



## Misconceptions of the Sabbath as Rest: The Social Interpretation of Exodus 23:1-12 and Its Relevance

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**ABSTRACT:** This article is driven by the many problems related to Sunday activities and land problems in the Moluccas. According to J.H Elliott, the authors analyze the text of Exodus 23:1–12 using the social sciences critique method. Meanwhile, the theory used as an analytical tool is the Structural-Functional theory proposed by Emile Durkheim and Jean Jacques Rousseau's social contract theory. The results of the analysis are then discussed in relation to the church context in the Moluccas. The study's results found that originally, Sabbath meant to rest within the context of work. "Work," as understood by the concept of Sabbath, means working with God in promoting social care, economic sustainability, and environmental concern. Misunderstandings of the Sabbath as Rest cause certain elements in the structure of Moluccan society not to function as they should because the Sabbath is misconstrued to perpetuate laziness, ignore others, hinder economic growth, and ignore the environment. In actuality, the Sabbath provides balance, not only balancing work with rest but also balancing rest with work. The Sabbath needs to be interpreted as 'working' in the context of communion with God, social care, guaranteeing economic sustainability, and concern for the environment. Local wisdom and regional culture as a social contract are still necessary in caring for humanity and preserving the territory, so such local wisdom and particular aspects of regional culture must be preserved and strengthened.

Keywords: Sabbath, Rest, Work, Social, Care

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### INTRODUCTION

Some of the social problems in the Moluccas that have caught the attention of the writers are land issues and community activities on Sundays. First, land issues include land boundary conflicts, overlapping land ownership, the buying and selling of land, and large areas of unused land. Land tenure on each island in the Moluccas has caused many conflicts regarding unclear land boundaries (Nugroho, 2018), and even problems related to land ownership rights by customary law residents continue to increase every year (Lewedalu et al., 2021). Several cases of land disputes in the Moluccas, for example, are documented in the village of Woirata, in the Southwest Moluccas Regency (Lewedalu et al., 2021). Land boundary

conflicts between Pelau, Ori Hamlet, and Kariu (Noya, 2022), as well as land issues in Wotay State, Teon Nila Serua District, Central Moluccas Regency (Uktolseja et al., 2021). The problem of overlapping land ownership has occurred between the Indigenous People of Honitetu Village, West Seram District, Moluccas, and the government. This is because there is an overlap between customary territory claims and state forest area claims (Tjoa et al., 2018). These cases show how many conflicts over land boundaries and overlapping land ownership and control can cause social conflict.

The problem is that buying and selling land for consumptive interests, such as for the purposes of various celebrations like baptisms, confirmations, graduations, and the like, requires significant

expenditures. Buying and selling land, then, has the potential to cause social problems. In addition, a large amount of agricultural land has not been optimally processed, so it becomes unused land. Agricultural products in the Moluccas are generally only used to meet daily needs (i.e., subsistence farming) and have not yet led to an increase in the family economy's prosperity (Karyani & Waas, 2019). In contrast, in certain areas of Indonesia, agricultural land management does not utilize the principles of a properly understood Sabbath "rest" due to a lack of agricultural land. The conversion of agricultural land to housing developments functions as one of the causes of reduced arable land as the population increases and development activities (Hastuty, 2017).

Second, Sunday religious community activities are impacted by a proper (or improper) view of the Sabbath. Christians in the Moluccas generally, except the Seventh-day Adventist Church congregations, understand and accept Sunday as the Sabbath, so any activity on Sunday will be met with opposition. This is the Christian view of the Sabbath (Budiman & Objantoro, 2021), particularly in the Moluccas. Sunday is the day when Christian's worship God while at the same time resting from all activities. Congregations that work in offices, both in government and private agencies, take holidays on Sundays. Likewise, farmers do not garden, and fishermen do not go to sea on those days. This custom developed from an understanding of the Sabbath as a day of rest.

According to the authors, there is something wrong with applying the Sabbath concept because the attendance rate at Sunday services in the church is low. According to the authors' observations, congregational attendance at Sunday services does not reach fifty percent of the total number of church members. The concept of the Sabbath as a break from work ignores the activities of God's servants, both assemblies and pastors, who 'work' on Sundays so that it seems as if the Sabbath law 'does not apply' to them. The crowd of tourists at tourist spots on national holidays, including Sundays, is an

interesting phenomenon related to the theme of the Sabbath. Managers of tourist attractions will work optimally, as will people who work for a living on Sundays in these places.

The concept of the Sabbath as Rest is currently being advanced by many researchers in Indonesia. Pengumbahas and Napitupulu (2021) view the Sabbath and work from the perspective of work theology, assuming that ongoing work makes humans hostage to their performance. Budhi (2021) and Waruwu (2020) say that the Sabbath is an essential component of a Theology of Rest. Meanwhile, de Villiers and Marchinkowski (2021a) emphasize the spiritual aspect of the Sabbath without ignoring the meaning of the Sabbath as Rest. The interpretation of the Sabbath as Rest relates to many areas of life, such as well-being and health, as stated by Speedling (2019) and Gallagher (2019). Speedling (2019) links the contribution of Sabbath practices to the well-being of individuals, communities, and the planet. At the same time, Gallagher (2019) links the practice of the Sabbath with restoring the health and well-being of all creation. The same thing was stated by Hough et al. (2019), who saw the Sabbath as a rest connected with mental, physical, and spiritual health.

Sabbath is also related to giving the land rest, that is, neither planting nor harvesting. This situation is in accordance with the agricultural context, which manages land by shifting. However, it becomes a problem when available arable land decreases to the point that it is impossible to cultivate crops by rotating fields. On the other hand, modern agricultural land management can be carried out without allowing the soil to rest while maintaining soil fertility. According to the authors, Sabbath as Rest is relevant when discussed in The city of Ambonareas with the title of the world's busiest cities such as; Seoul, Paris, New York, Tokyo, London, Shanghai, Beijing, Moscow, Hong Kong, Mumbai, and others. However, it becomes irrelevant when connected to the current agricultural context, especially in the Moluccas, where most farmers cultivate long-lived trees. Hence, working

hours are generally much shorter than resting hours. Understanding the Sabbath as rest resulted in many unused acres of land in the Moluccas.

