

**NEW LEISURE ETHIC: IMPLICATIONS FOR ELDERLY & THE CHURCH****Joy B. Reeves, S. F. Austin State University, Texas****David L. Petty, S. F. Austin State University, Texas****GRANDFATHER**

During my grandfather's waning years, he spoke to me on several occasions about wanting to go out and "kill a bear." I learned quickly that he was not speaking literally, for I doubt he had ever seen a bear. What he wished for was to be able to work vigorously again.

Pappy, as we affectionately called him, had in his younger years led a team of men around the East Texas oil fields building wooden derricks. My dad relates that his team could raise such a derrick from ground to completion in a day.

He instilled in his four sons the importance and the value of good, honest, hard work and he set the model for them. A severe automobile accident, followed years later by a debilitating operation, rendered him partially incapacitated. A decline of body, but not of mind, resulted. He could not "kill the bear" as he so desperately wished, and I am convinced that whatever unhappiness he felt in later life was due largely to his inability to work.

**THE WORK ETHIC**

Many in our society were greatly influenced by our cultural notion of the positive aspects of work. The concept of work, in terms of actions and attitudes, has been very important to Americans. "Seest thou a man diligent in his business?" asked Cotton Mather in 1695, "He shall stand before Kings . . . Let business ingross most of our time" (Heilbroner, 1976:12-E). Those remarks of the famous Boston clergyman and scholar were an early expression of that philosophy embodied in Ben Franklin's counsel, "Be ashamed to catch yourself idle . . . Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry all things new . . . A sleeping fox catches no poultry . . . Time is money (Poor Richard's Almanac, 1757).

Americans have long been known for their dedication to work, and they have traditionally regarded their work habits with pride. It is still deemed honorable to spend long, if sometimes empty, hours in an office or plant pledging allegiance to a "work ethic".

Prior to the Protestant Reformation work

was held in low esteem (Dunn, 1978). For example, the early Catholic view was that God, in driving Adam and Eve from Paradise, ordained that henceforth Eve and her daughters would bear their children in pain and Adam and his sons would earn their bread by the sweat of their brows. Labor, then, came to be seen not as a virtue but as a punishment - a reminder of original sin.

Martin Luther, the religious reformer sometimes credited with creating the Protestant Work Ethic, believed that work was a way to serve God (Dunn, 1978).

Later in the 16th century, John Calvin combined the three theological concepts of (1) the glory of God, (2) predestination and (3) "calling" into the classic statement of glorifying God through labor and hard work. More than three hundred years later, the German sociologist, Max Weber, developed the thesis that Protestantism, particularly in its Calvinist form significantly influenced the rise of modern capitalism.

Thus the concept of work has evolved from the idea of a punishment from God to a righteous, and moral, form of behavior. It was later endorsed by the Church as appropriate and necessary. As Dahl suggested, "religion has played a profound role in convincing modern Americans that their work is both the seat of their dignity and the source of their destiny - as individual persons and a modern society" (1974:6).

There can be little question that the work ethic has contributed to the success of America as a nation. After World War II, for example, a British Parliamentary commission attributed the remarkable momentum of U. S. economic growth in part to its hard-working laborers. Samuel Gompers, the first president of the American Federation of Labor, testified before a U. S. Industrial Commission regarding the superiority of American workers over Europeans:

"In every mechanical trade, when European workmen come over to this country and stand beside their fellow American working men, it simply dazes them - the velocity of motion, the

deftness, the quickness, the constant strain," (Heilbroner, 1976:12-E).

### LEISURE AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM FOR THE AGED

A condition becomes a social problem when the attention given it leads to a definition of the event as problematic. Thus a problem develops whenever people become conscious of events that stand between the way things are and the way things ought to be. In an affluent nation such as ours where leisure is possible but difficult to experience because of our current value system that sanctions work and not leisure, leisure is perceived by many as a major social problem (Kraus, 1978; Brightbill & Mobley, 1977; Neulinger, 1981:179; Compton & Goldstein, 1977; McDowell, 1976). Defining the leisure problem is difficult because it depends on one's concept of leisure. Different definitions of leisure suggest different structurings of reality and consequently different explanations for the leisure problem. A recreation planner who defined leisure in terms of discretionary time may attempt to solve the leisure problem by persuading employers of the value of reducing the work week or by introducing flexitime. Another may suggest expanded recreation facilities because he views leisure as an activity. Someone who perceives leisure in the classical sense, i.e., a condition or state of being in which one is particularly free, may advocate opportunities for self-renewal through contemplation.

Leisure is particularly a problem for people over 65 years of age who have internalized the value of work but not leisure (Boyack, 1973; Gunn, 1977; Hochschild, 1973). The aged segment of our population is growing faster than the population at large and the aged have the greatest amount of potential leisure. The physical health of most elderly is better than generally believed in that 81 per cent are fully mobile and self-sufficient (Butler, 1975). In spite of improved health and increased longevity of the aged, the results of a national study reveal a majority of the elderly desired involvement in formal senior citizen programs but did not participate because several barriers prevented them from doing so. These barriers included such things as the presence of negative stereotypes attached to the aged by the public at large, unawareness of avail-

able facilities, unavailable public transportation, crime, cost of gas, and physical limitations. Gun (1977) stated that the term leisure is often perceived by the aged to be a euphemism of idleness, laziness, and non-productivity; and thus, the aged have a difficult time adapting to what they define as "forced" leisure. The most significant fact about older people is that their bodies have passed their zenith. Any recreational activity that emphasizes physical prowess is often repugnant to them. Some writers allude to the guilt experienced by the aged which keeps them from the fruits of the good life (Butler, 1975; Friedman and Orbach, 1974). The guilt is partly due to the lack of legitimacy accorded leisure in our society (Hochschild 1973). The aged cannot be expected to value something that the larger society does not value. If one has never learned to value and enjoy leisure as a young or middle-aged person the likelihood of enjoying it as an older person is diminished (Mulac, 1977). Pomery (1977) reported in her study of 1,600 elderly residents of public housing that leisure time was considered burdensome because the aged had a negative attitude toward recreation. Older people who have internalized the basic tenets of the work ethic are more likely to suffer socially and psychologically when deprived of their work than those who were not work-oriented in their younger days. For this population, leisure is a social problem of considerable magnitude.

