or displease her boss, or a consumer who has happily adopted the convenience of one-click ordering. For people in these and many other circumstances, as soon as the Sabbath becomes merely a good idea instead of a mainstay of their faith, they no longer have either the obligation or the opportunity to wrestle with it. If the Sabbath is a merely spiritual principle, the business owner is unlikely to let it affect her business model; the employee can now be easily pressured into, or paid so little as to require, seven days of work; and consumers can have little reason not to feed the market around the clock. Whether it is for the protection of a person against those who have power over him, or the protection of a person’s own spirit against a host of easy, “harmless” temptations, the Sabbath may only be a gift to the extent that it also retains the authority to feel like a burden.⁴⁶⁵

The most promising way to express what is at stake in Christian Sabbath observance may be to maintain that, while Sabbath observance itself is not definitive for a Christian’s *salvation*, the experience of wrestling with it may be definitive for Christians’ *spiritual health*. For Christian groups interested in eternal salvation and nothing else, this will of course not be persuasive. But for groups that see a life of faith as a matter of long transformation accomplished

⁴⁶⁵ Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (New York: Random House, 2011), 194ff, esp. 212; Shalom Carmy, “Heaven and Everything Else,” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, no. 292 (2019): 16ff.

through various disciplines, such an idea is nothing new. Indeed, such a line of thinking is already widely held: God may not *require* Christians to pray the hours, for instance, but a community may adopt the discipline and see the commitment as binding, the practice as transformative, and even the struggle with it as fruitful.

Sabbath as Queen and Bride

The personification of the Sabbath is perhaps the most surprising way Christians can converse with Heschel's *Sabbath*. I find three aspects of this personification to be worthy of reflection by Christians. First, like the tradition from which Heschel draws, Christians have also associated the Sabbath with the qualities of a person, but the focus for this interpretive move among Christians is Jesus himself. Second, Heschel's figure of the Sabbath is distinctly feminine, which raises questions both about whether the Sabbath has characteristics associated with the feminine and about whether God "himself" has a feminine side. Third, the character associated with the Sabbath is depicted as a spouse—for Heschel *as well as* for Christians.

I find it remarkable that in both Jewish and Christian traditions, the Sabbath took on personal qualities. For Christians, this appears to have begun in the early centuries of the Church, likely inspired by passages like Matthew 11:28-30, in which Jesus offers true rest, and Hebrews 3:18-4:11, in which the "sabbath rest" of Israel is reframed in Christological context. A second-century Jewish-Christian Gospel has the Holy Spirit name Jesus as "my rest" when descending upon him at his baptism, thus designating him as the eschatological resting place of both God and his people.⁴⁶⁶ The idea that the Sabbath is finally fulfilled in Jesus gains traction from the

⁴⁶⁶ Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church," 252, quoting Jerome, *Comm. in Esaiam* 4:11:2.

work of St. Augustine through the Protestant Reformers, as true rest is expressed both spiritually and eschatologically in union with God. In Jewish tradition, the development of personal characteristics associated with the Sabbath is not documented until the late Middle Ages in the writings of the Kabbalah. While we cannot pursue the relationship between these two developments, we can note at least two possible explanations: first, that Christianity and Judaism may have developed their speculative traditions in dialogue with each other, and second, that the strength of the biblical imagery surrounding the Sabbath may have been compelling enough that some within both traditions could not help but find the Sabbath to be a manifestation of an aspect of God's character.

Heschel's depiction of the Sabbath as female is worth noting, not only because it raises questions about the relationship between the Sabbath and traditional ideas of femininity, but also because it suggests a feminine quality to one aspect of God's nature. As for the feminine character of the Sabbath itself, when we wish to know why the Sabbath is associated with a female persona, some obvious possibilities arise. Is there something feminine about passivity as opposed to productivity, about the quality of being ornamental or beautiful as opposed to conforming to necessity, or about a break from norms? To invoke themes from Charles Taylor and Victor Turner once again, are we seeing the Kabbalists and Heschel ascribing a feminine quality to anti-structure, while there is something masculine about the structure of the everyday? These questions are not posed for the purpose of discrediting Heschel or his imaginative sources, but for the purpose of considering the varied themes that have come together in his work. Perhaps a contemporary reader would wish to distance himself from such associations, or perhaps not. There is, however, a by now well-known caution against the dismissal of actual women that can occur when feminine personas are a frequent source of symbols for ideal or

abstract concepts—when the feminine is treated as an exception to the masculine norm or as an ideal in contrast to the masculine “real”—or as an “inoperative” Sabbath to the heavily-lifting masculine weekday.

In an oblique defense of the concept of Sabbath as feminine, however, I would call upon the collective insights of eco-feminism, which associate the bulldozing of nature for profit with a similar bulldozing of the needs of people (such as women, children, and indigenous peoples) who readily see their own human fragility. If industrial capitalism is a system that has *no* bounds, subordinating human needs to the self-perpetuating domain of efficiency, then by these lights, the introduction of a multifaceted, society-altering Sabbath cannot but be good for actual women.⁴⁶⁷

Another way to consider the meaning of Heschel’s personification of the Sabbath is to note that, for the Kabbalists, the Sabbath often stood for a feminine emanation of God. Catholic Christianity has shied away from speaking in terms of “emanations” of God, so Christian readers may be appropriately hesitant to follow the Kabbalists here. But Christians have their own treasury of rich imagery for God: Scripture and subsequent theology has attempted to free Christians from thinking that a single image for God can exhaust who God is for us. Many of these images have been explicitly or implicitly feminine, and—noteworthy as we consider Christian resonances of the Sabbath—Christian uses of feminine language for God have often focused on the Second Person of the Trinity.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ Support for the integration of these concepts is a commonplace of ecofeminism and is upheld by some thinkers in the ethics of care. See for instance Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Religious Ecofeminism: Healing the Ecological Crisis,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* Vol. 1. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴⁶⁸ For a helpful directory of such language, particularly in the Medieval period, see Eleanor McLaughlin, “Christ My Mother: Feminine Naming and Metaphor in Medieval Spirituality,” *Saint Luke’s Journal of Theology*

The final aspect of Heschel’s Sabbath personification that is noteworthy for Christians is that the Sabbath is not only like a personal presence that ought to be welcomed, and it is not only a feminine image (perhaps of God), but that it is like a royal bride. Heschel says that Israel is *engaged* to eternity through the Sabbath and must welcome “her” with the love and joy befitting an expectant groom. Christians ought to recall at this point that Christ himself has been called the spouse of the Church—but in this case, it is the male spouse! The Church plays the role of the “bride” of Christ, and, similar to Israel for Heschel, is thus also engaged to the figure of the Sabbath.