Ideally, not tilling the land also has a social meaning in that it can overcome social inequality. Still, the fact is that areas with a Christian majority population in Indonesia are identified as poor areas, and there are still inequalities in economic growth in these areas (Ferezagia, 2018). Data for March 2021 shows that the Moluccas are the fourth economically poorest province in Indonesia, with a poor population of 321.810 people, or 17.87% of the population (Latupeirissa et al., 2022). Meanwhile, inequality in economic growth is at a high level, with various classifications of growth areas. Ambon is classified as a prosperous area, the city of Tual is classified as a depressed area, and nine other districts are classified as affluent areas that are in decline (Lamere et al., 2016).

Various problems indicate a misconception of the Sabbath as rest, or at least an error in applying the meaning of the Sabbath as Rest. That is why it is essential to properly understand the importance of the Sabbath according to Exodus 23:1–12 and its relevance for the present state of affairs in the Moluccas. This research focuses on the issues of land and religion, with the assumption that these two things cannot be separated. This study aims to interpret the meaning of the Sabbath according to Exodus 23:1–12 and its relevance for the Moluccas. This research was conducted assuming that the text of Exodus 23:1–12 has a social context that differs from the current context of Indonesia and the Moluccas. Still, this text can be applied to answer the current problems of the Moluccan people.

## **METHOD**

The research method utilizes J. H. Elliott's (1993) social scientific approach in conversation with Exodus 23:1–12. Data collection, organization, and classification were carried out in the first phase. In the second phase, the results are interpreted. The authors use the structural-functional theory proposed by Emile Durkheim and the social contract theory

by Jean Jacques Rousseau as analytical tools to analyze the text of Exodus 23:1–12. The social scientific method complements that of historical-critical interpretation because its historical-critical methodology is necessary for the science of interpretation to deal with the problem of the transmission of the biblical text (Singgih, 2006).

The relevance of the Sabbath theme in Exodus 23:1–12 will be explored in relation to the church context in the Moluccas. The data was analyzed in stages: explaining the social context of the text, explaining the relationship between the meaning of the text and the social context of the text, and presenting a reflection of the meaning of the text that is relevant to the current context (Elliott, 1993). The meaning of the text is related to the social context of the text, emphasizing perspectives: social, economic, political, and religious texts, text genres; social settings of the text; community patterns contained in the text, social issues of the text, and social values of the text, which will then be explained in reference to the church context in the Moluccas.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Tracing the Structural-functional theory of Emile Durkheim (1995) and Jean Jacques Rousseau's (1986) social contract theories is a means of universal truth-seeking because it is based on a way of analyzing the world through oppositional categories (Williams, 2002, p. 63). According to Durkheim's structural-functional theory, religion is a representation of social relations in society. He uses field evidence on Australian totemism to show the religious category of such a society as a representation of the social relations in which its members engage (Scott, 2006, p. 56). Religion has a main function as social glue, social control, and a means of giving meaning and purpose (Lukes, 1972, p. 148). In his last work, Durkheim (1995) discussed the nature, sources, forms, effects, and alterations of religion from a sociological point of view. According to him, religion originates from society itself, which interprets God according to its ideals.

This opinion is based on the argument that religion is an embodiment of collective representation and collective consciousness (Durkheim, 1995).

Durkheim's Structural-Functional Theory emphasizes the order in which society is a social system consisting of elements that are interrelated and united in balance. If some elements do not act as they should, then the balance of the system will be damaged. For example, he explains the act of suicide using the solidarity built up by people. According to him, low levels of integration and regulation, which he refers to as states of 'selfishness' and 'anomie,' create patterns of constraint that predispose people to suicide. On the other hand, the level of integration and regulation may be too high, which he calls a state of 'altruism' and 'fatalism,' which also results in suicidal tendencies. Suicide is at its lowest when these social forces are balanced (Scott, 2006).

The second is the social contract theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. According to Rousseau (1986), the people are fully authorized to determine their destiny. He proposed a social contract as a peace solution to various conflicts in which the state must ensure justice and welfare for the people. It departs from the natural state of human beings, which was originally good but was damaged by civilization, causing chaos. According to him, no human being has absolute power over his fellow human beings because one's power does not result in any rights against his fellow human beings. That is why all powers justified among fellow human beings must be determined based on convention (Rousseau, 1986, p. 8). He emphasizes the importance of social contract theory by calling it a secular "Bible" (Rousseau, 1986). That is why a social contract in the form of an agreement will be carried out by everyone who understands natural laws and their rights (Pesurnay, 2021). The social contract can be made in two ways. First, it is carried out only between members of the community. Secondly, it is carried out by each person delegating all his rights to the community (Ruslan, 2013).

### **The Meaning of the Sabbath on the Land**

Theologians subscribing to the Documentary Hypothesis generally understand Exodus 23 as a work of tradition E, which emphasizes Abraham as the chosen one and his descendants as the successors to God's ownership (Childs, 1976; Gottwald, 1987, pp. 137–138; Santoso, 2014, p. 51; Wahono, 2013, p. 61). Many scholars believe that the covenantal provisions found in Exodus resulted from an ancient literary process that added related material to the original smaller and sharper Sinai covenant tradition, centered on two tablets of stone (Greengus, 2014, p. 109). According to Gottwald (1987, pp. 137–138), two main aspects concern the traditions of the ancestors, namely, first, the difficult struggle to maintain the security and stability of communities that require harvests and soil productivity, and second, the breakdown of communities with different minds (Gottwald, 1987).

