

# Retrieving and Articulating Liberative Aspects of the Sabbath Doctrine in Context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa

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## Abstract

The crisis in Adventism in South Africa is that eschatology has been an escape wagon from liberative mission, or at best, an optional, even disposable aspect of the gospel. This attitude or understanding of seeing everything in the future with no connection to the present has caused Adventists to shun social, political and cultural responsibilities. This article explicates and advocates the position that Adventists must explore the broader message and liberative meaning, purpose and function of the Sabbath. As a re-interpretation of the traditional, legalistic understanding of the doctrine of the Sabbath, the model proposed locates the Sabbath at the centre of a radically liberative mission to the poor. It argues that rest, as a mark of wholeness, must be realised in those aspects of human life that the Sabbath addresses; and that theology is not averse to liberative mission. Any theology which claims to be a biblical theology must link its understanding of the gospel to social concern. Therefore, this article aims to retrieve and biblically articulate aspects of the Sabbath doctrine. Adventists cannot be persuaded to operate meaningfully in responding to the millennial hopes of the poor outside of formal recognition of the potency of the Sabbath as a time of deliverance or liberation of people from social, emotional, political and material consequences of sin. Thus, in the following sub-themes the broader liberative message and meaningful aspects of the Sabbath will be explored. The universality of the Sabbath will touch on the following: the Sabbath as a time for release from labour, from oppressive life, indeed a time to embrace even justice and mercy. The Sabbath entails an inclusive mission, God's dominion-free order in a world impacted by violent engagement with oppressive powers; Sabbath as missionary in its nature will also be explicated.

**Keywords:** Sabbath; Seventh-day Adventist; retrieving; liberative mission; destitution; mission theology



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## Introduction

Genesis 2:1–3 authenticates that the Sabbath was originated during creation week. Hence, the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist state that the Sabbath points to the beneficence of the Creator, who rested after his creative programme, and instituted the Sabbath for all humanity as a memorial of his creative power. It is tragic, however, that the Adventist mission to South African people has remained in the model of a colonial society, in which evangelism is recruitment rather than also social transformation and liberation. This means that Adventists have used the Sabbath simply as a day of worship and not a season for redemptive service to humanity. Visible ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus Christ must be done on the Sabbath day. To Adventists, the Sabbath has become their day. True, the day was made for us, but it is not of us. Human beings can use time but they cannot own it. It must be clearly understood that time is created by God for us and, therefore, belongs to God alone. “But the seventh day is the Sabbath of Yahweh; your God” (Ex 20:10a; Deut 5:14a). Our cosmic relation with time is that it is a platform for existence, life and activity. Hence:

The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God’s kingdom. The Sabbath is God’s perpetual sign of his eternal covenant between him and his people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God’s creative and redemptive acts. (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2005, 16)

Consistent with the above understanding, Adventists must use this central doctrine as their belief system to respond to the multi-disciplinary challenges of the poor in South Africa and countries beyond South Africa that have been ravaged by colonialism and other related ills.

## The Liberative Functionality and Universality of the Sabbath

There is a social-liberative value in the Sabbath which makes it a platform, first, for the affirmation of people’s divine humanity and second, for relief from conditions of psychological and material destitution.

### **Function 1**

The Sabbath should be a time for restorative capacitating of the poor to continue in their search for fulfilment and freedom from want. In formulating a liberative mission perspective on the Sabbath, I am especially indebted to concepts expressed by Plantak (1998), Strand (1982), and Kubo (1978). Plantak (1998) presents important aspects of the Sabbath that are articulated in the three points presented below: The first important fact about the Sabbath is its universality.

## Function 2

As an interval in time, it exposes humanity to the rest that God intended all humanity to experience once a week. This 24-hour period cannot be restricted to a place or condition of society. It arrives once a week and embraces all created life, thus subjecting all human beings to the same blessings—regardless of place of residence, social class and variations in material well-being.

## Function 3

The universality of the Sabbath implicates humanity in the omnipresence of God in creation. The Sabbath has no specific or limited geographic application. The Sabbath is a global blessing to all humanity. It should, therefore, not be seen as and restricted to a given faith community or cultural group. As Finley (2017, 37) aptly states: “The Sabbath was given at Creation for all people as a day to worship the Creator and praise him for the gift of life itself. It was set aside at Creation as an eternal symbol of God’s creative power for his people in every age. The Sabbath<sup>1</sup> cannot be monopolised or privatised.” It cannot be the preserve of the Jews and any other national or denominational group of humans.

