

## I. Introduction

A. In the introduction to his very insightful book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, the late Neil Postman, a communications professor and social critic, suggests that at different times in our history different cities have captured the essence of America.

1. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century – as the colonies were forming a nation – it was Boston, ground zero for the shot heard “around the world.”
2. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century it was New York, whose Statue of Liberty welcomed wave after wave of new immigrants into the country.
3. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chicago moved center stage – “the city of big shoulders and heavy winds symbolized the industrial energy and dynamism of America.”

B. But today<sup>1</sup>, Postman says, the city that best captures the character of the nation is Las Vegas, w/ its Black Jack tables, chorus girls and glitzy hotels.

1. B/c Las Vegas is a city devoted entirely to entertainment. And to that end it epitomizes a culture in which all public discourse, all conversations – not just those about entertainment – but conversations about politics, current events, athletics, education, business and even faith have been transformed by our desire to be entertained.

II. I would like to share some observations with you today as leaders of the church and invite your thinking about an issue that confronts us both as individuals but also as leaders – and perhaps especially as preachers and teachers – that is the idolatry of entertainment: the amazing focus, in both time and energy, that we devote to our amusement.

A. These thoughts come out of Acts 17.

1. I’ve been preaching through the Book of Acts. Started last fall and arrives recently in Acts 17, where the Apostle Paul, traveling with Silas, Timothy, Luke and a few others on his second missionary venture, has recently crossed into Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Postman’s book was written in 1985, but his point is only more true today.

2. They've held their some meetings at various places – Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea – and generally riots keep breaking out.

- a) Paul has that knack.
- b) When he preaches it tends to lead to a revival or a riot or both.
- c) When I preach neither.

3. But after this latest round Paul the group thought it best to get Paul out of town and so he's been sent on to Athens while Silas and Timothy try to settle things down a bit.

4. While there he looks around, sees lots of idols and ends up climbing Mars Hill to engage the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in a bit of a debate.

5. Having mapped out my preaching schedule last year – and knowing that this was coming – I wrote to about a dozen friends from around the world and asked them this question: What do you think the Apostle Paul would say if, instead of walking into 1<sup>st</sup> century Athens he showed up in 21<sup>st</sup> century Chicago?

6. What are the idols of our age?

7. What are our cultural blind spots?

B. That has led to a series within the Acts series in which we've been considering a handful of good things that we have promoted beyond their merit.

1. My premise has been that our problem today does not revolve around jade statues and totem poles but on gifts from God that, in the ultimate application of the Peter Principle, we've elevated far beyond their design.

2. That our idols today are aspects of the creation that we have given some of the honor due only to the Creator.

C. This morning I'd like to invite you to think about how we have done that with what I am going to call, for lack of identifying any suitable existing word, the term "third space."

1. The first space refers to work

a) Both the things we do for which we are paid and the things that we have to do because when we don't life stops

(1) Buying groceries, doing the laundry, putting gas in the car

2. The second space is rest

a) Which includes sleep

b) But also includes Sabbath restoration & other spiritual practices.

c) We are told in the 10 commandments to, Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

d) I recently confessed that I'm not sure I know what that looks like.

e) And confessed to my small group that I'm sure this the area I am called to work on personally.

f) I know what it's not. I know that we confuse amusement with Sabbath rest

(1) The one sure seems, etymologically, to imply that we are not thinking.

(2) And Sabbath restoration – I believe – demands that we do just that.

(a) That we reflect on our life

(b) That we think and pray and assess and realign.

(3) And there is great energy that comes out of alignment.

g) We have largely lost Sabbath rest just as we have lost the term Sabbath. It morphed to Sunday which now seems to be being swallowed by the "weekend."

h) In any event, the second space is restorative.

3. And, distinct from these two – work and restoration - is the “third space”

- a) Which is neither. It’s free time
- b) Leisure time that we can do with what we want
- c) Go on a walk, read a book, watch TV, hang out with friends

D. My premise today starts with the idea that this “third space” is a gift from God. That it is perfectly legitimate. Having down time to laugh and play is a good, even a great thing. There is nothing wrong with having fun.

