

'Actualisation' and 're-enactment': Two categories in understanding the Old Testament

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Exegesis has been an integral part of Professor Jurie le Roux's life. Throughout his scholarly career, he has continually worked to realise the 'actualisation' and 're-enactment' of Old Testament stories and ideas. As a modest tribute to Professor le Roux, this contribution seeks to demonstrate that both concepts also play a central role within the process of composing Old and New Testament texts. This will be illustrated with reflections on how Old and New Testament texts speak about the Sabbath. Firstly, the Sabbath commandment in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy will be dealt with. Secondly, a brief survey will present how the Sabbath commandment has been understood during the Second Temple period. Finally, it will be argued that the New Testament authors sought to forge a link with the original tenor of the Sabbath commandment by presenting Jesus as the one who 'actualises' and 're-enacts' the Sabbath commandment that often became rigid over time.

Introduction

Research into the origins and composition of the Pentateuch occupies an important place in the scholarly career of Professor Jurie le Roux, as is evident from his many years of inspiring and passionate dedication to the ProPent seminar (Projek vir Pentateugstudies/Project for Pentateuchal Studies) (Le Roux 2005:1–21). Le Roux has never shied away from the path of the historical-critical method (Le Roux 1993) – one of only a few in the recent history of South African biblical scholarship. Quite on the contrary, he has continually defended historical-critical biblical exegesis. In his overview of Old Testament studies at the University of Pretoria's theological faculty, he describes the background behind his enthusiasm in the following way:

To be able to narrate the Bible or to make it actual and relevant for our times, we must first of all feel our way into the life experiences of Israel, relive their past experiences, re-enact that past in our mind and, especially, re-tell that story (like Israel) in our words. Thus, the actualisation of the Old Testament for the present day depends on the exegete's competence to immerse him-/herself in the text and relive Israel's past. (Le Roux 2009:6)

With the term 'actualisation,' which he uses against the background of a 21st century understanding of the Bible, Le Roux names a concept that is central to an adequate comprehension of Old and New Testament literature. First of all, biblical texts can only be understood correctly if one has an eye for their 'actual' meaning or function. In other words, one must take into account the meaning they had for the intended readers. Furthermore, the concept of 'actualisation' played an undeniable role in the process of the formation of the biblical texts. Indeed, historical-critical biblical scholarship has demonstrated that countless Old and New Testament texts came about precisely through the 'actualisation' of older texts and concepts (Ausloos 2000:103–129).

In this contribution, I would like to demonstrate how this process of 'actualisation' determined the formation of biblical literature, basing my arguments on reflections on how Old and New Testament texts speak about the Sabbath. It will furthermore be made evident that the concept of 're-enactment' – the other term Le Roux uses – played a significant role in the manner in which the biblical authors spoke of the Sabbath. Together with Le Roux, I am convinced that an appreciation of the importance of these concepts of 'actualisation' and 're-enactment' could encourage today's Bible readers to continuously actualise and reinterpret biblical traditions in the light of changing circumstances. Although some of these reflections have previously been published in French (Ausloos 2011:27–43), I hope that by revisiting them, I could honour Professor Jurie Le Roux.

The Sabbath commandment as found in the decalogues of Exodus and Deuteronomy

The recognition that the Bible contains numerous contradictions between its many texts is undoubtedly one of the greatest stumbling blocks for biblical fundamentalists. Whenever the Bible present two versions of a command, both of which are said to be words that YHWH spoke

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to Israel but nevertheless differ in content, the difficulties become almost insurmountable. This is the situation we also have with regard to the Old Testament prescriptions on keeping the Sabbath. This command is handed down in two deviating versions of the so-called Decalogue (Ex 20:2–17 and Dt 5:6–21). Only a historical-critical approach can offer a conclusive answer to this problem: because of the similarities it has to be concluded that both versions undoubtedly either depend on each other or are based on another version they are dependent on; despite the similarities, however, each one witnesses to a specific point of view of its authors that in turn relates to a specific situation in the ancient society.

