

“The Roman Catholic Church’s Position Regarding Sport and Leisure Practices Before and Subsequent to the ‘Quiet Revolution’: The Case of Quebec in Canada”

As this present Congress is concerning sport activities, I would like, first of all, make some brief connections between sport and leisure. According to Michel Bernard, sport has the appearance of a paradox: it is a word understood by all, but that person, even the most learned scholars, cannot properly define. But the word “sport” derives from the old French word “desport” during the 13th century, and that means all the ways in which time goes nicely such as conversation, distraction, banter and games. In the fourteenth century, the word “sport” pass slowly in England, but keeping the same meaning while giving birth to a British terminology such as “to sport”, “disporter”, “disporteress”. Without wishing to offend anyone, always according to Michel Bernard, sport is presented primarily as a leisure activity: it is practiced or it is appreciated during the free time left by work, family or others compulsory activities. Nevertheless, sport and leisure have a common understanding by the agonal function of play which is represented by its competition goal and means. Sport and leisure are simply the two faces of the same coin: sport typically represents more or less active practices whereas leisure represents more passive practices. Therefore, these two concepts of human activities are categories principle which lead to enriched living and global health fulfillment.

Now, I would like to discuss the ambivalence reflected by the attitude of clerical perception and the intellectual world of leisure in the province of Quebec in Canada. First, the tradition of the Church considered leisure in peripheral or even a dangerous and unproductive activity. However, during the end of Christianity, the Quebec Church seemed to have exceeded this distrust and abolished the distance, recovering leisure under the tutelage of the clergy. So, the Quebec church invested widely in leisure by having rightly or wrongly a dogmatic and moral approach in leisure. The way of thinking in that time can be resumed shortly by this aphorism cited by the Curé d’Ars, now named saint Jean-Vianney, about the dancing status, **And I quote**, “When you enter a dance hall, our good angel left at the door, and a demon takes its place! and soon in the dancing room, there are as many demons as dancers!” **End of quotation**. Thus, during this traditional period, leisure as an earth reality was not regarded as an end in itself but as a subordinate pastoral activity under the depositary of the Church.

In the Quiet Revolution during the sixties, the Quebec Church has lost the institutional control on leisure and became silent by placing leisure on the periphery. How can we today understand it’s intellectual silence when considering the strength of its relative investment during the thirties, forties and fifties? Is it possible that the Quebec Church takes an elaborate speech on leisure only when it exercises control over this human practice? Can it have something to say today even if leisure is expressed in this present post-secular era?

Finally, the reports of ambivalence is manifested in the intellectual world, and this, to leisure milieu as well as in theological circles. With the Quiet Revolution, leisure became secular and autonomous. Obviously, there was a majority trend to study leisure with a management approach that denied the opportunity to links it with a deeper experience and the transcendence. In this sense, this trend would exercise control over leisure, and thereby substitute to the role of the ancient institutional clergy. Perhaps this refusal to see leisure with a religious or spiritual views was marked by an apprehension to return under the yoke of the Church? The leisure management approaches were part of the logic of

production, and in extreme cases, the practitioner of leisure risks being reified, that is to say transformed, into an object of leisure.

Nevertheless, some theorists and philosophical thinkers view leisure with a more critical perspective of the leisure management model. They developed a discourse on leisure from an indeterminate and creative guidance. For them, leisure is an end in itself which could transport a religious and a spiritual sense of meaning. Thus, according to Michel Bellefleur, leisure is like the earthly paradise which exists only crumbs and good moments of life more or less durable. This minority trend allowed to open new horizons and human hope for theological study of leisure.

With this new spiritual and theological approach, we can address some of the problems surrounding the study of leisure. The various actors seek first to define the space of leisure and relationships with other spaces. They set boundaries and want to subordinate other components of leisure. Thus they oppose or separate each other often resulting in a “territorial conflict” which is more or less implicit. This kind of “territorial conflict” may be manifested either by exclusion, isolation or mutual indifference of the various stakeholders concerned by the control of leisure. In most cases, these conflicts arise from competing definitions which usually are initiated by specialists of leisure and not from practitioners themselves in defining leisure in all its dimensions. As a matter of fact, people suffered and are injured implicitly and/or explicitly by this “territorial conflict”. Therefore, the definition of leisure should be created by the experiences of the practitioners in order to integrate a Christian spirituality into the experience of leisure in the specific domain of sport as an earth reality. One of the way to get out of this “territorial conflict” about this church problem is the need to justify the development of a theology of disability which is more than necessary for mental and physical disabled persons.

