

# How the Views of Rosemary Ruether and Josef Pieper Can Help Us to Restore Harmony and Accommodate Leisure Time in Our Busy Lives

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## ABSTRACT

Twentieth-first century society seems to be advancing and changing on a daily basis. The expectation and needs of culture often clash with technology, the latter constantly improves. Distractions from technology, demanding jobs and other pressures leave people with progressively less time to restore harmony in their lives and accommodate leisure time in today's world. The views of Rosemary Ruether and Josef Pieper explain how people can achieve a harmonious life and implement leisure in today's society.

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## 1. Introduction

Twentieth-first century society seems to be advancing and changing on a daily basis. The expectation and needs of culture often clash with technology, the latter constantly improves. Distractions from technology, demanding jobs and other pressures leave people with progressively less time to restore harmony in their lives and accommodate leisure time in today's world.

Many theologians and philosophers address how people can re-discover and restore harmony in their lives. According to Rosemary Radford Ruether, it "is essential to the human capacity to invent artifacts and ways of behaving that incrementally improve daily lives" (Ruether, 1992, p. 15). However, as people are reinventing and improving their lives, they must also consider how these experiences can restore overall happiness and how ongoing progress will affect the future of the world. It is also interesting to consider whether people also extend their compassion to reach out to other people as well as the planet.

As people continue with their daily lives, they also need to find time for leisure. People find it a struggle today to find a balance between work and free time. In Josef Pieper's view, it is essential for people to find this balance because "work is the means of life; leisure the end" (Pieper, 1998, xii). It is inevitable that in time, people will realize that every moment of life continues and adds to their story (Campbell & Moyers, 1988, p. 31). Humanity's own mythology continues to grow, though perhaps sometimes, people forget to take time to watch the sunset or glance at the stars.

An examination of these theologians' ideas can help us to better understand humanity in today's fast-paced world. They explain what is distracting today's society, and how people can find time for harmony and leisure. Finding this avenue might just explain the state of affairs for people, and the next steps that can be taken and the effects of future generations of human kind.

## 2. Rosemary Radford Ruether – Restoring Harmony in People's Lives

As we explore how people can restore harmony in their lives, it is important to understand the background of Rosemary Radford Ruether, her theories and philosophy. Ruether is an ecofeminist theologian, and she explores how people can find happiness and community in their lives. She also examines the relationships between gender, nature and religion, and "challenges popular notions of...notable myths and rivals" (DeRoche, 2005, p. 138). In one particular book, *Gaia and God*, she discusses how individuals can connect with their genuine perspective on life. She also suggests that people have a quest in life. In her mind, "the goal of the quest is earth healing, a healed relationship between humans and the earth" (Ruether, p.1).

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Ruether claims that the American family is also a significant contributor in the continuing quest for harmony (Hawkins, 2001, p. 37). According to Nancy Hawkins, Ruether challenges people to "rethink their presuppositions concerning the contemporary American family" (p. 35). She thinks that today's Christian family is modeled after the Victorian age, and she traces the structure of the family back to the Jewish and Greco-Roman times (35). As we know from the changes in society, these models and structures have changed. "They have evolved and have contributed to some major deviations in the family unit. In Hawkin's opinion, Ruether is claiming that "there is instability within the American family" (p. 35).

The reason for this instability is because households are consistently meeting the needs and wants of society resulting in less and less time for people to share together. In Ruether's view, people can re-create their family life with just a little bit of imagination. This might involve celebrating moments that typically would not otherwise be celebrated. According to Hawkins, Ruether feels that "as our family structures are realigned and re-envisioned, our entire society will benefit" (35). If people can implement a little imagination within the dynamics of their households, they will not only restore harmony for their families, they will have an effect on society. According to Nancy Hawkins, "Ruether is hopeful for the future of the contemporary family" (p. 35).

In her explanation of her philosophy of the American family, Ruether also addresses the impacts of American history, progress and environmental concerns. According to Isaac Weiner, Ruether suggests that sometimes it is difficult for people to restore harmony in their lives, particularly in the U.S., because of a "fundamental contradiction at the heart of American history" (Weiner, 2008, p. 736). On the one hand, he notes that the U.S. has proclaimed itself as specifically chosen by God to help other people in the world, while on the other; it has implemented policies that have sometimes caused harm (p. 736).

The decisions of politicians may introduce more technological progress, and this progress may improve people's lives to some extent. However, it can also be a distraction for people as they search for a balance in their lives. At the same time, progress may be changing the environment, and once the earth is changed, it can never be restored.

As progress advances, technology helps and hinders people's lives. In *Gaia and God*, Ruether discusses how people once believed that technology was the answer to all the issues of the day. In her mind, "in the last quarter of the twentieth century, this dream of infinite progress began to turn into a nightmare" (Ruether, 1992, p. 199). It is interesting to consider whether she thought that people relied too much on technology to make their lives happy. Perhaps, too much reliance on the instant gratification of texting and checking e-mail, and other social media technology distracts them from enjoying real life's genuine conversations and experiences.

