



AKADEMIA
AD FUTURUM PER FONTES

A THEOLOGY OF REST: AKADEMIA'S FUNDAMENTAL REFLECTION ON THE DAY OF REST

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1. Introduction

As a classical higher education institution, Akademia is committed to the Christian sources of the city "Jerusalem." The primary source symbolised by the city is, of course, the infallible and inspired Word of God, the Bible. Although Akademia is not a church and therefore cannot and must not replace the church in any way, it nonetheless serves the ancient classical Christian tradition and, in a broader sense, serves the universal church.¹ Amid the significant difference between university and church, Akademia also has a responsibility and calling towards the church.

As a higher education institution, Akademia is committed to the rich classical university idea, which in turn cannot be separated from its classical Christian origins and tradition. This explains why Akademia finds it necessary to address the theme of rest in a principled manner.

The theme of *rest* is undoubtedly a significant theme in the Bible. Therefore, it is also an important theme for Akademia. Anyone who uses the Bible as a guideline will approach the theme of rest with the necessary seriousness. In many respects, the "act of rest" is just as great a divine command and gift as work itself.² When considering rest, the establishment of the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1-3 and the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:8-11 immediately comes to mind. The theme of rest can thus be appropriately contemplated on a principled level within the context of the Sabbath.

However, before discussing the Sabbath in any depth below, it is first necessary to unpack the need for good rest universally. The world, with the rise of modernism and secularism, has been plunged into a state of constant efforts towards upward mobility and a kind of super-activism. In many respects, the modern world has forgotten how to rest.

2. Universal Phenomena and Considerations

In the professional work environment, phrases such as "hurry sickness," "fast life," "consuming life," "unending workdays," "turbo capitalism," "overwork," "the urgent now," "speed, stuff, and stress," and "burnouts" have become part of everyday vocabulary. It is no secret that most studies on the phenomenon of burnout indicate that it is increasing annually and globally. The

¹ The word "general" is used very deliberately here to refer to something from the Apostolic Creed as well as the Nicene Creed.

² The command to work, as bearers of God's image, can be traced back to Genesis 1:28. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10, Paul is also quite serious that no one should be lazy but must work.



majority of people who have worked for a particular company for, say, five years report that their stress and workload increase each year as expectations to perform also rise.

This phenomenon is also depicted in movies, suggesting that a successful professional career goes hand in hand with a life that cannot accommodate the “luxury” of rest. Consider, for example, the film *A Good Year*, starring Russell Crowe. He is a highly successful individual in the financial sector. After the death of his uncle, he must settle the estate in France. However, in all his years of work, he has never taken leave for personal reasons because he fears someone will take over his position in his absence. This mentality is so strong that at one point he states in so many words that going on vacation is worse than dying.

An article appeared in *The Guardian* based on an interview with Elon Musk. In the article, Musk mentions that his workweek consists of about one hundred and twenty hours. For perspective, it's worth noting that a week has only one hundred sixty-eight hours in total. Musk elaborates by explaining that on his forty-seventh birthday, he was alone, with no friends, working in his office. In his own words: “All night – no friends, nothing.”

In our modern era, the average person in the professional workplace is almost solely interested in climbing the so-called “ladder of success”. Our era has an obsession with upward mobility for the individual. The prevailing promise is that you will only be truly happy once you reach the next rung on the “ladder of success”. This constant upward movement is, ironically enough, immensely unsatisfying and frustrating in the long term because true fulfilment always remains just out of reach, given that there is always another rung to climb. Sociologist Kate Northrup expresses this cycle as follows: “We overwork ourselves, overschedule ourselves, and become ‘busier than thou’ because we think there’s some sort of prize on the other side.”

There are, of course, various reasons for this global trend in the professional workplace. The fact that appointments are not always permanent and that job opportunities are not always plentiful means that individuals are willing to work more hours than necessary and set higher performance goals than are realistically achievable. Moreover, there has been a significant shift regarding the factors in which modern people find their identity. Whereas people used to find their primary identity in their participation in their communities (families, etc.), the modern individual finds identity much more in status, power, money, and profession. Ironically, advances in technology have contributed to societies where we, as humans, work not less, but more. Technology has effectively invaded the household, turning bedrooms into offices. Furthermore, the rise of a machine-like consumerism and consumer culture serves as the driving force for the non-negotiable and immediate fulfilment of individual desires.



