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Leisure Studies and Christian Scholarship: Two Solitudes?

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Abstract

This paper examines the interrelationships between scholarly Christian writings on leisure and leisure studies literature. As an academic field of study leisure studies is a fairly recent development, however throughout Christian history leisure has been considered by Christians such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin. A number of observations can be made from a review of these two bodies of literature. First, although numerous books have been written in recent decades by Christian scholars on the subject of leisure, very few of these scholars have been leisure studies scholars, and in most cases, these Christian writings have not made reference to some concepts prevalent in leisure studies literature (e.g., leisure as a state of mind, feminist perspectives, serious leisure). Second, with a few exceptions, leisure studies literature rarely references these Christian writings on leisure. Third, leisure studies literature sometimes takes biblical verses out of context and portrays the leisure attitudes and behaviours of some Christian groups such as the Puritans in an overly negative manner. Fourth, the recent interest within the leisure studies field of the relationship between leisure and spirituality offers the possibility of some convergence between the two bodies of literature, although the leisure studies literature tends to favour a more humanistic view of spirituality. In particular, qualitative research studies on leisure and spirituality give a voice to Christian perspectives as expressed through the words of Christian participants.

Introduction

A number of years ago, in a discussion of leisure research, Shaw (2000) raised the question, “if our research is relevant, why is nobody listening?” She referred to a study conducted by Samdahl and Kelly (1999) that involved a citation analysis of two journals: the *Journal of Leisure Research* and *Leisure Sciences*. Based on the distribution of studies cited in these leisure journals and the degree to which papers in these journals were cited by publications beyond the leisure studies field, Samdahl and Kelly concluded that leisure research is intellectually isolated from related and important research in other disciplines. As an academic field of study leisure studies is a fairly recent development that emerged in the Twentieth Century (Henderson, 2016) however, throughout Christian history leisure has been considered by Christians such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin. The purpose of this paper, with a much narrower focus than Samdahl and Kelly’s study, is to examine the interrelationships between scholarly Christian writings on leisure and leisure studies literature. Are Christian writings on leisure intellectually isolated from research and literature published in the leisure studies field? In other words, do these two bodies of literature exist as two solitudes? This question will be examined through the consideration of four topics. First, do Christian scholarly writings on leisure reflect and make reference to concepts and theories prevalent in current leisure studies literature? Second, does current leisure studies literature reference Christian writings on leisure? Third, when leisure studies literature references Christian writings on leisure how are biblical texts and Christian groups portrayed? Fourth, does the recent interest within the leisure studies field of the relationship between leisure and spirituality facilitate a bridge between these two bodies of literature? Answers to these questions may help Christian leisure scholars identify: leisure studies concepts and theories that need to be reflected on from a Christian

perspective, leisure studies literature that needs to be critiqued from a Christian perspective, and areas of commonality that provide opportunities to make bridges between the two bodies of literature.

Contemporary Christian Scholarship on Leisure

Although Christians have reflected upon leisure for centuries, since 1950 Christians have begun to develop a more thorough philosophy of leisure. Foundational work was done in the mid-twentieth century by Roman Catholic theologian and philosopher Josef Pieper (1952) in *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* that described leisure as an attitude of mind and a condition of the soul that is rooted in divine worship. The 1960s witnessed two books written by American Protestants. Robert Lee (1964), in *Religion and Leisure in America* illustrated how human time and God's eternity are connected in the Christian use of leisure while Rudolf Norden's (1965) book *The Christian Encounters the New Leisure* argued that Christian vocation encompasses both God's call to leisure and to work.

