

# **Recreation vs. Amusement**

**Christopher Smith**

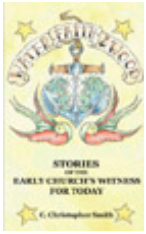
As the Holidays and our winter vacations are almost upon us again, I wanted to share a couple of related thoughts that have been pestering me recently. These thoughts revolve around the issue of how we spend our free time. Maybe it's different for you, but for me one of the things that I'm most selfish about is my free time. So I got to thinking about it recently and the more I mulled it over, the more a distinction started to emerge, the distinction between amusement and recreation. On first thought these two terms might appear to you to be synonymous, but they seem to me to represent two different attitudes with which we approach our free time. Allow me to explain...

Amusement has at its roots the prefix "a-" (which means "not", as in the word atypical) and the word "muse" (which in its verb form means to think or ponder). Putting these pieces together, we can define amusement as an activity done without thinking, or – as it is common to say – a mindless activity. Amusement therefore is a sort of escapism, through which we can escape the realities of the day by turning off our minds. It is a selfish fear of the realities of life, and a subsequent lack of trust in God's provision, that leads us to want to escape into amusement. There is therefore little or no support in the Scriptural story for amusement. If it is our minds that are being transformed (Rom. 12:2), then are we standing in active resistance to that transformation when we seek to "turn off" our minds? Furthermore, the New Testament stories of Jesus and the Apostles demonstrate that their lives were lived with a purpose, and if we likewise are seeking to live according to the Reign of God in all things, can we justify the purpose-less-ness of amusement? Indeed, it is the very purpose-less-ness of amusement that makes us vulnerable to all sorts of evils. How much gratuitous violence and sensuality – in the forms of music, television, movies, books, magazines, etc. – have we subjected ourselves to under the guise of amusement? For me, the answer is "way too much."

In contrast, the roots of the word recreation indicate that it means the process of being created again. Maybe I am off-base here, but it seems that being created anew is an essential part of the process of transformation to which we are called. Although God could not literally be created again, I would argue that God's resting on the seventh day of creation was a form of recreation and was intended for us as a model of the recreated life. The Jewish people demonstrated their commitment to recreation through their practice of the Sabbath. Of course in recreation, it is God and not ourselves who is doing the re-creating. Thus, in contrast to the purpose-less-ness of amusement, recreation involves a very intentional act of allowing God to re-create us. Recreation is, as I understand it, rest and renewal that serves the purposes of the life of the Kingdom; it is reflective and serves the purposes of the Body, rather than the selfish fears of the individual.

The difference between amusement and recreation lies more in the realm of attitudes than it does in practices. Reading a novel or watching a movie can be a recreational activity, if we are willing to engage our minds and think about what is being communicated through the medium of the book or movie. On the other hand, the gathering of our community can become a haven for amusement, if our purposes are nothing more than having "a good time" together. So this winter as our minds turn once again to vacations, let us think about how we are spending our "free time". What habits of ours tend toward amusement, and which ones toward recreation? How can we help each other to begin to move away from amusement and toward practices of recreation? How do we become a people that encourages both corporate and personal reflection?

May we allow God to recreate us and may His Reign be known more fully in the midst of our congregations.



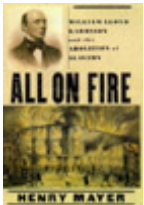
**Water, Faith and Wood:  
Stories of the Early  
Church's Witness for  
Today**

**Christopher Smith  
Softcover, Doulos  
Christou, 2003.**

*Water, Faith, and Wood* attempts to bring the early Church to life. The book is split into two halves. In the first part of the book, Smith chooses to focus on three particular elements of the early Church: baptism, faith, and the cross (or suffering). The second half of the book is comprised entirely of the ancient, original sources (in translation). Here we find Clement's *Epistle to the Corinthians*, Tertullian's *On Prayer and On Patience*, the account of the Martyrdom of Ignatius, and dozens of other primary sources. The finest part of this book, however, is the way that these writings are made applicable to us, today, in our situation. We put down this book having read it, knowing that the things contained within demand a response, one way or the other. And this is what makes *Water, Faith, and Wood* so powerful, and so deserving of repeated readings in the coming months and years.

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**All on Fire:  
William Lloyd Garrison  
and the Abolition of  
Slavery**

**Henry Mayer  
Softcover, St. Martins,  
2000.**

This is the authoritative biography on the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, who not only opposed slavery but also was radically committed to all forms of peace. You will not want to miss the captivating story of the man who once said: "[W]e can allow no appeal to patriotism, to revenge any national insult or injury. The Prince of Peace, under whose stainless banner we rally, came not to destroy, but to save, even the worst of enemies. He has left us an example, that we should follow his steps."

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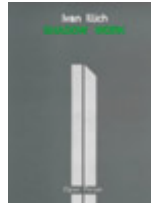


**Communities of Faith  
and Radical  
Discipleship: Jurgen  
Moltmann and Others**  
**G. McLeod Bryan  
Hardback,  
Mercer UP, 1986.**

In *Communities of Faith and Radical Discipleship*, we get to hear about what is inherently *political* in the message of the Cross. Above all, we are challenged by the critical observations of Jurgen Moltmann's political theology, a "Theology of Hope." As Moltmann clearly views all things through the lens of the Cross, from "The Cross and Civil Religion" and *The Crucified Christ*, Moltmann maintains, "The Cross of Christ is the beginning point and the criterion for a Christian political theology" (p38). This book encapsulates the central message of the Cross in our discipleship towards a more Christ-likeness. This little book encourages a more complete awareness of how our individual actions affect others in the everyday while it also does not fail to telescope out into a more comprehensive look at the Church in the world.

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**Shadow Work.**  
**Ivan Illich  
Hardback,  
Marion Boyars,  
1981.**

This is a powerful book, and it clearly illustrates why parallels are often drawn between Illich and the social criticism of Jacques Ellul. Illich's arguments against the economics of the nation-state and for the "vernacular" economics of the household economy come as a refreshing message in the present age of globalization and imperial expansion. Illich has a superb understanding of history, which he skillfully puts to use in defense of his arguments. This book is a must read for anyone struggling to understand their place amidst the economic powers of the world.

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