

Luther, Calvin, and Loyola's Thoughts Concerning the Body, Physical Activity, and Sport

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The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the attitudes, thoughts, and theological interpretations of Luther, Calvin, and Loyola concerning the body, in order to ascertain the effects of their concepts of the body, upon their attitudes and thoughts towards physical activity and sport.

This investigation was a limited portion of a larger study of the total views, and writings of Luther, Calvin, and Loyola. This investigation was confined to the primary sources of each man which did not include his writings on the commentaries of the books of the Bible. The writings included in this study were sermons, tracts, treatises, institutes, and correspondences.

In addition, a study was made of each man's life as viewed by his contemporaries, by his own account of his life, and by the reflections of later historians and theologians. The focus, however, was upon the development of each man's concepts and attitudes toward the body as a foundation for his theological concepts and doctrines concerning the body. These were subsequently examined for their possible effect on each man's thoughts relative to the value of physical activity and sport.

Examination of the writings of each of these three men revealed a relatively consistent pattern of thought which emerged in the formation of their doctrines concerning the body. Each man held a unique and definite attitude toward the body and its relative influence on the "Christian way of life." The consistency they demonstrated toward the body, however, was not on all occasions as consistent in their discussions of the value of physical activity and sport. Calvin, and to a lesser extent Luther, seemed to be somewhat influenced by their audience when in discussion of the place of physical activity and sport in the Christian life. At the same time, Loyola never varied from his fundamental beliefs and attitudes both toward the body and the place of physical activity and sport in the work of the "kingdom of God".

Since the entire works of each of these men have not been used in this study, it is imperative to be cognizant of the fact that the findings represent the results of selected reading; therefore, there must be TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS drawn. Further research on the commentaries of these men, may reveal evidences which differ from those evidences found in the rest of their writings.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

1. Luther separated the body, mind, and the soul. He placed the very essence of the potential for sin in man upon the PHYSICAL body. The mind had a higher rank and might be used to purify the soul, while the soul itself held the only way to goodness and salvation.

THEREFORE: participation in physical activity and sport could be used as a means toward preventing man from engaging in more corrupt and sinful pursuits by turning him away from his carnal nature towards more wholesome endeavors.

2. Calvin perceived the body, mind, and the soul of man as having equal potential

for good and evil. Man's total being shared in the responsibility for sin, and in the effort to prevent the carnal nature of man, and his corruption from interfering with the glorification of God and the seeking of eternal life.

THEREFORE: participation in physical activity and sport was seldom advocated, nor often denied man. If man selected to participate in any form of physical activity or sport; however, it must be done in moderation and with admiration and thanks to God.

3. Loyola believed in the totality of man. Although man had a carnal nature, it was not the primary cause of sin, although contributory. Sin was a result of a lack of dedication, obedience, or service to God. The development of strength and vigor and ability to relax was important as a means to laboring in Christ's kingdom on earth.

THEREFORE: participation in physical activity and sport was necessary for physical fitness of the individual and to learn to relax, as well as to offer pleasant diversion for self-renewal.

CONCLUSION:

Luther, Calvin, and Loyola each had his own thoughts concerning the importance and place of the body in the pursuit of the "Christian way of life." These attitudes did affect their concept of the relative importance of physical activity and sport, and each man's concepts did differ from the other two men. Luther believed physical activity was a means towards preventing man from more corrupt pursuits; Calvin believed physical activity might be permissible in moderation and with admiration; and Loyola believed in physical activity both for fitness and pleasant diversion.