# Creation Is for Rest: A View of Moltmann's God in Creation

# 创造是为了安息—从《创造中的上帝》管窥“安息”的现实意义

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**Abstract.** “Rest” and “Sabbath” are high-frequency words in the Bible holding the Sabbath in high regard and calling it the Holy Day. Rest on the Sabbath is consolidated in the form of Law. However, Jürgen Moltmann believed that traditional theology did not pay enough attention to Rest and the Sabbath. Since the Renaissance and the Reformation, a regard for anthropocentric theology and philosophical approaches have rationalized humans' unbridled domination and exploitation of nature. Moltmann perceived an insufficiency of critical reflection on the doctrine of Creation, which resulted in a series of natural disasters and social problems emerging from the West's Industrial Revolution. Moltmann's *God in Creation* dealt with the issues related to the Sabbath and the concept of Rest; in doing so, he developed an independent system of striking a correlation between the two to shed some light on social life in practice.

**Key Words.** creation; sabbath; rest; Moltmann

## Introduction

“Rest” (שָׁבַת *šāḇaṯ*), mentioned as a verb in Hebrew, is found in the Biblical narrative of Creation; the seventh day is set as

a day of rest and worship.[1] As a noun, "Sabbath" ( שָׁבַת *šāḇaṯ*) is the fourth or the third of the Decalogue, with variations depending on different denominations. Israel regards this day as a custom and an eternal covenant.[2] "Rest" in its modern sense of "taking a rest" also means that the act of "resting" is accompanied with "fragments" brought about by "suspensions." While the "Sabbath"[3] is frequently mentioned in the Bible, this concept has not attracted enough attention compared with other doctrines. Its appearance is always connected with the day, that is, the Sabbath. In other words, if there is no specific record of the Sabbath, it will be difficult for us to discuss the topic of rest effectively. Therefore, Moltmann believes that if we can give some thought to the crises caused by excessive human plundering of natural resources, it may be beneficial in overcoming the exploitation and destruction of the earth and in bringing about some new liberation and transformation. [4]

Moltmann believes that Western civilization, in which Christian faith is culturally embedded, is facing crises in areas such as technology, morality, values, beliefs, and nuclear conflict. Therefore, he believed an Earth Day ought to be set up on a global scale to reposition and understand the relationship between humans and the earth and all

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1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbath: (as the verb שָׁבַת *šāḇaṯ*) is first mentioned in the Genesis creation narrative, where the seventh day is set aside as a day of rest (in Hebrew, *shabbath*), and made holy by God (Genesis. 2:2-3).

2 Ibid. It is one of the Ten Commandments (the fourth in the original Jewish, the Eastern Orthodox, and most Protestant traditions, the third in Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions). Most people who observe the Sabbath regard it as having been instituted as a perpetual covenant for the Israelites (Exodus 31:13-17).

3 Hence onwards, there will be no further use of closed quotes for the terms rest and Sabbath due to their high frequency use.

4 Preface of Moltmann's *God in Creation*, Chinese translation by Bingyan Song (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2002), 21.

things in it, just like the covenant between Noah and God in the Old Testament. Therefore, he proposed the doctrinal idea of building the Earth's Sabbath[5] to mitigate the plundering and destruction of natural resources resulting from the rapid development of modern society through the help of rest on the Sabbath.

The theme of the Sabbath and rest can be found in most chapters of God in Creation, except Chapter 11, which is dedicated to its discussion. It shows its significance in the book. Therefore, it is necessary to summarize all mention of the Sabbath in the book to show its significance in relation to the ecological crisis.

## 1. Rest in Rest

Moltmann believes that the natural beings created by God are alive and can interact with human beings. God's creation is purposeful and meaningful. It is created for his glory and is to be finally actualized in the "Kingdom of God's Glory." This Kingdom is like the home of the world. It is quiet and peaceful, and God is willing to dwell in it with people so that people and all beings can unite together and become one, no longer separated.[6] "In the tempestuous ocean of time and toil, there are islands of stillness where man may enter a harbor and reclaim his dignity."[7] This day is the Sabbath, which keeps people from agitations and enables them to retrieve inner peace.

