

Babeş-Bolyai University
Faculty of Orthodox Theology from Cluj-Napoca
“Isidor Todoran” Doctoral School of Theology

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

Doctoral Supervisor:

Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Ştefan Iloaie

Candidate:

Pr. Drd. Lupaşcu Gabriel- Ionuţ

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"The Time That Has Been Given to Us"
A Theology of Leisure: Moral and Spiritual
Reflections on Time in Postmodernity

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Abstract

The dissertation “The Time That Was Given to Us. A Theology of Leisure. Moral and Spiritual Considerations on the Use of Time in Postmodernity” provides a theological and moral analysis of how contemporary people live their leisure time in a society marked by consumerism, digitalization, and spiritual fragmentation. The study explores the historical evolution of leisure, reflecting on its anthropological, social, and religious dimensions. Starting from a theological understanding of time as a divine gift, the thesis proposes a Christian model of leisure as a space of responsible freedom, sanctification of daily life, and anticipation of eternity. Special attention is given to the different stages of human life and their specific challenges, offering moral and spiritual guidelines for an authentically Christian life in postmodernity.

Keywords

Leisure, Orthodox theology, Postmodernity, Spiritual life, Christian morality, Theological anthropology, Religious education, Eternity

Summary

Introduction

This research is driven by several realities of contemporary life, the foremost being the devaluation of leisure time and the loss of its deeper meaning. In the postmodern era, leisure is either neglected or used in ways that fail to bring genuine fulfillment. Many people experience chronic fatigue, and their free time does not provide the inner rest they truly need. This study aims to rediscover the sacred dimension of leisure.

Leisure is often seen as a space for consumption rather than reflection. Sociologists like Gilles Lipovetsky have highlighted how leisure has become trapped in the logic of consumerism—transformed into time devoted to shopping, compulsive entertainment, and passive distraction. Instead of serving as a moment of spiritual reconnection, leisure is frequently wasted. The impact of technology and digitalization has fragmented leisure and overstimulated it. Social media, video games, and streaming platforms have turned free time into a space of digital consumption, often distancing individuals from themselves and from others. This research will explore how a more balanced relationship with technology can be cultivated, and how leisure can be reclaimed as a time for authentic growth.

The need for a theological perspective on leisure

Although there are numerous sociological and economic studies on leisure, its moral and spiritual dimensions remain underexplored. This research aims to make an original

contribution by integrating theology into the discourse on leisure, offering a Christian vision of how it can be used consciously and responsibly.

In the Christian tradition, time is a divine gift, and the way it is used reflects an individual's values and priorities. Since this work is grounded in theology, it will emphasize leisure as a space for sanctification, service, and preparation for eternal life—highlighting that the way we spend our free time has eschatological implications. Many people feel an inner void despite having countless options for spending their leisure time. This study will argue that this lack of meaning stems from a shallow understanding of leisure, and that a moral and spiritual approach may provide a solution to the existential crisis faced by many today.

This research seeks to offer a deeper perspective on leisure, moving beyond current sociological and economic frameworks to propose a model grounded in theology, ethics, and morality. By analyzing leisure as a divine gift and a moral responsibility, this work will contribute to a better understanding of how people can live more balanced lives, integrating leisure into their spiritual journey.

I. Chapter I

The first chapter establishes the general conceptual framework of the research, offering an interdisciplinary analysis of the notion of leisure, with a particular focus on its theological, philosophical, and moral implications.

The discussion begins with a reflection on the concept of time itself, examined from various perspectives—philosophical, theological, existential, and cultural. Time is understood both as an objective, measurable reality and as a subjective experience, deeply connected to human consciousness and condition. The chapter highlights the tension between chronological time (chronos) and existential or salvific time (kairos), emphasizing how Christianity brought new meaning to time by orienting it toward eternity and spiritual fulfillment.

The chapter then explores the concept of freedom, beginning with its fundamental meanings: external freedom (political, social) and internal freedom (moral, spiritual). A key distinction is made between the secular notion of freedom as the ability to do anything and the Christian understanding of freedom as the ability to choose the good. This distinction is essential for a theological understanding of leisure, which is not merely a suspension of obligations but a space where authentic human freedom can be expressed in communion with God and others.