- 1. God created us w/ an ability to experience pleasure, to laugh and to sing.
- 2. He created us w/ an ability to enjoy beauty and appreciate the arts.
- 3. We most certainly can – and most certainly do – use this third space and the gifts God has given us in inappropriate ways.
  - a) We do things we shouldn’t.
  - b) We laugh at things we should cry at.
  - c) We flaunt things that should be kept private
  - d) We pursue pleasure out of context
  - e) Without much effort we manage to find lots of ways to get ourselves in trouble.
- 4. But, finding joy in life, finding reasons to laugh, taking time to play a game with a child, reading a novel, going on a long walk – these things are not bad.
- 5. They can be celebrated, especially by those who love and serve the God who created beauty
  - a) The God who commissioned feasts of celebration.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It would be worth listing the feasts and explaining where they fell in the calendar and what purpose they served.

b) The God whose Son – our Savior – kept the wine flowing at a wedding party.

E. Over the last two thousand years some Christians have argued that we should never be happy, take a vacation, smile, eat dessert or play a game. There have been kill-joys who have crusaded against cards, golf, movie theaters and anything that hints at fun.

1. I am not picking up on that theme.

F. However – and here is the second half of the premise – I do believe that we have a problem.

G. Turn with me to I Cor 6:12

1. Here we have the Apostle Paul, writing to a church that has found plenty of ways to get in trouble. And he opens by quoting one of the popular mantras of the day: “Everything is permissible for me.”

a) He is not suggesting that “everything is permissible” here.

b) He is quoting a popular phrase of the day

(1) Some believe this is the tag line for Corinth

(a) Much like “What happens here stays here” is the tag line for Las Vegas

(2) Others think the church in Corinth misunderstood his teaching on freedom.

c) As you almost certainly know, he’ll pick up this same refrain again in chapter 10.

2. In chapter 6 he states:

a) Everything is permissible for me, and then qualifies it by stating, “but not everything is beneficial.”

b) “Everything is permissible for me,” but I will not be mastered by anything.

H. My premise is that we (the West) are being mastered by our amusement. That in the last 60 years entertainment, amusement – our devotion to our diversions and distractions – have taken over way too much of our life. And that today we

1. not only engage in activities we should not
  - a) We are not only uncritical consumers of a society in decline
2. But we devote too much time to meaningless distractions which are acceptable in moderation but which now have both taken over the third space – pushed aside other third space activities – but have also spilled over and have basically taken over the second space as well.
3. And the net effect is that we fail to develop as people – as spiritual beings in relationship with God – to the point that we can appreciate the great gifts He has given us.

I. To our own great loss we have made an idol of entertainment.

III. Now perhaps this challenge seems unfair to you. In fact, you find yourself thinking, “I wish.”

- A. I wish I had time to spend too much time being entertained. All I do is work.
- B. That may be. And for you this message may remain a simple assessment of our culture.
- C. I don’t know this group that well.
  1. I know that I’m not speaking to a bunch of hedonists – at least not self-described ones as Paul basically was.
  2. I can imagine that you are very, very busy.
  3. And I further understand that if I attack fun at great length that I’m likely to be labeled a Puritan - by people who mean that in a derogatory way. In truth they were remarkable people for whom we could learn a lot. And they really do not deserve their reputation.<sup>3</sup> They were a life-embracing, sport-loving and sex-affirming group.

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<sup>3</sup> The Puritans, more than any other group, were responsible for expanding if not providing virtually all the democratic institutions we enjoy, as well as for preserving the intellectual riches we cherish. When the Royal Academy of Science was formed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, nearly all its charter members -- leading scientists of the day -- were Puritan clergy. When the Puritans were ascendant in Britain and in North America their rate of literacy was vastly higher than that of their detractors (especially among Puritan women). When the Jewish people had been expelled from Britain in the 13<sup>th</sup> century it was the Puritans who welcomed them back and allowed them synagogue, school and cemetery. The Puritans were sober and serious, of course, yet also life-embracing, sport-loving, and sex-affirming. Still, for reasons I can't fathom,

a) Despite that there is a notion that the Puritans were people who “worried that someone, somewhere was having fun”

D. But I still think it holds.

E. My guess is that while you believe that you are charting a healthy course.

F. That you believe that in the buffet line of life you are selecting a balanced meal with only a bit of dessert, that you meal only looks healthy by comparison, b/c our culture is so far down this path – entertainment has remade so much of every field that it is very hard not to be affected.

IV. For starters let point out that, relative to most people in most ages we spend a lot of time in this third space.

A. Not as much as some experts predicted we would thirty years ago.<sup>4</sup> And in some cases the first space overwhelms the second and third space leaving us feeling overwhelmed and the pace feels frenetic.

B. But we actually work much less today than we did in the past.

1. Over the last 150 years the number of hours the average American works outside the home has dropped from about 70 to about 40.