When Christians have contemplated what it means for Jesus himself to be the fulfillment of the Sabbath, a common conclusion has been that Jesus has not only fulfilled but also *replaced* the Sabbath, rendering its observance obsolete or even sinful. But I would like to propose an alternate way to interpret the Sabbath through a Christological lens. We accept that Christians must recognize the Sabbath as (not only, but *at least*) an introduction to Christ. We realize that the earliest Christians understood Christ in terms of the Sabbath, as a continuation and as the culmination of the grace of God revealed to them in the Sabbath. If these things are true—if Christ’s first followers came to understand who he was in reference to the Sabbath rest of God—might we not also come to know Christ better through coming to know the Sabbath? If Christ *fulfills* the Sabbath (fills it with meaning⁴⁶⁹), must we not surely come to know Jesus better by learning what the Sabbath means?

18, no. 4 (September 1975): 366–86. On feminine language for Christ, see Christophe Gripon, “À Propos de La Relation Érotique à Christ Dans Son Reflet Féminin: Eléments d’une Approche Apophatique Du Masculin et Du Féminin En Christ,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 72, no. 1 (February 2016): 123–44.

⁴⁶⁹ Gregory A. Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God: Interpreting the Old Testament’s Violent Portraits of God in Light of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 1:100. See also Don A. Carson, “Jesus and the Sabbath in the Four Gospels,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 79.

Heschel's Jewish readers will certainly not read *The Sabbath* this way, and Heschel certainly did not intend his meaning Christologically. But I suggest that, for Christians wishing to receive the gifts God might yet offer through him, it is quite reasonable—not to mention theologically defensible—to approach the text asking to understand Jesus himself more fully.

The Mystical “More”

An extensive mystical tradition within Christianity parallels, and often dialogues with, the mystical tradition within Judaism, and this interplay goes far beyond what we will consider here. I will highlight just two themes Christian readers might consider as we read *The Sabbath* and reflect on the mysterious sense of abundance to which Heschel often alludes. The first is the way Christians must see the Resurrection lurking under the surface of reality. The second is the persisting mystery of God, even after Christ's Incarnation, which has been taught in the apophatic stream of theology.

When Christians note Heschel's festive joy on page after page, with the question left open “What is this mysterious spirit of freedom and abundance that descends upon Sabbath-keepers?”, we can suspend disbelief, much like we do when we watch a suspenseful film for the second time, or as we do each Holy Saturday when we pretend not to know what is coming. The secret heart of reality is no less luminous just because we can say in a whisper, if pressed, “After the end, there's new life.” Heschel knows with delight that God created the world from nothing, and for him existence itself is pure gift.⁴⁷⁰ More being, more reality, more vibrant life, is always hiding below the surface of what he can see. For Christians, there is direct continuity between

⁴⁷⁰ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 43-51, 412.

God's creation *ex nihilo* and his raising Jesus to life out of death.⁴⁷¹ When Heschel speaks of the Sabbath joy of a God who creates abundance from nothing, Christians cannot help but think of the same God, who resurrects.

Despite believing that God has been manifested in Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection, Christians have a long tradition that reminds us not to make the mistake of thinking we can express everything about God. Heschel's theological heritage, too, partakes of the *via negativa*,⁴⁷² the observation that sometimes we only speak truly about God by saying what he is not. Overflow of wonder is sometimes appropriately manifested in restraint. Heschel offers us the insight that the negative space of the Sabbath can be understood as directly in keeping with this tradition. As he puts it, "the splendor of the day is expressed in terms of *abstentions*, just as the mystery of God is more adequately conveyed *via negationis*.... We often feel how poor the edifice would be were it built exclusively of our rituals and deeds which are so awkward and often so obtrusive. How else express glory in the presence of eternity, if not by the silence of abstaining from noisy acts?"⁴⁷³

Many Christians reason that, because Jesus undertook a few deeds of mercy on the Sabbath, it is always the right and best thing to serve God actively and vocally rather than highly valuing a time for rest, worship, and a kind of silence. Heschel challenges us, on the contrary, to be still enough simply to recognize the glory of the presence of God. God's glory is, indeed,

⁴⁷¹ James Noel Hubler, "Creatio Ex Nihilo: Matter, Creation, and the Body in Classical and Christian Philosophy through Aquinas." (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1995). Brian D. Robinette, "The Difference Nothing Makes: Creatio Ex Nihilo, Resurrection, and Divine Gratitude," *Theological Studies* 72, no. 3 (September 2011): 525–57.

⁴⁷² Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* I.52. Maimonides explains the inappropriateness to God of the five kinds of positive descriptions we normally apply to objects.

⁴⁷³ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 15.

there at all times and in all places, but “the world is too much for us,” and God’s presence in it “surpasses our ability to comprehend.” Because “life is routine, and routine is resistance to the wonder,” the practice of stepping outside of routine is a discipline designed to invite us to contemplate God’s presence.⁴⁷⁴

Pure contemplation of God, by pausing from action *even in God’s service*, is also an authentically Christian practice. As Chapter Four noted, the duality of action and contemplation has a long history within Christian thought, especially expressed in the interpretation of Mary and Martha. If some Christian groups historically prized contemplation to the disparagement and neglect of active Christian service, the tendency among modern Christians, particularly Protestants, is to glorify action and scorn contemplation. If Heschel is to have something to say to us here, it may be that we will worship God more truly, and witness to God more faithfully, through the humble silence of periodic *inaction*.