Christian reflections on leisure were more prevalent in the 1970s and the 1980s perhaps because of the prediction at that time of a leisure society that has not really materialized. Gordon Dahl (1972), a Lutheran campus minister who wrote *Work, Play and Worship in a Leisure Oriented Society* conceived of leisure as a qualitative aspect of human life; a Christian experiences leisure when one comes into complete awareness of the freedom one has in Christ. David Spence (1973) in *Theology of Leisure* suggested "leisure is the opportunity and capacity to experience the eternal, to sense the grace and peace which lifts us beyond our daily schedules" (pp. iv, v). Harold Lehman (1974), a Mennonite scholar who wrote *In Praise of Leisure* saw leisure as God's gift that takes on many different dimensions. Writing on the related topic of play, theologian of culture Robert Johnston (1983) in his book *The Christian at Play* stated that the style of life God intended for us included both work and play in a crucial balance and creative rhythm. Jeanne Sherrow (1984), a leisure studies scholar, in her book *It's About Time: A Look at Leisure, Lifestyle and Christianity*, maintained that leisure is time that God has given Christians to make a difference in themselves, in day-to-day living, in relationships and in the world. John Oswalt (1987), an Old Testament scholar, explored leisure through the themes of creation, grace, freedom, worship and the Christian's calling in his book *The Leisure Crisis: A Biblical Perspective on Guilt-Free Leisure*. Leland Ryken (1987), in *Work and Leisure in Christian Perspective* emphasized leisure primarily in terms of recreation or leisure activity and within a rhythm to life that involves a balance of work and leisure. Roman Catholic theologian Leonard Doohan (1990), in *Leisure: A Spiritual Need*, argued that leisure is a spiritual attitude that must be integrated into every aspect of our lives in order to make us more fully human and more fully Christian.

Since 1990, there have been fewer books written on Christian perspectives of leisure. Ryken's 1987 book was revised and republished in 1995. A collection of academic essays on a range of leisure topics presented at the annual conference of what is now called the Christian Society for Kinesiology and Leisure Studies was published in 1994 and republished in 2006

(Heintzman, Van Andel, & Visker). In 2004 British churchman Graham Neville published *Free Time: Towards a Theology of Leisure* comprised of eight essays that offer a theological reassessment of leisure based on the expansion of free time in contemporary society.

When we examine this list of Christian books on leisure, and also include more popular books (e.g., Hansel, 1979) and books on a theology of play (e.g., Berryman, 1991; Moltmann, 1972; Neale, 1969; Rahner, 1972) only one book, *It's About Time* by Jeanne Sherrow (1984) was by a leisure studies scholar. In Heintzman, Van Andel and Visker's (1994) edited book of conference papers, only six of 20 chapters are by leisure scholars. Furthermore these Christian writings tend to focus on traditional concepts of leisure such as time and leisure activity and have not made reference to concepts prevalent in the leisure studies literature over the last couple of decades. There has been very little Christian reflection on the social psychological concept of leisure as a state of mind, including the concept of flow, or even connections made between Christianity and this understanding of leisure that dominated the leisure studies field in the 1980s and 1990s and is still very prevalent today. There has also been little Christian reflection on the very popular concept of serious leisure and the related concepts of casual and project-based leisure that have been introduced by Robert Stebbins (1982, 1997, 2005) in recent decades and that have been used extensively in social science research.

In addition, there has been little, if any, Christian reflections on feminist leisure perspectives that have been very popular within leisure studies for slightly more than two decades. Of the more recent Christian writers on leisure, Ryken (1995) discussed the feminist work ethic but not feminist leisure. Heintzman, Van Andel and Visker's (1994) edited volume on *Christianity and Leisure* had little, if anything, on feminist leisure. In his book *Free Time: Towards a Theology of Leisure*, Neville (2004) correctly observed that the unique situation of women had not been adequately documented in leisure literature. He wrote critically of a book edited by Barrett & Winniffrith (1989) on the philosophy of leisure for which all nine contributors were male and which did not include any specific discussion of the uniqueness of women's leisure. He went on to ask whether there is any Christian judgment on this and the yearning of many women to change this situation. However Neville's comments on feminist leisure are limited to a few paragraphs at most. When we consider the over a dozen books on Christianity and leisure identified in the above paragraphs, only one was written by a woman.