2. When you additionally factor in:

a) That there is much less to do around the home – lots of labor saving devices.

b) Vacation and holidays

c) Retirement

d) And the fact that we live so much longer.

3. When you put all that together we end up with over twenty years more leisure time – more third space time - today than people had just over 100 years ago.<sup>5</sup>

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the word "Puritan" is said to call to mind someone who fears that somebody, somewhere, might be having fun. (Victor Shepherd, June 2002)

<sup>4</sup> Is it possible to get some stats here of what the predictions used to be?

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Ralph Winter, *Bored In a Culture of Entertainment* (IVP, 2002), goes on to quote Robert Lee: It is a striking fact to note that the working man of a century ago spent some seventy hours per week on the job and lived for about forty years. Today he spends some forty hours per week at work and can expect to live

- C. Which is a tremendous gift!
  - 1. Now it doesn't all come in big blocks of time – much of it comes around the margins.
  - 2. And it doesn't feel like we've got lots of down time. In part, I'm convinced because we fail to take a true Sabbath and as a result we remain high strung. We never really rest.
- D. But, the time is there. It is ours to do with as we will. Most people have never had the kind of opportunities that we have before us.
- V. So, what do we do with it –as a culture? How do we invest the twenty extra years we have? The 1500 hours per week each year that we are given?
  - A. Today we spend a remarkable amount of that time watching TV or being amused by some type of game on some type of screen.
  - B. And, not only have we been given huge amounts of third space time to start with.
    - 1. And not only has the TV pushed a lot of friends, hobbies and community service out of that space
  - C. But, passive entertainment also ends up stealing time from the second space as well.
  - D. The average adult watches four to five hours of TV a day. The average child watches three hours per day and that average TV is on for 7 hours and 40 minutes every day.<sup>6</sup>
  - E. Now, let me assure you, I am not going to turn this sermon into your basic rant against TV.
    - 1. There is not the place for that. & besides, many of you've not only heard these rants before, many of you give them w/ some frequency.
    - 2. They generally pick on two things.

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about seventy years. This adds something like twenty-two more years of leisure to his life, about 1,500 free hours each year, and a total of some 33,000 additional free hours that the man born today has to enjoy! Robert Lee, *Religion and Leisure in American Life* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964), p. 37. See also <http://dallasfed.org/fed/annual/1999p/ar93.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> TV Turnoff Network facts [www.turnoff.com](http://www.turnoff.com).



a) The first is the simple amount of time people spend watching the tube.<sup>7</sup>

b) And the second is the quality of the stuff they watch. Which is pretty abysmal.<sup>8</sup>

(1) In my lifetime we've moved from Father Knows Best and the Dick Van Dyke show, where Mary Tyler Moore and Dick Van Dyke, though married, slept in separate beds, to Sex in the City and MTV's Spring Break coverage.

(2) And along the way we've added Jerry Springer and reality TV shows that allow us to watch as others are frightened or humiliated.<sup>9</sup>

(3) It is quite clear that more than a few TV execs will do anything the FCC lets them in the chase for 1/10 of a Nielson rating point.

F. Besides, while the TV is new, passive and detrimental forms of entertainment are now.

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<sup>7</sup> It's hard for some young people to grasp that the TV is not even 100 years old or that middle aged people such as myself grew up without computer games.

<sup>8</sup> Forty-five years ago Newton Minow, President Kennedy's newly appointed chairman of the FCC described TV as "a vast wasteland." He was hardly singing solo. In 1958, in a speech at the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago, Edward R. Murrow railed against TV, which he called, "the money-making machine." Fifty or a hundred years from now, Murrow said, historians would view tape of network programs and find "evidence of decadence, escapism and insulation from the realities of the world in which we live. We are currently wealthy, fat, comfortable and complacent. Our mass media reflect this. But unless we get up off our fat surpluses and recognize that television...is being used to distract, delude, amuse and insulate us, then television and those who finance it, those who look at it and those who work at it, may see a totally different picture too late. If we go on as we are, then history will take its revenge, and retribution will not limp in catching up with us." Tim Jones, *Mining the Wasteland*, The Chicago Tribune, Sunday, May 6, 2001, Section 2, page 1. That was when we only had three channels to fill and they were only on during the day and evening. Today we have hundreds of channels to fill and they never sign off.