After decades of technological progress, one might think that technology should have solved many of the world's problems. On the contrary, however, it has created a negative effect on the quest of self-understanding. These problems extend from a personal level to a society-wide range. In Ruether's mind, "western elites imagined that this technological way of life would gradually conquer all problems of material scarcity and even push back limits of human mortality" (p. 199). Even though this progress has led to wealth and prosperity, it has not solved all problems for all people. It has especially not helped in their discovery of their own perceptions, visions and self-awareness of faith and beliefs. Instead of relying on technology, there should be a movement for a "new society and spirituality...to allow every voice to be lifted, to gather together in mutual interaction and transformation the many cultures of humanity" (Ruether, p. 11). In other words, technology has interfered with earth healing.

Technology has given people the power to exploit lands, like mining for gold or cutting down trees in a forest. Ruether claims that "what modern science and industrialism have added is not so much new forms of domination, as the enormous increase in the productive and destructive power and the lengthening of the lines of hierarchical exploitation" (Ruether, p. 201). Ruether goes on further to say that people need to unite to make sure that the earth does not suffer from future exploitation. "We ultimately have to think and also act globally as well as locally" (p. 272). This unity can restore harmony in some people's lives. As Ruether argues, "being rooted in love for our real communities of life and for our common mother, Gaia, can teach patient passion, a passion that is not burnt out in a season, but can be renewed season after season" (p. 273).

As people restore happiness and peace to their lives, it is also important to ensure that future generations have the same opportunity. "Our revolution is not just for us, but for our children, for the generations of living being to come" (p. 274). People can do this by improving the well-being of the earth. Even though, there are no guarantees of the success of all environmental efforts, people can still experience a sense of gratitude that they are contributing to the world in a positive way. People should remember to take care of the environment by preserving the "land for all the children and love it, as God loves us all" (Campbell & Moyers, p. 35). For Ruether, women are at the forefront in restoring in harmony in their lives with their efforts and involvement in environmental conservation. She claims, "You can't do justice work in the environment and leave out half of the world" (Hinton, 2002, p. 31).

In many of her publications, Ruether also encouraged people to discover the purpose and significance of society and spirituality. In her mind, "spirituality and therapy...are... designed to free us from cultures of alienation and restore harmony" (Ruether, p. 146). Harmony among people could lead to true happiness and form a community bond. This applies to our individual lives as well as to the future of America and the world. With this in mind, religion must be considered as part of the equation as it is also important to life's journey. In Isaac Weiner's opinion, Ruether is suggesting that religion "encourages reflection on the legitimacy of America's mission to spread religious liberty to the world" (Weiner, p. 737).

### **3. Josef Pieper – Fitting in Leisure Time**

Josef Pieper is a philosopher who believes that people should take time for other things in their lives besides the basic necessities. These other things can start with forms of enjoyment for people. With today's fast-paced society and culture, there are distractions and pressures from the daily routine of work schedules and sometimes even family life.

In his *Basis of Culture*, Pieper discusses how people need more balance in their lives. They need to find time for leisure as well as work. In his mind, "work is the means of life,...but...leisure the end" (Pieper, p. xi). If people took the opportunity to organize their time around this principle, they would probably learn a little bit about themselves. In Pieper's mind, "feast, festival and faith lift us from idleness, and endow our lives with sense" (p. xii). He goes on further to say that festivals are at the "heart of leisure" (p. 50).

The work environment in big cities provides very little leisure time. Brent Kallmer agrees with Pieper's thinking of leisure, and also suggests that the work places, especially in the big cities, provides little opportunity for leisure (Kallmer, 2007, p. 24). As a result, people cannot escape the buzz of business and politics to go for a walk or read at a coffee shop. There are very few moments for reflection or meditation. Kallmer also suggests that in large metropolitan areas, like Washington D.C., the political and business connections start during the regular workweek and sometimes extend into the evenings as well as the weekends. This interferes with the ability to find necessary time for leisure. In Kallmer's mind, "the city exerts siren's attractions on the sharpest political junkies...and every evening a drama unfolds as the office exodus commences" (p. 24).

The distractions do not stop there; some people will continue to work and others will attempt to allocate leisure time. Kallmer suggests that these executives are practicing active leisure because "they are on their way to the post-work gauntlet of happy hours, networking events, meet-and-greets, spinning class and yoga" (p. 24). This is not exactly the way many would interpret leisure.

It is interesting to look at how the entire concept of leisure has evolved and changed. According to Kallmer, people today may not feel very comfortable with leisure. It is possible that people today truly believe they need to be constantly busy and therefore cannot sit still while the rest of the world is in motion. Kallmer further claims that "the best we can do is to view leisure as a respite from our daily burdens" (Kallmer, p. 25). As an example, he explains how going to the spa or gym is a way for the human body to recharge, but he does not call this genuine leisure. The reason is there is no opportunity to connect with self-understanding or humanity. He suggests that "the wellness craze draws its force from giving exercise and diet a veneer transcendent meaning – a sort of vanity cult whose liturgy takes the form of spa treatments and personal training sessions" (p. 25). This does not exactly coincide with what Pieper feels people should experience in their leisure moments. True leisure goes beyond the surface of a pedicure or the next Pilates class. According to Kallmer, Pieper wanted to see people incorporate "divine worship" in leisure activities (p. 25).

