

Sabbath, Pt. 1 (2023)



Muslims, as well as Jews & Christians, observe the Sabbath. (c) Journey Films

Most of Martin Doblmeier's fine documentaries usually clock in just under one hour, probably so as to fit into the format of PBS—virtually all of his works have been featured there. In the case of taking us into a deep dive into the history and meaning of the Sabbath, one hour is not enough, hence his dividing his subject into a Part 1 and a Part 2. This review will cover the first, and the second part we will report on later.

The director opens his film with engaging statements from several experts—the first of 26 that explain virtually every facet of the Sabbath, from history, religion, social, ecology, its becoming secularized in labor and law, and even its psychological and medical implications. And you read right, *twenty-six* persons that include rabbis, pastors, and seminary profs. They represent the Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant faiths, and one of them is an Imam, so all of the Abrahamic faiths are represented. Walter Brueggemann probably will be the best known, but all have studied the subject—many have written books about the Sabbath—and have something important to say about it. (For min-bios of the interviewees click [here](#).)

Here are some quotes that you who preach and/or teach can use:

“Sabbath isn’t simply a pious teaching, an add-on. What’s at issue is the very meaning of life.” Norman Wirzba, Duke Divinity School

“Time is our only non-renewable source.” Dana Trent, author of *For Sabbath’s Sake: Embracing Your Need for Rest, Worship and Community*

“Sabbath has ethical implications. Work should not be what defines us as human beings.” Richard Rice, Prof. Loma Linda University

“Shabbath is a revolutionary concept. It actually changed human history.” Ammiel Hirsch, Stephen Wise Free Synagogue

The film begins by various interviewees pointing out how after WW 2 our society became the overly busy society, with everyone working more and more, undergoing stress and depression, spending less and less time with family members—problems which Sabbath addresses and alleviates. The religious origins of the day are explored in the Genesis Creation Story and the Tenth Commandment, in which God “rests” on the seventh day. In the second compilation of the Law, Deuteronomy, Shabbath is tied in with the Israelites’ forced labor in Egypt, and so is to be observed as a day of freedom. The Day’s relationship to the labor movement in America and unionists’ fight to shorten the hours and days of work is explored. The over strictness on the Day of English Puritans and their flight to the New World where they established what became the Blue Laws is included, as well as the joyfulness of the Day’s celebration in synagogues and at home meals is shown.

Preachers will find the discussion of Jesus healing on the Sabbath Day very helpful. It is not that he was negating the importance of the Day but recognizing that healing on the Day is very appropriate.

The section on a Black pastor who had long ignored the meaning

of Shabbath and what he was able to lead his thriving congregation to do in the community after he took a personal Shabbath with his family will be of interest to church leaders.

The above is just a partial listing, but I have run out of time before leaving on my trip to Europe, so will end with the admonition to watch out for this film. You can learn more about it, including watching a number of interviews with the participants by clicking on – www.journeyfilms.com or [Interviewees – Journey Films](#).

Special note: Journey Films has now gathered five of its bio films into a “Prophetic Voices” set, offering it at the bargain price of \$29.95. I’ve covered all of these in Visual Parables and can vouch for their top-notch quality. You probably have one or more books by these spiritual giants on your bookshelf, and these fascinating films allow you to share their wisdom and challenges with your people. They are Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dorothy Day, Abraham Heschel, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Howard Thurman.

This review is in the May issue of VP along with a set of questions for reflection and/or discussion. If you have found reviews on this site helpful, please consider purchasing a subscription or individual issue in The Store.