<sup>9</sup> It would be hard to chronicle just how bizarre TV programming has become. But it's worth noting that on one episode of Spy TV people ate what they thought was human flesh so that they could make it onto a reality TV program, and many people watched. Temptation Island and Fear Factor are more "akin to emotional pornography or "voyeur-vision" because of the pleasure obtained by watching other people in intimate emotional and physical situations. (Winter, p.43).

1. Cultures has declined before, and those that do usually end up offering their citizens some pretty wicked fair.<sup>10</sup>

a) The Roman coliseums featured gladiator death matches.<sup>11</sup>

G. This is not my point. I do not want you to go away believing that my comments can be summarized by saying, “turn off the TV.”

1. Given the clear counsel of Scripture to “avoid the lust of the eyes.”

2. And given the advice from Paul to fill our minds with good things

a) “Whatever is true and whatever is noble and whatever is just and pure and loveable and gracious. Whatever is excellent and worthy of praise – fill your mind with these things.

3. This is bad counsel. But there are some good things on TV and our family gathered over at a neighbor’s last night to watch the game with much of the rest of Chicago.

H. But my concern is a bit broader. The question I set out to answer is, “What would the Apostle Paul say if, instead of walking up Mars Hill and confronting the idols of Athens he walked into 21<sup>st</sup> century Western culture.

I. I suspect he’d have a few things to say about TV. But I believe he’s frame his comments more broadly – lamenting the way we’ve mishandled the third space.

J. For starters I suspect he’d point out how dull all of this entertainment makes us. Which, is Postman’s point.

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<sup>10</sup> William Wordsworth, the 19<sup>th</sup> century ?, noted that at that time some people had a, “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation.” William Wordsworth, “Preface to Lyrical Ballads, 1800,” in *Selected Poems and Sonnets* (London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1954), p. 7. Cited in Winter, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> The Romans were famous for their games. The great coliseums were home to gladiator fights where huge crowds gathered to watch men kill each other. In *City of God* Augustine tells of a friend, Alypius, a gentle man who avoided the games until his friends finally cajoled him into attending. He went planning on listening but not watching, but when a tremendous roar went up from the crowd he opened his eyes just in time to watch a gladiator put his opponent to death, found the spectacle appalling. And appealing, & was hooked. Augustine says that the young man was eventually broken of his addiction and baptized as a Christian – even became a bishop. But for a time he was given over to the lust of the eyes – to the adrenalin that came from reveling in something very dark and bad. Anthony Esolen, *Unseen Spectacles*, *Touchstone*, March 2006, p. 6

VI. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death* – which I recommend if you have not read it - Postman starts out by arguing that the TV is the most significant invention of the 20<sup>th</sup> century b/c it has changed us from a literary culture - where arguments are made based on reason and developed over time - to a visual culture, where arguments are not made so much as feelings are elicited and where the camera angle is constantly changing in order to keep our attention.

A. One of the examples he uses is the Lincoln – Douglas debates, where the opening comments from each candidate were one hour long and the entire debate took seven hours.

1. Contrast that to today where we ask a candidate for their views on the Middle East and give them something less than three minutes to respond.<sup>12</sup>

2. Or where an “in-depth” news story is 3 minutes long.

B. Several weeks ago I was lamenting about the challenges of preaching in this culture. That there are times in my study when I say – I can’t get to this point. I can’t make this point in the sermon because I can’t hold them that long. And a lawyer said, “we regularly concede cases b/c we know that we can not hold a jury’s attention long enough to explain how we are right. And that a simple emotional appeal with trump logic.”<sup>13</sup>

C. Postman’s book builds on the idea that we are becoming less literate, less rational and less aware – but perhaps the most disorienting thing for me was the way he developed Marshall McLuhan’s idea that the medium is the message. And that there are, quite honestly, points you can not make in this culture because we are losing the medium of books.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Putnam, Harvard professor and author of the study *Bowling Alone*, in which he noticed that between 1980 and 1993 the number of bowlers was climbing but league play was down 40% b/c, people were bowling alone. Putnam now argues that community life – and with it the future of democracy begins to unravel in the 1950s when the first television-raised generation comes of age. Putnam believes that community organizations are the learning grounds for participatory democracy and fears that “each hour spent watching television is associated with less social trust and less group membership. He also notes that readers are joiners but TV watchers are “stay-at-homes.” Frederick Koenig, a professor at Tulane University, has documented that many people feel almost as close to TV reporters and sitcom characters as they do to their friends, and notes that there are only so many hours in the day. TV takes away from interacting with others (See Charles Leroux, *Our Electronic Friends*, Chicago Tribune, May 6, 2001, Section 2, p. 1).