Beginning with the very first word already, the version found in Deuteronomy differs from the one in Exodus. Deuteronomy 5:12 exhorts the listener to *keep* the day of rest. The Hebrew term used here [שמר] is a stereotype in the book of Deuteronomy (Weinfeld 1972:332–341). The beginning of the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8 uses a different verb, namely ‘remember’ [זכר]. It is worth noting that Exodus 20:8 in the Samaritan Pentateuch also uses the word ‘keep’ [שמור] (Tal 1994:75). There is actually no *de facto* difference in meaning between the terms used in Exodus 20:8 and Deuteronomy 5:12 (Ausloos 2011:32). In other words, the Hebrew term for ‘remember’ [זכר] implies the word for ‘keep’ [שמר] and vice versa (cf. Ps 103:18). Despite this interchangeability of terms, the choice made in Deuteronomy 5:12 for ‘keep’ [שמר] is not insignificant, as it is precisely this term that is used in Deuteronomy when the text refers to the following of a directive. On the other hand, the term ‘remember’ [זכר] implies ‘to do again (in worship)’. According to Exodus 20:8, therefore, to remember the Sabbath is also to ‘re-enact’ YHWH ’s Sabbath. Just as YHWH rested on the seventh day, so must the Israelites honour the rest on the seventh day. The parallelism between verses 9–10 on the one hand and verse 11 on the other, as well as the motivating particle כִּי in verse 11, testify to this.

The term ‘remember’ [זכר], which is used in Exodus 20:8, also appears in Deuteronomy 5:15. By appealing to history, this latter verse provides a religious foundation for the Sabbath commandment:

Remember that YHWH your God, because you were a slave in the land of Egypt, brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore YHWH your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Dt 5:15)

Note that the Septuagint’s translation of Deuteronomy 5:15 also reads ‘keep’ (MT: לְעִשׂוֹת אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת LXX: ὠσεε φυλάσσεσθαι τὴν ἡμέραν τῶν σαββάτων), perhaps in order to harmonise with verse 12.

In Deuteronomy 5:15, we encounter the counterpart to Deuteronomy’s frequently recurring verb ‘to keep’ [שמר], namely the verb צוה, meaning ‘to command’. This term also appears quite regularly in Deuteronomy in the context of living up to YHWH ’s commands (Weinfeld 1972:356–357). By framing the Sabbath commandment in verse 12 and verse 15 with this verb, the author strongly emphasises that this is a divine commandment. The legislative nature of the command is

thereby given a stronger accent than it has in Exodus 20:8–11. Moreover, Deuteronomy 5:15 points to the most significant difference between the Sabbath commandments in Exodus and Deuteronomy, namely the motivation.

According to Exodus 20:11, the keeping of the Sabbath is legitimated based on the creation account as given in the creation poem of Genesis 1:1–2:4: God worked for six days and rested on the seventh. Humans and animals must therefore do likewise. They must work for six days, but the seventh day must be a day of absolute rest. Although Genesis 2:1–3 does not call the Sabbath by its name, it still resonates through each verse:

On the seventh day [יַם הַשְּׁבִיעִי] God finished the work that he had done. He rested [יִשְׁבַּת] on the seventh day [יַם הַשְּׁבִיעִי] from all the work that he had done. God blessed the seventh day [יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי] and hallowed it, because on it God rested [יִשְׁבַּת] from all the work that he had done in creation. (Ausloos & Lemmelijn 2010:137–138)

The Sabbath therefore plays an important role in the poem. The entire text has been composed with an eye towards the seventh day. By presenting the seventh day as the day on which God rests, the author roots the Sabbath as one of the creation ‘acts’.

The idea that the creation narrative we have today in Genesis 1:1–2:4 was composed during and in the context of the Babylonian Exile (6th century BCE at the earliest) enjoys almost complete scholarly consensus. For the Israelites who were driven out of their land, the keeping of the Sabbath is equivalent to the observance of the temple cult in honour of YHWH . Having been ‘shaped in God’s image’ (Gn 1:26–28), human beings are obliged to honour God as the creator. In exile, with both the temple and the temple cult gone, this religious duty can be observed in a most pleasant way, namely by following God’s example of resting.

By referring to God’s rest on the seventh day of the creation, the keeping of the Sabbath is characterised in Exodus (Ex 20:11; 31:16–17) as an imitation or re-enactment of God’s rest. This is where the use of the aforementioned term ‘re-enactment’ is relevant. The seventh day was a day of blessed completion and harmony for God.

