



Leisure and spirituality: biblical, historical, and contemporary perspectives, by Paul Heinzman, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2015, 324 pp., CND \$31.25/UK £16.74 (hardback), ISBN-978-0-8010-4872-2

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BOOK REVIEW

Leisure and spirituality: biblical, historical, and contemporary perspectives, by Paul Heintzman, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2015, 324 pp., CND \$31.25/UK £16.74 (hardback), ISBN-978-0-8010-4872-2

While we cannot derive an operational definition of leisure from our discussion of rest, our discussion supplies a wide variety of clues that are descriptive of leisure: a pleasant, secure, and blessed life in the land [...] a rest of completion, not inactivity, such as the Creator enjoyed when the works of creation were completed; a Sabbath rest of peace, joy, well-being, concord, and security; a relief and repose from labors and burdens; a peace and contentment of body, soul, and mind in God.

—Heintzman (2015, pp. 117–118)

This well-argued textbook by a respected Canadian scholar demonstrates the complexity of the Christian spirituality of leisure within the post-secular era. Despite appearances and religious controversies in the social world, Heintzman offers efficiently these following investigations: “How do we understand and practice leisure? How do we forge a lifestyle of leisure and work that is consistent with scripture and respectful of other people and God’s creation? What place should leisure have in Christian discipleship?” (p. 247). In order to make his Christian reasoning, the author, who recovered in the past from a cancer caused by a stressful life, argues that leisure practices combined with Christian biblical observances allow the possibility to heal and overcome hopefully any diseases. Being inspired by the legendary Canadian writer, filmmaker, canoeist, and artist Bill Mason, the author transports us smoothly in his academic leisure universe as part of God’s lifestyle within us: for renewal, for rest; and for appreciating, learning about, and enjoying God and God’s gift of creation.

The textbook is divided into six parts: **Part 1**–Leisure in Contemporary Society: (1) Concepts of Leisure, (2) Contemporary Leisure Trends and Issues; **Part 2** – The History of the Leisure Concept: (3) The History of Classical Leisure, (4) The History of Leisure as Activity; **Part 3** – The Biblical Background to Leisure: (5) The Sabbath, (6) The Biblical Concept of Rest, (7) Other Biblical Words and Themes Related to Leisure; **Part 4** – Leisure and Work: (8) Work Today and the Past, (9) The Biblical View of Work; **Part 5** – Christian Perspectives on Leisure: (10) A Critique of the Concepts of Leisure, (11) Leisure, Work, and Ethics; **Part 6** – A Leisurely Spirituality: (12) Leisure and Spiritual Well-Being, (13) Leisure-Spiritual Coping. The textbook is well organized with many components complementing its contents (i.e. images, figures, tables, acknowledgments, introduction, epilogue, notes, index, and

bibliography), which provide the main structure of this substantial theological and sociological asset.

One of the crucial theological themes of this textbook is the concept of the biblical Creation, the Mosaic Law, and the Sabbath within the context of Alliance with God as a sign of the relationship and the gracious gift of the Heavenly Father who clearly stated the observance of this following command: “Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well may be refreshed” (Exodus 23: 12). In spite of this instruction, the author draws some nuances from that statement, which he says has not be taken literally especially with Jesus’s teachings who said in front of institutional adversities that: “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2: 27). Leisure as the day of Sabbath is not a question of quantity, but quality as the author affirms:

The Sabbath’s one day of rest in seven is not just a day of inactivity. It is not just a time period. It is a time set aside for humans, a time for bringing healing and wholeness. It is the same with leisure. Leisure is not just a quantitative segment of life but also a quality of life closely related to wholeness and fullness. (pp. 102–103)

As a result, leisure should not be cultivated an idolatry obsession of worshiping the false gods. As Master of the Sabbath, the Lord Jesus might affirm in today’s time that leisure is made for humans, not humans for leisure. Thus, the Sabbath as a leisurely day of Jesus’s rest is “to experience one’s God as a God whose very nature is one of rest and to rejoice in and celebrate in God’s gift of creation” (p. 106). Therefore, human rest, restoration, and re-creation are possible for better global health.