<sup>13</sup> Even our literature is changing. Newspapers feature more pictures and shorter articles. When I first started writing a management column the editor wanted articles that were 4000 words long. Ten years later when I quit they wanted articles that were no longer than 400 words.

- VII. Perhaps he overstates his case. But think about what this means.
- A. As people called to love God with all of our mind
  - B. And as people who not only believe that God not only gave us special revelation in a book, but also that His most complete revelation – His Son – is referred to as the Word of God. Well, the idea that the screen is pushing aside the book is alarming.
- VIII. Now please remember my thesis.
- A. I am not arguing against the third space.
  - B. And I am not arguing that it is wrong to have fun or to have downtime.
  - C. I am not arguing against entertainment per se – or even passive entertainment (namely TV) as part of a broader, healthy life.
  - D. Quite the contrary - I am arguing that they are gifts from God.
  - E. What I am trying to point out is that:
    - 1. As a culture our third space time has been over run by passive entertainment, often of very questionable value
    - 2. And that we have allowed this third space time to expand at the expense of the second space
      - a) That our spiritual formation has been pushed aside for our amusement.
    - 3. By stuff that might be fine in small amounts – just like cotton candy. But is a horrible staple for our diet
  - F. Despite Paul’s counsel in I Cor. 6 and 10 – we have been mastered by our amusements. And we are softer and weaker people because of it.
- IX. Which I think would have shocked Paul.
- A. I think he would be amazed at how many Christ followers would be content to sit on the sidelines watching others role play life
  - B. I think he’d be mystified that people would rather channel surf than serve.
  - C. And there is no small irony here. All idols are ultimately ironic

1. Those who think too highly of themselves often struggle with low self esteem.
  2. Those who try to make sex more than it is make it less than it can be.
  3. Those who promote unqualified tolerance end up losing their freedom.
- D. Well, those who squander their third space time seeking to be thrilled through passive entertainment end up living dull lives. And, not too surprisingly, they often end up bored.<sup>14</sup>
- E. One of the things we hear more and more today – especially, but not exclusively young people – is that they are bored.<sup>15</sup>
1. Can you imagine?
  2. How is it possible – in a world of such wonder, in a land of what appears to be almost limitless opportunity and in a society crammed full of sporting events and concerts, books to read and museums to tour, TV shows of never-ending supply to watch - how is it that so many people are bored?<sup>16</sup>
- F. Some psychologists are suggesting that it is because we are overstimulated and, as a result, our body develops a “psychic callus.”
1. In much the same way that our skin will develop a callus to protect us, our mind develops one if there is too much coming in.

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<sup>14</sup> I am going to set aside the obvious irony that many people watch TV, but they sure never watch TV of people watching TV.

<sup>15</sup> Professor Gene Veith writes, “Boredom is a chronic symptom of a pleasure-obsessed age. When pleasure becomes one’s number one priority, the result, ironically, is boredom.” Gene Veith, “Boredom and the Law of Diminishing Returns,” AFA Journal, January 1998, p. 20. (Cited from Richard Winter, *Still Bored In a Culture of Entertainment*, IVP 2002, p. 44).

<sup>16</sup> In his book *Still Bored In a Culture of Entertainment* (IVP, 2002), Ralph Winter cites a study by Yankelovich Partners on consumer attitudes that was quoted in Tom Kuntz’s New York Times article, “Yawn: These Are Such Exciting Times.” NYT, February 20, 2000, p. WK7. The survey noted that in 1999, 71% of approximately 2,500 people surveyed wanted more novelty in their lives, an increase of 4% from 1998.

2. Which, is part of what drives people to more and more outrageous acts and forms of entertainment in order to get the same adrenalin rush.
3. Certainly there is something to that.

G. But I think there are other reasons. I think the reason many end up bored is because we were made for more than this.

- a) We were made for more than entertainment
- b) We were made for more than sitting passively.
- c) To quote Augustine, We were created for God – and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Him.<sup>17</sup>
- d) And we were created for community.
- e) And we were created to serve. We were created, as Paul wrote in Eph. 2, We were created in Christ Jesus to do good works.
- f) Think of it this way:
- g) Downtimes are wonderful if they follow times of service
- h) Victory parties are wonderful if they follow victories
- i) Harvest festivals are great if they follow the harvest.
- j) But not if they don't.<sup>18</sup>

2. The third space time is far richer if the time in the first and second space has been well spent.
3. If it hasn't, well, crashing other people's parties gets old.

