

13th September 2021

Rest

**“Man is the shuttle, to whose winding quest
And passage through these looms
God ordered motion, but ordained no rest.”**

Henry Vaughan, Silex Scintillans 'Man'

Henry Vaughan was a 17th century Welsh metaphysical poet. In his collection of poetry, *Silex Scintillans*, he explores many aspects of the human condition, including the one devoted to “Man” from which the quote above is taken. As you know, I am a lover of metaphor. So, Vaughan’s image of the shuttle in the loom, making its passage hither and thither, always on a “winding quest”, appeals to me. He is right when he says, “God ordered motion”. And if you don’t like “ordered” or the “God” part, isn’t it still true that we’re designed to be active, to “do” things on our “passage through these looms” of time and purpose?

However, I want to take issue with Vaughan’s assertion that God “ordained no rest”. Again, I don’t mind if you choose to abandon the words “ordained” or “God”. But surely, we can’t do without rest in our busyness? If we are to be so much in motion, we must have times of rest. The loom in which our shuttle of activity passes on its “winding quest” is not, and should not be, a 24/7 production-line. Regularly, the loom needs to be shut down and the shuttle laid aside, for the good of the production process and the lasting benefit of the loom and the shuttle.

John Henry Newman, in an oft-quoted sermon from 1843, said:

May He support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done! Then in His mercy may he give us safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last.

The promise of “eternal rest” when life is over? Maybe. But I see Newman’s words as being more pragmatic, immediate and relevant to my day-to-day life. When the fever of each *day* is over, and “our work is done”, should we not seek, and value, and benefit from the holy rest we need right now?

So tonight, shut down the clatter of the loom. Lay aside the passage of the shuttle and give yourself to the rest and peace you need.

A prayer for today

Ordained? Ordered? God? Too much for now. I'll just rest here awhile. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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