Unlike the author of Exodus 20:11, the author of Deuteronomy appears to distance himself from this mythological tinted rationale. He does not associate the Sabbath with God’s rest on the seventh day, but with a ‘historical’ event from the past. The Israelites must keep the Sabbath in order to remember that they were slaves in Egypt and God liberated them from bondage. This specific motivation of the deuteronomical author also reveals a shift of focus from the origins of the Sabbath to the purpose of it. Israel must keep the Sabbath, not *because* God rested on the seventh day, but *in order that* ‘your male and female slave may rest as well as you’ (Dt 5:14). In place of the mythological justification of Exodus 20:11, Deuteronomy bases its arguments on social grounds. In this manner, the author of Deuteronomy is explicit in stating that, in his opinion, the Sabbath is for humankind. And in order to give

more weight to the commandment to observe the day of rest 'by keeping it holy', the author of Deuteronomy 5:12 provides a theological justification: one must keep the Sabbath rest 'as YHWH your God commanded you'. One can see that this prescription applies to all of Israel, without exception, from the fact that unlike Exodus 20:10, all categories are connected to each other with the conjunction 'and':

... you and your son and your daughter and your male slave and your female slave and your ox and your donkey and any of your livestock and the resident alien in your towns. (Dt 5:14)

All in all, the Sabbath commandment has an exclusively positive meaning in both versions of the Decalogue. The Sabbath is a sign of harmony and freedom. Whether the keeping of the Sabbath is motivated by a reference to God's rest on the seventh day or by a reference to the bondage in Israel makes no difference. One could say that 'received freedom' is the central concept of the Decalogue, and therefore also of the Sabbath (Wénin 1997:36). This can be seen in the words that introduce the Decalogue in both Exodus and Deuteronomy and point to God's liberating action: 'I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery' (Ex 20:2/ /Dt 5:6).

The Sabbath in Judaism

With the fall of the Babylonian Empire in the 6th century BCE, the Jews were once again able to worship God in their reconstructed temple. Nevertheless, perhaps due to the specific situation of the Diaspora, they did not simply do away with the practice of keeping the Sabbath rest as a way of worshipping God (after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, Judaism found itself once again facing the same challenge as the one they encountered after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE). The pericope in Nehemiah 13:15–22, for example, recounts how Nehemiah ordered the gates of the rebuilt city to be closed during the Sabbath in order to prevent people from doing business on the Sabbath. This text also shows that the Sabbath began at sundown.

The Greek translation of the aforementioned creation narrative is one of the oldest texts to show the importance of the Sabbath for Second Temple Judaism. Based on the Hebrew text of Genesis 2:2, which says that God 'completed' his work on the seventh day, one could conclude that God in fact worked on the seventh day. For this reason, the Septuagint translator of the book of Genesis, who was himself of Jewish origin and lived in the 3rd century BCE, changed the text in the following way: 'And on the sixth day God finished his works that he had made' (Hiebert 2007:7).

One can also find various references to the Sabbath in the so-called deuterocanonical Old Testament literature. I will limit myself to a few simple examples. In order to portray Judith as a woman loyal to God and the Law, the author of the Book of Judith emphasises – at the end of the 2nd century BCE – that Judith keeps the Sabbath by not leaving her house (Jdt 10:2). This is clearly in conformity with the command given in Exodus 16:29. The books of Maccabees, which also date from the late 2nd century BCE, likewise testify to a

great respect for the Sabbath despite the fact that the Greek overlords mocked and violated it (1 Macc 1:39.43). The episode in 1 Maccabees 2:29–47 brings the issue of obedience to the Sabbath prescription to the fore by recounting how Jews loyal to the Law allowed themselves to be killed rather than resist on the Sabbath. For Mattathias, the leader of the Jewish resistance, this clearly went too far. When he learned of the deaths of his compatriots, he declared: 'Let us fight against anyone who comes to attack us on the Sabbath day; let us not all die as our kindred died in their hiding places' (1 Macc 2:41). In 2 Maccabees 5:25–26, the Greek leader Apollonius waits 'until the holy Sabbath day; then, finding the Jews not at work, he ordered his troops to parade under arms'.