Reference to Christianity in Leisure Studies Literature

With few exceptions, leisure studies literature rarely references the above mentioned Christian writings on leisure. According to Google Scholar (2015) Ryken's (1987/2002) book *Work and Leisure* has been cited 35 times with 7 of these citations by leisure scholars. Ryken's (1995) follow-up book *Redeeming the Time* has been cited 32 times with 5 citations by leisure scholars. Meanwhile Neville's (2004) book: *Free Time: A Theology of Leisure* has been cited eight times with four citations by leisure scholars. Most of the citations of these Christian leisure studies books by leisure scholars are by Christian leisure scholars. There are a couple of exceptions. One is Pieper's (1952) book, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* that is widely referenced

often with a quotation of his description of leisure as “an attitude of mind, a condition of the soul...a receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative attitude...” (pp. 40, 41). According to Google Scholar (2015) this book has been cited 843 times. Pieper's work is considered a classic within the leisure studies field and his definition of leisure is frequently quoted in leisure studies literature, yet there is little explanation of his definition of leisure within the context of his Christian theology or the 20 centuries of Christian tradition which shaped his understanding of leisure. What is less recognized is that Pieper's understanding is consistent with many other Roman Catholic writers from Aquinas to the present day writers such as Doohan (1990) and others (Billy, 2001; DuBay, 1999; O'Rourke, 1977; Steindl-Rast, 1984; Teaff, 1994). Although Pieper's book is for the most part received favourably within the leisure studies field, one exception is Hemingway (1996), a leisure studies scholar, who is critical of the Pieper's spiritual conceptualization of leisure as he sees it as a subjective, internal mental experience that does not place leisure against the political and social structures of modern western society. However, Pieper makes it clear that his view of leisure is not just internal but is the basis of culture.

The other Christian book mentioned above that is referenced more widely, especially in the past, is Lee's (1964) *Religion and Leisure in America* which has been cited 62 times according to Google Scholar (2015). The remainder of the Christian books are not well known within the leisure studies community.

Christianity Portrayed in Leisure Literature

Leisure studies literature sometimes takes biblical verses out of context and portrays the leisure attitudes and behaviours of some Christian groups in an overly negative manner. The following are two examples.

2 Thessalonians 3:10

Current leisure textbooks sometimes quote 2 Thessalonians 3:10 to illustrate and explain a biblical view of work. For example, Henderson, Bialeschki, Hemingway, Hodges, Kivel and Sessoms (2001) directly quote part of this verse, “If any would not work, neither shall he eat,” to support their statement that “Diligent work is praised as a virtue in several Biblical passages” (p. 112). While Henderson et al. make reference to one other verse (1 Thess. 4:11), the partial quotation of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 is the only direct quotation they make from the biblical record to support their statement. In a more recent textbook, Henderson (2014) begins with the same statement that “Diligent work is praised as a virtue in several Biblical passages” (p. 106) and then gives the saying “If any would not work, neither shall he eat” as the only example. In a discussion of Christianity and work, Goodale and Godbey (1988) do not reference or directly quote 2 Thessalonians 3:10 but they allude to it in a paraphrase: “And Paul, in his missionary work, was quite clear; if you want to eat, then you must work,” and then incorrectly attribute to Paul the phrase from Genesis “From the sweat of thy brow...” (p. 33). In a discussion of the Judeo-Christian view of leisure, Sylvester (1999) also quotes this verse, and includes the two subsequent verses as well:

If any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. (3:10-13). (p. 24)

Neither Henderson et al., Goodale and Godbey, nor Sylvester, explain the context of this passage. While Sylvester does make reference to, and quotes, other biblical passages, the majority of these refer to God's work (Gen. 2:2, 1 Cor. 3:10, Psalm 7:28, Psalm 22:24) or what we would commonly refer to today as spiritual activities (1 Cor. 3:9 Matt. 4:19).

The saying "If any would not work, neither shall he eat" from 2 Thessalonians 3:10 has no doubt been quoted out of context by Christians (e.g., Falwell, 1980) as well as the above-mentioned leisure scholars. This saying occurs in a very specific context where the original readers had a confused understanding of eschatology and expected the immediate return of Christ (Heintzman, 2005). Therefore direct applications of this verse to other contexts require caution. If it is not put into its historical and literary context, the saying definitely suggests a strong work orientation and even sounds overly harsh and callous to contemporary readers including leisure studies students who may not be familiar with biblical texts. It is important to understand this verse within its original context and within the total biblical teaching on work which is conditioned by other biblical elements suggestive of leisure (Heintzman, 2005). Such consideration is especially needed in today's society when students have little familiarity with biblical texts. Furthermore, summaries of biblical themes are more helpful than the quotation of isolated verses when explaining biblical concepts such as work.