The Holy and the Good

Christians ought generally to agree with the idea that the holy situates the good, and not vice versa, but our long Gentile history has made us likely to be more comfortable with the God of the philosophers: the prime mover, the being greater than whom no being can be conceived, transcendental beauty, truth, or *goodness* itself. Euthyphro’s question of whether divine will or goodness comes first is often more of a challenge for Christians than it seems to be for Heschel. The sense that God could sanctify things and existence in a particular way, and that all goodness takes shape around what is holy, can seem risky because it is too personal, and perhaps even arbitrary.

⁴⁷⁴ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 85.

But the metaphysical realism and liturgical theology expounded by Nathan Jennings, which was introduced earlier, gives some help for how Christians may conceive of the holy situating the good. Jennings depicts all of creation taking shape around the divine economy, or the activity of gift exchange in God's household that manifests itself in liturgical structures. What humans may experience as recognizably holy through the enactment of the Eucharist is not something fundamentally other than the dynamic of generous giving and grateful sacrifice between God and the angels that produces the whole structure of the universe. When we participate in the holy ritual of the Eucharist, in other words, we are participating in the very same divine economy that spins the world into existence. The (holy) gift exchange between God and his household is reflected in the order of creation, and all ethics takes place in this context. The good is thus completely encompassed by the holy life of God.

When the Euthyphro question is being discussed, the idea that God's will precedes what is good is often framed in the language of divine command. God (arbitrarily) decrees that something shall be so, and it follows that it is good. But if we imagine that all of reality simply *is* shaped around the divine gift economy, something like a cosmic-scale sacrament that places in context the specific sacraments in which humans participate, the idea that the good derives from what God calls holy takes on quite a different character. Participating in this kind of goodness now becomes a matter of contemplative worship, of dwelling in God's presence, of drawing nearer to the sources of reality itself.

And what is the "good" that comes out of this holy liturgy? While, to be sure, it is the contemplation of God that sets the terms for action, not an ethics from below, the divine economy does indeed emanate into the arena that is more widely recognizable as ethics. Jennings just begins to touch on this in *Liturgy and Theology: Economy and Reality*, noting that just as

ancient Israelite meat sacrifices fed the entire community, the Christian Eucharist means that the Church must be implicated in provision for all its members. And even beyond the Church, Christians' participation in human economies should be disciplined and realigned by the role we learn to play in God's economy.⁴⁷⁵ A great deal more work could be done to discover how participating liturgically in God's economy has a direct bearing on human ethics.

For our purposes in response to Heschel's *Sabbath*, I would like to point out that the pattern of the Sabbath is, like that of the Eucharist, a liturgical one. If it was given by God to Israel, mirroring God's work of creation, and remains the structure of Christians' weekly time, it is appropriate to relate to it, too, as an apocalyptic key to drawing nearer to the life of God. The pattern of the Sabbath is not *merely* an object lesson about rest and God's provision but an avenue into reality itself, by which we can participate in and be shaped by the dynamics of God's rightly ordered household. The Sabbath is not merely one day of rest, nor is it merely a prefiguration of eschatological completion. The ethics of Sabbath, which has to do with economic ethics and (like the Eucharist) reflects the sacrifices that would be shared among the community, are always in the context of holy time. The rhythm of Sabbath shows how even economic justice is rooted in liturgy, and this-worldly value must be chastened by the space we give the values of eternity even in this world.

Observance

If we are to operate by the conclusions of Chapter Two, we will acknowledge that practices of piety—while not eradicated—play a subtly different role for Christians. Even if Gentile Christians, by being baptized into Jesus, do implicitly accept the authority of Torah apart

⁴⁷⁵ Jennings, *Liturgy and Theology*, 128.

from which forgiveness would not be needed, we are nonetheless brought into the Sinai Covenant in a position of seeing our failures by its terms as already atoned for. This situation necessarily creates a looser relationship to the practices of piety than Heschel has in mind. (For Heschel in *God in Search of Man*, God “needs” human holy deeds.⁴⁷⁶)

But if the practice of the Sabbath is indeed a gift “for the sake of humans,” as Jesus said it was, we may be foolish to turn it down simply because our salvation does not depend on it. By dislodging our spiritual posture from practices that implicate both our bodies and our interactions in society, we forfeit a great deal of real-world traction. We have fewer resources to bring our individual habits of both mind and body into alignment with God’s character, and we surrender much of the weight our obedience might have in producing a more just society. In neglecting a practice such as this, which is nonnegotiable to observant Jews, Christians have the (dubious) privilege of selecting which matters of conscience they wish to be relevant to public life. Throughout history, we have at one time or another chosen every imaginable ethical issue as the *one* worth engaging in conflict over (and have, by turns, dodged them all as well). Because of Christians’ ability to spiritualize moral requirements, we can be quite inconsistent with regard to our ethical positions, and easily swayed in our priorities by whatever ethical program accords most readily with our position in society.

For observant Jews, however, there is a somewhat more narrowly delineated arena in which they might run into conflict of conscience with religious outsiders, but that arena is clear and (comparatively) fixed. Both the Jew and the outsider, in general, know what is expected of a pious Jew, and the choice is left up to the Gentile: to tolerate or to persecute the Jew.

⁴⁷⁶ Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, 291.