Referring to Gottwald's opinion, the land Sabbath laws were part of the emphasis on how Israel obtained assurance of a peaceful life on the promised land and the process of struggle within the framework of fulfilling the promise of descent and land. The ancestors were in complex relationships with other people in Canaan and Egypt. Tradition E organizes the Sabbath material to demonstrate to Israel that religious, economic, ecological, and social principles are balanced. In particular, Exodus 23:1–12 presents the land Sabbath principle as an orientation towards the following aspects: religious, social, economic, and ecological. The New Translation of the Indonesian Bible Society gives the title of Exodus 23:1–12 as "Ordinances concerning Human Rights." The land Sabbath laws are motivated by various social and environmental problems in Israeli society, as described in the passage. Based on this background, the authors analyzed the meaning of the Sabbath according to Exodus 23:1–12.

Exodus 23:11–12 mentions two forms of the Sabbath: the Sabbath year over the land (10–11) and the Sabbath rest from work (12). After six years

of sowing and gathering the produce of the land, in the seventh year, the land must lay fallow (*tisymetennâ*) and lie still (*unetasyettâh*). The Hebrew verbs *tisymetennâ* and *unetasyettâh* are almost synonymous and seem to mean omission, but they have a deeper meaning. According to Mulder, the Hebrew root *shamat* in Exodus 23:11 and Deuteronomy 15:3 is specifically related to the noun *syemita* in Deuteronomy 15:1, which is translated as 'writing off the debt.' The verb *syāmat* is concerned with regulating the rhythm of work and rest, culminating in establishing the Sabbath year. And the root *syāmat* (let) followed by the verb root *nātsy* (to leave) adds to the nuances of this interpretation (Mulder, 2006, p. 200). These two forms of Sabbath are interrelated, and thus an analysis of the text of Exodus 23:1–12 seeks to find out the meaning of the Sabbath as carried out in both ways simultaneously. According to Boorer, the Sabbath regulations concern several things, including rest for the land, the welfare of the poor, wild animals, agricultural land, and restrictions for enslaved people (Boorer, 2014).

### ***The Sabbath as Fellowship with God***

The commandment to honor the Sabbath day and the Sabbath year is full of spiritual significance. The composer(s) of Tradition E do not limit their description of Sabbath rest to only the weekly and annual sabbaths. He also links the Sabbath to other ancient Israelite religious holidays such as the Passover (2 Kings 4:23; Isa. 1:23, Hos. 2:13). The celebration of unleavened bread and the Sabbath are part of the history of salvation (Noth, 1962, pp. 160–162). Childs conveyed the same thing: that the main content of the law regarding the Sabbath is cultic. He later identified the text of Exodus 23:10–19 as part of a cultic calendar (Childs, 1976).

Exodus 23 does not explicitly explain the correlation of the Sabbath commandment with other spiritual realities. Still, the etiology of the Sabbath is based on the creation of the universe, so Sabbath observance is an acknowledgment of Yahweh as

Creator (Seters, 1999). Silva stated that the Sabbath is not only a sign of the Covenant between Yahweh and Israel but is also theologically based on the seventh day of creation (Silva, 2015). That is why profaning the Sabbath is tantamount to testifying that God did not create the earth in six days and did not rest on the seventh day. This understanding of the commandment expresses the idea that Israel honors God through social relations (Langston, 2006). The emphasis on the Sabbath as the seventh day of creation has implications for the prohibition of idol worship. According to Novak (2005), in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, idol worship is the primary sin because idol worship is the most basic rejection of the truth that only one God has created everything, and therefore this one God is the one that all humans must obey unconditionally (Novak, 2005). Sabbath observance is a powerful antidote to an inhuman system of power. Theologically, this is an insistence that the world does not belong to predators but to the Creator of heaven and earth, who wills that those who are made in God's image cannot be reduced to commodities (Brueggemann, 2016).

The Hebrew word *syāmat*, translated as 'let it be,' literally means to let go and rest. That is why Runić (2022) explained the concept of the Sabbath as rest, which is then linked to Hebrews 4:2–4, where God rests on the seventh day. He mentions a higher rest, God resting and enjoying quality time with his creation (Runić, 2022). Thus, the concept of the Sabbath as Rest goes beyond rest itself—that is, not only maintaining a balance between work and rest but also meaningful fellowship with God.

It is not certain whether the Sabbath over the land arose from myth or was advanced in favor of agricultural and land-respecting laws in Israel. Still, indeed, the concept was later given a theological explanation. The motivation for the priestly writings, in particular, was to perpetuate the thought of Yahweh's ownership of the land that He loaned Israel. Yahweh's ownership of the land emphasizes the theological meaning of the Sabbath over the ground as a form of communion with God

and is filled with spiritual values. Theologians put forward spiritual values in the concept of the Sabbath. Brueggemann (2016) and Seters (1999) focus on the nature of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is God's gift to sinful humanity (Brueggemann, 2016), and the Sabbath is a holy day and a sign of the eternal covenant between Yahweh and His people (Seters, 1999). Other theologians have linked the Sabbath to personal spirituality. The Sabbath is a spiritual exercise to restore and refresh, which is ultimately related to the search for spiritual maturity and growth (de Villiers & Marchinkowski, 2021a), as worship to God (Noth, 1962), and the Sabbath restores us as human beings into right relationship with God (Friesen, 2015).

The importance of land theology is about God choosing and making a covenant with Israel. God's claim to land ownership can be compared with the system of land ownership in some contemporary cultures. Before the Israelites occupied Canaan, the king held title to all the land. The citizens who lived on the land worked as farmers and tenant's dependent on the king, usually under a heavy tax burden. The whole land is his, and because of that, he has the right to demand loyalty from his people. Under a king as a landowner, the people live in constant oppression. Under God as the landowner, Israel lived in freedom. If God was the land owner, then no Israelite could treat his land as if he owned it so that he could act as he pleased, nor could an Israelite have any claim on the land of another Israelite, except according to inheritance laws and kinship. Even a king is only a tenant of God's land.