As the world is immersed in this constant pursuit of upward mobility with the rise of modernism and secularism, it also creates a constant conflict with *time*. Humanity, in its quest for progress, is competing with time. In many respects, the invention of clocks in the thirteenth century contributed to the way this challenge has ultimately manifested.

3. Humankind's Constant Conflict with Time

Time is not the simplest thing to make sense of. It sometimes feels as though the concept of time belongs to another world because, in many respects, we have lost the necessary and correct categories to process it. Even though humankind has designed a device that fits around your wrist to read the specific time of day, the experience of time, unlike space and matter, remains elusive in many ways.

The problem in everyday life is that the more a person focuses on the watch on their wrist (or, nowadays, rather the smartphone in their pocket), the more they feel as if there is no longer enough time for everything that still needs to be accomplished in their professional career. The fact that time is understood as something with which we are in constant conflict reveals the extent to which the world has bought into a modern conception of time. Time is no longer viewed in a deeper metaphysical sense as the actualisation of potentiality, but rather is reduced merely to clock time against which we must constantly compete.

The Jewish philosopher Abraham Heschel articulates the problem in his book on the Sabbath: “Man transcends space, but time transcends man.” Although humankind has, to some extent, conquered space and matter, the victory over time remains impossible. Even the clock is merely an attempt to reduce time to space and matter, as space occupied by matter is more manageable. Sociologist Os Guinness frames the problem as follows:

We may have conquered space ... but we have not conquered time, and our time saving has turned into our time slaving ... in our restless haste we have also obliterated the gap between one thing and the next thing so that our breaking news, our emails, our phone calls, our texts, and our to-do lists come faster and more crowded than ever ... The boundaries between work and leisure, public and private, are dissolving, so that we have no rest and we are all forced to be time jugglers and multitaskers ... We are all overwhelmed by all we have to do, and we struggle with priorities to remember and agendas to keep under control. Time slaves under an unforgiving master, we are Darwinians now, living under the daily threat of ‘the survival of the fastest.



This competition with time also causes people to not know how to live in the physical world while simultaneously remaining independent of it. Although people have literally ingrained themselves in certain advantages on political and social levels, very few are not addicted to things. Moreover, it is difficult for many in the professional workplace to deny that they are slaves to their clocks and, by implication, their calendars.

This constant conflict with time, where life is dictated solely by a clock, directly contributes to the modernist attempt at continuous upward mobility. It often results in people not experiencing true rest. Because true soul rest must be open to the transcendent, modernism and secularism, which from the outset cannot accommodate the supernatural, ensure that modern individuals are cut off from “the things above”. Charles Taylor thus describes the secular person as a “buffered self”, meaning a self that is not open to the transcendent. Therefore, it is not merely a case where people do not experience true rest anymore; rather, it is a case where humans have forgotten how to rest.³

A proper illustration of how the concept of rest and the Sabbath can serve as an alternative to the modernist and secular race against time is expressed in Judith Shulevitz’s article, “Bring Back the Sabbath”. Shulevitz grew up in a deeply religious environment. However, she moved away from that and settled into a more secular context. In her own words, she describes her experience of weekends after living in this secular context for some time as follows:

My mood would darken every weekend until, by Saturday afternoon, I would be unresponsive and morose. My normal routine, which involved brunch with friends, made me feel impossibly restless. Then, I began to do something that, as a teenager profoundly put off by her religious education, I could never have imagined ever wanting to do. I began dropping in on a nearby synagogue ... Finally, I developed a theory for my condition. If formally people suffered from the Sabbath, which means all the regulations, I now was suffering from the lack thereof. There is ample evidence that our relationship to work is out of whack ... Most people mistakenly believe all you have to do to stop working is to not work, but the inventors of the Sabbath understood that it was a much more complicated undertaking. You cannot downshift casually and easily ... The rules did not exist to torture the faithful. Interrupting the ceaseless round of

³ This phenomenon reminds one of the words of Isaiah 57:20-21: “But the wicked are like the troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace for the wicked, says my God.”



striving requires a surprisingly strenuous act of the will, one that has to be bolstered by habit as well as by social sanction.

It is clear that for Shulevitz, rest is not just about sleep or relaxation with friends. While this is part of true rest, rest, in the truest sense, is more than just that. True rest, or deep soul rest, is evidently an extremely important matter and something that is not easily attainable. Shulevitz continues:

When the Sabbath was still sacred, not only did drudgery give way to festivity and family gatherings and occasional worship, but the machinery of self-censorship shut down too, stilling the eternal inner murmur of self-reproach.