The situation could hardly be more different for a Christian in the United States. In the first place, the Christian's piety is more likely to be already accommodated by the structure of public life, and we are less likely to be considered an anomaly. But when we do run into a conflict between our religious convictions and an action that is expected of us in public (as we sometimes do), the habitual over-spiritualization of Christian piety does nothing but weaken the Christian's position. A Christian may doubt the validity of his own ethical conviction, wondering, "Is this requirement truly something that cannot be met adequately by the mere attitude of my heart?" After all, he knows plenty of other Christians who think it is. The outsider, also knowing many kinds of Christians, may say, "Why do you need to be *that* kind of Christian? This ethical position surely need not be decisive for you." He may choose to move his convictions exclusively to his interior life, and no matter what the issue is, he will surely find some group of Christians waiting for him there, ready to assure him that he has only abandoned the outer trappings of religion, but not Christ. If he chooses, however, to keep his convictions and let them determine his actions in public, he will likewise find others who agree this was the hill to die on with Christ. He will also find numerous others who will say he is a legalist, has misrepresented the Gospel, or has inverted his priorities.

Because Jewish piety has inescapable consequences, Heschel says, "It is utterly inconvenient to be a Jew."⁴⁷⁷ My caution is that being a Christian, with theological room to wriggle out of almost any consequences, can be far too convenient.

Observing a Sabbath will not solve all the problems I have described. For one thing, some of the most enthusiastically Sabbath-observant among us are seventh-day Sabbatarians, but I am endorsing Sunday observance in deference to the catholic majority; we will not consolidate

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 424.

our positions on this point. For another, we walk a delicate line between teaching that people ought to wrestle with a practice so it can do us good, and making that practice out to be decisive for salvation. The Sabbath may be spiritually, theologically, and ethically rich, but the value of its observance will always be a matter of negotiation among Christians. Finally, much of the difficulty with discerning which practices are binding for Christians stems from the fact that we exist in schism. Many Christian groups indeed do have authorities that have been decisive about ethical issues and the relative importance they should have for Christians in public. But as long as Christians remain both divided and numerous, our diversity with regard to practice will only undermine our ability to fully commit to and be disciplined by the difficult spiritual practices—as well as our ability to say in public, “This is what a Christian does and does not do. Tolerate me or punish me, but the choice is yours, not mine.”

In the meantime, Christians can respond to Heschel’s wisdom regarding the soul-shaping power of Sabbath practice by adopting it on the scale that is possible. Individuals can commit—as far as possible—to avoid paid work, domestic tasks, and making purchases, and even to limit use of technology on Sunday. Those who have authority over employees can accommodate their Sabbath rest, and those who make decisions at the highest level can work to structure their business practices so that production takes a break and employees do not suffer for it. Families can develop routines that encourage everyone, including school-aged children with homework, to rest on Sundays in spiritually fruitful ways; it will probably mean taking part in fewer activities than similar families. But all these levels of Sabbath practice will feel quite solitary and, while probably fruitful, will be difficult to maintain. They will not have the broader social impact the Sabbath also intends. In light of this, there may be some Christian communities that commit *together* to a Sabbath rhythm. If a large number of Christians (and Jews) periodically

refrain from economic activity, this would likely have a chastening effect on the economy, noticed even in the business community. And, while campaigning for the reinstatement of blue laws is not a strategy I recommend in a religiously pluralistic society, Christians may choose to begin placing a higher priority on advocating in public for just labor practices of all kinds.

Assessment

We can now turn back to what we have read from Heschel, along with the kinds of responses that arise from an explicitly Christian dialogue partner, to reflect on what has been gained through this exercise. Four specific gains seem evident, though they are certainly not exhaustive.

First, Heschel draws our attention to the broad relevance of the Sabbath, when most Christians' attention is elsewhere. The Sabbath is not *foreign* to Christians—our ambivalence is simply because we have confused and varied ideas of what it means, and it has slipped to the outer periphery of our piety. Since the Sabbath is not entirely foreign to us, it is actually possible to engage with Heschel and feel a degree of commonality right from the beginning. But since he has lived, thought, and wrestled with the Sabbath in a much more focused way than most Christians, what he brings to the Christian reader is certainly enriching and probably surprising. Another advantage is that Heschel does not argue systematically for Sabbath practice, and he is not theologically explicit about the role Sabbath observance plays in a Jew's objective status before God. Because of this, Christians prepared to raise theological objections to the claim that the Sabbath is necessary for salvation are likely to be disarmed. Heschel turns the Sabbath over in several directions and brings out its spiritually rich resonances. By remaining present with Heschel as he does this, Christians have the opportunity to discover new possibilities in

understanding the Sabbath. These can be challenging and new, enriching but not defeating Christian theological commitments.

Second, if Christian thinking on the Sabbath is allowed to be mentored by Heschel's approach, we must grapple with what it means for our eager ethical outcomes to be disciplined by the patterns of the holy. Many Christians may be disenchanted with the idea of a designated time for worshipful rest but inspired by the option of serving the poor on Sundays as a more authentic expression of Sabbath principles. Others may be uninterested in economic justice *or* a day of rest, but highly attracted to the Sabbath-adjacent goal of personal wholeness. To approach the Sabbath Heschel's way, as neither a paean to personal boundary-setting nor a social justice agenda, goes against the stream. But to allow conformity to a holy pattern to set the agenda for both spirituality and ethics would be a step toward holistic Christian integrity for each of these factions. It might even forge more common ground between groups motivated primarily by personal piety and those motivated by social justice. The Sabbath chastens and stretches Christians of both kinds.

Third, Heschel's presentation of the Sabbath opens an avenue of thought for Christians who find themselves conflicted with regard to their relationship with human culture. Some Christians may recognize themselves in the position of Rabbi Shimeon, who saw distorted motives behind civilizational achievements and took refuge alone with only a trusted companion. Others may feel a similar alienation from non-Christian human society but respond by attempting to locate themselves in a community and society in which they can move about widely without ever having to feel they are leaving distinctly Christian space. These choices and others directly reflect Christians' often tumultuous process of navigating the relative importance of their belonging in this world and their belonging in eternity. Heschel's account of the Sabbath

provides a ray of hope and clarity, because it effectively arbitrates between earthly and heavenly belonging, and *at the same time* maps this relationship onto a life pattern in which human cultural achievements can be celebrated without becoming ultimate. There is time in this life for eternity, and time for this world; there is a place for being set apart, and a place for affirming common humanity.

