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Syne Altena
Dordt College

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The Physical Responsibility

by Syne Altana
Assistant Professor of Physical Education



Mr. Altana 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. Altana taught and coached at Northern Michigan Christian High School in McBain, Michigan. Mr. Altana 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)

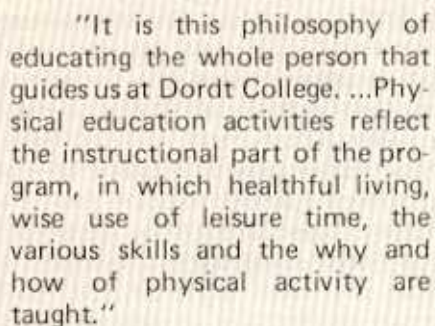
• What does it mean to be a physical educator? To some it means "fun and games," while to others it means working out in the gymnasium on a regular basis. To farm kids it may seem like a useless profession: after all, they already have muscles. Others may think of physical education as athletics or sports. 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 concerning 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



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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 problem 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 education 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 activity, 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 physical 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 psychological 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 College. 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. In intramurals fun and enjoyment are stressed. In sports clubs leadership ability and individual talents are developed, both of which are important in the Christian community. In athletics we develop competitiveness, with concentration on the achievement of whole-person development in very concrete situations. 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 truly 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 below¹ the longterm trend which automation causes in our activities:

source of energy	in 1850	in 1900	in 1950
human	13.0%	5.3%	0.9%
animal	52.4%	21.5%	0.6%
inanimate	34.6%	73.2%	98.5%

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.²

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.³

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

1. Frederick K. Dewhurst and Associates. 1955. America's Needs and Resources. The Twentieth Century Fund, New York, p. 908.

2. Robert Lee. 1964. Religion and Leisure in America. Abingdon Press, Nashville, p. 22.

3. Ibid.