The fact that the Sabbath commandment in the Decalogue as found in Exodus and Deuteronomy gives no precise definition of what is to be considered 'work' has led to different definitions of 'work' by the various Jewish movements of the Second Temple period. It appears that the concept of actualisation once again had a role to play (Doering 1999).

Evidence that the Sabbath played an important role in Judaism in the last centuries before the Christian era can be seen in the Dead Sea manuscripts. The so-called Damascus Document (D) is especially noteworthy in this regard. This document was unknown until a copy (from the 10th century CE) was discovered in the geniza of the Ibn Ezra synagogue of ancient Cairo. When various different (and fragmentary) versions of the same document were found in the fourth, fifth and sixth caves of Qumran in the latter half of the 20th century, it began to appear that the Damascus Document was one of the important documents of the sectarian community of Qumran (Falk 1998; Kahl 1998; Doering 2000). All of these fragments dated from the period between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE. Against the background of the study of the Sabbath, the 10th and 11th columns (D x:14–xi:18) are especially significant. These columns list roughly 20 actions that are forbidden to do on the Sabbath. I will select a few: on the Sabbath, 'no-one should say a useless or stupid word' (D x:17–18) and 'he is not to speak about matters of work or of the task to be carried out on the following day' (D x:19). On the Sabbath 'no-one should go after an animal to pasture it outside his city, except for a thousand cubits' (D xi:6), and 'no-one should press his servant or his maidservant or his employee on the Sabbath' (D xi:12) (García Martínez 1994:41–42).

Although some of these rules undoubtedly do justice to the seriousness of the intentions with which the authors of Exodus and Deuteronomy imposed the Sabbath rest, other prescriptions testify to a remarkable degree of hardness:

No-one should help an animal give birth on the Sabbath day (...). And if he makes it fall into a well or a pit, he should not take it out on the Sabbath. (D xi:13–14 – compare with Mt 12:11)

When dealing with people in emergency situations, the Damascus Document is even harder:

And any living man who falls into a place of water or into a place (...), no-one should take him out with a ladder or a rope or a utensil. (D xi:16–17)

Nevertheless, it is notable that the document also adds: 'But everyone who goes astray, defiling the Sabbath and the festivals, shall not be executed' (D xii, 3–4) (García Martínez 1994:42). The document thereby seems to go against the radical sanction given in Exodus 31:14–15 and 35:2: 'Whoever does any work on this day should be put to death' (see also Nm 15:32–36).

It should be noted that the Old Testament texts do not specify what should be understood as falling under the definition of 'Sabbath rest'. Nevertheless, in keeping with the stiff penalties championed by the biblical tradition, the Book of Jubilees also advocates the death penalty for transgressing the Sabbath rest (Jub 2:25, 27; 50:8, 13). In Jubilees 50:6–13, we encounter a list of Sabbath rules with strong similarities to the Damascus Document. Jubilees 2:31 also establishes that the Sabbath is a holy day that must be kept by Jews alone (VanderKam 1989:15). The keeping of the Sabbath would later be seen as an explicit marker of Jewish identity. In the 3rd century, Rabbi Lakish even goes as far as stating that non-Jews who do keep the Sabbath deserve death (*Sanhedrin* 58b) (Schachter & Freedman 1969).

This summary and undeniably fragmentary sketch of the reception of the Old Testament Sabbath commandment indicates how people – at least in certain milieus – strayed far from the original intentions of the Sabbath commandment: in both versions of the Decalogue the Sabbath is not only a 're-enactment' of the divine rest and harmony at the Creation (Exodus), it also simultaneously strives for the wellbeing and healing of the human person, just as God had intended when God liberated Israel from Egypt (Deuteronomy). This is where the Sabbath retains its significance, even for people of the present day. It seems that also the authors of the New Testament hoped to renew the Old Testament Sabbath commandment from this perspective.