Finally, if Christians see Jesus as a fulfillment of the Jewish Sabbath, then by dwelling longer with the Sabbath in Jewish perspective, we will very likely end by understanding Jesus better. The Sabbath is a concentrated time for spiritual presence; the place where God meets humanity; the intersection between time and eternity; the spouse of God's people; the boundary line that says to human achievement "this far and no further"; the holy feast that comes from God's abundance; human dignity transcending rank and status; a foretaste of eternal rest; and the symbol of God's work completed. Let us return to the New Testament and read it again. Who, now, is Jesus?

CONCLUSION

Tasks Accomplished

At the beginning of this dissertation, I laid out a pair of presenting problems. The first pertains to the choices American Christians face with the prospect of increasing religious (and cultural) pluralism. Should we aspire to find as much common ground as possible with non-Christians, celebrating whenever diversity, equity, and inclusion increase, and moving past familiar elements of Christian community life that conflict with these values? Should we, alternatively, set up new, marginal spaces where older norms can remain dominant, and defend our legal right to occupy them without interference? Should we work ever harder to keep or regain power? Or can we imagine other possibilities?

I have made the case that some of these responses—the temptation to blend in uncritically or to cling anxiously to separateness—become especially tempting and highly charged when Christians find ourselves imagining a one-dimensional cosmos. Insofar as our plausibility structures have been constructed in an immanent frame, our impulses tell us we must *either* streamline our religion and morality to fit dominant values with little remainder, *or* we must fight hard to keep a culture we call “Christian” dominant...*or*, having given up that hope, we may perhaps retreat from the centers of cultural power and start afresh in an alternative space we must try to keep for ourselves. There is little intuitive possibility for being at home among all humans, carrying on cultural activity with even non-Christians, *while* following Christ in being “not of this world.” Our imaginations have ceased to be formed by a pattern like that of the

Jewish Sabbath, which reserves a place within time for eternity and gives us a resource by which we can say to this-worldly value: “You do not judge all.” I thus offer the Sabbath as an ancient but timely answer to the Christ-and-culture question.

The second presenting problem has to do with why Christians have largely been cut off from a Sabbath of the kind I have described. While not abjuring the Sabbath entirely, Christians have most often interpreted it in contrast rather than in keeping with the Jewish Sabbath. It has been my conviction that the Sabbath cannot be a resource for Christian ethical thinking without returning to the question of how we relate to its Jewishness. That is what this dissertation has attempted to do.

In Chapter One, I developed an overview of the meaning of the Sabbath. I described it as a commandment with a double origin story, corresponding to a double theological meaning: it signifies belonging to Israel, as it is sealed with the Sinai Covenant and points to Israel’s liberation from Egypt, at the same time as it reflects the character of God since creation. Because of what it shows about God’s character and relationship to Israel, it forms human Sabbath-observers to respond through gratitude toward God and liberality toward fellow humans. Christian and Jewish traditions both came to see the Sabbath as a foreshadowing of eternity, but Christians gradually distanced themselves from Jewish piety by interpreting the Sabbath in *purely* spiritual terms, as opposed to a day of rest. It often signified reliance on God’s grace, perfect rest in Jesus.

Chapter Two proposed a model for contemporary Christian engagement with Judaism based on the theological model of Jean-Miguel Garrigues. Though the Sabbath is a sign of belonging to the Mosaic Covenant, Christians baptized into Christ can only understand their relationship to God through continuity with the People of the Mosaic Covenant. Torah may be

“fulfilled” in Christ, but this does not mean it is obsolete or meaningless. It simply has a fuller meaning for Christians. If Jesus said the Sabbath was made for humanity, Christians should remember the inverse truth: for the good of humanity, the Sabbath was made. Paul told his Corinthian hearers that not everything that is permitted is beneficial; today’s Christians can learn the corollary principle: some things may not be required for salvation, but it still may be unwise to toss them to the side. In other words, what does it mean that Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets without erasing them? Jesus, the Messiah, fulfills the Sabbath—but this does not mean he rendered it obsolete.

Chapter Three dispelled the objection that true Christian faith is a matter of interior faith rather than practices of piety. It showed that this myth has been fueled by Christian antisemitism and has gone on to perpetuate an anti-Jewish and anti-Torah tendency among Christians, which has limited our ability to observe the fourth commandment. Christians have avoided adopting the Sabbath in the manner of the Jews, in part, by spiritualizing it rather than practicing it. We have also characterized Jewish piety as focused on earning God’s favor through “works-righteousness” based in fear. Chapter Three showed that not only was this characterization of first-century Judaism historically inaccurate, but that practices of piety are an important subject of concern in a number of deeply Christian discourses that take seriously the unity of mind and body in Christian theological anthropology.

Chapter Four turned to something that could be gained if Christians managed to recover a more vigorous Sabbath imagination. I argued that the Sabbath, while not well known as a theology of culture, does in fact mimic the ability to hold “tensions in equilibrium” that H. R. Niebuhr and Charles Taylor both describe as part of the medieval synthesis. It holds together

time and eternity, this world and the next, activity and contemplation, and ordinary human flourishing and the self-transcendence of being set apart for God's purposes.

Chapter Five demonstrated several of the above themes coming together. The exercise there does not exhaust what could be done in the same spirit, but I chose to engage with work by Abraham Heschel on the Sabbath, noting how many of the Sabbath's rich themes are layered together in it. I discovered that when Christians engage with this modern Jewish classic on the Sabbath, we find there a number of insights that are not far from our own Christian heritage—but of which we have been deprived through our history of supersessionist theology and excessive avoidance of Jewish influences. We can receive *The Sabbath's* insights, many of which we cannot find in the resources of our own tradition, without either harmfully appropriating from Judaism or sacrificing the opportunity to understand the Sabbath Christologically. In fact, as we read Heschel and his Jewish influences as faithfully as possible to their intentions, we can become more familiar with the Sabbath that Jesus fulfills. We come to understand Jesus himself more fully.