The concept of land as belonging to God and God's gift results in a wide range of rights and responsibilities for the nation and individuals. These responsibilities can be classified into three parts: responsibilities to God, family, and others. Accountability to God is expressed in the form of tithes and first fruits of the harvest, harvest laws, and ordinances on Sabbath concerning the land, such as the seventh year Sabbath, wherein the land is not planted, and debts are forgiven.

Responsibilities to the family cover the basic law of the land as immovable property. Land may not be bought and sold but must be maintained within a kinship framework. This principle was supported by other kinship responsibilities related to land, such as redemption procedures, inheritance rules, and levirate marriage.

### ***Sabbath as a Form of Social Concern***

The section discusses the human aspects of the Sabbath, namely, the poor, the enslaved, and foreigners. Concessions for forest animals, oxen, and donkeys mentioned in this context will be explained in another section regarding the Sabbath as a form of concern for the environment. Emile Durkheim's structural-functional theory examines the concept of social order to see how society can live in harmony with this concept of the Sabbath (Lukes, 1972). However, the social problems seen in the text of Exodus 23:1–12 indicate that elements in the social structure are not functioning as they should. That is why the Sabbath has implications for social realities. Epzstein and Meyers emphasize the social implications of the Sabbath. The historical motivation for the Sabbath is meant to reaffirm the social impact of the festival, and more important in human terms is the formula 'so that your servant and your servant may rest as well as you do' (Epszstein, 1986, p. 131).

Theologians emphasize the social responsibility of the Sabbath commandment related to the land in Exodus 23:1–12. Childs (1976) put forward social motivation due to genuine human sympathy for subordinates and living things. Meanwhile, Brueggemann (2016) emphasized that all of God's creatures, human and non-human, must be respected in a real and practical way. Social care, as Meyers refers to it, is referred to as concessions for all. He acknowledged that the rationale for the Sabbath in the book of Exodus differs from that in the book of Deuteronomy. Still, the implications for humans are the same; the seventh day provides respite for all (Meyers, 2005). Leniency, according to Exodus 23:1–12, is for the poor, forest animals,

oxen, donkeys, enslaved people, and foreigners. The Sabbath also means 'liberation' for humanity based on the text of Deuteronomy 15, as emphasized by Gerhard von Rad (1966), that the Sabbath is a deliverance to God, which is done every seven years. According to him, the power of Sabbath rest was now passed from agriculture into the economic system, the burden of debt was terminated (15:1-6), and the bondage of enslaved people was experiencing liberation and freedom (Rad, 1966).

The Sabbath day and the Sabbath year are mentioned in the section titled New Translations, 'The Law on Human Rights.' The passage explains various social and humanitarian issues in Israeli society, including; false witnesses (*syema' syawe'*), untrue witnesses (*'ēd khamās*), crime (*lerā'ōt*), taking sides (*teheddar*), lying (*middevar-syeqer*), accepting bribes (*wesyōqer*) and so on. Jesus defended His disciples who picked wheat on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–28), and he healed a man with some sort of bodily swelling as well as a paralytic (Luke 13:14; John 5:9–10). The Lord Jesus emphasized the importance of 'the Sabbath being held for humans and not vice versa for humans for the Sabbath when talking to the Pharisees (Mar 2:27 ITB). In the text of Matthew 12:5, the Lord Jesus alluded to the ministry of priests on the Sabbath in the temple of God, saying that they violated the Sabbath law but were innocent (Matt. 12:5). Thus, the Sabbath is not resting but working for humanity because the Sabbath is a form of humanizing (Hyatt, 1971, p. 247). According to Clarke (1997), the reason for instituting the Sabbath year was to maintain equality and imbue people with a sense of humanity. Social care needs to be shown concerning the humanitarian problems stated in Exodus 23:1–12, namely poverty, slavery, and immigration.

#### Poverty Issues

Poverty due to Feudalism became a social problem during the reign of the kings of Israel. Feudalism was usually used to give land to someone in appreciation for their services to the king and country. This system contradicts the Israeli people's

principle of justice in land distribution. Another reason was the very high loan interest (Ex 22:25; Lev 25:35–37; De 23:19–20; Pro 28:8). When someone borrows from a rich person to buy seeds because of a bad harvest, the possibility of another crop failure could lead to compounding debt, and then he has to pay the loan with interest, leading to an unending cycle of indebtedness. The consequence is that the farmer then sells his land to pay off his debts. That is why more and more land changes ownership from farmers to the rich who live in cities (Is 5:8; Am 5:11; 6:1-6). This condition causes a gap between the rich and the poor (Baker, 1995). The text of Exodus 12:6 emphasizes this form of social injustice by calling it 'violating the rights of the poor.' Such a humanitarian impulse was significant in ancient Israel's agrarian society, where most people were engaged in difficult labor (Meyers, 2005).

#### Slavery Issues

The next humanitarian issue is the problem of slavery, which existed in the Ancient Near East long before Israel even existed as an enslaved people in Egypt. Chelst calls Israel's status as a slave the establishment of Israel before obtaining the promised land (Chelst, 2012). The context of the book of Exodus 21:2–3 explains that enslaved people were not foreign captives but Hebrews who were enslaved for debt or had sold themselves into indentured servitude. In ancient times, a person had the 'ability' to borrow against himself or sell himself and his family into slavery (Silver, 1993, p. 186). The Bible shows that conditional agreements between humans were recognized in the Torah and later developed by the Rabbis, which shows that the general requirements for personal and social contracts are not foreign to Jewish legal theory. This legal theory developed into Jewish political theory (Novak, 2005). According to Novak (2005), what is contained in the Sabbath is the social contract of Judaism. Every social contract ultimately leads to the Sinai agreement, which becomes the basic social structure that cannot be reduced to any other social

structure. According to him, political phenomena and other ideas in Judaism can be referred to as the 'social contract' (Novak, 2005).