## The Sabbath: A Time for Release from Labour

In discussing this aspect of the Sabbath, Strand (1982, 215–228) makes the following crucial comment:

The fourth commandment encompasses both the six days of Israel’s work and the seventh day of rest and thus the weekly rhythm of working and resting is intimately connected. Quoting Bacchiocchi, Strand says: “The six working days find their meaning in the seventh day of rest, and the seventh day finds its meaning in God’s presence among his people, the meaning of all human time is found in communion with God” (Bacchiocchi 1980, 104). Strand then quotes Davidson (1988, 101) as saying: “Even in the busiest time of year God rescues us from the tyranny of toil. No secular business is so important as to rob us of fellowship with him.”  
[www.discipletree.com/05Courses/ChurchGrowth/.../Sabbath%20and%20Discipleship](http://www.discipletree.com/05Courses/ChurchGrowth/.../Sabbath%20and%20Discipleship)

The writer of this article may safely state that when labour robs Christians of fellowship with God, it becomes slavery and idolatry. Labour without meaningful rest corrupts and degrades humanity.

Strand further argues:

The community of Israel was to nurture and demonstrate its weekly devotion to God. The Sabbath was to be one of the important means God would use to sanctify them (cf.

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1 True Sabbath-keeping touches the whole of life. The Sabbath sanctifies the week. One cannot be dishonest on Monday and truly keep the Sabbath, because Sabbath-keeping is essentially a posture toward God that is not a one-day-in-seven kind of activity (Provonsha 1993, 86).

Ex 31:13–17) thus making them a holy witness to the nations. The remembrance of a definite holy time, grounded in the original creation week would provide an ongoing reminder that it was God who had both made and redeemed them. Sabbath rest therefore, would separate the sacred from common time. As such, this sharp distinction between the sacred and common time is not shared with some recent writings on the Sabbath which have a more philosophical than biblical basis.

If Strand is right, then it should be understood that the Sabbath was not meant to be a mere doctrine but a cosmic stage for the restoration of godliness to humanity. The Sabbath is an opportunity for humanity to experience divinity.

### The Sabbath: A Time for Liberation

On the Sabbath, Christians are freed from the shackles of drudgery and toil. They enter into a redemptive encounter with divinity and the rest of creation. They become reconciled with humanity as liberated persons. The Bible associates the Sabbath with God's power and authority to deliver us from the cares of life and makes it possible for us to be recreated through sanctification (Ez 20:10–12, 20). The broad time span within which the Sabbath was located in the Old Testament was the jubilee system. The jubilee system was marked by seven-year periods that culminated in the 50th year of the system. The 50th year was greeted with communal glee as it symbolised God's favour on all those who were poor, indebted and enslaved.

Thus each seventh day in the cycle was a miniature jubilee in which the Sabbath rest symbolised God's release of his people from moral indebtedness and all forms of material discomfiture and disablement. For the Jews, the Sabbath was enveloped in the 50-year cycle of broad-based social justice and the equalisation of social privilege and humanity. The jubilee period and Sabbath year traditions found in Leviticus 25, point to God as the only true and eternal owner of land. Christians are like tenants, managers whose task is to "lease" the land for not more than half a century. Thus, woven through this tradition are themes of caring for the land, for the poor and destitute. The seven- and 49-year cycles were meant to give recognition of the sovereignty of God over the human and non-human creation. In Exodus 23:9–13 there is a marriage of Sabbath-keeping with the seventh year rest for the land and for people who were rendered poor and landless for various reasons and causes.

The understanding of the Sabbath as presented above has serious implications for the Adventist Church in South Africa and elsewhere in the world where there have been systems of oppression and slavery. The church's assimilation of the discriminatory practices of the apartheid state compromised the sanctity and liberation that are embedded in the Sabbath. Sabbath teachings and laws, by echoing the jubilee traditions, go to the heart of the biblical emphasis on justice and compassion. Sabbath becomes an enduring sign of hope that the poor will see justice and the distraught find peace. Thus the Sabbath must remain to be observed even in the millennial period. Kubo (1978, 46) presents the following graphic concerns about the Sabbath: "Sabbath observance has

integral social and humanitarian aspects that we dare not forget. The Sabbath as a sign of redemption points in two directions—to our own redemption and to that of the oppressed. We must bring rest to those who live in servitude.”