Remaining Questions

A few questions that are suggested by the foregoing discussion should be addressed here in brief.

A Sabbath Practice or a Sabbath Imagination?

First, since Chapter Three argued for the continued possibility—and value—of Christian *practices* against the view that sees faithfulness as exclusively a matter of the heart, but Chapter Four introduced the possibility that the Sabbath could be a heuristic tool for discerning

Christians' relationship to human culture, these different arguments may seem to present a conflict. Am I arguing for Sabbath *practice* or a Sabbath *imagination*?

On the one hand, because practices shape the imagination and the spirit, I can hardly advocate for one without also arguing for the other. We saw this dynamic in Nathan Jennings' liturgical theology, where the practice of the Eucharist is in harmony with the divine gift economy and the ethics that can be patterned on it. If our liturgies do in fact mirror God's economy, then it is reasonable to think that ideas and their corresponding practices are inseparable.

On the other hand, it often happens that we must begin one place and move from there toward greater integration. In the case of the Sabbath, we might begin either way. Many of us may find it more within reach to begin by cultivating a Sabbath practice of ceasing work; but we must then not stop there. I urge that we must go on to ask what happens when the implications of this act is allowed to ripple outward into other areas of life and thought. What are the economic implications of this simple action? What do we learn about our relationship to human culture? What is happening to our spirits? We might call this approach to a holistic Sabbath practice an inductive one. Alternatively, we could grow into the Sabbath deductively, by first allowing the Sabbath to become an imaginative construct for thinking through our participation with and distinction from our neighbors. But, as with the other approach, we mustn't be tempted to let our imagination be enough; rather, we must allow this way of thinking to permeate the actual shape of our lives. We should have to wrestle with its practical constraints.

There may be pitfalls with beginning either way. If we begin with practice and move toward theory, there is the possibility we could fail *ever* to discover the spirit of the Sabbath and the larger context of wisdom that it offers. If we begin with theory and move toward practice, on

the other hand, there is the risk that our imagination will be untethered to actions. Not only might we be lulled into a false sense of satisfaction that comes from resting on a tidy mental construct, but the construct itself may also fail to mature and develop if we never put it to the test in the world of practice. We can imagine the same dynamic as it pertains to a Eucharistic theology and ethics: someone may indeed philosophize about the Eucharist, but if the philosopher is not shaped by regular participation in the physical sacrament, her insights are dubious.

A Personal or Collective Sabbath?

I have noted that a political push for public Sabbatarianism is not likely to be successful in our increasingly pluralistic society. I have also said that Christians cannot view Sabbath observance as a *sine qua non* of salvation or belonging to the Church. On the other hand, I have also noted that an individual, *a la carte* Sabbath, which has been the subject of several recent books on Sabbath spirituality, is not enough. Judith Shulevitz and Shalom Carmy have both observed that much of the Sabbath's richness for Jews is due to the fact that it is a mandatory, communal, and inconvenient thing with which everyone in a community must struggle. It loses its transformative power when it has no authority beyond a given individual's will. In acknowledging that Christians cannot see Sabbath observance as strictly required, have I effectively deprived it of all its power?

It seems inevitable that the practice of Sabbath will have considerably less authority and staying power than it does in Orthodox Jewish communities. It is likely also to have less power to shape our spirits as a result. But from a theological standpoint, I think we must view this difference as acceptable.

We can, however, think of many ways in which practices of Christian piety, though not quite a matter of salvation or condemnation, nonetheless do have transformative power. Benedictine communities pray the hours, for instance; Orthodox Christian communities engage in regular fasts. The Sabbath, like these practices, will surely be most powerfully transformative when it is adopted by communities made up of willing persons, who recognize its spiritual fruitfulness and understand the role it plays within a comprehensive life of faith.

There seem to be at least two components of this commitment. First is the agreement of the community, such as a congregation, family, or residential community, which can undertake the practice together and create a mutually reinforcing pattern of life. Individual members may indeed be helped by the expectation of others that they will engage in the practice, and they can receive as a gift the opportunity to struggle against what is likely to seem burdensome, inconvenient, and at times insufficiently meaningful. The second component, however, is equally important: the practice must be backed by members' underlying acceptance of the practice's intrinsic worth. Members will recognize that the community does not hold the authority of salvation over them, and that the practice gains value as it gains the compliance of the heart. As parents of adolescents learn, some rules and routines can do more damage than good if the young person does not understand and generally accord with the spirit behind them. While an Orthodox Jewish community might see the Sabbath as so integral to its identity that someone who balks at it must also depart (if only temporarily) from the entire community, I do not think Sabbath practice need be such an inflexible fixture in a Christian's life. If an individual, after wrestling for a time, has lost the understanding or joy of participating in it, mentors might recommend that the person adjust his or her pattern of life to rediscover a love of Jesus wherever it can be found.

While I think the Sabbath is most likely to be transformative for Christians when it is taken up by communities, it is not useless for individuals who wish to adopt it on their own. Individuals can practice a pattern of work and rest, deepening a life of prayer, and taking a quiet stance of economic resistance. Lone practitioners will, however, likely find themselves struggling against the pressure of their communities rather than in unity with others. While individual strength of will is not entirely at odds with the spirit of the Sabbath, neither is it quite what the Sabbath is designed to inculcate.

How Should Christians Keep the Sabbath?

While I have made some brief recommendations for how Christians might observe the Sabbath practically, I have not explained these in great detail or offered rationales for them. What specific practices do I recommend, and why?

While the thirty-nine actions named in Exodus 31 became the standard list of Sabbath prohibitions in rabbinic Judaism, I think Christians benefit most from discerning more broadly the principles that underlie the Sabbath commandment. This is because, even taking a generous view toward Torah observance as a Christian, the rabbinic tradition is extra-biblical and can hardly be considered binding upon or relevant to Christians. Biblical principles do exist that can be expounded without too much difficulty in a manner that *is* applicable by contemporary people.