The Puritans

In an excellent study published in 2009, Karl Johnson evaluated "several of the most commonly used American introductory textbooks in the field of recreation and leisure studies with respect to their historical treatment of colonial recreation and the Puritans in the United States" (p. 31). He concluded that "most of these texts contain numerous errors with respect to both recreation legislation and recreation practice, effectively perpetuating an ahistorical image of the dour Puritan" (p. 31).

The dour Puritan, it is suggested, functions as a "myth"—i.e., an essentialized narrative that castigates the story's characters in order to serve the storyteller's present purposes.

The Puritans thus function as a proxy for those who continue to advocate instrumental or oppositional recreation ethics, and as a foil to those authors advocating a more expressivist ethic. (p. 31)

Johnson suggested "that this reductivist myth is not only a disservice to our historical understanding of the past, but also to the complexities and nuances of recreation ethics more generally" (p. 31).

Johnson (2009) found that of the eight textbooks reviewed, "some... have more problems than others...but only one... even acknowledges that Puritan historiography and colonial recreation is complex or contested territory" (p. 48). He concluded that "the majority of them do a disservice to the past and arguably are miseducative" (p. 48).

An introductory textbook published in 2013 perpetuates the miseducation that Johnson (2009) summarized. In regards to recreation in early New England it is stated that “Although the settlement in New England also had to fight for its survival, its settlers were Calvinists escaping persecution in Europe. All forms of recreation were illegal, and the Puritan ethic restricted social activities” (O’Sullivan, 2013, p. 27). To state that “all forms of recreation were illegal” is simply inaccurate. Elsewhere in the same chapter, it was written “The reformer John Calvin believed that success on earth determined your place in heaven. With that in mind, extraordinary hard work and lack of leisure time were signs of great success” (p. 25). A reading of chapter four titled “The original Protestant Ethic” in Ryken’s (1987) *Work and Leisure in Christian Perspective* makes clear that this is one of many misconceptions of the original Protestant Work Ethic.

One exception of the treatment of Christian perspectives is Charles Sylvester’s (1999) book chapter titled “The Western Idea of Work and Leisure: Traditions, Transformations and the Future.” Compared to other textbooks, Sylvester, who advocates an Aristotelian understanding of leisure, provides not only a more thorough discussion but also a much more balanced perspective on the Judeo-Christian view of work and leisure. In fact, he draws upon Ryken’s (1995) book *Redeeming the Time*. However such exceptions are few and far between.

Recent Interest in Spirituality by Leisure Studies Scholars

In the last two decades there has been an increasing openness to spirituality within the leisure studies field. Heintzman (2010) has observed that the renewed interest in spirituality may be seen as the recognition of spiritual need and an opportunity for introducing Christian spirituality and the Christian spiritual tradition of leisure, although there are also some concerns. First, there is a need to expand the "interiority" of contemporary discussions of leisure and spirituality and to emphasize transcendence. Second, contemporary discussions of leisure and spirituality often focus on the inner self with little discussion of relationships with others or of community. Third, there is a need to go beyond spiritual experience to spiritual well-being. Fourth, the majority of theoretical reflection and empirical studies on leisure and spirituality has involved nature-based recreation and spirituality. Research is needed on leisure and spirituality in all settings. Fifth, the majority of studies on leisure and spirituality have been small-scale qualitative studies. More quantitative research is needed. Sixth, there is a need within the leisure studies field to make connections with 20 centuries of Christian spirituality. While there are a number of areas of concern in current study of leisure and spirituality that Christians need to be aware of and which they need to critique, they should welcome the increasing popularity of this topic. Christians have an opportunity to affirm what is valid in current discussions on the topic, to build upon what is valid, and to enter into dialogue with others.