Epszstein compares the Book of Hammurabi to the Book of the Testament (Exodus 21:1–11) when he describes the practice of slavery. The two books show the existence of slavery for the same reason, the same time for freedom after a certain period (According to Hammurabi, after three years, while according to the Book of Testament, after six years), as well as parallels in announcing his freedom (Epszstein, 1986). This comparative study suggests a general social system that prevailed in Israel and the Ancient Near East. There are indications that slavery in Israel was generally far better than that of its neighboring nations. The prevailing working conditions in Mesopotamia and Egypt were centralized exploitation, whereas, on the small agricultural properties of the ancient Israelites, this implied that the work was done by the owner, his family, and several enslaved people. The enslaved people were treated as members of the family to which they belonged. They are almost friends whose services are valued according to their true value (Epszstein, 1986).

Traditions E and D, in their development, take into account the realities of time and accept slavery even among the Israelites. However, there are a series of restrictions, especially in Deuteronomy, that attempt to make the institution as humane as possible. A purchased Hebrew enslaved person must serve his master for six years, and in the seventh year, he will be free, without payment (Ex. 21:2; Deut. 15:12). In the case of a man who is not free, the man sells himself voluntarily. In this case, the initiative will be taken by him and not by the master (Epszstein, 1986). However, when a person surrenders his freedom to others to become enslaved, it means eliminating his nature as a human being, consisting in his human rights and obligations according to the concept of the social contract as propounded by Rosseau (1986).

The existence of concessions for enslaved people does not mean that the Bible approves of the institution of slavery. Jacobson noted at least three things regarding the Biblical record regarding slavery: First, slavery in Israel was different from slavery elsewhere in that enslaved people were freed after six years. Second, slavery in Israel is not based on race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Third, it was not until the last five hundred years that the notion of a slave-free economy was conceivable (Jacobson, 2016). The large gap between the rich and the poor shows that social evils equivalent to the ancient practice of slavery have not been corrected. In this case, the moral aspect plays an important role in the practice of slavery, as emphasized by Durkheim's theory of morality, which has implications for social solidarity (Lukes, 1972).

#### The Foreigner and the Stranger

The term foreigner is translated from the Hebrew root *gēr*, which means stranger. This root word means living among people who are not blood relatives (Stigers, 1995). The word is also used to describe both the forefathers and the Israelites, who lived as foreigners. Abraham in Egypt (Gen 12:10), Israel in Egypt (Gen 47:4), and Isaac and Abimelech in Gerar (Gen 26:3), in which context they became protected citizens. Thus, 'foreigners' in Israel are people who do not come from the tribe of Israel, but they have the same rights as guests and enjoy some protections.

Leniency for foreigners in the law regarding the Sabbath day is motivated by the existence of Israel itself, who was a former slave in Egypt (Ex. 23:6). Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt was a form of 'rest' so all those in their power also needed to rest. This order is important for Israel to not repeat the oppression it left behind (Schifferdecker, 2016). Let (*sy<sup>e</sup>mittâ*) and leave (*nātasy*) are almost synonymous verbs. The word *sy<sup>e</sup>mittâ* is used four times in Deuteronomy (15:1-2, 9; 31:10) in contexts related to writing off debts. The commandment to absolve debtors from their



debts every seven years is a constant reminder that those who have experienced God's grace in forgiving sins must also manifest the spirit of grace in their interpersonal relationships (Austel, 1995).

The word sabbath in the book of Exodus means 'to stop,' giving little detail on what to do on the Sabbath other than to stop working and refrain from lighting a fire (Meyers, 2005). The principle of the Sabbath is rest from work, which is why Jacobson calls it a sabbatical and liberation from slavery. He called it the first labor law book (Jacobson, 2016). However, the issue of social justice in the traditions of the Ancient Near East is different from the labor context, where the traditions and general views of Ancient Near Eastern Society regarding social justice are arranged hierarchically. The basic unit is the household, which is headed by a father and his wife, children, and enslaved people as subordinate members.

Above the household are the nobility, above them the king, and above the king the gods, whose pantheon is understood in terms of the household and hierarchical structure. The original use of the term slave illustrates the structure of society. Where a real enslaved person is a person who is not free, the term slave is also used in a relative way to describe a person's relationship with a superior in all hierarchies. Thus, a free citizen is called an enslaved person by the king. The person and the king are enslaved to the gods (Westbrook, 1995, p. 149). This hierarchically arranged social justice shows that no human being is truly free. Or at least his freedom is limited by the freedom of other people who are hierarchically above him.

### ***Sabbath Ensures Economic Sustainability***

Israel's background lies in a combination of agriculture and livestock, in many cases in mountainous environments (Halpern, 2012). When they settled in Canaan, the promised land was a valuable natural resource for them. The value of land lies in the benefits obtained by each ecosystem component. The author of tradition E pays attention to the ground according to his theology. Israel, as a

desert tribe, encountered agricultural patterns when they settled in Palestine. Israel experienced socioreligious and socioeconomic changes in its encounter with this agricultural pattern. From a socio-religious point of view, Israel is a confederation of tribes living in Palestine. They believe in God as a unifying God who has chosen ancestors and made promises, including the promise of land. This belief in God gets weight in the totality of Israel's life. Conversely, the totality of Israel's life gets meaning as a nation chosen by God among other nations in Palestine by implementing all the rules, regulations, and laws that come from God amid the totality of life.

The practice of slavery in Ancient Israel was inseparable from the economic reality in which the existence of an enslaved Israelite was due to economic reasons. For an agrarian society like Israel, land has important economic value because it is a place of business. Israel's belief in God directs their mindset and lifestyle towards using land to improve the welfare of the people in Palestine. However, the practice of feudalism 'forced' them to sell land as their place of business. The land was treated as merchandise that could be traded freely, thus opening up opportunities for the Israelites, who were able to expand their land.

On the other hand, Israelite families who could not afford it would lose their land because they sold it to the Canaanites. Land rights are regulated in a system related to the composition of society controlled by the nobility. This situation resulted in a smaller gap between the nobility and the semi-free peasants and enslaved people (Baker, 1995). Those who lose their land lose their source of livelihood. The Sabbath rule on land is given so that the poor and enslaved people can eat, as well as forest animals, meaning that social care for others is related to basic human needs.

