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## **NEW SCHOLARS**

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## **BEYOND HUMAN DOMINION**

### **An Appraisal of the Ecological and Ethical Implications of the Sabbath in Reconsidering the Theology of Creation**

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This dissertation addresses the present environmental crisis, by exploring the theological profundity of the Priestly creation narrative, specifically, its vision on the 'seventh day's rest. The whole project is divided into three chapters, and analyses the theologies of creation and Sabbath and their ecological and ethical implications respectively.

The first chapter reconsiders the theology of creation, by answering the most fundamental questions concerning God, universe and

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human beings. In the Priestly creation narrative, God is the sovereign creator of the universe and every existing reality in it is the offshoot of his creative word. The creative power of the word of God has brought out order in a chaotic situation through different acts of separation and ornamentation. The creation is an orderly move from '*tohu wabohu*' (chaos) to '*cosmic koinonia*,' in which God the creator had established order, regularity and harmony; and prepared favourable surroundings for the living beings. In spite of the similarities of the different acts of creation, the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the human being are underscored with their specific role in the universe, by applying certain terms such as *selem*, *demut*, *kabash*, and *rada* (image, likeness, subdue and dominion) along with their creation. Though the terms 'subdue and dominion' have been understood in a strong anthropocentric sense in the past, the contemporary biblical scholars interpret this commissioning in terms of the special task and responsibility of the human being.

The second chapter explores the theological profundity of the Sabbath tradition by analysing the different biblical pericopes and Jewish customs related to it. There are two different motives for the observance of the Sabbath: (i) the culmination of creation and (ii) the remembrance of the redemption from the Egyptian slavery. The theological enormity of the Sabbath can be summarised in three premises: (i) the proclamation of faith, (ii) the symbol of the relationship between God and Israel and (iii) a way of life. For the biblical author, 'the rest of God on the seventh day' is an assertion of God's unquestionable role in the creation of the universe, his sovereignty and prerogative, and a sign of dependence of all beings on him. By abstaining from work on the seventh day, the Jews solidly proclaimed the authority of God in their life. Moreover, the Sabbath functions as an innovative motif in designing the manner of the human labour. The Sabbath rest is the fundamental means to design the identity of the people of God that would determine their basic ethos and vision of life. Ultimately, it is a time devoted to God wherein people set apart a specific time so that God may work in them and they may be engaged in deeper relationship with God, one another, and with the entire creation. While relating to the resurrection of Christ, Christian tradition perceives Sunday as the new Sabbath, which also stands as the foundation of Christian faith and its celebration became the identifying mark of Christians. As a day of rest, it insists on the gains of spiritual benefits, focusing on the interior joy and peace.

Anchored on these theological insights, the final chapter develops a comprehensive view on the ecological and ethical significance of the Sabbath in reconsidering the theology of creation. Adherence to the Sabbath exemplifies the different realms of human relationships and our obedience to it brings prosperity and well-being whereas any

kind of defiance would cause punishments and disaster. While associating the negligence of Sabbath with the contemporary environmental crisis, we identify the rupture of different sorts of relationship in one frame. The observance of Sabbath is a means to reclaim the order of creation by accepting God's action in creation and articulating his absolute sovereignty over the entire creation. It also will help the human beings to find out their place and position in the created order and to value the non-human world. The Sabbath experience is a meaningful paradigm that initiates reconnection and retraction. This study indicates the need of acknowledging our failure in realising the richness of the symbol of the 'resting God' in our lives. The author's critical approach to the different trends of contemporary society, especially towards the liberal market economy, the method of development and work-obsessed culture highlighted its role in isolating people from God, estranging them from each other and alienating them from nature. This approach further prompted us to bring out the relevance of the Sabbath tradition in the present context of environmental crisis. The sabbatical experience of withdrawal, contemplation and repentance is an attempt to retrieve and regain the ruptured relationships in a fragmented culture by penetrating into our deeper internal self. The author has substantiated this view by qualifying the relationship between human beings and nature through the innovation of three motifs such as: the ethics of love, wholeness and attunement. Thus, action and recollection, work and leisure, movement and stillness, and the creation and the Sabbath are converged in pursuing a new ecological vision in which human beings become more authentic, responsible and conscious in their relationship with God, each other and nature.