According to the Old Testament tradition, God's creation is purposeful. He did not create for creation's sake but to lead humanity into rest, to end being busy, and to replace it

5 Ibid., 23.

6 Ibid., 8-12.

7 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath, Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Noonday, 1994), 29.

with a calm and happy state. In rest, God appreciates what he has created. This rest is realized by establishing and celebrating the Sabbath day in the Old Testament. [8]

The advancement of modern society, the convenience of transportation, the development of information exchange and technology are undoubtedly helpful in liberating people from burdensome labors for more leisure. However, when all these advancements and conveniences are superimposed on us, they aggravate people's anxiety. With the acceleration of the pace of life, people lose their due rest under all kinds of tangible and intangible pressures.

In the New Testament, Jesus heals openly on the Sabbath day, and he points out that the Sabbath is set for people and that Jesus himself is the Lord of the Sabbath. So, the Sabbath, or the day of Rest, turns from focusing on the day to focusing on Jesus. In contrast, Jewish tradition has always emphasized the day itself and nothing else. However, if people are in danger, they can temporarily overlook many laws concerning the Sabbath. On this point, there are differences between the New and Old Testaments, but they are both accommodating where human welfare is concerned. [9]

It was not the intention of Jesus to abolish the observance of the Sabbath but to fulfill it. Those with physical ailments were thereby obliged to eliminate the physical and mental distress caused by illness and pain. In this case, only through physical healing can rest be first granted.[10]

Of course, if we go beyond those obstacles that prevent people from having rest, we should focus on Jesus, the

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8 Heschel, *The Sabbath, Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Chinese translation by Yuanwei Deng (Shanghai: Joint Publishing, 2013), 12-14.

9 Song, op cit., 393.

10 Ibid., 393-394.

ultimate implementer of Israel's "dream of completion."[11] "Israel's sabbath is a unique foretaste. Jesus' proclamation of the imminent kingdom makes the whole of life a sabbath feast."[12] The purpose of creation is to let all beings, God, and especially human beings, enjoy real rest.

## 2. Renew in Rest

From the perspective of Moltmann, due to the intervention and termination of the Sabbath, God's creation has been continuous, which means that creation is constantly in the process of renewal. However, as far as humankind is concerned, the progress of science and technological development has undeniably brought about adverse effects, resulting in various crises in the natural and human environments. [13]

This crisis is the initiator that brought a sense of ruin, and the author believed that "it started in the modern industrial countries, which developed in the civilization formed by Christianity."[14] He believes it is necessary to "use new methods to explain the belief of creation according to its true origin."[15] Therefore, we need a new understanding and perspective to treat nature respectfully, change the previous idea of arbitrary manipulation and slaughter, and build on new ideas to overcome the current dilemma.[16]

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11 Ibid., 394.

12 Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, English translation by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985), 292.

13 Jürgen Moltmann, God in Creation, Chinese translation by Bingyan Song (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2002), 31.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 31-32.

The increase in high population density, environmental overload, anxiety, anomie in emotional and behavioral management, and the distortion and disruption of moral standards and belief in life, all these present an urgent need for renewal and the establishment of a new order. The human habitat needs to be renewed into a place of peaceful rest.[17] It is different from the separation caused by the dichotomy of subject and object, between man and other beings in the past. It is adjusted to the view that humanity is also a part of nature. The community between human beings and things is established to reduce the weight of human possession and domination of nature.

Everything seems to be anticipating a release: "It is enslaved and yearns to be liberated because it is ephemeral and hopes for a permanent residence."[18] As the Creator, God wants to save all things through new creation and guide them into the future, meditating on God's glorious creation through the Sabbath.

The reconstruction for glory is a kind of renewal, "Just as the creation was created for rest, human beings were created in the image of God for the glory of God."[19] This creation is fresher than before.

## 3. Complete in Rest

Whether time is like a circular repetition without an end or a linear trajectory without ends, it does not matter whether it is from the future to the present, continuously flowing to the past; or it is the past flowing through the present and finally emerging into the future. Or, perhaps, time is only a process of movement? Either way, if there is no termination or completion, it will make people and the creation unbearable.

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17 Ibid., 34-67.