### The Sabbath: A Time to Embrace Justice and Mercy

The Sabbath highlights how, in the very fabric of Hebrew society, justice and mercy worked together in favour of the less privileged in society. The Old Testament mentions three Sabbaths which reflect justice and mercy:

- Instructions to keep the seventh-day Sabbath included providing equal opportunity for everyone to rest, including servants, animals, and foreigners.
- In every seven years, the Sabbath was a time for cancelling debts, for showing concern for the poor, and for freeing slaves. Interestingly, God instructed the people to include the animals in the benefit of the Sabbath year (see *Levi 25:6–7*).
- Jubilee that came on the 50th year after seven Sabbath years, instructed that property that was sold was restored to the original owner; debts were forgiven; and prisoners and slaves were freed. Jubilee was an equaliser of society, a time to give everyone a new beginning. White (1941, 185) also confirms this truth when she states that it was a “safeguard ... against the extremes of either wealth or want.”

### The Sabbath: An All-inclusive Mission

The Sabbath should be a time when Adventists move from their exclusiveness to open worship and communion with God and humanity. The Sabbath should not be seen as private property or a monopoly of the Adventist community. The Adventist Church should learn to be true to scripture when Jesus says: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (*Mk 2:27*).

Therefore, the Sabbath is a platform for the doing of good acts and administration of justice in an unjust world. Adventists, therefore, should be known as people who are sensitive to issues of injustice and deprivation, especially, in South Africa. The Sabbath is, to use a common expression, a time for “levelling the playing fields” between those who have the blessings of life and others who lack means of sustenance. The Sabbath does not manipulate and exploit the poor but seeks to redress the undesirable conditions that continue to plague the image of God. Thus, in her article, Claassens (2011, 75) explicates as follows:

In our globalized world it seems that work has become increasingly fragmented and depersonalized; employees being able to expect little humaneness or loyalty from their employers. The Sabbath commandment thus serves as an imperative to counter the ugly

face of capitalism's relentless surge for profit, as well as globalization that affects us all, but in particular exploits the poor and vulnerable in countries far away.

What amazes one repeatedly is the inclusiveness of Jesus' mission. It embraces both the poor and the rich, both the oppressed and the oppressor, both the sinners and the devout. His mission is one of dissolving alienation and breaking down walls of hostility, of crossing boundaries between individuals and groups. As God graciously forgives every person on earth, Christians must learn to forgive those who wrong them up to seventy times seven, which, in fact, means limitless—more often than they are able to count (StuhlmueLLer 1983, 148). LapidE (1986, 91), an Orthodox Jew, confirmed this attitude of loving one's enemies<sup>2</sup> as "an innovation introduced by Jesus." The disciples would be reviled, interrogated, ostracised, and threatened like sheep among wolves, yet they were to continue offering their message of peace and love to the very people who treated them unjustly.

Even the persistent rejection of their message did not cause them to give up (Bosch 1991, 28). Jesus addressed those who are "evil" (Mt 5:11), the enemies of the message of Jesus, but God has not turned his back upon them. He still makes the sun to rise even on them (Mt 5:44). In keeping with God's magnanimity, the followers of Jesus do not define their identity in terms of opposition to outsiders. They remind themselves of Jesus' words: "If you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (Mt 5:46 f). God is the father of all humanity. "No father will give his son a stone instead of bread, or a snake if he asks for fish? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father who is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him" (Mt. 7:11).

## The Sabbath: God's Domination Free Order

If the Sabbath is a time for liberation it is also an opportunity for us to remove from worship, church order and mission practice or all practices that entrench inequality and unequal access to the blessings of life. The function of the Sabbath as a time for liberation implies that there is equal access to God as our leader. It is a day that should remove all forms of discriminatory practices from the church. This, then, presupposes that Jesus Christ regards domination free order as an indictment to a domination system. In fact, his sermons and teachings were demonstrative of this truth and ever rebuking the domination system. Luke in his gospel writes:

A dispute ... arose among [the disciples] as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But [Jesus] said to them: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest

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2 The injunction to love enemies has rightly been described as the most characteristic saying of Jesus (StuhlmueLLer 1983, 159).