According to Shulevitz, humans have their everyday professional work that occupies them in life. But there is also a work that is deeply seated in the soul – a work beneath the surface of our everyday labour. She subtly refers to this as “the machinery of self-censorship” and “the eternal inner murmur of self-reproach”. This deeper form of work may look different from person to person, but it seems that humans continually seek to prove themselves to themselves and to others. Beneath the surface, there is a need for recognition and acceptance, which serves as a deeper motivation for actions and also places immense pressure on people. This deeper motivation is ultimately the work beneath the work that over the long term is not only physically exhausting but also spiritually draining. It creates a profound soul restlessness that cannot be alleviated by physical rest and relaxation. This explains why mere physical rest and relaxation cannot qualify as true soul rest. To truly rest from work, one must rest from both everyday tasks and the deeper work beneath those tasks.

By way of analogy, the concept of REM sleep (rapid eye movement sleep) can be considered. To completely restore yourself overnight for the next day’s work, one does not just need a specific number of hours of sleep, but also the necessary depth of sleep. This necessary depth of sleep is called REM sleep and is only fully achieved after a few hours of sleep. For instance, one cannot take eight one-hour naps and expect to be fully rested. Fatigue will still set in the next day despite having technically slept for eight hours. It is not just the number of hours of sleep that one needs, but also the depth of that sleep.

Similarly, true soul rest is not just about physical rest and relaxation, but also about the depth of rest. Church Father Augustine understood something of this when he prayed to God with the words: “Our souls are restless until they find rest in You.” This short phrase from Augustine serves below as an introduction to a theology of rest. The alternative to the condition of the



modern world's relentless pursuit of upward mobility, constant conflict with time, and the loss of the ability to attain true soul rest is effectively encapsulated in a properly formulated theology of rest that, without slipping into legalism, still takes the Sabbath seriously.

4. A Theology of Rest

The Sabbath, in itself, is a unique phenomenon in the Old Testament. It is, for example, the first thing God sanctifies in the Bible (Gen. 2:3). Other highlights in Israel's history, such as the tabernacle, temple, or promised land, do not come close to this unique establishment of the Sabbath by God. The fact that God has sanctified it implies that even if no one observes the Sabbath, it remains holy. Moreover, the Sabbath is not like the temple and the promised land – a place that occupies physical space – but rather a sacred moment in time. Although the Israelites, for instance, lost their temple and land and were taken into exile, they never lost their Sabbath as a holy institution of God.

For the ancient Jews, the Sabbath, as a sacred institution, was primarily seen as a type of exodus from their work environment and an entrance into a time of soul rest. Note that the Sabbath rest still took place within time and thus did not stand in conflict with time but rather manifested in harmony with it. As a sacred moment in time, the Sabbath was an opportunity to find rest in God, the source of life and everything that exists.

The only way to bridge the modern challenge of time is not to try to “win” against time as if we are in a race with the clock around our wrist, but rather to seek the sanctification of time by finding true soul rest in time. Since humans are both creative and created beings, the Sabbath is a time to rest from our own creativity and to acknowledge the One who has woven us together as creatures with cosmic creativity. The Sabbath is a time to cease doing and to know that we live, move, and exist because of God (cf. Acts 17:28). John Calvin emphasised that the institution and sanctification of the Sabbath are not intended for humans to take a vacation every seventh day “as if [God] delights in [human] laziness, but rather that they, freed from all other matters, may direct their thoughts even more toward the Creator of the world” to find their soul rest in Him alone.

Of course, any theology of rest would be incomplete if it did not mention Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, for a New Testament perspective. In Luke 6:1-5, we read about an occasion when Jesus and His disciples “went through the grain fields”. The disciples picked some heads of grain and ate them. Immediately, the Pharisees accused the disciples of doing what was not permitted on the Sabbath. Jesus responded to the Pharisees' accusation by refreshing their memory with an event from 1 Samuel 21.



1 Samuel 21 recounts the story of David fleeing for his life due to Saul's vengeance. He and his men entered the temple on the Sabbath and took and ate the showbread, which was only meant for the priests. Although this was not permissible according to the ceremonial law, it was about the fact that David was God's anointed king and that he and his followers could eat the showbread in their state of hunger. The fact that Jesus brought up this piece of history implies that David and his men did nothing wrong on that Sabbath, and therefore, neither did Jesus' disciples. The ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were only a provisional arrangement that was fulfilled with the coming of Jesus Christ as the final anointed king. In this way, Jesus liberated the true meaning of the law from the chains with which the Pharisees sought to control it according to their own plans and needs.