H. And I believe the other reason we are bored is because we've failed to develop as people.

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<sup>17</sup> Joy doesn't follow the pursuit of pleasure. Lasting joy is the by-product of a life rightly lived in relationship to God.

<sup>18</sup> We think of the rise of the modern world as a story of dynamism, energy, progress, and achievement – which it is. But we often overlook its other side. The world produced by such dynamism is a world of convenience, comfort, and consumerism. And when life is safe, easy, sanitized, climate-controlled, and plush, sloth is close. The flipside of dynamic optimism is corrosive boredom. Os Guinness, *The Call*, (Nashville: Word), 1998, 0. 149.

1. Did you know that boredom – which is a relatively new word, not found in print before 1750<sup>19</sup> - used to be considered a sin?
  2. No one would confess to being bored because what that meant was that you had not developed your inner life.
  3. Boredom implied a “deadness of your soul.”
  4. To be unmoved and untouched in the presence of God and His creation exposed an “interior inadequacy.”
  5. You had not learned – as Paul had – how to be content in any situation.
  6. You had not grown as a servant to the point that you had meaningful ways to use your gifts
  7. You had not developed relationships with others to the point that the community provided meaning for your day.
- I. 100 years ago being bored wasn’t seen as a problem someone else had to fix for you. It wasn’t blamed on a lack of stimulation. It was blamed on a lack of development. It was assumed that you’d neglected the second space and were a shallow person.
  - J. Boredom was considered a sin.
  - K. Our diet of entertainment has left many mentally slow, moderately bored, easily distracted spectators.
  - L. My contention is that despite Paul’s warning to not be mastered by anything, we’ve been mastered by our amusements.
- X. So where do we go from here? Well, there are more than a few opportunities for you as people and for you as pastors and teachers
    - A. You might ask yourself whether you are happy with your second space – especially the Sabbath

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<sup>19</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 13. Cited in Winter, page 16.

B. You might find it very profitable to keep a time log for a couple weeks, writing down everything you do so that you have a good read on how much first space, how much second space and how much third space time you spend.

1. And what you do in the third space
2. And then ask yourself – if I stay on this course. If this allocation of time holds steady over time, do I become who I really want to be in Christ?

C. A third thing you might do is fast from the TV for a week or two and see what happens when you do?

1. At the very least, limit your TV to intentional watching. No surfing.

XI. Well, I opened with an observation by Postman, let me close with one.

A. In his introduction – and let me point out that his book was published in 1985 – in his introduction he opened with a comment that George Orwell's dark descriptions of society, spelled out in 1984, have not proven true.

1. It's in 1984 you might remember, that Big Brother has taken over. The future is bleak and gray because everyone is oppressed by an all invasive government that controls everything, rewrites history to stay in power, spies on its citizens 24 hours a day and even arrests them for committing "thought-crimes."

- a) There are many who argue that Orwell's description of life has come true in this country.

- b) Especially after it came out that our government was listening in on phone conversations.

2. But surely to the extent that Orwell is describing society he was describing something much closer to communism than democracy.

B. What Postman argues is that Orwell got it wrong, but that Huxley, the author of Brave New World – who wrote his view of a dark future in 1932 – got it right

1. Many people believe that they were both saying essentially the same thing b/c both describe rather bleak scenarios of very little freedom.



2. But, as Postman points out, in Orwell's nightmare people are overcome by an externally imposed oppression.
3. "But in Huxley's vision no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think."<sup>20</sup>
4. What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be not one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny "failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions." In 1984, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us. This book is about the possibility that Huxley, not Orwell, was right.

## XII. Quotes

- A. As Thomas Aquinas wrote: the temperate man does not shun all pleasures, but those that are immoderate and contrary to reason."

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<sup>20</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Penguin Books, 1984, p. vii.

B. We have entered a new phase of culture – we may call it the Age of the Cinema – in which the most amazing perfection of scientific technique is being devoted to purely ephemeral objects, without any consideration of their ultimate justification. It seems as though a new society was arising which will acknowledge no hierarchy of values, no intellectual authority, and no social or religious tradition, but which will live for the moment in a chaos of pure sensation.<sup>21</sup>

### XIII. Questions:

A. When was the last time you were bored? Why? What did you seek to do to overcome your boredom?

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Inquiry* (1931; reprint, Peru, Ill: Sherwood Sugden, 1991), p. 228. Cited, Rodney Clapp, ed. *The Consuming Passion: Christianity and Consumer Culture*, IVP, 1998, p. 19.