According to Jones, the immediate reason for observing the Sabbath is philanthropic and economical, and the commandment in Exodus 23:13 shows the true goodness of God behind it (Jones, 1984). Economic sustainability can occur if

there is economic justice. The Sabbath guarantees economic justice for the poor. The reality of injustice and inequality encourages the existence of Sabbath rules that urge people to go through a heavy obligation to lighten the burdens of life for their fellows who can't even sell themselves as enslaved people (Browning, 2007, p. 272). Bradford called the Sabbath a priority for systemic action for social and economic justice. He thinks the Sabbath principles of economic justice can take the form of advocating for minimum wage workers and fighting for workers' rights in retail and food service establishments. Economic equity eliminates high-risk speculative trade taxes that have not contributed to the real economy but harm low-income households. Systemic protection for vulnerable people against poverty under market dynamics (Bradford, 2015).

The Sabbath is a covenant between God and the Israelites and a covenant between masters and their servants. His servants did not work that day, so the master did not take advantage of his servants (Novak, 2005). However, not providing workers with daily wages would be detrimental to the workers themselves because the principle of economic sustainability does not work as it should. In other words, the practice of the Sabbath on the land had serious implications for the daily wage workers. Lemos (2010) gives a good picture of the situation. Literary sources assume that the average daily wage of a wage worker was one *dinar*, although labor wages appear to have varied according to a person's skill level. Apart from the daily wages of labor, weather, sickness, Sabbaths, and other problems prevented workers from working every day, so one dinar per day could barely be considered sufficient for an entire family (Lemos, 2010, p. 125).

### ***Sabbath as a Form of Concern for the Environment***

The use of the words 'sow' (*tizra'*) and produce (*t'ebû'â*) about land (*'erets*), as well as the existence of a rural scope, shows that the

agricultural interpretation fits better in the context of Exodus 23:1–12. According to Kwakkel (2009), the sowing metaphor expresses that God will give His people a place to settle down where they can prosper, grow, and multiply, like seeds sown in a field (Kwakkel, 2009). History, in general, describes Canaan as a fertile land with abundant sources of food. There are many references in the Bible, especially the Torah, that mention food produced in Canaan, namely the triad of 'grain, wine, and oil' (Deut. 14:23). According to the context of the author of Exodus, the Sabbath is set in an agricultural context. That means the life of agriculture and ranchers became Israel's way of life. Nomadic herders became farmers to support themselves and their livestock. In the pre-monarchical period, the commandment in Exodus 23:12 is an indication of the practice of obedience on the seventh day, with the basic motivation being attention to the balance of human life that cultivates the land. During the Middle Bronze Age, most people were attracted to grazing as a reliable livelihood. In addition, people will adopt a mixed strategy that combines agriculture and horticulture, switching from one strategy to another when necessary (Golden, 2004). During this period, there was a marked increase in settlement on the coastal plains. The northern valleys and well-watered interiors were even more densely populated, and agriculture formed the basis of subsistence, with barley and wheat as the main staple goods (Golden, 2004).

The word sabbath refers to the observance of stopping work on the seventh day (20:8–11). Two older texts expressly contain the commandment of observance of the Sabbath without identifying it as a Sabbath (Ex. 23:12), namely part of the Code of Covenants, tradition E, which preserved pre-monarchical notions of law; and 34:21, which is part of the Cultic Decalogue, tradition Y. The story of tradition Y is only limited to laying the groundwork that the land of Canaan is the land that God has promised them, and the conquests told by this tradition are only limited to the conquest of the East

Jordan region. This tradition developed in South Israel after David became king over Israel (Santos, 2014). The verb sabbath is found in Exodus 23:12 and 34:21, where the seventh day is known as the Sabbath in history; Israel is the oldest (Bromiley, 1991, p. 249).

The concept of "ploughing the land and gathering the harvest" is limited in its function only to the totality of activities entering the Sabbath year. The special thing that was found was that the horizon of the concept was precisely the model of Israel's rural culture when they were in Canaan. The Sabbath, from a practical point of view, provides space for workers, land, and even animals to be in the process of maintaining physical balance. Humans, land, and animals in a chain of processing and production of land products are given a special day to recover. The Sabbath on land is a guarantee system in agriculture where land acquisition is carried out for one year and is not cultivated. The land is left for a year to undergo a recovery process for the sake of soil fertility. According to Hyatt (1971), the practical purpose of leaving the land uncultivated is for the soil to produce its fertility. The soil climate in Israel and Palestine is generally subtropical, so the influence of wind and rain is important for soil aggregation. Leaving the land uncultivated for the time stipulated in the Israeli agricultural pattern is an improvement in the aggregation of the soil, a maximum possible effort, so that the land is recovering.

### **Sabbath in the Moluccan Context**

This analysis's results regarding the meaning of the Sabbath are expressed in several ways: communion with God, social care, economic sustainability, and concern for the environment. These results are now brought into conversation with the Moluccas context, particularly concerning the problem of low congregation attendance at Sunday services, poverty, unemployment, migration, and environmental conservation issues.

### ***Sabbath As Rest and Fellowship with God***

Christians in the Moluccas generally respect Sunday as the Sabbath, and that day is a day of rest, a holy day, so not much physical activity is done. Farmers and fishermen generally do not work, as do traders. Not many shops are open in urban areas where there are many Christians. The analysis results show that the meaning of the Sabbath is not only a break from activities but also communion with God. There is a gap between the concept of the Sabbath as communion with God on a practical level because there is not much physical activity done on Sundays, but on the other hand, based on the authors' observations, the attendance rate in church does not reach fifty percent of the total congregation members.