Of particular relevance to this paper is the sixth concern identified above. The spiritual conceptualization of leisure is not exclusively a 20th century insight; long before leisure studies became a program of study in the modern university, leisure was associated with spirituality. For example, both Augustine and Aquinas saw the contemplative life, the life of leisure, as important

and essential to the spiritual life. Augustine made the distinction between an active life (*vita activa*) and a contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*). Both the active and contemplative lives were good, but the latter life was given higher status: "If no one lays the burden upon us, we should give ourselves up to leisure (*otium*) to the perception and contemplation of truth" (Augustine as quoted in Marshall, 1980, p. 7). Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) also used Augustine's distinction of the *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*. He located Aristotle's notion of leisure and contemplation in the beatific vision of God (Owens, 1981). Both lives were accepted, but the contemplative life was truly free while the active life was restricted by necessity: "the life of contemplation" was "simply better than the life of action" (Thomas Aquinas as quoted in Marshall, 1980, p. 8). An important theme of monastic life was that of leisure (Leclercq, 1982); *otium* came to be "fused with the contemplative life within monasteries and continued to have an association with learning" (Arnold, 1980, p. 131).

The history of Christian spirituality has much to contribute to the present study of the relationship between leisure and spirituality yet this tradition is largely ignored. In fact, some present day findings on leisure and spirituality merely confirm what has been known throughout the history of Christian spirituality (Heintzman, 2011). At least eight processes that link leisure and spirituality have been identified through empirical research (Heintzman, 2009b). Spirituality is facilitated through: leisure that creates *time and space*; a *balance of work and leisure* in life, in contrast to busyness; leisure settings of *personal or human history*; an *attitude* of receptivity, gratitude and celebration during leisure; opportunities in leisure to experience *nature* and develop a relationship with it; *being away* to a different environment; *solitude* within leisure activities and programs; and activities that help people explore and develop their *connections with each other*. Heintzman (2011) has documented how these processes have been advocated as spiritual practices within Christian spirituality for centuries. For example, researchers (e.g., Fox, 1997; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Heintzman, 2000, 2007, 2012; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992; Sweatman & Heintzman, 2004) have found that solitude is important for leisure participants' spirituality. Such a finding is consistent with Scripture passages such as Jesus withdrawing to the hillside to pray (e.g., Mark 6:46) as well as Christian teaching throughout history. For example, Thomas à Kempis (c. 1379-1471) explained that "The person who wants to arrive at interiority and spirituality has to leave the crowd behind...In quiet and silence the faithful soul makes progress..." (as quoted in Foster & Griffin, 2000, pp. 149-150). John Main (1926-1982) stated: "Now to tread the spiritual path we must learn to be silent. What is required of us is a journey into profound silence" (as quoted in Foster & Griffin, 2000, p. 156). Similarly, Henri Nouwen (1932-1996) wrote "without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life" and continued "solitude allows us gradually to come in touch with this hopeful presence of God in our lives, and allows us also to taste even now the beginnings of the joy and peace which belong to the new heaven and the new earth" (as quoted in Foster & Smith, 1993, pp. 95-97). Examples from the classics of Christian spirituality can also be found to support the other seven leisure-spiritual processes identified by empirical research (Heintzman, 2011). Thus leisure research studies on leisure and spirituality confirm, with a different type of knowledge--empirical

knowledge, the experiential knowledge and wisdom that has been passed down through the centuries in the Christian spiritual tradition.

