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Seeking Out the Seventh Day: A Review of God's Sabbath with Creation

Abstract

"Our covenant God will never rest until he brings us and his new creation into his eternal sabbath celebration."

Posting about the book *God's Sabbath with Creation* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/seeking-out-the-seventh-day-a-review-of-gods-sabbath-with-creation/>

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Comments

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in things

February 11, 2020

Seeking Out the Seventh Day: A Review of *God's Sabbath with Creation*

Ethan Brue

Title: *God's Sabbath with Creation: Vocations Fulfilled, the Glory Unveiled*

Authors: James W. Skillen

Publisher: Wipf and Stock

Publishing Date: April 9, 2019

Pages: 369 (Paperback)

ISBN: 978-1532659492

I am a product of middle-American evangelical Christianity.

I count that both a gift and a liability. Christian contemporary music was growing out of its infancy into market viability, premillennial dispensationalism was hitting the theological pop-charts, and myriads of new technologies (particularly communication mediums) were being embraced wholesale by the Christian community under the auspices of the great commission. The evangelical community was busy trying to argue and market their way into cultural, scientific, political, economic, and social legitimacy. I was a teenager.

Back then, I paid little attention to the theological air I breathed. I was not doing theology, just consuming the music—the soaring tenor melodies and electric guitar interludes of artists such as Keith Green syncopating the backdrop of my teenage years.

A diamond-tipped needle was the only thing needed to exegete the vinyl theology spun for me at 45 rpm. Even when we do not seek theological understanding, our deepest theological understandings most often follow our feet (39). I believe it is to a generation of theological consumers such as myself whom Skillen writes for—well-meaning Christ followers tapping our feet to an abridged version of scripture that under-amplifies “the greatest commission of all” (53).

Back in the early 1980’s, Keith Green borrowed his own prelude for a teaching moment:

<live crowd cheers as the piano begins to play> You know, I look around at the world and I see all the beauty that God made. I see the forest and the trees and all the things...and it says in the Bible that he made them in six days and I don’t know if they’re a literal six days or not...scientists would say no, some theologians would say yes...it doesn’t matter to me...but I know that Jesus Christ has been preparing a home for me and for some of you, for two thousand years...and if this world took six days and that home took two thousand years, hey man, this is living in a garbage can compared to what’s goin’ up there. *<live crowd cheers again>*

Seaside sunset, silver lining round the clouds,
Birds fly, singing, making such a joyful sound.
Thoughts of heaven somehow seem to fill my mind,
But I can’t even imagine, what it is I’m gonna find.
I can’t wait to get to heaven, when you’ll wipe away all my fears.
In six days you created everything,
But you’ve been working on heaven two thousand years.
(Keith Green, *I Can’t Wait to Get to Heaven*, Prodigal Son, 1983)

For all of us in the cheering crowd, Skillen graciously lifts the needle to remind us of the missing undertones needed to experience the full spectrum of the Biblical revelation.

Regarding “seaside sunsets,” Skillen lifts the needle on the songwriter to have us consider not only the sky and sea, but also the bus that brought the songwriter to the stage, the municipality that provided the stoplights, the public auditorium, the electric guitar, the piano hammer linkages, and so many other creatures that should also fill our beings with “thoughts of heaven.” While the “garbage can” may be a poor metaphor for the earthly beauties we see, it may be an apt metaphor for our clouded imaginations. While Skillen may concede that we “can’t even imagine” what seventh day living holds for us in this work-in-progress world, it is by sheer revelatory grace that the Creator of all things sketches this out for us in his Word. From beginning to end, the creator God composes a picture of ongoing seventh day fullness right before our eyes. If only we could have eyes to see.

Skillen and Green do agree that the details of the first six days are far less important than what is yet to come. However, while Green is eager to leave the first six days behind, Skillen wants to bring us back to the final day of creation—the seventh day. The day with no beginning and no end. The day which is the purpose, destination, and goal of what was merely catalyzed in the first six days. Wholeness, fullness, holiness, and shalom are to be found at the never-ending day in which all things join in celebration. Rest. For Skillen, two thousand years of human time is far too short for the recreating God who is far more concerned with fullness than expediency.

Within the bounds of this brief review, I will not even scratch the surface of what this 300-page book contains, so I can easily promise no spoilers.

If I were to offer a single praise for this work, it is this: the book is very comprehensive. Practicing what it preaches, the text engages scripture from cover to cover as a unified drama with a single storyline. Taking center stage is the covenanting God who will never cease his work until his very good creation finds its rest fully and completely with him. Creation, redemption, restoration, sabbath, revelation, covenant, atonement, scriptural exegesis, creaturely dependency, spirit-filled living, stewardship, justice, hospitality, honor, and many more Biblical themes are all stitched together between covers like a kingdom-size patchwork quilt.

If I were to offer a single critique of this work, it is this: the book is very comprehensive. Skillen has done his research, building on the work of numerous scholars, and leaning heavily on the works of N.T. Wright, Jürgen Moltmann, and Abraham Kuyper. However, as a reader familiar with only some of the works of Wright and Kuyper, and even less of Moltmann, I found myself losing my way in the side conversations, as Skillen frequently stops to affirm, challenge, or qualify the work of these authors in detail. This makes the book read more like the literature review of a dissertation at times. While this careful review will likely engage theologians and academicians, it may impede the reader coming from outside the discipline of theology.

For the trained theologian and Christian philosopher, I expect that there is ample substance to be mined from this text. For the lay theologian exploring what it means to live into an understanding of God's revelation, the book requires a pilgrimage mindset. With persistence and a willingness to explore fast-food alternatives, this book is worth the effort. Whatever our place or profession—whether artist, engineer, teacher, leader, musician, manager, neighbor, or family member—we all find our singular vocation in God's sabbath with creation.

What ultimately matters about creation is that creation matters ultimately. This is "God's Sabbath with Creation." Our covenant God will never rest until he brings us and

his new creation into his eternal sabbath celebration. In a church that so often seems preoccupied with trying to explain the first six days, it is refreshing to be reminded of the seventh day of creation. As Skillen so aptly describes it, “The Lord of heaven and earth governs and draws all things toward the divine honor and hospitality, and it is for the full, seventh-day unveiling of divine glory that everything has been created, commissioned for service, and redeemed in Christ” (48). Remember the Sabbath day. Serve it up holy.