Jesus' return to the original intention of the Sabbath prescription

Against the background of a view that tries to forcibly squeeze the Old Testament into the role of radical antipole to the New Testament, people have often asserted on the basis of some New Testament texts that Jesus wanted to either abolish or restrict the Sabbath. To this end, people have frequently referred to the statement 'the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath' (Mt 12:8; Mk 2:28; Lk 6:5). This statement is framed by the parallel passages about the plucking of grain on the Sabbath (Mt 12:1–8; Mk 2:23–28; Lk 6:1–5) (Fitzmyer 1970:604–606). It is, however, rather implausible that this statement was meant to subordinate or weaken the Sabbath. Neither does this passage seek to exempt the followers of Christ from keeping the Sabbath. By proclaiming Jesus with the Christological title of 'Son of Man,' these passages unambiguously allude to Daniel 7:13, where the Son of Man receives eternal lordship from God and therefore enjoys divine authority. The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath, just

as God is (Gnilka 1986:446). What is weakened is not the idea of the Sabbath as the day of rest, but rather the human interpretation given to the Sabbath by Jewish *halachah*. As God's proxy, Jesus is portrayed as the one who wants to restore the honour of the Sabbath – to bring it back to God's intentions – by purging it of the Jewish *halachah* that had reduced it to a formulaic following of everything but the liberating prescriptions (Jeremias 1973:201). Without going into the redaction history and mutual interdependence of the gospel texts that speak about the Sabbath, we can state that all of them, without exception, hold that the New Testament Jesus (re)establishes the original intention of the Old Testament Sabbath commandment, in which blessing and healing are to be taken as the central characteristics of the Sabbath.

The statement that 'the Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath' (Mk 2:27) undoubtedly can be understood in this sense. This statement also refers to the ancient idea of the seventh day as a day of rest that would allow humans and animals to rest once each week. Whilst the Decalogue (Ex 20:10 and Dt 5:14) legitimises this rule by coupling it to the Sabbath as the day of rest, other texts such as Exodus 23:12 provide an explicitly social motivation. Translated literally, the text reads:

Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, *so that* your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your slave and the alien may be refreshed. (Ex 23:12)

Although this text does not explicitly name the Sabbath as the day of rest in question, it is nevertheless unquestionable that it does so by virtue of its use of the verb 'to rest' [שבת]. Based on the assertion that Exodus 23:12 does not provide any theological motivation for the Sabbath – it looks more like an old farmers' custom – one can reasonably suppose that this is one of the oldest biblical references to the custom of the Sabbath.

It is, however, primarily by situating most of the healing stories on the Sabbath that the New Testament authors sought to emphasise the liberating and healing origins of the Sabbath. There is of course the pericope of the healing of the man with the withered hand (Mt 12:9–14; Mk 3:1–6; Lk 6:6–11), but within the corpus of the synoptic gospels, it is especially Luke who situates these healing stories on the Sabbath, namely in Luke 4:31–41 (the driving out of a demon and the healing of Peter's mother in law; paralleled in Mk 1:23–34), Luke 13:10–17 (the healing of the crippled woman) and Luke 14:1–6 (the healing of the man with dropsy). John also situates two healing stories on the Sabbath, namely the healing of the lame man of Beth-zatha (Jn 5:1–18) and the healing of the man born blind in John 9:1–38 (Sevrin 1997:226–242). Furthermore, John 7:19–24 also refers to Jesus' healing action on the Sabbath: if the Jews can perform circumcisions on the Sabbath in accordance with the law of Moses, Jesus considers it legitimate to 'completely heal' someone on the Sabbath as well.

By situating the healings on the Sabbath, the evangelists proclaim that the Sabbath is for the healing of the human

person, and not for restriction. They thereby refer to the Old Testament intention of the Sabbath prescription as found in the decalogues of both Exodus and Deuteronomy. Although this liberating aspect is more evident in the version from Deuteronomy – the reference to God’s intervention to liberate the oppressed Israelites from Egyptian slavery makes it obvious that the weekly Sabbath is connected to the theme of liberation – liberation out of chaos also stands central in the Sabbath commandment of Exodus 20:11. As was suggested above, this verse shows how the weekly Sabbath is a ‘re-enactment’ of the ‘original’ Sabbath when God blessed the work he had done and brought it to completion. God also blessed and sanctified the day itself. The construction of the creation poem in Genesis 1:1–2:4 indicates how the author conceived God’s creation as a transformation of disorder (Gn 1:2) to order (Gn 2:1–4) (Ausloos & Lemmelijn 2010:121–143). Creation is here synonymous with the transition from chaos to harmony, and it reaches its climax on the seventh day – the day of completion and blessing. Here it should also be noted that Genesis 1:1–2:4 emphasises the universalistic character of God’s creative activity. The continually recurring seventh day of rest applies not only to Israel or Judaism alone, but to all of humanity. Indeed, the creation narrative proclaims that God is lord and master of the entire creation: besides the heavenly bodies, seas, plants and animals, the human is created in God’s image and is given the task of making the world habitable. When the evangelists situate Jesus’ healing actions precisely and explicitly on the Sabbath, these actions become a ‘re-enactment’ of the original Sabbath: chaos becomes harmony once again.

