

# *Getting Work Right: Labor and Leisure in a Fragmented World*

By Naughton, M. J. Emmaus Road Publishing, 2018, \$24.95.

REVIEWED BY MARTY MCMAHONE

What does it mean to lead an undivided life in the world of work? While not always stating it that way, that is a question that many Christian academics and business leaders have struggled with over the years. The theme of Naughton's work is that we must recognize that the world is not a right we have earned but a gift we receive. Hard work may be necessary to succeed in the world of work, but even that hard work begins with the gifts and abilities that God has graciously given to each person. He argues that a key element of recognizing that gift is the reflection made possible by proper understanding of the Sabbath. While Naughton acknowledges there is validity in the market logic that effort leads to reward and pursuit of self-interest creates utility, he also argues that logic does not tell the whole story. The reality for all of us is that even in our work, we are dependent on the gifts of grace. Drive, talent, skill, and energy may all be part of what makes us succeed, but all of those things begin as gifts from God. We need to recognize our need to receive the gift that makes all of life possible. For Naughton, that recognition comes in the contemplation that becomes possible through the practice of the Sabbath. Rather than talking about "work/life balance," Naughton focuses on integrating work into one's whole life by recognizing that grace is at the core of all of our success.

Naughton leans heavily into MacIntyre's (2011) definition of what makes work meaningful. MacIntyre suggests that for work to be meaningful, it has to involve good work, good goods, and good wealth. Naughton translates that into three principles that define the purpose of business. Good work means that a business organizes work so that employees develop their gifts and talents for themselves, the business, and the larger community. Good goods mean that a business develops products and services that the world needs. Good wealth means that a business creates sustainable wealth and distributes it equitably to all stakeholders. All of that becomes mean-

ingful when tied to the rest and reflection provided by the Sabbath. It is in that rest that we can examine our weekly work and evaluate whether it measures up to the requirements of good work.

In order to avoid the divided life, Naughton argues that we need to have the right attitude about work. He identifies several erroneous views of work and leisure. The first is the idea that we work to make money and leisure is for amusement. This attitude puts all of the emphasis in the workday on things that can be measured. Leisure becomes how we forget about work. This leads to an attitude of consumerism that focuses on what we have rather than on what we are becoming. The second erroneous view of work that Naughton identifies is the idea of work as career with leisure as utility. Work as career becomes more focused on goals and leisure becomes something that can help toward meeting life goals. While careerism may be superior to consumerism, it is still a system that fails to feed the human soul.

As an alternative to these two errors, Naughton offers the idea of an integrated dynamic of giving and receiving. Work is about following a calling based on the giftedness that a person has already received. Leisure, in this perspective, is about time to consider the good things in life that can only be received as gifts. Naughton suggests that the disciplines of silence, celebration, and charity lead us to reflect on the gift that we have received and to see the need to extend that gift to others. This integrated approach to life leads to a richer, more fulfilled life than the consumerist or careerist perspectives on work life.

Naughton's book provides a very strong foundation point for a conversation about what a Christian approach to business might look like. It is well-written and easy to follow. It would be a good conversation starter about questions involving the relationship of work and leisure, the meaning of work, the role of employer and employee in developing good jobs, and the responsibility to develop

a just workplace. It would fit well into any course that involves a discussion of vocation and its meaning. It might be ideal in an early “Intro to Business” class to introduce a faith perspective along with more general business principles. Naughton does convey a Catholic perspective of a sharper distinction between clergy and laity than most Protestant Evangelicals would espouse, but that is a long way from being a key point of the book. Otherwise, Christians from a wide variety of denominations should be comfortable with the general perspective of the book.

The strength of the work is that it offers an easy-to-understand approach to thinking about work that can apply to any life direction. It organizes thoughts about the meaning of work, life, and business into a manageable and sustainable framework. The concepts about good work and good wealth would be easier to apply as an owner than as an employee, but Christians at any level of an organization could work to develop a more just system of business where they have influence. The book does not necessarily break much new ground, but it organizes an approach to work into a systematic and easy-to-grasp approach.

#### REFERENCES

MacIntyre, A. (2011). How Aristotelianism can become revolutionary: Ethics, resistance and utopia. In *Virtue and politics*, ed. Paul Blackledge and Kelvin Knight. University of Notre Dame Press.

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