

WORK AND PLAY

By DOROTHY M. BERRIDGE

AMONG THE NORMS drawn up to guide religious communities in their task of implementing the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* comes a brief section that could well escape notice in the face of more compelling demands. This is the recommendation concerned with 'the community life of institutes engaged in the active work of the apostolate'¹ and which takes up the issue of the horarium.

In these institutes it will often be impossible for all the houses to follow the same order of the day, and from time to time, in the same house, for all the brethren. But their daily order should be such as to include, not only times for spiritual exercises and apostolic work, but also some free time for themselves and for suitable recreation.²

Few people would be likely to quarrel with the first half of this statement, especially in a house where the works of the community are many and varied. But what may cause alarm in some circles, and what is in fact the striking part of the above quotation, is an innovation not found in the relevant section of the original conciliar document.³ This is the inclusion of recreation with prayer and apostolic activity as an essential element of religious life as we know it today, and especially the explicit reference to individual 'free time'. This is possibly the most revolutionary contribution to the problem of work in the life of active religious, and as such seems to offer a challenge to much of the spiritual and ascetical training we have received in the past. It is this that the present article will try to examine.

What most readers are more likely to have considered is the more obvious problem, namely the practical one of creating opportunities for joint recreation among members of a community already over time-tabled and possibly barely meeting during the day for worship and meals in common. But this whole question of lack of leisure is

¹ *Religious Renewal*, in Supplement to THE WAY, No 4 (November 1967), p 27.

² *Ibid.*, p 31.

³ *Perfectae Caritatis*, 15.

simply a transitional problem, and one that future generations of religious will not have to face; the problem of leisure for them, as for all members of the technological community, will be in quite a different context, which I shall try to outline in the middle section of the article. However, we still have to explore what possibilities are open to us here and now, for individual and corporate recreation in groups large and small. This final question is one that many religious communities are already beginning to tackle at a practical level, and will consequently be dealt with controversially rather than conventionally, in the hope of provoking a reaction from those who have something to offer from their own experience.

The traditional attitude to leisure

'Victorian' and 'puritanical' are possibly two over-worked adjectives in the vocabulary of the angry young religious of today. Nevertheless we must admit that much of our reaction as religious to both work and leisure is shaped more by the social attitude of the english-speaking areas of post-reformation culture than by our more basic but hitherto neglected biblical sources. Harvey Cox pointed out that the concept of salvation through work is essentially a protestant one, and is 'what formed the absolutely decisive difference from Catholicism'.¹ The traditional catholic emphasis has always been on salvation through membership of the Church and participation in her sacramental life, while the exaltation of the worker is as much a protestant as a marxist tenet.

This same attitude is reflected in the Jesuit Constitutions, the prototype of so many post-reformation rules of religious congregations. Here we read the solemn warning, that

All when they are in good health shall have sufficient spiritual or exterior occupation, so that idleness, which is the origin of every kind of evil, may be banished as far as possible from our houses.²

Even at their official 'recreation' periods, women religious were expected to bring with them some form of needlework with which to occupy their idle hands, just in case the devil were to intervene – though this was always with the proviso that such work should not prove too absorbing in itself.³

¹ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (London 1965), p 185.

² *Summary of the Constitutions*, S.J., 55. Cf *Rules of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus*, 173.

³ *Ibid.*, 77.

Work, or rather man's application to it, was almost equated with the four last things, as can be seen in the following example of genuine victorian piety, such as was worked on samplers to be hung on our walls, like so many jewish mezuzahs.¹

The hand at work,
The eye on the tomb,
The heart in heaven.

And it was this same spirit of victorian piety, continuing the ignatian tradition, that was built into the prayer and practice of so many of the active congregations of religious founded in the nineteenth century, and which we are trying to adapt and renew today. It was the language and mentality of this period that shaped the writings of the foundresses of this period, those writings that we are bidden by the conciliar decree to take as one of the guiding norms for this same adaptation and renewal.

Each institute must faithfully acknowledge as its own and preserve its founder's spirit and special aims, and also its sound traditions, for all this constitutes the inheritance of an institute.²

The question of leisure is, of course, only one aspect of a very complex problem, but one that challenges the ascetical principles of religious life in a particular way.

