Physical Responsibility

Syne Altena
Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege

Part of the Christianity Commons, Health and Physical Education Commons, and the Higher Education Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol3/iss3/5
The Physical Responsibility

by Syne Altena
Assistant Professor of Physical Education

Mr. Altena received an M.A. degree in Physical Education from Michigan State University and an M.A. degree in Recreation from Central Michigan University. Before coming to Dordt College in 1968, Mr. Altena taught and coached at Northern Michigan Christian High School in McBain, Michigan. Mr. Altena is a native of Sioux Center, Iowa.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Romans 12:1 (KJV)

What does it mean to be a physical educator? To some it means “fun and games,” while to others it means working out in the gymnasium on a regular basis. To farm kids it may seem like a useless profession: after all, they already have muscles. Others may think of physical education as athletics or sports. Still others suppose that “a sound mind in a sound body” presents a dichotomy. And there are other views. But they all are more or less burdened with misconceptions about physical education and the physical educator.

How then should a Christian view physical education? What is the Christian’s responsibility in regard to the physical aspect of man? How important is our body, really? And who made this body? Psalm 100:3 says, “Know ye that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” And Genesis 2:7 tells
us, “And the Lord God formed man of the
dust of the ground, and breathed into his
nostrils the breath of life; and man became
a living soul.” The biblical answer is that
God made us. But if God made us, then
our bodies are important (Rom. 12:1), and
we do have a responsibility to our Maker.
This is where Christians often fail. Should
one exercise? Is physical fitness important?
What about smoking, or the use of alcohol
and other drugs?

Let us see what Scripture says con-
cerning these problems. I Corinthians 6:20b
says, “therefore glorify God in your body,
and in your spirit, which are God’s.” And I
Corinthians 6:19 says, “What? know ye not
that your body is the temple of the Holy
Ghost which is in you, which ye have of
God, and ye are not your own.” Proverbs
23:21 says, “For the drunkard and the
glutton shall come to poverty.” These all
speak, directly or indirectly, to the prob-
lem of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, fornication,
and overeating.

There are many more commands and
guidelines in Scripture, and on the basis of
these I would like to present my philosophy
of physical education as I see that it applies
at Dordt College.

Physical education should be educa-
tion about and through our physical body.
I am convinced that people need to know
about physical activity so that they can
make proper decisions. If one wants to en-
gage in physical activity one should know
the long and short term effects of both
exercise, and of smoking, of alcohol, and of
other drugs. If a Christian is to make an
intelligent decision regarding physical ac-

tivity, it is essential that he be well informed.
And physical education must be through
physical activity, simply because physical
activity is the medium for the physical
educator.

But I believe that the Christian physi-
cal educator has further opportunities and
obligations. He must also educate socially,
intellectually, psychologically, emotionally,
and confessionally. To organize a team
takes real cooperation and teamwork. It
takes a good mind to understand defenses,
offenses and fast breaks. It takes psycholo-
gical building up to persist to the end in a
four-mile race. Think also of the emotional
strain of losing a close game. We must,
therefore, show in all our activities that we
are Christians. If the physical educator then
tries to develop the whole person, the
charge that we have a dichotomy between
mind and body certainly does not hold.

It is this philosophy of educating the
whole person that guides us at Dordt Col-
lege. This is also reflected in the activities
of our Physical Education Department.
Physical education activities reflect the
instructional part of the program, in which
healthful living, wise use of leisure time, the
various skills and the why and how of physical activity are taught.

"It is this philosophy of
ing the whole person
that guides us at Dordt College. ... Phy-
sic education activities reflect
the instructional part of the pro-
gram, in which healthful living, wise use of leisure time, the
various skills and the why and how
of physical activity are taught."

Physical education activities reflect
the instructional part of the program,
in which healthful living, wise use of leisure time, the
various skills and the why and how
of physical activity are taught. In intramurals
fun and enjoyment are stressed. In sports
clubs leadership ability and individual tal-
ents are developed, both of which are im-
portant in the Christian community. In
athletics we develop competitiveness, with
concentration on the achievement of whole-
person development in very concrete situa-
tions. Recreational activity helps us learn
to use our leisure time wisely. And in our
major, minor and specialist programs we
train young men and women to teach others
to develop as whole persons for the Lord.

The Dordt student has an opportunity
carly to glorify God with the body God has
created. What will happen to this physical
body, and how important is the body?
I Tim. 4:8 states, “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” And Eccl. 3:20 says, “All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.” This puts our body into perspective quite well, and should warn us never to make an idol of our body.

Finally I would like to express a few thoughts concerning how a Christian ought to use his free time. The greatest threat to American society may be the increase in leisure time. It is true that next to the abundance of material things, the most significant characteristic of the American scene is the abundance of free time. Among the apparent causes are automation, and rapid transportation, and, unfortunately for many, unemployment can be added.

Frederick Dewhurst, comparing the sources of energy contributing to work output, indicates in the figures below the longterm trend which automation causes in our activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>source of energy</th>
<th>in 1850</th>
<th>in 1900</th>
<th>in 1950</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>human</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>animal</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inanimate</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>98.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We then face the moral problem of what to do with our leisure time. Robert Lee quotes R. W. Spike as follows:

There are two conflicting motifs that characterize American leisure time: first, a great sense of vacuity, of time emptied of meaningful activity; and second, an impression of determined frenzy to relax, to unwind, to do something different.

Lee then presents his view:

The moral problem is complicated by the fact that while Christians, especially since the Protestant Reformation, have developed a sizeable body of literature to provide moral guidance with respect to work or vocation, any such doctrine or direction for our leisure or avocation is lacking. Modern Western industrial civilization has a work ethic, which, of course, is a curious compound of Puritan and bourgeois values. But when it comes to a morality or ethic of leisure, we face an alarming vacuum. We are confronted clearly with what might be called a “theological lag” in which theological and ethical thinking lags behind rapid social changes. This is obviously an instance in which the pace of historical, technological, and social change has far outrun the pace of theological and ethical thought.

And how ought a Christian to use his leisure time? The new leisure revolution ushers in a rare opportunity for us to proclaim the Lordship of Christ over all of time, over history, and over our personal destiny, and it gives us a new challenge to witness to the world. Leisure can be used to extend the Sabbath by weekday retreats, prayer breakfasts, downtown noon services, and week night services. Leisure time can also be used to recreate ourselves through exercise, relaxation, art, music, and reading. And, of course, there are many other ways we can use this abundance of leisure time.

As Christians we must make wise and careful decisions regarding our physical activities, and it is my hope and prayer that we may all make the proper decisions for our own personal lives.

FOOTNOTES

3. Ibid.