To open the discussion toward the theology of disability, most of the disabled persons may have asked the following questions like the suffering and questioning of Job: Why did God abandoned me? Where are you God? Does God really exists? Why is this disability happening to me? What I did wrong to deserve this? What is my mission in life? What is the will of God for me? How should I live a more acceptable life for the better? And, finally, is there an eternal life?

Pastoral and spiritual landmarks can help us to overcome these questions. Thus we represent infinitely the Temple of the Holy Spirit as saint Paul notifies, **And I quote**, : “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own ? For you were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6: 19-20), **End of quotation**. As such, the particular practice of sport as a leisure experience, without its hyper competition direction, is a relevant site to do so. We should, as a disabled persons, considered that we are not obsolete, even if the world try by all means to scrap us, as Dr Graeme Watts (2015) affirms, **And I quote**:

people with a disability are often regarded as disadvantaged, sometimes as inferior, not only physically, but socially, and even spiritually. From a spiritual point of view, this reaction has led to disability being linked to moral imperfection, as a punishment for sin, as a test of faith, or an opportunity for redemption through suffering (p. 59) **End of quotation**.

I would like to open here a parenthesis about persons suffering a mental disorder and are also therefore disabled. This group of persons were considered a nuisance factor through history. They were ironically even persecuted brutally by the Christians themselves in the early Christianity because they were perceived as evil and dangerous persons. Things are hopefully changing for them in this present post-secular era. Furthermore, if we do not see explicitly this illness, it can be viewed as a disability because of environmental factors even if it is firstly genetic. It should be emphasized that most of these persons cultivate a religious or an active spirituality which provide them a sense of meaning to life.

We live in a world too serious for the disabled persons because we do not relate to its criteria of overconsumption purposes, high productivity and management rationalities. These characteristics of society encourage in the long run the harmful “cult of normalcy” according to the words of Dr Nicholas Watson, This “tyranny of normality” is conducted mostly by the mechanical *telos* of over perfectionism and narcissistic attitudes that are hidden in each of us, which then shape more or less the whole humanity. It can even become a Babel prides where people struggle for life desperately. Hopefully, we know that we need the grace of the Lord Jesus as He says, **And I quote**, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15: 5) **End of quotation**. It is then important to pray daily by being connected to the Son of Man physically and spiritually.

The sociologist and humanitarian philosopher Edgar Morin (2004) observes that it is important to promote the medicine of love. This medicine of love includes loving life, living to love, and loving the fragile and vulnerable persons which help to create a more healthy and robust society. In that sense, we know when the competitiveness is shut down and when we received the gracious gift of leisure that, **And I quote saint Paul**, “athletes exercise self-control in all things, they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one” (1 Co 9: 25) **End of quotation**. This is why the practice of sport is an important way of asceticism for the glory of God. The aim is not to empower once and for all disabled persons within their hyper-individualistic interests, but rather to facilitate empowerment with the support of the cultural tools that are at the vulnerable population’s disposal. These cultural tools can help them to be healthy and happy within their daily routines and for them to enhance their inner lives for a second life enterprise where, **And I paraphrase saint John**, the Lord Jesus is the light of the world. Whoever follows Him will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life (Jn, 8: 12).

I would like now to conclude with this beautiful statement of Jean Vanier, the founder of l’*Arche*. He declares in his book, *The Broken Body*, **And I quote**:

Our God knows that in so many ways we are lame and half-blind. We will never win the Olympics of humanity, racing for perfection, but we can walk together in hope, celebrating that we are loved in our brokenness, helping each other, growing in trust, living in thanksgiving, learning to forgive, opening up to others, welcoming them, and striving to bring peace and hope to our world. (...) The plan of God is to heal and repair the damages body, to bring it to a new and deeper fecundity **End of quotation** (1988, p. 99-31).

After all, this church problem in Quebec can only be resolved by God's forgiveness and prayers for self-restoration and salvation between each other with this Christian worldview where we realized step by step that everybody is part of the body of Christ. As such, we should appreciate daily, **And I quote saint Paul**, that "if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Co, 12: 26) **End of quotation**. Thank you for your understanding, patience and attentiveness !

References

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