18 Ibid., 97.

19 Ibid., 311.

It is like Sisyphus' rolling stone in Greek mythology. It is endless. When will it end? Or should repetition be the case? Common sense seems to be the same, but Moltmann believes that "The goal and completion of every Jewish and every Christian doctrine of creation must be the doctrine of the sabbath; for on the sabbath and through the sabbath, God 'completed' his creation."[20] However, Moltmann believes that the tradition only pays attention to the "six-day work" and ignores the "rest" of the Sabbath. It leads to the fact that "the meaning of their lives is identified with work and busy activity; and rest, the feast, and their joy in existence are pushed away, relegated to insignificance because they are non-utilitarian." [21]

According to the Priestly Source, creation has a suspension, followed by a segment of "rest." God realizes rest through creation and "realizes completion through rest."[22] God rests from his works, facing his creation, and appreciating the results of his creation. God rests from what he has done, and he returns to himself by doing so. It is a kind of artistic conception full of Poetry:[23] Static, stop, rest, filled with joy and pleasure.[24] God is with beings. This co-existence enables the occasional, transient, and limited beings to obtain some kind of a reality, infinity, and some degree of eternity and sanctity. God lets his creation "be what it is on its own account"[25] through the creation of rest. "In his rest they all acquire their essential liberty."[26]

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20 Song, op. cit., 373; Kohl, op. cit., 276.

21 Song, 374; Kohl, 277.

22 Song, 376.

23 Harold Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose*, Chinese translation by Xiujuan Lin (Hong Kong: Chinese Bible International Limited, 2011), 34–36.

24 Song, 377.

25 Ibid.

26 Song, 378. Kohl, 279.

"In the works of creation, created beings, through their existence and their modality, 'experience' the power and wisdom of God."[27] In creation, he completes, he rests, he faces the work, and lets the work rest. The ongoing creation makes God leave himself, rest lets God return to himself. He spoke in silence persistently, revealing his eternal glory in tranquility, and achieving the "the dream of completion" in rest. It indicates an opening of the eternal glory, the restful end, and the glorious opening.[28] It is an unexpected completion and a promising start.

## 4. Enjoy in Rest

After God finished his creation, how would he continue to function in the world? According to Moltmann, "It is the sabbath which manifests the world's identity as creation, sanctifies it and blesses it."[29] It is through a tranquil and peaceful way, including external environment and inner peace, the sanctity of this peace, "But this divine peace encompasses not merely the soul but the body too; not merely individuals but family and people; not only human beings but animals as well; not living things alone, but also, as the creation story tells us, the whole creation of heaven and earth. That is why the sabbath peace is also the beginning of that peace with nature which many people are seeking today, in the face of the growing destruction of the environment."[30] So, the creation is blessed through the Sabbath.

It is a difficult doctrine to understand, but Moltmann believes God's blessing is obtained through the Sabbath.

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27 Kohl, 279.

28 Song, 378-380.

29 Ibid., 373.

30 Ibid., 375.

God also stopped the work of creation and blessed the Sabbath day. God did not give blessings through frequent interventions but through the day that enabled all beings to multiply and proliferate, ensuring the competence of procreation. God blesses all visible things through invisible time, and through tranquility, all beings are blessed with rest. Suppose we avoid the discussion of whether the day itself has a mysterious power. Can it be understood that people receive God's blessing by contemplating the idea of rest, and by practicing it, the same blessing is channeled to all beings? The author did not give any clues or hints on this matter.

Moltmann once again stressed that "The sabbath preserves created things from obliteration, and fills their restless existence with the happiness of the presence of the eternal God. On the sabbath all creatures find their own place in the God who is wholly present. The world is created 'out of nothing,' and it is created 'for the sabbath'; so on the sabbath it exists 'in' God's presence. This is the sabbath blessing."[31] God blesses the invisible and formless days rather than the actual creatures directly, which is nothing more than to awaken the joys of all creatures' existence and call it "joining the rest of God." [32]

Israel has cultivated feelings and passion for the Sabbath. For example, it addresses the Sabbath as a sister, brother, bride, and queen. It shows how Jews treat the Sabbath with an intimate attitude and practice their faith daily. Susanna Herschel, Herschel's daughter, describes how her father died peacefully on the Sabbath day. She

31 Ibid., 381; 282.

32 Ibid., 382.

believes this is a special honor given to her father by God.[33] The unique Jewish feelings towards the Sabbath can be told from this. It is doubtless to say that the idea of the Sabbath or God's rest has a special significance and status for the creation.

## 5. Sanctified in Rest

The Sabbath is called the "festival of creation"[34] and refers to "this day".[35] This day is called a holy day, which indicates that it has been sanctified. Interestingly, other cultures will emphasize the sanctification of space and geographic region, but the Bible accounts that the Sabbath day is sanctified. Some even hold that the sanctity of the Sabbath day is the same as the name of the Holy One, which cannot be called at will.[36]

The sanctification of time means that it is not a visual object but an experience that can only be sympathized with a contemplative mind. Space, territory, enclosure, and all tangible property are limited and belong. When the day "Sabbath" is sanctified, it is infinite and targeted at all creation.[37]

The sanctification of other cultures is the expression and visualization of space, region, and patterns, but the sanctification of the Sabbath "is the presence of God without pictures or figuration."[38] The specific time corresponds

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33 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Chinese translation by Yuanwei Deng (Shanghai: Joint Publishing, 2013), 135-147.