The liberating connotations of the Sabbath are also evident in the specific content of Jesus’ teachings given on the Sabbath. Having Jesus speak in public on the Sabbath does more than simply report how rabbis spoke to people in synagogues on the Sabbath. Mark 1:21–22; 6:1–6 and Luke 4:31–32 make no mention of the content of Jesus’ preaching on the Sabbath, though they do associate it with his healing actions (cf. Mk 1:23–31; 6:5; Lk 4:33–37). Luke 4:16–21, on the other hand, explicitly links Jesus’ Sabbath preaching to his liberating action:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. (Lk 4:16–21)

According to the evangelist, this promise from Isaiah 61:1–3 is fulfilled in Jesus. At the beginning of his gospel, however, Luke does not simply present Jesus as the one through whom Isaiah’s eschatologically interpreted promise is definitively fulfilled. Luke does not simply re-apply the pericope of Isaiah 61:1–3 just like that. Amongst other things, he adds a section of Isaiah 58:6 (‘to let the oppressed go free’), a text that unambiguously takes the side of the poor over against those rich people whose religious piety comes in direct conflict with their social behaviour. In light of the combination of Isaiah 61:1–3 and 58:6, Jesus is the one who stands up for the poor and oppressed and grants them freedom. This option for the

poor is translated by Jesus’ actions into the resolute liberating of the sick beggars. Not only does Luke 4:16–21 situate Jesus’ action completely in line with the concerns of the Jubilee of the Old Testament (Lv 25), by setting the proclamation of this text from Isaiah precisely on the Sabbath, Luke also emphasises the liberating core of the Sabbath from the beginning of the gospel. Jesus thereby explicitly transcends the Old Testament particularism of Isaiah 61:1–3, in which the ‘grieving ones of Zion’ are blessed. Jesus’ liberating action does not apply to them alone. He liberates all (Albertz 1983:191–198).

Finally, it should be noted that in addition to emphasising Jesus’ liberating preaching and healing, through which he acts as God’s proxy in restoring the honour of the Sabbath, the four evangelists also link Jesus’ rising from the dead – the ultimate liberation – with the Sabbath. Indeed not only Mark 15:42 and Luke 23:54, but even John 19:31 are explicit in having Jesus laid in the grave before the beginning of the Sabbath. Furthermore, the three synoptic gospels emphasise that the women find the stone rolled away from Jesus’ grave precisely on the first day of the week, after the Sabbath has ended (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:1; Lk 23:56) (Boyarin 2001:678–688).

Conclusion

In conclusion we can state that whilst the Sabbath prescription – whether seen as a re-enactment of God’s completing rest on the seventh day of the creation or as a reference to God’s liberating action that freed the Israelites from Egypt – sought to free the Israelites from *l’idolâtrie du travail* [idolatry of labour] by allowing them to put limits on their work (Wénin 1997:35), the New Testament authors have Jesus react in word and deed against *l’idolâtrie du sabbat*. Jesus’ actions thus ‘fulfil’ the Sabbath prescription by validating and confirming it (Zenger 1992:126–127): the Sabbath aims to liberate. Understood in this way, Jesus restores the Sabbath to its original intentions and true properties. To keep the Sabbath means, above all, that the human person can enjoy ‘divine’ rest in freedom. The Sabbath thus also becomes a symbol for liberation from everything that gets in the way of the human being – slavery, sickness and even death. What better day could the New Testament authors have chosen in order to characterise Jesus’ actions as liberating – or as John 7:23 says, ‘to make someone completely healed’ – than the Sabbath?

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