What is interesting in very recent years is that social scientific studies on leisure and spirituality, especially qualitative ones, actually give voice to Christian perspectives in a way that is more visible than books that have been written on Christian perspectives on leisure. Here are a few examples. In a study designed to understand the meanings associated with recreational experience in U.S. National Parks, spiritual themes were the second most prevalent category of themes. Furthermore, while the researcher attempted to remain open to the many deities that might be mentioned by park users, the spiritual themes were dominated by references to God (Hoover, 2012). In a masters' thesis completed on climbing as a spiritual experience, clear differences were seen between Christian climbers and climbers of other spiritual traditions (Pond, 2013). Nature played a different role for Christian participants as it was not only perceived as Creation and a sacred place but it was helpful in connecting more deeply with God. In addition, climbing and the outdoors was viewed as a means of sharing and teaching their spiritual beliefs, while those of other spiritual traditions did not desire to share or spread their spiritual beliefs (Pond, 2013). A study of canoeists in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, turned out to have a Christian-dominated sample and thus two-thirds of the participants referred to the landscape as the creation of their Christian God (Foster, 2012). In a study of gardening, those participants who held religious views of spirituality, taking care of their garden was a grateful response to God, as illustrated by the following comment: "Gardening somehow or another, it's our way of giving back to God, to the earth, what has been given to us" (Lilly as quoted in Unruh & Hutchinson, 2011, p. 572). Lastly in a qualitative study of spiritual experiences in nature those from a religious spiritual tradition clearly articulated a metaphysical framework in which their experiences were viewed as purposeful and intelligible while those who held a nonreligious spiritual perspective struggled to come up with, or resisted interpretations of their spiritual experiences that would give any more substantial meaning to these experiences other than them being pleasant or extraordinary psychological states. Snell and Simmonds (2012) speculated that "Perhaps religious beliefs serve to legitimize the subjective experience of the sacred by providing a language and metaphysical framework that make it more meaningful for long-term self-development and psychological well-being" (p. 332).

Conclusion

A number of observations can be made from a review of the interrelationships between scholarly Christian writings on leisure and leisure studies literature. First, although numerous books have been written in recent decades by Christian scholars on the subject of leisure, very few of these scholars have been leisure studies scholars, and in most cases, these Christian writings have not made reference to some concepts prevalent in leisure studies literature (e.g., leisure as a state of mind, feminist perspectives, serious leisure). Second, with a few exceptions, leisure studies literature rarely references these Christian writings on leisure. Third, leisure studies literature sometimes takes biblical verses out of context and portrays the leisure attitudes

and behaviours of some Christian groups such as the Puritans in an overly negative manner. Fourth, while the relationship between leisure studies and Christian scholarship in recent decades may be characterized as that of two solitudes, the recent interest within leisure studies of the relationship between leisure and spirituality offers the possibility of some convergence between the two bodies of literature, although the leisure studies literature tends to favour a more humanistic view of spirituality.

A number of implications for Christian leisure scholars arise from the findings of this paper. First, Christian leisure studies scholars need to keep up-to-date in their reading and knowledge of leisure concepts and theories prevalent in leisure studies literature. Second, while Christian writings on traditional understandings of leisure such as classical leisure, leisure as activity and leisure as time are common, Christian scholars need to offer reflections on more contemporary notions such as leisure as a state of mind, feminist perspectives, and serious leisure. Third, in regards to leisure studies literature rarely referencing Christian writings on leisure, Christians need to go beyond publishing their books with Christian publishers and presenting their papers at Christian conferences. Most of the Christian books on leisure mentioned earlier in the paper were published by Christian publishers. An example of a Christian who has not restricted himself to Christian publishers is Hayden Ramsay whose book *Reclaiming Leisure: Art, Sport and Philosophy* was published by Palgrave Macmillan (2005) and whose book chapter titled “Reflective leisure, freedom and identity” appeared in Elkington and Gammon’s (2014) book *Contemporary Perspectives in Leisure: Meanings, Motives and Lifelong Learning* published by Routledge. An example of a conference presentation is Heintzman’s (2009a) paper on Psalm 46:10 titled “Have Leisure and Know that I am God: Hermeneutical Considerations” presented at the 2009 National Recreation and Parks Association Leisure Research Symposium. Fourth, when leisure studies research and literature takes biblical verses out of context or inaccurately portrays Christians and Christian groups, Christian scholars need to be encouraged to publish and present research that puts these biblical verses in context or sheds light on inaccurate descriptions of Christians and Christian groups. An excellent example is Johnson’s (2009) paper titled “Problematizing Puritan Play,” mentioned earlier in this paper, in which he critiques the portrayal of the Puritans in eight leisure studies textbooks. Another example is Heintzman’s (2005) paper titled “In and Out of Context: The Use of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 in Leisure Literature” presented at the Eleventh Canadian Congress on Leisure Research. Fifth, Christian leisure scholars should consider conducting more qualitative research studies on the leisure of Christians that gives voice to Christian perspectives as expressed through the words of Christian participants.

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