In Luke 6:5, Jesus concludes His response to the Pharisees' accusation with profoundly weighty words: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." "The Son of Man" is a messianic title that not only emphasises Jesus' human nature, but also His heavenly origin and glory (see Dan. 7:9-14). As the "Son of Man", Jesus Christ is also "Lord of the Sabbath". This is a strong claim to Jesus' divine nature that simultaneously points to the enduring significance of the fourth commandment. Since the Sabbath was established not by humans but by God Himself, Jesus is stating that He is the very God who instituted the Sabbath at the beginning of creation, and He did not come to replace the Sabbath but to fulfil it in the deepest sense of the word.⁴

With the words: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath", it is as if Jesus invites us to reckon with the full implications of the Sabbath. Essentially, Jesus further claims that He is the Lord of rest. True and deep soul rest is therefore available only in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is, of course, an extremely exclusive claim to make, but there is an exceedingly good reason why He has the authority to make it. Because Jesus Christ is the union of God and man in one person, He is the only one in whom the immaterial, spaceless, and timeless (God) meets matter, space, and time (man) in an unspeakable and indescribable way.⁵ Furthermore, He experiences a cosmic restlessness on the cross, yet despite this, He ensures that His work is accomplished. This means that humans can find true soul rest only in Him as the rest-giving person, as well as in His eternally sufficient work. In Him, it is not necessary to

⁴ The reason Christians no longer observe Saturday as the Sabbath is precisely because Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week, Sunday. According to Christian traditions, Sunday has therefore taken on this important place in Christian life.

⁵ The early Christians who commented on the Chalcedonian Creed used the words "inexpressible" and "indescribable" to refer to the hypostatic union of God and man in the person of Jesus.



rely on your own deep-seated and soul-crushing work for acceptance and recognition, because His work is already sufficient.

Just as God is satisfied with His creation in Genesis by declaring, “It is very good”, so followers of Jesus Christ can be satisfied in His person and work. The sanctification of time through finding true soul rest in time thus occurs through an encounter with “The Son of Man” as “Lord of the Sabbath”. While physical rest, relaxation with friends, and vacations can be very good for you, true soul rest will only be made possible by the One who can create a holy moment in time for you. Jesus’ invitation is, therefore, to become participants in God’s rest, not only to receive the necessary amount of rest, but also the necessary depth of rest. Humans must therefore “be diligent to enter that rest” (Heb. 4:11). And if there is no diligence for this, the question that must be asked is: What else is the person a slave to? In Deuteronomy 5:15, the Sabbath is grounded in the Israelites’ deliverance from slavery in Egypt. They were slaves who worked every day under ruthless people. If someone does not make time for true soul rest in Jesus Christ, the only question left to ask is what they are still a slave to in their life.

Thus, while there is restlessness among modern individuals in a secular atmosphere, Augustine’s premodern words remain relevant: “Our souls are restless until they find rest in You.” Jesus Christ, as the Lord of the Sabbath, extends His invitation firmly to all people. The question is, can humans place their trust in Him? To rest from both your physical everyday work and your deeper motivations is to acknowledge that God is in control of a person’s life. The point is that God is God and not us humans. We can trust Him because He is the one who upholds the universe at every moment. Yes, Jesus Christ is the One of whom Paul says: “by Him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17).

It is, of course, also Jesus Christ who occasionally opens doors in the walls of the universe for us to experience something of the eternal transcendent in time. The walls of the universe are represented by time, space, and matter, which can sometimes feel like limitations to us. But a door overcomes those limitations and shows us that the natural reality, with its truth, goodness, and beauty, has always been a mirror of deeper and supernatural things and still is today.

5. The Practical Implications

In conclusion, the practical implications of the aforementioned truths must be briefly considered. For Akademia, the celebration of the Sabbath in a New Testament sense is extremely important. It is a sacred moment in time to give thanks to God and to find rest in Him. Aside from attending worship services to honour God, it is a day set apart for deep reflection and joyful festivities with family and friends. It is intended for community building that culminates in the gift of friendship and togetherness in the nurturing presence of our Creator.



With this document, Akademia aims to create space for true soul rest for its staff and students. While the academic task is important and the pursuit of knowledge must not cease, the practice of rest should not be swallowed up by a packed calendar. It must therefore be appropriately reflected in Akademia's annual agenda.