among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table but I am among you as one who serves.” (Lk 22:24–27)

Kgatle (2015, 113) in his doctoral thesis, “Servant Leadership in Mark 10:35–45 applied to the African Pentecostal Christianity,” corroborates this injunction of God’s domination free order when he states:

Jesus is asking his disciples to be different from the worldly system of leadership. The disciples should not lead like Gentile leaders. Jesus introduces another style different from what the disciples know as a norm. In contrast to exercising authority and leadership, they should minister and serve others. Jesus repeats this teaching for the second time, because they did not understand him the first time. In Mark 9:30–50 Jesus taught the disciples humility and servanthood, but this teaching is disorientating for them as they already take leadership as authority and lordship.

Christ’s rejection of domination hierarchies was received with great astonishment each time He taught. The following passages illustrate this fact:

When you give a banquet, Jesus suggests to the wealthy with a straight face, don’t invite your friends, because they will just reciprocate, but invite instead the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. If another invites you to a feast, don’t sit down in a place of honour, but in the last place (Lk 14:7–14). Don’t be like the religious leaders, who make their prayer shawls ornate and their robes fashionable, and who covet salutations in the market place and the best seats in the synagogues, and places of honour at the feasts and make long, pretentious prayers. (Mk 12:38–40)

Wink (1992, 112) aptly states that “the words and deeds of Jesus reveal that He is not a minor reformer but an egalitarian prophet who repudiated the very premises of the Dominion System: the right of some to lord it over others by means of power, wealth, shaming or titles. In his beatitudes, his healing, and his table fellowship with outcasts and sinners, Jesus<sup>3</sup> declared God’s special concern for the oppressed.” The followers of Christ are not to take titles: “But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor” (Mt 23:8–10). On the Sabbath day there is no male nor female, rich or poor, great and small, master or slave. The Sabbath is an embodiment of the belief that all men are equal, “it is a day of independence of social condition” (Heschel [1951] 2003, 21).

His followers, therefore, are to maintain domination-free relationships in a discipleship of equals that includes women. They must do away with the hierarchical relationships

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3 Jesus’ actions embody his words. According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus washes the disciples’ feet, a task considered so degrading that a master could not order a Jewish slave to perform it (Jn 13:1–20). Consistent with all that He has said and done, Jesus enters Jerusalem farcically, on a donkey. The human being who has no place to lay his head (Lk 9:57–58) is the same “king” who owns nothing and must borrow—not even a horse—but an ass!

of master and slave, teacher and student. “I do not call you servants any longer because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15). The gospel of Jesus is founded on economic equity, because economic inequities are based on domination. Statuses and domination hierarchies are largely built on power provided by accumulated wealth. Status consciousness and articulation in the church undermines equality, equity and social cohesion. Sadly, Adventists in South Africa have not discussed or confronted these dynamics of human life. There remains a void in the social critique of practical Adventism in this country. This article, therefore, advocates for a new discussion on these matters, which would also influence the church’s labour practices.

In the larger social context, breaking ranks with domination means ending the economic exploitation of the many by the few. According to Wink (1992, 114): “Since the powerful are not likely to abdicate their wealth, the poor must find ways of transcending the Domination Epoch while still in it.” Jesus challenges creditors not only to forgo interest but ask no repayment whatsoever (Lk 6:34). To those who wish to follow him He counsels selling everything, and warns the rich that they have no access whatever to the new society coming. To the religionist’s dream of being able to be “spiritual” and still amass wealth within an unjust system, Jesus pronounces an unconditional “no”: “You cannot serve God and wealth” (Mt 6:24); “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Mk 10:25). His followers were to begin living in the present as if the new order had already come. Jesus and his disciples lived from a common purse. He sent them out preaching the new order without food or money or extra clothes, relying on God’s providence through the generosity of hearers.

They “had all things in common; and they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44–45). They were not to give special status to the rich among them. Jesus condemns those that exploit the poor. Christ categorically states: “Whosoever believes may come...” (Jn 3:16). The word “whosoever” includes also the poor. Hence, Wink (1992, 115) aptly states that God elects and blesses the poor; the meek and the broken hearted and the despised who will inherit God’s coming reign on earth. It is the merciful, not the mighty; the peacemakers, not the warriors; the persecuted, not the aristocrats, who will enter into the joy of God (Mt 5:3–12). In parable after parable, Jesus speaks of the “reigning of God” using images drawn from farming and women’s work, not warfare and the palaces of kings.