Pope John Paul II would probably agree with Pieper's idea of leisure. In his book, *On Human Work* (1981), he not only indicated the need for people to rest, but he presented his unique interpretations about the meaning of work. In his mind, work should be beneficial to humanity as a whole. He believed that "work can be a good thing for man" because it is not only good in the sense that is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy...as corresponding to man's dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it" (Pope John Paul, p. 23). His book discussed how work could provide a foundation for other things in people's lives, like family time. He believed that work contributed to the values and education that are formed and expressed in the home. He further claimed that, "work constitutes a foundation for the formation of family life, which is a natural right and something that man is called to" (Pope John Paul, p. 24). He believed that people should not lose sight of what is most important, and people should fit in time to rest. Pieper would agree with his theory about rest.

Abraham Heschel agrees with Pope John Paul II and Pieper that people should have more time that is sacred. He stresses that there should be more free moments from the work world. For people to discover holiness, they "must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man" (Heschel, 2005, p. 13). He also thinks it is a good idea to have time for rest, especially on the Sabbath. This concept of rest echoes one of Pieper's themes of both Pieper and the Pope. In his mind, "labor is craft, but perfect rest is an art. It is the result of an accord of body, mind and imagination" (14). As we discover rest and leisure time, Heschel believes that people will also explore more about their passions, like the glory of a sunny day. These experiences bring people closer to God as "there is not enough freedom on the top of the mountain; there is not enough glory in the sea. Yet the likeness of God can be found in time; which is eternity in disguise" (p. 16).

#### **4. Does Technology Offer Any Positive Attributes in Finding Self-Understanding?**

Technology is advancing more and more every day, and these advances allow people to retrieve more and more information. There are some positive results of this because people can find an infinite variety of information on the Internet. Some of this information includes religious websites and music, such as "Pray as You Go" and "Peace through Music." Sources, like these, allow people of all faiths to connect, share information and listen to music.

When people connect on the Internet, they can share information and ideas about their spirituality. This collaboration creates more continuity for religions all over the world. It is interesting to compare the quality of the community formed on the Internet with that of a physical church building. Some philosophers believe technology has changed how religious information is gathered and interpreted. In Ilia Delio's mind, "while technology is influencing the evolution of Christ insofar as it is changing the contours of daily normal life, there is another dimension of technology that is altering the view of Christ in the universe" (Delio, 2008, p.165). He feels that technology has truly affected the way people view the society they live in. He argues that "Technology has fundamentally altered our view of the world and ourselves in the world. The tribe is no longer the local community, but the global community which can now be accessed immediately via television, Internet, satellite communication and travel" (Delio, p. 27).

#### **5. Conclusion**

After evaluating and reviewing the point of views of many philosophers, we can clearly see that people can find a way to restore harmony in their lives and fit in leisure time. They all leave us advice on how to live our lives today and tomorrow. They also provide a legacy of inspiration and positive words for generations to come.

If Ruether chooses to leave a message for posterity, she would undoubtedly endorse the opportunity for people to find harmony in their lives. This harmony is not good for the whole world, but combined with communities elsewhere, it is good for the whole world. People need to take responsibility for completing her mission, and her vocation of earth healing. People must get involved in energy and environmental conservation efforts to protect the earth. She encourages "reflection on the legitimacy of America's mission

to spread religious liberty to the world...and...offers a critical reminder of America's failure to live up to its own promise – and the inherent tensions that lie within that very promise" (Weiner, p. 137). She would also encourage people to keep an open mind as they strive for more harmony in their social circles. In her opinion, "the church has shut the door to a lot of social change and in the past twenty years, the top magisterium has tried to close all progressive doors" (Hinton, p. 33).

Pieper would encourage people to take the opportunity to enjoy more leisure time. This is not easy because there are many distractions today, and these will only increase in the future. In fact, technology may also be the cause of occupying people's leisure time (Delio, p.163). "Technology reinforces the individualistic tendencies of modern society, and it must be given a focus, a direction because of the survival of humanity" (p. 163). For the future of humanity to go on with continuing grace, leisure time will also need to incorporate spirituality and sacred time. If people have the opportunity to enjoy religious festivals in the future, they may find the rewards far greater than they will anticipate. According to Pieper, "it is in the nature of the religious festival to make a space of abundance and wealth in the midst of external poverty in material things" (Pieper, p. 53).

The messages of these thinkers will endure for a long time. In a certain sense, they are reminding people to ponder, reflect and relish feelings and experiences. They are encouraging people to take a break from the busy times in life, to explore their religious beliefs and spend some time to reflect on their lives. Perhaps the opportunity to listen to music, reflect and meditate would restore a harmonious balance in people's lives. As Thich Nhat Hanh so eloquently noted, Buddha's advice for all of us is, "meditation is to be still: to sit still, to stand still and to walk with stillness. Meditation means to look deeply...Our home is available right here and now" (Hanh, 1999, 45).

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