Another theme in this tremendous textbook is the focus given to the model of leisure and spiritual well-being where the author develops his own thinking on the balance in life about work and leisure; leisure as time and space for spiritual activities; attitudes of gratitude, openness mind, and celebration of life in all forms; leisure settings with personal or meaning of human history; affording time in being in nature and engaging with it; being away to different environments; moments of solitude and personal reflection for meanings; and connecting with each other. Mostly, these perspectives on their own illustrate the holistic dimension of leisure. We learn particularly that people who lose sight of their spiritual values because of societal pressures of everyday life may employ:

... their leisure as an opportunity to become sensitized or resensitized to the spiritual. This process of sacralisation can ultimately lead to the pursuit of spiritual development. In stressful situations, leisure activities may also “ground” a person and divert his or her attention away from the stress and thus perform a function similar to palliative coping. (p. 239)

As a matter of fact, leisure-spiritual coping resources act as mediating variables through the stress-coping process and take the form of connections with nature, others, and God. This authorizes in the long run a leisure-spiritual meaning making for a hopeful vision of lifestyles.

Nevertheless, this revised textbook (taken mainly from the author’s Master’s degree, but upgraded since then) has some frailness that needs to be overcome. Heintzman relies on three play theorists: Johan Huizinga, Robert K. Johnston, and Thomas L. Visker.¹ Even if this serious work is not on the playful nature of humans, authors such as Eugen Fink, Joseph Lee, Roger Cailliois, Hugo Rahner,

Robert E. Neale, David L. Miller, Fernand Landry, Edmond Robillard, Éric Volant, and François Euvé could have been revisited for a more theological undertaking.² Furthermore, the French Canadian approach about Christian spirituality of leisure is regrettably not addressed in this textbook. Since 1960 and even before, leisure as a sign of times with the perspective of the theological earth realities was a predilection thematic for some priests and theologians within Christianity. The pioneers and makers of meanings such as Gilles Raymond, Jean-Paul Médéric Tremblay, Roland Dufour, André Beauchamp, Maurice Boutin, Jean-Claude Petit, Michel Bellefleur, and Gervais Deschênes,³ to name a few, have constructed their own perspectives on spirituality of leisure and deserved to be acknowledged for their efforts, but unfortunately this textbook does not consider them.

Generally speaking, this thoughtful textbook is designed notably for those who have a high level of integrated faith and spirituality. It is fully documented with many famous thinkers who are quoted like a quilt. Thus, this outstanding and erudite work should be well received particularly in Christian universities and Colleges in North America. In other words, Heintzman succeeds very well in answering with lucidity this difficult philosophical question: “What is leisure?” (p. 54), especially by through the influence of classical thinkers such as Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, and so forth. Reading this relevant textbook gives the opportunity to travel though the historic path of leisure. The author really manages to create his own fruitful Christian thinking about the conceptual intricacy of post-secular leisure. His bright writing style is accessible to the average reader interested in ameliorating their spiritual lifestyle. No doubt this textbook will be a fundamental theological and sociological reference in the near future to be taken into account by those who are interested in Christian spirituality of leisure.

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Notes

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3. Raymond, G. (1961). *La pensée divine sur les loisirs: définitions, finalités*. Montréal, QC: Université de Montréal; Médéric Tremblay, J.-P. (1961, 1965). *Loisir, loisirs*. Ministère de la Jeunesse, Service des cours par correspondance, tome 1; Montréal, tome 2; Dufour, R. (1967). *La spiritualité du week-end*. Montréal, QC: Fides; Médéric Tremblay, J.-P. (1976). *Vienne le temps du loisir*. Montréal-Paris: Paulines-Desport; Beauchamp, A. (1976). *Sur un air de fête*. Montréal-Paris: Paulines-Desport; Boutin, M., Volant, É., & Jean-Claude Petit, J.-C. (dir.). (1976). *L'homme en mouvement*. Montréal, QC: Fides; Dufour, R. (1980). *Mythologie du week-end*. Paris: Cerf; Bellefleur, M. (1986). *L'Église et le loisir au Québec avant la Révolution tranquille*. Québec, QC: Presses de l'Université du Québec; Deschênes, G. (2007). *Le loisir, une quête de sens: Essai de théologie pratique*. Québec, QC: Presses de l'Université Laval.

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