It is not described as coming from on high down to earth; it rises quietly and imperceptibly out of the land. It is established not by armies and military might, but by an ineluctable process of growth from below, among the common people. He is, in sum, not looking for a kingdom for himself or anyone; elsewhere God imposes the divine will on the world. Rather, He is inaugurating God’s dominion-free society. With regard to women, as far as the gospels go, Jesus went contrary to the Jewish traditions, their status and roles in society. His approach to women had no parallel in “civilised”



societies since the rise of patriarchy approximately three thousand years before his birth (Wink 1992, 129). Traditionally, respectable Jewish men were not allowed to converse with women in public; Jesus freely conversed with women. A woman was to touch no man but her spouse; Jesus was touched by women, and He touched them.

Graphically, Wink (1992, 129–130) states how, on the Sabbath, Jesus healed a woman who had suffered from a spinal disease for 18 years. By healing her on the Sabbath, Jesus restored the Sabbath to its original meaning of release from bondage. By touching her, Jesus revoked the holiness code with its male scruples about menstrual uncleanness and sexual enticements. By speaking to her publicly, Jesus jettisoned male restraints on the freedom of women, born of the female sexuality. By placing her in the midst of the synagogue, Jesus challenged the male monopoly on the means of grace and access to God. By asserting that her illness was not divine punishment for sin, but satanic oppression, Jesus liberated her from the domination system, whose driving spirit is Satan. In freeing this woman from Satan’s power, Jesus simultaneously released her from the encompassing network of patriarchy, male religious elitism and the taboos fashioned to disadvantage some in order to preserve the advantage of others. Her physical ailment was symbolic of a system that literally bent women over. For her to stand erect in a male religious space represents far more than healing.

It reveals the dawn of a whole new world order. Here is the awesome power of God unleashed before their very eyes. Some see it (“the entire crowd was rejoicing”), others see only a threat to everything they hold dear (Lk 13:10–17). Jesus’ disciples illustrate the new domination-free order. His loose band of followers is scandalously mixed, including prostitutes like the one who washed his feet with her tears, women such as Mary Magdalene who was freed from demons, and aristocratic women like Joanna, wife of Herod’s chamberlain, “and many women, who provided for them out of their resources” (Lk 8:1–3). When the rich young man asked to follow him, Jesus told him to sell all, give it to the poor—not to Jesus’ group of followers—and follow him (Mt 10:17–22). The women, however, He puts in the place of patrons and benefactors—the first shall be last, and the last first, as a necessary reversal of roles on the path to full partnership in God.

Women in that world had little veracity as witnesses. How odd of God, then, to choose women as witnesses of Jesus’ Resurrection (Mt 28:9–10; cf Jn 20:1–18). Women received the Holy Spirit at the founding event of the church (Acts 1:14; 2:1) and were co-equal with men in receiving prophetic gifts. They headed house churches, opened new fields of evangelism (Philip 4:2–3), and were Paul’s co-workers. They were persecuted and jailed like the men (Acts 8:3; Rom 16:7) were named apostles (Rom 16:7), disciples (Acts 9:36–42), and deacons (Lk 8:3; Mk 15:41), led churches (Philip 1–2) and even in one case, acted as Paul’s patron (Rom 16:2). Now it becomes clear that Jesus treated women as He did, not because He was “nice,” but because the restoration of women to their full humanity in partnerships with men is integral to the coming of God’s kingdom.

Schmidt (2001, 98) notes not only the contribution of Christianity to the redeemed status of women, but its special place in contrast to the way other cultures treated women. Schmidt continues to say:

The high and honourable marital ethic set forth in Ephesians, which stems forth from Christ's interactions with women, cannot be found in the pagan literature of the Greco-Romans or in the cultures of other societies. The civil and human behaviour that is expected between husband and wife today, even by secularly-minded people, reflects the sea change effect Christ has had on the lives of women and on marriage, especially in the West. (Schmidt 2001, 98)

Quoting another scholar, Schmidt says that "the conversion of the Roman world to Christianity brought a change in women's status" (Schmidt 2001, 98). Schmidt, in this terse statement, encapsulates the essence of the kingdom of God, which treats and accepts everyone as his image. Hence, Apostle Paul would succinctly state: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