34 Ibid., 375.

35 Ibid., 383.

36 Ibid., 33.

37 Song, op. cit., 384.

38 Ibid., 384.

to relative things and events, and the time of God's sanctification is the Sabbath. The "Sabbath" belongs to the basic structure of creation itself, so the Sabbath is the most sacred moment in Israel - more sacred than all other festivals.[39]

The Sabbath has nothing to do with other periodic and recurrent natural objects or events because "The sabbath is Israel's holiest time, because it is the first thing that God sanctified: holy is God and holy is his Name, sanctified is the sabbath, sanctified is the people, and sanctified is the land of Israel. The sanctification is in that order. The sabbath comes before people and land". [40]

The Sabbath has been mentioned in all Judaism's reformations, which shows its importance in the Jewish nation's collective memory, cultural tradition, and belief heritage. "God sanctified the Sabbath because on that day he rested from creation."[41] Rest is not only for people, but also other beings; it is not only for the master but also the servant. Humanity's bearing of the image of God is not a result of restless acts but because of rest. Only in this way can we venerate the Sabbath with recollections and gratitude for the present. For the sake of rest, people exemplify themselves as good stewards, so that they can live and sense, know the benefits of all things, and be thankful. The sanctification of rest means seeking detachment from pursuit and endless acts, treating God's established rest with praise and appreciation, and permeating this idea of rest into daily works.[42]

The sanctification of the Sabbath is expressed as the remembrance of the past and the expectation of the future

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39 Ibid., 385.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 386-387.

through suspension and segmentation. Moving out of the repression from external binding and entering the internal rest and tranquility, cease exertions, and eliminate the extra burden of life to "find the peace of the sabbath in God's presence."[43] Therefore, sanctified rest is not obtained by pursuing it but by observing it.

## 6. Saved in Rest

The Sabbath is the perfection of creation and the festival of salvation. It is the Creator who appears in the silence of all things. He does not reveal himself in the activity of creation but makes his face appear through the rest of the Sabbath. This kind of salvation is a new creation. It unites revelation and creation and puts an end to the activity of affairs.[44] In order to commemorate the past in the Sabbath, it is more important to look forward to the "eternal Sabbath" that will eventually be realized. [45]

On the Sabbath, people cannot walk for long distances, foreigners can tarry, and many families take this opportunity to receive travelers from afar. In modern society, family members spend much less time together. The establishment of the Sabbath, in a sense, can contribute to enhancing the intimacy among family members. In terms of natural ecology, six days are for work, and one day for rest, and six years are for cultivation, while on the seventh year, cultivation is suspended. In terms of social ecology, there is a "year of God's Jubilee" occurring every 50 years during which each person should return to his/her homeland. There is the cancellation of debts, a suspension of economic transactions, and the restoration of freedom to the enslaved. The crops in

43 Ibid., 388.

44 Ibid., 399-389.

45 Ibid., 389.

the fields should not be harvested.[46] Its purpose is to provide remuneration for migrants. It will be particularly effective in preventing the rich-poor gap from widening, as well as the crystallization of social classes. Care for the vulnerable and the redistribution of social wealth are undoubtedly positive measures.

For those in trouble, efforts should be made to enable them to overcome their situation: "to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives..."[47] This ideal state cannot emerge suddenly. Indeed, it remains an unrealized and unfinished dream. Salvation must therefore point to Christ, to the future, and to the eventual realization of "eternal rest"!

## 7. From the perspective of Chinese culture

In Chinese cultural elements, there is no concept of rest. Confucianists believe that "Once the aim of perfection is attained, is a man able to set the orientation of his ambitions. After setting his orientation, he will not waiver in his ambition and will be satisfied with his position. Satisfied with his position, he will be able to ponder well. Being able to ponder well, he will be able to achieve all he wants."[48] Buddhism's "Zen"[49] is a state of contemplation. As far as individuals are concerned, during China's Spring and Autumn period, the Chinese ancients emphasized "work at sunrise and rest at sunset" so that they can "be happy and contented between heaven and earth." Only those

46 Ibid., 390.

47 Ibid., 391.

48 Confucius, *The Great Learning*, in *Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books*, accessed August 15, 2020, https://publish.ancientbooks.cn/docShuju/platform.jspx