### THE CONSUMPTION ETHIC

One alternative to the work ethic is the consumption ethic, that one has an obligation to society to consume its goods because this will stimulate the economy and thus be functional for society. Whyte's "Organization Man" and Reich's "Consciousness II Man" ideally reflect the operation of the consumption ethic (Whyte, 1956; Reich, 1970). According to Kando (1980) meaning is increasingly found in the consumption rather than in the production. The destructive long-term consequences of the consumption ethic are readily becoming evident. Our productive system has become severely strained because it cannot meet the rising demand of mass consumption. The United States is losing its edge in the world market. Our natural resources are in jeopardy. Inflation appears uncontrollable. Pollution is

rampant. Consumption of products that leave chemical wastes which remain permanently toxic menaces public health. Consumption is even the model for leisure activities. The hedonistic recreation of Americans described by Mills (1970), Sorokin (1947) and Reich (1970) are all expressions of the consumption ethic. The consumption ethic does not appear to be a viable alternative for anyone, but it is especially nonviable for the elderly who live in poverty. One-fifth of the poor are citizens over 65 years of age and half of these live in deprivation (Butler, 1975). A change is needed but what change? And who shall make the change?

### A LEISURE ETHIC

An alternative to both the work ethic and the consumption ethic is a leisure ethic. This proposal is not new for it was advocated by the hippie counterculture in the 1960's and popularized by Reich (1970) and Rozak (1969). Reich predicted a cultural revolution would occur in this country — the new culture would seek meaning in interpersonal and spiritual experiences rather than in technological and financial achievement. Love and faith would replace materialism as a basis for living. The thrust of the movement would be humanistic.

Reich's cultural revolution never materialized, but there is an increased interest in the occult, and in religion generally. (Glock and Bellah, 1974; Houston Post, 1981). The human rights movement and an increased number of civil suits suggests an increasing concern for stereotyping and social inequality. The corporate world has become more sensitive to environmentalist issues and Americans are more concerned about the quality of their lives (Etzioni, 1979; Rosow, 1979). It may be that the cultural revolution never materialized because the humanistic thrust, anti-work ethic, and identification of the movement with hippies were viewed too threatening by the general population.

To make the leisure ethic a more viable alternative, a reformulation of the leisure construct appears to be a necessary first step. The classical notion of freedom from necessity and ennoblement of self should be retained in the construct. Unlike the classical definition of leisure, however, the new construct would re-

move the Aristotelian notion that leisure and work are antithetical and of unequal value. Leisure cannot be made more creative unless work is also made more creative, and thus it is logical to combine the two concepts (Ellul, 1964; Seligman, 1971; Twardzik, 1976; Kando, 1980). By integrating work and leisure, the older person would not feel worthless when he/she retires and equally important, the productive worker would not feel deviant if he chose to work in his/her leisure time.

A normative definition of leisure that incorporates the possibility of work in its definition would seem to be more meaningful than either the residual or the non-normative definition of leisure in addressing the leisure problem as it especially relates to the elderly. Leisure would thus be conceived as a spiritual capacity for freedom that results in self-fulfillment and renewal.

### THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

In addition to reformulating the concept of leisure, it must be accepted and transmitted to people by appropriate agents of social change. This is where the Church comes in.

Leisure behavior is mainly a function of how the religious questions of life are answered, because in leisure one is most free to be oneself. How one should use leisure time is always a moral question. Choice implies the operation of a value system which is ultimately derived from religious sources. This is why the sociology of leisure can be a study of values. The Church's sanction of the proposed concept of leisure and a leisure ethic is reasonable because both religion and leisure emphasize a need for the individual's well-being and self-realization. Both encourage individual volition and expression of inner desires. Piper (1963) suggested that both religion and leisure involve significant attitudes of wholeness, calmness and contemplation. More than any other age group, the elderly have time to contemplate and to reflect about fulfillment and commitment. Psychological blocks that prevent them from experiencing leisure must be removed to permit a free flow of the spirit.

Self-fulfillment comes by integrating all facets of one's personality. By developing leisure and work as important parts of one's lifestyle, each becomes a part of growth and self-identity. The Church, by sanctioning leisure as



well as work, and by providing a nurturing religious community and opportunities for social participation and service, can help the elderly in their search for fulfillment. The Church may help older persons accept leisure without guilt and to use leisure creatively to celebrate life, to recreate meaningful aspects of self, and to renew major life commitments.

We cannot meaningfully participate in leisure because we have been taught to believe leisure is inferior to work, that it should be subordinate to work, and that it is antithetical to work. Large segments of the aged particularly suffer. The leisure problem we have in this country is of our own cultural making, and anything that is cultural can be changed if people are convinced it is necessary and are willing to use resources available to them that facilitate the desired change.

The development of a leisure ethic, one that is amenable to legitimation by the religious community, appears to be a viable alternative to both the work ethic and the consumption ethic. Such a leisure ethic would function, not to replace the work ethic, but to complement it. Given moral sanction by the Church, this ethic could contribute to the feeling of worthiness and usefulness among the elderly; and it could provide them opportunities to celebrate life and to find fulfillment and renewal.

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