### The Sabbath as Jesus' Third Way: Non-violent Engagement of the Powers

Wink (1992, 175) aptly states: "Human evolution has provided the species with two deeply instinctual responses to violence: flight or fight." Jesus offers a third way: Non-violent direct action. Non-violent direct action stems from the classic text of Mt 5:38–42: You have heard that it was said:

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist an evil doer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. (cf Lk 6:29–30)

Wink acknowledges that Christians have on the whole, simply ignored this teaching. This teaching has seemed impractical, masochistic, suicidal—and an invitation to bullies and spouse-batterers to wipe the floor with their supine Christian victims. Some who have tried to follow Jesus' words have understood it to mean non-resistance: let the oppressor perpetrate evil unopposed. Even scholars have swallowed the eat-humble-pie reading of this text: "It is better to surrender everything and go through life naked than to insist on one's legal rights," to cite only one of the 115 scores of these commentators from Augustine times right up to the present (Schweizer 1976, 130). Interpreted thus, the passage has become the basis for systematic training in cowardice as Christians are taught to acquiesce in evil.

Cowardice cannot be associated with Jesus. Either He failed to make himself clear, or we have misunderstood him. There is plenty of cause to believe the latter. These sayings

of Jesus (“If anyone strikes you ... wants to sue you ... force you to go a mile ...”) were addressed to listeners who were subjected to these very indignities, forced to stifle outrage at their dehumanising treatment by the hierarchical system of class, race, gender, age and status, and as the result of imperial occupation. Christ, by counselling these already humiliated people to turn the other cheek, wanted them to learn the non-violent direct action of Jesus’ third way. The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect: “Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you. Your status does not alter that fact, you cannot demean me” (Wink 1992, 176). The logic of Jesus’ examples in (Mt 5:39b–42) goes beyond inaction and overreaction, capitulation and murderous counter violence, to a new response, fired in a crucible of love, that promises to liberate the oppressed from evil, even as it frees the oppressor from sin.

“Do not react violently to evil, do not counter evil in kind, do not let evil dictate the terms of your opposition, do not let violence draw you into mimetic rivalry”—this is the revolutionary principle, recognised from earliest times, that Jesus articulates as the basis for non-violently engaging the powers (Lambert 1960, 101). Jesus’ third way did not arise out of a vacuum. It was a logical development that Israel had an idealised concept of the holy war. One line of Israel’s development can be seen as the movement from submission, to holy war, to prophetic peace-making. War is not the means used to subdue the cosmos, as it is argued in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* narrative. This expression was created by Walter Wink as part of a discourse on modern culture and its legitimisation of oppressive power structures.

Contrary to this notion, the scriptures present peace and order as the norms of the cosmos from its beginning. “Holy war” enters the narratives as God’s sovereign act of liberating the Hebrew slaves from Egypt without their striking a blow. God, and God alone, fought on their behalf. God would drive out the inhabitants of Canaan by means of hornets, terror, panic, or pestilence—not the sword (Ecc 23:28; Deut 7:20; Josh 24:12). Jericho’s walls collapsed after ritual, not military action (though the mopping-up operation was carried out by the Hebrew warriors [Joshua 6]), and God overcame the Midianites by means of 300 men armed only with torches and trumpets (Jud 7, cf Wink 1992, 188). With its defection to monarchy, however, Israel began waging political wars that the false prophets tried to legitimate as holy. Israel came to trust in military might rather than God (Hos 10:13); yet God continued to offer to save the people, but not “by bow, or by sword, or by war, or by horse, or by horsemen” (Hos 1:7; see also Zech 4:6).

The unique contribution of the true prophets was their refusal to turn a holy war into a political war. This led them at times to declare that God was waging a holy war against faithless Israel (Is 10:5–6; 22:1–8; 28:1–22; 29:1–4; 30:8–17; Amos 3:1–2; 5:18–20). Out of the heart of that prophetic tradition, Jesus engaged the domination system in both its outer and spiritual manifestations. His teaching on non-violence forms the charter for a way of being in the world that breaks the spiral of violence. Jesus here reveals a way

to fight evil with all our power without being transformed into the very evil we fight. It is the only way possible—of not becoming what we hate. In summary, Wink presents alternatives, which could be adopted by the church for social transformation, and for socially engaging the domination system.