The section dedicated to leisure examines how this concept has evolved and been perceived in various cultural and social contexts. Leisure is presented as a complex reality that encompasses rest and recreation as well as activities aimed at personal, spiritual, and

communal development. The chapter underlines the ambivalence of leisure: on one hand, it can become a space for wastefulness and hedonism, but on the other hand, it can serve as fertile ground for deepening one's relationship with self, others, and God.

The final part of the chapter specifically addresses the theology of leisure, emphasizing that from a Christian perspective, leisure is not merely an escape from work, but an opportunity for encountering the sacred—through contemplation, prayer, communion, and holy rest. Reference is made to the biblical model of divine rest on the seventh day, as well as patristic teachings on the balance between action and contemplation. In this light, leisure takes on a profound moral and spiritual dimension, seen as a vocation to use the gift of time wisely, with gratitude and discernment.

Overall, this chapter provides the theoretical foundation for a moral and theological approach to leisure, paving the way for a coherent Christian understanding of how the postmodern individual is called to live out their freedom within the time they have been given.

II. Chapter II

This chapter offers a comprehensive historical overview of the evolution of the concept of leisure, analyzing how different eras and social or religious systems have understood, structured, and valued this aspect of human existence.

In Antiquity, leisure was the privilege of a select elite who used it for contemplation, education, and civic engagement. The distinction between work and *loisir* held deep cultural and philosophical significance. The Greco-Roman model shaped a society in which leisure was essential for the formation of the citizen and intellectual development—yet it remained inaccessible to the majority.

The Middle Ages brought a spiritual reconfiguration of leisure, where the rhythm of life was guided by the religious calendar, and recreational activities often had sacred or communal dimensions. The Rule of Saint Benedict, for instance, introduced a balanced approach to work, prayer, and rest, reflecting an integrated vision of time. Festivals, pilgrimages, and other forms of religious leisure played vital roles in maintaining social cohesion and offering sacred and symbolic anchors in everyday life.

Modernity marked a radical shift in the understanding of leisure with the rise of capitalism and the transformations brought by the Industrial Revolution. Within this context, the Protestant ethic contributed to a redefinition of the relationship between work and leisure, emphasizing the value of time as an economic resource. Work became central, and leisure acquired an ambivalent character—viewed either as a means of recovering labor power or as a

space for consumption and socialization. This period also witnessed a clear separation between work and leisure, alongside a diversification in the ways leisure was spent: from private life within the household and its associated values of domesticity and etiquette, to public cultural and social expressions of leisure.

The 20th century introduced yet another shift, driven by the rise of consumerism and the virtualization of everyday life. Leisure often became a vehicle for consumption, as individuals were enticed by an increasingly diverse array of products and experiences. Simultaneously, with the advancement of technology, the concept of “virtual time” emerged—a new space for leisure activities, but also a fresh challenge to the moral and spiritual discernment of the modern person.

In the chapter’s concluding section, it is emphasized that leisure, far from being a mere pause from labor, profoundly reflects the dominant values of a given era. The ways in which societies have organized and interpreted leisure offer revealing insights into their understanding of the human person, of work, spirituality, and community. This historical perspective lays the groundwork for the theological and moral reflections that will follow in the later parts of this work.

III. Chapter III

Chapter III of the thesis, titled “Human Life and Leisure Time,” represents the core of the study, offering a profound and well-articulated analysis of how leisure is experienced and perceived across the various stages of human life. The author presents a synthesis of the psychological, social, and theological dimensions of leisure, proposing an integrative vision in which freedom, responsibility, and spiritual orientation are coherently intertwined.

The chapter begins with childhood, described as the essential formative stage where the foundations for how one relates to time, freedom, and spirituality are laid. From a psychological standpoint, children do not have a clear perception of time; they live primarily in the present and are deeply influenced by emotional and familial rhythms. From a Christian perspective, childhood is a privileged and blessed stage, where the purity of the heart is cherished in the Gospel (“Unless you become like little children...”). In this context, leisure plays a vital role in religious education, serving as a space where the values of faith, community, and inner balance can be nurtured. At the same time, the author warns of the risks posed by the digital age, in which children’s leisure time is often hijacked by excessive technology use, exposing them to early temptations and alienating them from authentic values.

Adolescence is portrayed as a turbulent stage, marked by the search for identity, the need for affirmation, and age-specific crises. Leisure time takes on an ambivalent function: on one hand, it can foster maturity through beneficial activities (reading, volunteering, group life), but on the other, it may be overtaken by shallow entertainment culture or misguided identification with virtual “heroes” who lack strong moral foundations. Teenagers are often drawn to role models promoted by mass media—figures that contrast sharply with traditional spiritual and moral values. In this sense, the Church's involvement becomes crucial—offering stable reference points, encouraging participation in community life, and fostering a sense of responsibility. Volunteering is promoted as an ideal form of leisure, capable of developing empathy and civic awareness.