The most straightforward principles to apply involve ceasing work, ceasing to require others to work, and ceasing buying and selling. When it comes to ceasing work, there may be some confusion around what qualifies as work, but the phrase “servile labor” has usually been

interpreted to mean work that is for the sake of some other end.⁴⁷⁸ Whether the activity is paid or unpaid, or whether it is physical or mental, it is done because it must be done rather than merely for the joy of doing it. When we define work this way, baking bread might not count as work if it is an activity done for enjoyment, while baking bread to meet the needs of a household or to sell would be considered work. (There are those who abuse this kind of ambiguity by selecting the least burdensome, but still necessary, tasks for Sabbath days, with the explanation that they enjoy doing them—or, worse, that they feel more restful when they have accomplished them! This kind of finagling is *not* in the spirit of the Sabbath, as it merely perpetuates our habit of constant productivity without forcing us to confront the inconvenience of actually *ceasing*.) Stopping work can indeed have stressful consequences, especially when we have not yet learned to shape our routines around a day of rest. That is part of how the Sabbath works on us.⁴⁷⁹

For many of us, it may be more difficult to avoid compelling those in our employment to work on the Sabbath, but the principle is still not terribly difficult to discern from the Biblical Sabbath. In ancient Israel, it was more common for some people to be exclusively servants while others were exclusively masters—and a relationship of responsibility for provision could be more easily recognized. In our economy, by contrast, most of us alternate between supplying goods and services and consuming them, and to the extent that we rely on others' paid work, we do not have exclusive or ongoing relationships with the same providers. We imagine ourselves to be interacting around a single exchange; furthermore, the price of the exchange refers to the

⁴⁷⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 10-13. Instrumentality is central to Volf's definition of "work."

⁴⁷⁹ I realize that not everyone who could be included in "we" has the power to control their work schedule. People who are economically dependent on industries that have shifted to a seven-days-a-week schedule may not have options. I do not fault these workers, though I do encourage creative thinking where possible. Rather, I place even more responsibility on the employers and consumers who contribute to this kind of inhumane schedule.

market value of the good or service, not to the value of the person whose life it sustains. But to honor the Sabbath in respecting others' need for rest, we must begin to see our financial exchanges differently, doing what we can to make regular rest available to all (without reduction in pay). Despite what the market might tell us the price of a transaction should be, a Sabbath-observant consumer knows that no one should be compelled to work seven days a week, doing what we pay them for at the rate we pay them, in order to make ends meet. We need not justify going out to eat or similar activities on our own Sabbath, with the idea that we are providing for others: if these employees rely on Sabbath day earnings to maintain an acceptable lifestyle, what it tells us is that they are not paid well enough for their six weekdays of work.

We can show a commitment to these principles, first, by refraining from activities that require other people to be employed on the Sabbath. We can do little to influence employees' choices to give appropriate compensation and time off, but we can avoid contributing to the demand for workers on seven days of the week.⁴⁸⁰ Second, we can become more informed about the practices of businesses we frequent and choose where we do business (and how much we tip) on the basis of what we learn.

A third way to observe the Sabbath is by avoiding buying and selling of all kinds. Orthodox Jews are forbidden even to handle money on the Sabbath; while this rule is not clearly deduced from Scripture, it is in keeping with the prophetic texts that bemoan Sabbath breakers who buy, sell, and trade. It is also a faithful development upon the first two forms of observance: even if we are not clearly working and not obviously employing someone else (such as, for

⁴⁸⁰ It does also matter *which* day workers are given off, so it is not sufficient merely to *hope* that the employees are given a Tuesday or a Thursday off each week. The lack of a consistent schedule, and a schedule whose day off reliably corresponds to that of family and friends, takes a dramatic toll on workers' social connections. Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World*, 198-199, recounts the many negative social consequences of the Soviet Union's experiment with a continuous workweek, with groups assigned to rotating days off that differed from those of their families and friends.

instance, by making online purchases), we are staying in the mindset of the market. Getting and spending invades every day and, potentially, any moment of the day. And as long as we are making “one-click” orders, we remain in the territory of meeting our own needs rather than ceasing and resting in God’s presence.

A fourth possible way of observing the Sabbath, which has been gaining in popularity but is less directly related to the Biblical commandment, is to put away electronic technology. Many people, recognizing their devices’ power over them, have chosen to interpret the Sabbath as an opportunity to push back. This development upon the Sabbath is certainly in keeping with Abraham Heschel’s thinking, since “technical civilization” that lures us with greater control, and then begins to control us in return, can have few examples better than the smartphone. The question of electronic technology on the Sabbath would have been a non-issue for Heschel, though, because Orthodox communities refuse even to flip power switches. For a community to whom turning on power on the Sabbath is a sign of conceding too much to “technical civilization,” the question we ask of whether to limit screen time on the Sabbath must surely be laughable, a sign that we gave up our independence long ago.

So do I recommend a “tech Sabbath”? I doubt it can hurt. But the murky Scriptural precedent (the nearest thing is probably the Exodus 35:3 injunction against lighting fires) makes it difficult to recommend widely as something that should become a Sabbath standard. And if we are to give up electronics, why not go the Orthodox way and give up driving and electric appliances, too? What technology could we not think of giving up—all the way back, in fact, to the fire I just mentioned? It seems we must admit that most of us have, in fact, given up our independence of “technical civilization” to the point that we cannot perform a number of tasks, even ones that would be desirable on the Sabbath, without the help of advanced technology

(talking to relatives and getting to church, for example). How can we accept some forms of technology while rejecting others—particularly when so many functions are now combined on a single device?