The following are components of Jesus' third way. They are premised on the fact that poverty is a moral form of violence, which may be caused by people or social structures. There comes a time in the process of responding to the needs or conditions of the poor that structures of power should be confronted for relief or redress. In seeking the application of the Sabbath as a liberating experience, the church should seek for solutions that are free from violence. It should work from the conviction that human beings are endowed with a God-given dignity and thus deserve just treatment and unconditional access to the opportunities which are within their right to access. It should also work towards breaking the cycle of humiliation from which the poor suffer. Finally, the poor should be made to understand that they too have moral power over their decisions and choices. They should be made accountable for changing their situation.

### The Sabbath: Missionary by its very Nature

The Sabbath plays an integral part in God's programme for restoring *Imago Dei* and *Missio Dei* in fallen humanity. Charles van Engen (1996, 37) defines *Missio-Dei* as God's mission.<sup>4</sup> Dybdahl (1999, 17) also corroborates this truth when he succinctly writes: "Mission is central to our identity. Jesus did not create a church and then give it mission as one of its tasks. The divine sending plan comes prior to the church. Mission gives birth to the church and is its mother. The very essence or nature of the church is mission." All these definitions argue for one thing only "God is a missionary God" (Aagaard 1973, 11–15).

Mission belongs to God, not to any church or denomination or any man. In Mathew 28:20 Jesus said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go ...". The church has no authority. Authority is given only to Jesus. The church acts on the basis of the command Christ has given. Kgatle (2018, 5) in his article, "Globalisation of Missions: An Exegesis on Great Commission" (Mt 28:18–20) has also aptly explicated this when he says: "The Great commission is timeless and infinite, because it is to be valid until the end of the ages. It is a commission beyond human history." The validation of the commission is, therefore, divine and in the hands of the eternal Creator, Jesus Christ, who bids us to go and share this great salvation with those that have not known him yet. This commission is not only for exclusive nations like the Jews, but it transcends human ethnic groups because it is a universal commission. It is a commission to all people, regardless of race, religion, colour and class. It includes all

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4 The *Missio-Dei* is God's activity, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church may be privileged to participate. Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission (Aagaard 1973, 13).

the geographic and cultural contexts of the world (Kgatlé 2018, 4). He says: “Go.” When Christ commands us to go He empowers us. On our own we can do nothing (Jn 15:5).

Wright (2010, 24) summarises it all when he says:

Mission is not ours; mission is God’s. Certainly, the mission of God is the prior reality out of which flows any mission that we get involved in. Alternatively, as has been nicely put, it is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world but that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God’s mission.

The church should be willing to go into the physical and moral condition of the poor in order to bring them into the scope of God’s grace. The church should preach a gospel that embraces the poor as God’s children, equal in standing before him with the rich. The poor should be cared for as people who need not only material things but also the grace of God in their lives, for some of them are in this condition because of their own actions. This will help them to live with the understanding that that while systems of this world create conditions that cause social inequalities, satanic evil is also a factor in causing people to suffer conditions of want, and that in the ultimate end it is God who can change the hearts of men and women to care for the poor. The poor themselves should also take responsibility to change their situation where possible.

Wade (2006, 48) succinctly writes:

In nearly every false religion, including false Christianity, worship is a matter of doing. Only in the Bible are we instructed to worship by leaving off our own doing, laying aside our effort and struggles, to cease our labour and rest in the serene confidence that the work on our behalf is all done.

The fourth commandment declares: “The Seventh day is a Sabbath.” The word “Sabbath” literally means “rest.” The seventh day is the rest appointed by God himself. It is the day in which He invites us to join him in his rest—“in it you shall not do any work.”

However, the Sabbath is not the day of neglecting that which could possibly be done on the Sabbath day. Sabbath is the commandment of mercy. Christ has explicitly demonstrated this aspect in his ministry on earth. He confronted the Jewish legalistic nature of his day regarding Sabbath-keeping by doing works of mercy. He thus left an example for us until today. The church must not be concerned only with people’s spiritual condition; it should pair this concern with a focus on equitable living in which fulfilment of material needs is seen as consistent with a redeemed humanity. A gospel that focuses solely on evangelism for personal conversion and ignores the socio-moral challenges of the people is not consistent with biblical ethics. Incarnational mission should embrace issues of equality and justice as parts of its concerns. Evangelism that focuses primarily on moving people from their primary faiths or denominations, without

addressing their material conditions, cannot contribute to changes in people's material conditions.