Novak notes other abuse by liberals and conservatives looking forward to the weekend so they can enjoy their property and bodies. This abuse is based on the concept that a person "owns" his or her body, so they use it to justify practices prohibited by the Bible, such as abortion, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage (Novak, 2005). The situation is more or less the same as marking a Sunday night as a 'long night' so that it is spent staying up late, and as a result, one cannot fellowship with God in Sunday worship. That is why Sunday, as the Sabbath for Moluccas Christians, tends to be a day of rest, which in practice includes rest and communion with God.

### ***Poverty, Unemployment, and Migrant Problems in Moluccas***

The results of an analysis of the meaning of the Sabbath year according to Exodus 23:1–12, especially regarding social care, put forward several humanitarian issues that need to be considered in relation to the context of the Moluccas people, including the problems of poverty, slavery, and immigrants. First, the emergence of poor and enslaved people in Israel was caused by an economic system dominated by Feudalism with high-interest loans. A similar situation emerged as a social phenomenon in Indonesia with the emergence

of online loan applications. In the Moluccas, loan sharks under the guise of Savings and Loans Cooperatives lend money at very high-interest rates, up to 30%; but the government does not have a legal umbrella to restrict them. The Secretary of the Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises, Prof. Rully Indrawan, recognized this. According to him, the practice of loan sharks has claimed many victims, especially the lower middle class, who need fast funds to develop their businesses (Sutiawan, 2019).

In addition, statistical data shows that poverty and unemployment rates are still high. The number of poor people in the Moluccas in 2022 tends to decrease compared to 2021, where in September 2021, the number of poor people was 294.97 million, or 16.3 percent. In March 2022, it decreased by 4,32 million people to 290.57 million, or 15.97% (Tuasamu, 2022). However, this data does not deny that the Moluccas Province still suffers from significant poverty.

Second, data from the Central Bureau of Statistics for the Province of Moluccas shows that the unemployment rate is still high in the Moluccas Province, namely the Open Unemployment Rate of 6.44 per cent. The Open Unemployment Rate in urban areas is higher than in rural areas (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2022). Moluccas Province Central Bureau of Statistics data for 2017–2022 shows the open unemployment rate in Moluccas tends to fluctuate from each regency or city. Males and young people dominate the number of unemployed. Based on the level of education, unemployment is dominated by high school graduates. The distribution of unemployment in regencies/cities shows that the highest unemployment is in Ambon City, and the smallest is in South Buru Regency (Ramly & Ramly, 2022). The unemployment rate is influenced by several aspects, namely the Human Development Index, economic growth, and rising inflation (Saptenno & Maatoke, 2022). Economic growth in Moluccas tends to increase from year to year. Molucca's economic projection in 2022 will grow by 4,44 per cent based on trends and regional

economic indicators, which show an increase in consumption patterns (Soplanit, 2021). However, this increase in economic growth is not in line with the distribution of economic development in the islands in the Moluccas, so it does not contribute positively to reducing unemployment (Cliff et al., 2017).

Third, the terms "children of the country" and "trader people" are still dominantly used to distinguish indigenous people from migrants, both from within the Moluccas and from outside the Moluccas. The fact that there are many immigrants in Maluku, especially in Ambon City, both before the 1999 humanitarian conflict and after the conflict, has contributed to several social problems. Post-conflict migrants, for example, still find it difficult to adapt to local society, thus causing social distancing. Matakana and Matatula (2021), in their research, showed that newcomers in Ambon after the 1999 conflict found it difficult to internalize the value of the lives of *Basudara* people because they were difficult to adapt to and still maintain the customs of their home region (Matakana & Matatula, 2021). Conditions of high social inequality between migrants and indigenous people make it easy for conflicts to occur. Conflicts can easily occur when sparked by religious and ethnic issues, such as the one that hit the Moluccas in 1999 (Irfan, 2022). According to the authors, the meaning of the Sabbath as a form of social care to guarantee the rights of migrants is economically irrelevant to the Maluku context.

The local wisdom of the Moluccas culture shows social concern, namely the culture of mutual help and cooperation called *Badati*, *Masohi*, and *Ma'an*. Mutual help is found in the *badati* and *Masohi* Cultures. Meanwhile, the value of cooperation is found in *Ma'an* culture (Wakano, 2019). Along with the development of science, technology, and information, these values also experienced a shift, especially in urban areas, but in the villages, they still adhered to these cultures. According to the authors, cooperation and mutual

assistance are universal values relevant to the Sabbath's meaning as a form of social care.

### ***Sabbath Hinders Economic Sustainability***

The concept of the Sabbath should ensure economic sustainability for the poor, migrants, and wild animals. However, many workers in the tourism sector only earn sufficient income on national holidays, celebrated on the weekends. For example, the Natsepa Beach tourist destination is crowded with visitors on Sundays, so it contributes positively to residents and increases regional income (Molle, 2020). Understanding the Sabbath as Rest and implementing inactivity on Sundays will hamper economic sustainability. Some people cannot survive because there is no income on that day.

Related to the theme of Sabbath on Land, the people of the Moluccas mostly work as farmers and fishermen. That means the land becomes a place of economic production for them—not only farmers but also entrepreneurs. Selling land at a relatively low price means selling your livelihood and the opportunity to make a bigger profit. The land has a very high economic value and tends to increase over time. The community needs to understand this so that it can guarantee its economic sustainability. That is why efforts are needed to minimize land sales for consumptive purposes. In addition, it is important to optimize systems of joint ownership and management of land, such as *Dati* land. *Dati* land has been passed down from generation to generation and cannot be transferred or traded (Uktolseja & Radjawane, 2019). In addition, the land and sea ownership and management system in the Aru Islands can be used as a reference for how to preserve nature (Soselisa, 2007, p. 45,46).

### ***Sabbath and Environmental Problems in Moluccas***

Global environmental problems such as pollution, climate change, depletion of natural resources, waste, extinction of species, habitat loss, and deforestation are also environmental problems

in the Moluccas. Environmental pollution occurs in the sea of Ambon Bay, with several endangered species, deforestation, garbage, and so on. Understanding the Sabbath as a form of environmental concern encourages the development of a theology that can answer these various ecological problems. Borrong (2019) proposed using the theme of mystical nature as a form of local theological wisdom in the Indonesian context. According to him, theology in the context of an ecological crisis must use all theological approaches from the Bible in practice.

