



Heschel was a Polish-born American orthodox rabbi (1907-1972) and this book appeared in 1951. The advantage with reading 'old' books is their perspectives can challenge our modern assumptions – and we can often spot their weaknesses more easily. I also think it is essential for Christians to read how other faiths approach God for exactly the same reasons.

The Sabbath is a marvellous (and mercifully short) book. It was recommended to me and I bought it many years ago and just got round to reading it last week.

Heschel's whole thesis is that holiness is not found in places or things but in time. Time, he says, is Eternity in disguise. Sabbath is Judaism's cathedrals. So 'images' of God are not possible – God is not a thing, but God's Presence can be encountered in time.

He reminds us that throughout the Bible ("Old Testament" to Christians) places are less special than events in history - generations, moments of awareness. The tenth Commandment is 'do not covet', because *things* are not of primary importance – an injunction that is emphasised in the Hebrew by repetition (Do not covet, do not covet). For the prophets, the Day of the Lord is more important than the House of the Lord. Indeed, at Creation the first six days are described as 'good', the seventh is 'holy'. Creation isn't finished at day six, it needed holiness to make it live, to give it a soul and meaning and purpose.

Heschel rejects the idea that the purpose of the sabbath is to give us a rest to make us more efficient on the other six days of the week. Sabbath is its own thing. He says that preparing for the sabbath is like preparing for the arrival of the Queen or the Bride: not that he wants to personify the sabbath in any way at all, but that it is a period of time that has a different character, a time to be welcomed, embraced and enjoyed. It is a time of peace, of rest, of encounter. It is a sin to be angry on the sabbath. But if we don't mark the holiness of time it is as if we have prepared a room for someone and then they don't come.

Covid has prevented us from visiting our religious buildings or meeting together; it has given our present time a character, so maybe we can be even more alert to Heschel's ideas than we might have been otherwise. We may not want to observe sabbath as an Orthodox Jew but if we can increase our awareness of the reality of time, give it our attention to notice its pace, character, moments of significance, and open ourselves up to its mystery – and even its holiness – we may not encounter the Substance of God but we may encounter the Presence of God and we may find something of that peace that our world struggles to give us.