It is mainly a transfer of allegiance from one set of beliefs to another, from one church community to another. Social inequality is perpetually relocated from the community to the church. With each programme of evangelism, the poor move into the church with their challenges. Hence, the church is continually confronted by dual allegiance from newly baptised members. A critical reality about the church, while it is busy with the work of God, saving those that are not of this fold, is that the church has its own share of the poor and vulnerable in the membership. Thus, it is also ironic for the church to hope to deal with the poverty of the society while it harbours this class of humans within its fold. Jesus started his mission in Jerusalem, among his Jewish people (Lk 4:16–23).

The church must mingle with its own first and alleviate moral material conditions within its fold. When total membership of the Adventist Church is involved in caring, loving, giving, praying, and reading scriptures together, especially in the context of South Africa, the community will know that we have been with God. This was seen in the early church during Pentecost after they had received the Holy Spirit. The Bible account says: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all people: “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42–47). If more time was spent in ministering to the needs of the people, the people would positively respond to the mission of God. Thus, many will not just respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ but will become his disciples.

## Summary and Conclusion

As I summarise and conclude this article, I want to state that there are four reasons why the Sabbath remains the cornerstone of our liberative mission. In the New Testament there is a powerful text which cuts to the crux of the matter when it says: “So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb 4:9 ESV). Apostle Paul in Hebrews ties this idea of rest to the concept of the Old Testament Sabbath. Christian life is a busy lifestyle. As a result, Christians get entangled in many duties, even on the Sabbath day, and forget to recognise the importance of rest. Labour robs Christians of fellowship with God, it becomes slavery and idolatry. For Christians to renew their strength they must not work hard but must rest best in God. On the Sabbath Christians are freed from the shackles of drudgery and toil. They enter into the redemptive encounter with divinity and the rest of creation. God rested on the Sabbath. Therefore, Christians should do the same for the following four reasons:

1. To remind us that God is the Creator and reason for our existence.

Because of a busy lifestyle and cares of life Adventists and Christians in general disconnect from the purpose for which they were created. The Sabbath day must bring into remembrance and recognition that God did not create us to accomplish our goals but to be in love with him. God's people were not initially created for work, but for God. Therefore, nothing must come between them and God. The Sabbath is a day to be with God rather than to work.

2. To remind us that God provides.

Martha, even in the presence of Jesus, became busy instead of resting at the feet of Jesus like her younger sister Mary (Luke 10:38–42). If the Creator of the heavens and the earth visits you, what better provision can you make him? God commanded his people to rest on the Sabbath so that they could be reminded that God provides and is responsible for all they need. Thus, when Christians rest on the Sabbath, they simply declare that God is our eternal provider, and his provision encompasses all the blessings they need.

3. To remind us that God saves.

Deuteronomy (5:12–15) succinctly states why the children of Israel must remember to observe the Sabbath: “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy ... You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord 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.” The Sabbath gave Israel time to reflect on their salvation and the fact that they were freely delivered. They did not work for this salvation. God, because of his love (John 3:16), He freely saved them. Even today, Christians need to stop and reflect on their salvation so freely given. Apostle Paul aptly states: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:8–10).

4. To remind us that the Sabbath is universal.

The universality of the Sabbath touches the following, *inter alia*; the Sabbath is a time for release from labour, from oppressive life, indeed a time to embrace even justice and mercy. Further, the Sabbath entails an inclusive mission, God's dominion-free order in a world impacted by violent engagement with oppressive powers. The Sabbath is also missionary in its nature. Consistent with the principle of the universality of the Sabbath, the church must learn from the sacrificial and

missional life of Jesus Christ that redemption was never meant to be hoarded but to be shared to our families, neighbours and the world. Hasel has aptly concluded:

The Sabbath is grounded in creation and linked with redemption. It is an agent of rest from work and confronts man's religious and social relationship. It is a perpetual sign and an everlasting covenant. Its nature is universal and it serves all mankind. It is concerned with worship as well as with joy and satisfaction. The themes of creation, Sabbath, redemption, and sanctification are inseparably linked together, and with the Sabbath's covenant aspect, they reach into the eschatological future. (Hasel 1982, 21–43)

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