49 Anonymous, "Zen," in *Chinese Dictionary*, accessed August 15, 2020, https://www.chazidian.com/r_zi_zd7985/.

who know the balance of work and rest, can get a sense of happiness like immortals.[50] In the Warring States period, the anonymous poet's description of "At rise of Sun to tend to the farm one goes, his job done in the evening one starts to repose. For water he has dug a well by hand, and he makes a living by tilling the land. In fact, nothing to Yao at all he owes!"[51] According to Taoism, "there is no way to express one's ambition unless one is indifferent, and there is no way to go far unless one is quiet."[52] Only when you are in a state of rest and quiet can you accumulate and make achievements. In governance, Zhu Yuanzhang adopted the recuperation strategy of "building walls high, accumulating grain widely, and slowly becoming king."[53] In the military struggle, there is a combat strategy of "waiting at one's ease for an exhausted enemy".[54] One of the secrets of winning the war is that the army can take proper rest to deal with the tired division, which is key to victory. It shows the importance of rest. "The general's affairs should be quiet and peaceful,"[55] and the general's requirements should be clear, deep, and unpredictable (to maneuver) and be invincible.

The Chinese are positive and peace-loving people. Currently, China is in an era of globalization, urbanization,

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50 Zhuangzi, "Declines Politely the Throne" of *Zhuangzi*, in *Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books*, accessed August 15, 2020, https://publish.ancientbooks.cn/docShuju/platform.jspx

51 Anonymous, *Playing the Clay Shoe*, in *Database of Chinese Classic Poetries*, accessed August 15, 2020, https://so.gushiwen.cn/shiwenv_21c484c79935.aspx

52 Huainanzi, "The Ruler's Techniques" of *Huainanzi*, in *Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books*, accessed August 15, 2020, https://publish.ancientbooks.cn/docShuju/platform.jspx

53 Shi Bu, *Ming History*, in *Database of Chinese Classic Ancient Books*, accessed August 15, 2020, https://publish.ancientbooks.cn/docShuju/platform.jspx

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

and industrialization. The dynamic energy in Chinese society far exceeds its static energy. On the one hand, this high-speed flow of social energy has brought about rapid development. On the other hand, it has also given rise to many social ailments, urban diseases, and ecological crises. With the premise that the dynamic is greater than the static, it is necessary to bear in mind the need for tranquility. While the western industrial revolution has resulted in modernization, in the process of development, it has also been accompanied by the excessive domination of nature by human beings, resulting in merciless retaliation from nature, in the form of earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, and the relentless recurrence of natural disasters. Social problems such as the polarization of the rich and the poor have also emerged in the process of rapid development. The Chinese have achieved what the West has attained in a comparatively shorter time. Nonetheless, it is necessary to be calm and prudent in order to avoid the social problems and many environmental crises that have emerged in the West during its march to progress. We should learn from the past for present-day use and take note of the benefits of foreign experience for China. The essence of western theology can be absorbed with the attitude of sublation so that religion and theology can be enculturated in China.

## 7. Conclusion

Since the dichotomy of subject and object in Descartes' philosophy and the rise of natural theology, nature has been regarded as the object of conquest and transformation. The excessive emphasis on the transcendence of God undoubtedly intensifies the momentum of the wanton plundering of nature. While the industrial revolution and modernization have brought rapid development to society, they have also caused irreversible damage to the natural

environment. In addition, environmental pollution and the ecological crisis caused by brutal human domination and excessive development compelled Moltmann to frequently mention the concept of rest in the context of modern society. He roused people's attention and thinking by presenting the sabbath as a means of raising awareness of the long-neglected "rest."

Moltmann said, "The ecological day of rest should be a day without pollution of the environment - a day when we leave our cars at home so that nature too can celebrate its sabbath.... In the ecological crisis of the modern world, it is necessary and timely for Christianity too to call to mind the sabbath of creation."[56] The Sabbath opened a new beginning. The creation and establishment of the first Sabbath is the rest obtained by commemorating and observing the Sabbath day. Also, the eschatological rest is realized through Jesus Christ and the Messianic Kingdom. Whether it is the present world or the final rest and creation, it is to let people and all beings enjoy rest and finally realize it in the new heaven and earth. Today, the COVID-19 pandemic is rampant all over the world. In such situations, we need to be proactive. However, if it is necessary to be quarantined at home, silence and rest are other forms of proactiveness.

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56 Song, 400.

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