The book of Exodus 23:1–12 is one of the biblical texts that underlie the issue of environmental concern, and the Moluccas context has its traditions related to this issue. *Sasi* culture is local wisdom that preserves nature, so it needs to be maintained. This culture is very important for the sustainability of Natural Resources and supports the community's economy (Sangadji & Muspida, 2019).

### **Reflection, Implication, and Action**

The research aimed at analyzing the meaning of the Sabbath over the land according to Exodus 23:1–12 shows several important things. First, there is a misconception and application of the Sabbath as rest. Rest is meant to have a spiritual dimension as communion with God, not just to stop working. Second, ancient Feudalism has developed into a more modern form with the same usurious practices. The Sabbath on land is related to social concerns and has shifted to rest from work and worship while ignoring social problems. Third, the authors noted the weakness of the social contract governing land ownership. The Sabbath on land guarantees economic sustainability because, ideally, the land is a source of livelihood for farmers and entrepreneurs with land capital, but the community loses its rights to land. Fourth, the Sabbath should be implemented out of concern for the environment. The neglect of environmental issues indicates a misconception about the Sabbath and its observance.

The meaning of the land Sabbath, according to Exodus 23:1–12, reflects several important things. First, there is a misconception and misuse of the meaning of the Sabbath as a rest to justify laziness. Ideally, the Sabbath is a day of rest after six days of activity, and the Sabbath year for the land is a year of rest after six years of tilling. Second, the many practices that impoverish society by fellow human beings indicate the weakness of the social system that regulates life for the common good, including law enforcement against the perpetrators. The meaning of the Sabbath as a form of social care is ideally reflected in the social system of society. The widespread practice of loan sharks under the guise of savings and loan cooperatives, as well as the high poverty rate, show that the Sabbath as a form of social care is still limited to a concept and not at the implementation level. Third, the weakness of the social contract system in society regulates land ownership rights. The facts show that some people easily take shortcuts to get money faster by selling land, which is their 'livelihood' at a relatively low price. The land has economic value as a 'livelihood' but also has an economic value that continues to increase over time. Fourth, the misunderstanding of the meaning of the Sabbath on the land by interpreting the word 'let it go and leave it' as a form of neglect and not preservation. Sabbath on land is a form of concern for the environment that is in contact with ecological issues. Sabbath is not 'rest' so that it ignores environmental issues, but rather 'works' to preserve the environment.

The study of the Sabbath on the land, according to Exodus 23:1–12, has several implications. First, this research gives meaning to the reconceptualization of the meaning of the Sabbath not as "rest" (totally stopping work) but as communion with God. Communion with God is carried out in the form of ritual worship. Thus, communion is an activity of 'work' by the people and the servants. Second, this research strengthens society's social and economic systems and calls for regulations that regulate these systems and take action against social and economic 'criminals.'

Third, this study strengthens the social contract system related to land ownership rights. Fourth, the conceptualization of the meaning of the Sabbath is not 'rest' but 'work' to preserve the environment. The research results show differences from previous studies. Sabbath as 'work' received less attention from previous researchers. Previous studies have generally seen the Sabbath as a spiritual practice, and rest is associated with various aspects. Möller (2019) explains the Sabbath from a Christocentric perspective, with the implication that every believer must obey the Lord Jesus. Meanwhile, de Villiers & Marchinkowski (2021b) aspect analyze the nature and meaning of Sabbath observance in Genesis 2:1–3, Exodus 20:9–11, Deuteronomy 5:12–15, and Exodus 16:1–30 with an emphasis on the spiritual. Meanwhile, Wijaya (2021) focuses on the relevance of religious traditions, especially Shabbat and Nyepi, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Wijaya (2021), Sabbath and Nyepi must be seen as a synergistic call for a balanced lifestyle that is harmonious socially, economically, and ecologically. Bradford (2015) expressed different things by looking at faithfulness to God in Sabbath practice as a matter of equality.

Meanwhile, Woodley (2015) emphasizes the Sabbath's values regarding handling wealth and power. Other research conducted by Moltmann (2016) presents new ideas, namely changing the so-called world religions into earthly religions by respecting the earth. Cafferky (2015) emphasizes that the Sabbath goes beyond caring for others and the environment, with an expansive vision of all the relationships that the concept of Shalom aspires to.

The research results on the meaning of the Sabbath according to Exodus 23:1–12 show a fairly basic conceptual change in interpreting the land Sabbath. Accordingly, the authors formulated several action plans that could be carried out. First, there is a need to reconceptualize the theological understanding of the Sabbath as Rest, not in the sense of stopping work but in communion with God. Reconceptualization of Sabbath theology needs to be done through formal church education, church

policies that foster worship awareness, and new habits for church members. Second, it is necessary to strengthen social systems that promote human values. At the same time, this research encourages the government and related parties to take firm action against moneylender practices that impoverish the community. Third, rights to land with the status of joint ownership by the family, state, and *dati* land must be regulated by standard regulations as a form of a binding social contract for common prosperity. Fourth, it is necessary to proclaim weeks of concern for others and the environment so that the Sabbath is no longer a time of rest but a day and year of action for humanity and the environment.

## CONCLUSION

The Sabbath, according to the book of Exodus 23:1–12, means fellowship with God, social concern for others, economic growth, and concern for the environment. It turns out that interpreting the

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- This research is limited because it examines the concept of the year of the land Sabbath only based on the book of Exodus 23:1–12, even though this theme is generally mentioned in many Bible texts. Likewise, the use of the social sciences and their relevance to the Moluccas context limit the scope of this research. Further research is needed to analyze the theme of the Sabbath year based on other texts or interpret Exodus 23:1–12 using a different hermeneutical method.
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