

Vocation: Labor and Leisure in Christian Perspective

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“Earlier in this century someone claimed that we work at our play and play at our work. Today the confusion has deepened: we worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship.”

(Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, p. 12)

“The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure (*scholé/σχολή*); and he who has little business (*praxis/πράξις*) may become wise.” Sirach 38:24

Gordon: Americans are not weary because their labor is too demanding, but because their leisure is too unrewarding.

V. Pursuing our Divine Calling in all of life, in both labor and leisure

A. Labor

1. Does my labor cultivate the divine image within myself (and/or others)?
 - a. Do I create, judge, maintain, repair/redeem (or learn to do so)?
 - b. Do I *assist others* in creating, judging, maintaining, repairing?
 - c. Do I *encourage/patronize* others who create, judge, maintain, or repair?
 - d. Does my labor cultivate the attributes of the image of God, such as creativity, religious faith, sociability, language, imagination, rationality, music, or aesthetic appreciation (*aisthanomai/αἰθάνομαι* means “I perceive”)?
2. Does my labor cultivate the divine garden without?
 - a. Does my labor develop creation’s beauty (or help me understand/appreciate beauty)?
 - b. Does my labor develop creation’s utility (or help me understand/appreciate utility)?

B. Leisure: Amusement or Recreation?

Aristotle: “Nature herself, as has been often said, requires that we should be able, not only to work well, but to leisure well; for as I must repeat once again, the first principle of all action is leisure. Both are required, but leisure is better than occupation and is its end....Clearly we ought not to be amusing ourselves (during leisure), for then amusement would be the end of life.” (*Politics*, Book 8, part iii, parenthesis mine).

C. S. Lewis: “I agree...that our leisure, even our play, is a matter of serious concern. There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan...I mean that they (games and recreational reading) are serious, and yet, to do them at all, we must somehow do them as if they were not. It is a serious matter to choose wholesome recreations: but they would no longer be recreations if we pursued them seriously.” (“Christianity and Culture,” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper, pp. 33-34).

1. Does my leisure cultivate the divine image within myself (and/or others)?
 - a. Do I create, judge, maintain, repair/redeem (or learn to do so)?
 - b. Do I *assist others* in creating, judging, maintaining, repairing?
 - c. Do I *encourage/patronize* others who create, judge, maintain, or repair?
 - d. Does my labor cultivate the attributes of the image of God, such as creativity, religious faith, sociability, language, imagination, rationality, music, or aesthetic appreciation (*aisthanomai/αἰθάνομαι* means “I perceive”)?
 - d.* “Music” is not really an English word; it is a Greek word, *mousiké/μουσική*, which is derived from the Greek notion of the Muses, as the Liddell-Scott lexicon indicates: “μουσική, ἡ, *any art over which the Muses presided, esp. music or lyric poetry.*” The first-century work on aesthetics attributed to Longinus was entitled, “On the Sublime.” The very concept of music, historically considered, was sublime, not mundane.
 - i. Three categories of music: performance music, folk music (hymns are a form of folk music), commercial music, which appeared for the first time in the era of 1890-1930. Commercial/pop music eradicated folk music from common human experience. My father’s generation was the last to perceive commercial music as something “new.” By my generation, commercial music was the “new normal.”
 - ii. Commercial music is now the almost-exclusive experience people have of music, and its very banality has therefore silenced serious discussion of the matter, as I discovered after a lecture in Denver.

“I have always loved music. Those who have mastered this art are made of good stuff, they are fit for any task. It is necessary indeed that music be taught in the schools. A teacher must be able to sing; otherwise I will not as much as look at him. Also, we should not ordain young men into the ministry unless they have become well acquainted with music in the schools.” Martin Luther, to composer Ludwig Senfl.

“Never has there been so much food and so much starvation, and...never has there been so much music-making and so little musical experience of a vital order. Since the advent of the gramophone, and more particularly the wireless, music of a sort is everywhere and at every time...the loud speaker is little short of a public menace.” Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline*, 1934, 168-69.

“By marginalizing musical production that was not oriented toward the market, the industry rendered such music invisible (or, rather, inaudible) or less legitimate.... Music that was serious, complex, or demanding, noncommercial, or bound to local or regional identities or concerns—such music did not disappear, but it was forced to compete in the new musical culture with sounds deliberately crafted and promoted to capture as large a share of the public’s attention as possible.” David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (2012), pp. 13-14, 54 (parenthesis his). So Mark Katz, “...the technology of sound recording... has profoundly transformed modern musical life.” *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (2005), p. 5.

2. Does my leisure cultivate the divine garden without?

- a. Does my leisure develop creation’s beauty (or help me/us understand/appreciate beauty)?
- b. Does my leisure develop creation’s utility (or help me/us understand/appreciate utility)?

Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (2007).

Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff: How Our Obsession with Stuff Is Trashing the Planet, Our Communities, and Our Health—and a Vision for Change* (2010). She traces the entire path of extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal.

C. Additional Tests (of labor or leisure)

1. Does it make me/others thankful?
2. Does it make me/others prayerful?
3. Does it enhance/increase my/our understanding or appreciation of God, humans, or the natural order?
4. Would I recommend it to others, such as nieces and nephews?
5. Does some individual or group profit from it (especially leisure practices)?

-Dorothy Sayers, “Towards a Christian Aesthetic,” in *The New Orpheus: Essays Toward a Christian Poetic*, ed. Nathan A. Scott, Jr. (Sheed and Ward, 1964, original lecture 1944).

-Josef Pieper (1904-1997), *Leisure the Basis of Culture* (1952), pp. 3-20.

-Walter E. Buszin, “Luther on Music,” *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (January, 1946), 80-97.

-C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, 1961).

-Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Baker, 1995).

-Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, 2001).

-Christopher Boyd Brown, *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

-Paul S. Jones. *Singing and Making Music: Issues in Church Music Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006).

-David K. Naugle (Dallas Baptist University), “A Serious Theology of Play.” <http://208.106.253.109/blog/a-serious-theology-of-play.aspx>

-Scott Aniol, *Worship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Worship and Music* (BHM Books, 2009).

-T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can’t Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010).