

## Minilogue

In his classic study, *Homo Ludens*, the Dutch anthropologist and philosopher, Johan Huizinga, argues that play is at the very foundation of culture, and that includes, of course, religion. Play is more primordial than religion, more basic, more essential. Even more than the rational animal – *homo sapiens* – we are the playful animal, *homo ludens*.

In his remarkable book, *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility*, the philosopher, James Carse, makes a simple but profound distinction between two kinds of games: a **finite game**, which is played for the purpose of winning, and an **infinite game**, which is played for the purpose of continuing the play. His book-length meditation consists simply of a detailed and creative unpacking of the implications of this fundamental distinction. Think of the difference between trying to defeat your opponent in a tennis match and trying – with the same partner across the court – to see how long you can extend a rally together. The latter would be an example of playing in the spirit of an ‘infinite game.’ You would still want to challenge each other, not simply lobbing the ball softly back and forth, but stretching and testing one another with your ‘best shots.’ The spirit of the play would feel entirely different, however. There is nothing wrong with competition, but all of our victories (and losses) are but moments within a larger unfolding game. According to Carse: “finite games can be played within an infinite game, but an infinite game cannot be played within a finite game. Infinite players regard their wins and losses in whatever finite games they play as but moments in continuing play.”

As you go about your summer activities, may you be animated by the spirit of play and playfulness. Whether you are tossing a ball back and forth on the lawn or chasing one across a golf course; playing cards or a board game on a rainy day at the cabin; splashing in the cool waters of a lake; making music with friends; dancing at a wedding or a neighborhood block party; telling stories at a family reunion; gamboling with a frisky pet; cooking a special meal on the outdoor grill; or vicariously enjoying the athletic exploits of your favorite sports team, I hope that during this sweet season you enjoy many moments of self-forgetful, ecstatic joy and simple pleasure at the mere fact of existence, of being alive and at play in the ‘infinite game’ of this beautiful and creative cosmos.

In good and playful fellowship,

Rev. Bruce