Instead, a principle I do think can serve more broadly as an aid for Christians' discernment in the matter of technology is Heschel's guidance about the purpose of the Sabbath: it is "not an occasion for diversion or frivolity" but "an opportunity to mend our tattered lives; to collect rather than to dissipate time."⁴⁸¹ Christians will, indeed, lack the strict rabbinic injunctions that Heschel says have "succeeded in preventing the vulgarization of the grandeur of the day."⁴⁸² But perhaps we can take an active role in asking ourselves what it means to collect, mend, and make meaning. Some activities—perhaps *especially* those that involve electronic technology—can be described in no better terms than "diversion," "frivolity," and "dissipation"; instead of re-creation, they sap creativity and joy, while giving no sense of meaning in return, no deeper connection with God and others. These are surely not Sabbath activities, whatever form they take. But if there are activities that connect us more deeply with God, God's creation, and the people around us, and that clarify the state of our own spirits, the degree to which they involve technology seems to be a secondary question.

A Stable Synthesis of Christ and Culture?

A fourth question the foregoing chapters has likely raised is whether Christians' relationship to culture should be stable, always following a single model. I have recommended a

⁴⁸¹ Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 17-18.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*

synthesis position based on the Sabbath—but should this relationship look the same in every time and place?

In no way do I expect Christians' relationship toward the societies in which they live to “synthesize” harmoniously at all times. Sometimes a peaceful relationship may prevail and Christians' posture in a given environment may approach a “Christ of culture” model; in other times and places, the nature of a given society may prompt Christians to live more as if Christ is “against culture”—or a given instance of it, at least. The very same Christians, faithful to Christ in the same ways, will relate to their non-Christian neighbors in a wide variety of modes, depending on the circumstances. We must always discern what the times call for.

The Sabbath synthesis I am laying out should be seen, rather, as a pattern that encourages this necessary process of discernment and reserves a place for it. While culture's particular manifestations will be limitless, the Sabbath model reminds us of something constant: that whatever corruptions we now see in it, human culture is a good, with an appropriate place within creation—and that it is not our God. The disciplined habit of alternating between commonality with our neighbors and separateness as the people of God is a reminder to affirm both parts of this truth. It is a call to take part wherever possible in non-sectarian culture-making, while periodically withdrawing to a critical distance. It is from this distance, and among the people of God, that the sacramental life and the proclamation of the Gospel have the opportunity to direct our discernment of the other six days. What is the character of the society in which we live? Does our life as the Church reflect God's calling? In what ways should our life depart from that of our non-Christian neighbors? How far can we join in the pursuits of our neighbors, and where must we part ways?

Whether we find that commonality with our non-Christian neighbors is almost entirely in keeping with our call to follow Christ, or that we are in a circumstance where we must be quite separate, the pattern of the Sabbath challenges us to keep our eyes open to realize it. It is by keeping in mind both the original goodness of creation and the unchanging goodness of God, by cherishing the world we have been given to cultivate but offering it up to the eternal God, that we practice living faithfully as aliens in the world.

Further Work

There are also some questions that this project has hinted at but which I cannot treat here nearly in the detail they merit. These questions suggest future work, whether for me or other scholars to pursue.

The first is the question of what it looks like to have Sabbath-informed economic policies. To pursue this project at the level it deserves would seem to require interdisciplinary expertise. A number of active scholars, including some colleagues of mine and my supervisor, D. Stephen Long, have developed far greater proficiency than I in the area of theology and economics, and their participation in such a project would be welcome. Other scholars who might be called upon are economists themselves but take an ongoing interest in questions of ethics and just policy. As Mary Hirschfeld cautions, the respective ways economists and theologians tend to think of the human person are often so incompatible as to make interdisciplinary collaborations difficult—but surely this means the problem is even worse if members of only one of the two disciplines aim to carry on a discussion without members of the other. While collaborating across disciplines would be difficult, any attempt by theologians to

develop Sabbath-informed economic policy recommendations *without* the help of economists must be doomed to naïveté and impotence.

A second future project suggested by this dissertation is the question of what it looks like to have a Sabbath-informed policy toward immigrants and refugees. I have noted that the Sabbath command has implications for treatment of various kinds of outsiders, including religious outsiders (those not brought into the covenant with God) and political outsiders (such as non-citizens). What specific actions could be taken, as a Church or as a nation, to honor the Sabbath in our behavior toward immigrants and refugees is a worthy subject for future work. Interestingly, Ched Myers, the founder of the Sabbath Economics Collaborative, is also the co-author (with Matthew Colwell) of *Our God is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigrant Justice*.⁴⁸³ It is clear that the Sabbath command animates a drive both toward economic justice and toward neighborly treatment of immigrants, but more work is needed to draw out these connections.

A third area for further work pertains to how Christians and Jews can discover solidarity around Sabbath observance and the social policies that are tied to it. Such a project would require collaboration with Jewish theologians and ethicists and would surely be worthwhile.

In Conclusion

This project has presented the Sabbath as an essentially Jewish commandment that remains endemic to Christianity, and as a human practice that teaches us to conceive of the transcendent. In both relationships—between Israel and the Church, and between earthly and

⁴⁸³ Matthew Colwell and Ched Myers, *Our God is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigrant Justice* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2012).

spiritual realities—we encounter tension and the temptation to resolve it prematurely. But the very structure of the Sabbath resists this kind of collapse. Eternity breaks into time, as God has broken into creation—“without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” While utterly near, God remains wholly other. It is Jesus who creates a new intimacy between God and creation, and Jesus who calls his followers to set their sights on heaven, though he is the very Logos of the world.

This same Jesus tells us he came *not* come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them. The Sabbath has no more ceased to reflect the life of God than the Sinai Covenant has ceased to mark Israel as God’s people. Christians are called, however, to see both as fulfilled: we are called to see by faith the heavenly realities that transfigure earthly ones. If our bodies take part in the spiritual life of Christ’s body; if “Israel of the flesh” is, ultimately, joined to spiritual Israel; cannot the bodily practice of the Sabbath be taken up by faith into our faith in God’s fulfillment of it? When we hold the physical practice of the Sabbath together with faith in the grace it signifies, we are living the belief that God keeps all his promises.

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