Adulthood brings different challenges. Individuals are caught between professional pressures and family responsibilities, making the management of leisure time a matter of balance. The importance of harmonizing work, rest, and spiritual fulfillment is emphasized, with the author insisting that leisure should not be reduced to mere escapism. Rather, it should be seen as an opportunity for inner renewal and for strengthening one's relationship with God. Hobbies are valued as expressions of creativity and active rest, provided they do not become obsessions or lead to self-isolation. Vacations are also analyzed from a spiritual perspective: they can be moments of deep reconnection with the divine and with family, or they can devolve into exhausting superficiality if guided solely by consumerism and escapism.

In old age, leisure time increases quantitatively, though not necessarily qualitatively. Retirement brings with it the risk of isolation and a sense of uselessness, but also the possibility of reconfiguring life around service, prayer, and social engagement. The spiritual value of old age is highlighted as a time of wisdom and preparation for eternity. The author addresses the dangers of boredom and resignation, while also pointing to the sanctifying potential of this stage—if lived in communion with God and with others. The Church has a dual role: to honor the contribution of the elderly and to offer them spiritual and emotional support in the face of illness, loneliness, and suffering.

A distinct and profound section is dedicated to death and eternal life, understood as the fulfillment of time's ultimate purpose—including leisure time. The author proposes a theological vision in which leisure becomes a quiet but essential preparation for eternity. How a person spends moments of rest, silence, or contemplation reveals much about their inner state and spiritual orientation. Leisure thus becomes an anticipation of eternity, a foretaste of rest in God. The chapter also explores the tragedy of those who, though they appear to have

“free time,” are not truly free—due either to external constraints or to being trapped in selfishness or apathy.

The chapter concludes by emphasizing that leisure is not an “empty” or “neutral” period, but rather an essential dimension of life that must be understood, cultivated, and valued in the light of faith. At every stage of existence—from childhood to old age—leisure reflects, to some extent, the state of the soul and the deeper orientation of one's life. Leisure becomes not only a barometer of personal values but also a path to sanctification, humanization, and encounter with God.

Conclusions

Regardless of the context in which they live, their age, or their economic and social status, time remains an exceptionally valuable resource for all people. While the needs and expectations of the world are endless, time is finite and irreversible. For this reason, whether it concerns work time or leisure time, people must manage it wisely so that it brings them—and those around them—fulfillment and satisfaction.

Given that the contemporary world increasingly values speed and efficiency, while people themselves seem ever more exhausted and hurried, burdened by growing responsibilities and concerns, this academic endeavor sought to analyze leisure time from a theological perspective. The aim was to explore how leisure can best be used in today's world to support the pursuit of spiritual wholeness.

Over time, various scholars have approached this topic from sociological, philosophical, and psychological perspectives, but it has yet to be examined thoroughly from a theological standpoint. Therefore, although this is not the first doctoral thesis in Romania addressing leisure time, our work is unique in that it integrates theology into the broader academic conversation alongside the social and human sciences within the university setting—bringing even these auxiliary fields some fresh insights.

Far from claiming to be exhaustive, this work holds significance for the Romanian academic landscape because, for the first time in the specialist literature, it brings together multiple perspectives on leisure and unifies them in a coherent whole—placing everyday human activity in relationship with God and eternity, as the ultimate fulfillment of leisure time.

Considering all the aspects discussed throughout this thesis, we can conclude that leisure cannot be reduced to a mere pause from work or daily responsibilities—nor seen as a fleeting luxury during which a person is free to do whatever they want without responsibility.

Rather, leisure represents a meaningful opportunity for growth: to learn new things, to bring joy to others, to contribute to the Church and to society, to rediscover God, and to rediscover oneself—as a foretaste of our life together in the Kingdom of God.

Leisure is not merely an escape from routine and monotony; it is a sacred space for deification (theosis) through purposeful action—modeled on God Himself, who, through His work, created the world, and through His rest, remained close to it, in both good times and bad, throughout all of history. To be free does not mean to be free of responsibilities or concerns, but to carry them with wisdom and balance, together with loved ones, toward the fulfillment of all things.