In face of this dilemma, which is a genuine one for many of the elder members of our communities, it may be helpful to examine the earlier christian attitude to both work and leisure, for the history of religious life extends back further than Victoria – or even Ignatius (if they can bear being placed in the same category). The obvious source of information is the excellent third section of Pieper's treatise³ where he traces the attitudes of medieval spiritual writers to the seventh and crowning deadly vice of sloth. This was usually equated with *acedia*, that bugbear of the religious community of the day. But, as Pieper shows, St Thomas clearly distinguishes these from leisure, which is what we are concerned with here. 'Idleness and the incapacity for leisure correspond with one another. Leisure is the contrary of both'.⁴

For the diminishing numbers of religious involved in the highly

¹ Deut 6, 7.

² *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.

³ Pieper, Josef., *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (London 1947), pp 48–58.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 51.

professional world of today, over-activity may well be the equivalent pathological symptom to the more depressive problem of *acedia*. Industrial psychologists have established the maximum hours of employment, and how they can be most effectively spaced in order to ensure both optimum production and morale. The responsibility of superiors to provide humane working conditions for the members of their communities is by no means set aside by the fact of their joint consecration. But it is not enough for the superior to be convinced; some religious can drive themselves – and others – to distraction, and for the most spurious of motives.

The daily text offered by the Apostleship of Prayer for March 26 this year sums this up well. 'Realization that for success in work, sport or prayer, we must learn to relax', ending enigmatically with the day's special intention 'Pray for Bishops'. Perhaps the moral of this is that our bishops, like the abbots of old, must set us a public example in the right use of leisure. We can learn from the original Desert Fathers that the need for relaxation was accepted by their spiritual leaders as essential, even to mortified cenobites in the highly disciplined communities of the day.

Once Abbot Antony was conversing with some brethren, and a hunter who was after game in the wilderness came upon them. He saw Abbot Antony and the brothers enjoying themselves, and disapproved. Abbot Antony said: Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it. This he did. Now shoot another, said the elder. And another, and another. The hunter said: If I bend my bow all the time it will break. Abbot Antony replied: So it is also in the work of God. If we push ourselves beyond measure, the brethren will soon collapse. It is right, therefore, from time to time, to relax their efforts.¹

But it is the seemingly new emphasis on individual scope that now appears to present a challenge to past emphases on what remains a valid concept, that of christian self-denial. There is however, an established precedent even for this, as the following piece of sound advice given to one Abbot Mark by another Abbot Arsenius illustrates.

It is good, is it not, to have nothing in your cell that just gives you pleasure? For example, once I knew a brother

¹ Merton, Thomas, *The Wisdom of the Desert* (London 1960), p 63.

who had a little wildflower that came up in his cell, and he pulled it out by the roots. Well, said Abbot Arsenius, that is all right. But each man should act according to his own spiritual way. And if one were not able to get along without the flower, he should plant it again.¹

Leisure in the secular city

We are reliably informed by sociologists that work and leisure are going to present a completely different problem for future generations, and we must accept that this will also affect religious. We will no longer be faced with the problems of the proletariat which were Pieper's concern in his lectures of the late 1940s. The cybernetic revolution was then largely a matter of science fiction, like so many of the realities facing us today. Harvey Cox attempts an answer to this future problem in his chapter on 'Work and Play' in *The Secular City*; here he argues that 'the transition into technopolis is not yet possible' because of the 'monkish fanaticism that automatically discriminates against people who are unwilling or unable to find a job'.² The obvious monastic ghost that he is trying to lay is that of our old friend *acedia* – and one that need not delay us any further.

What is deserving of attention is the following valuable contribution to our present debate especially where it affects our present apostolate. Cox has already argued that in the technologically controlled world of the future 'leisure will acquire a positive definition. Instead of being the opposite of work, it will become the full utilization of man's potential for the cultural and psychic benefit of himself and his fellows'.³ By then all men, and not only those dedicated to christian works of mercy, will be able to devote themselves 'to the vast amount of work that still needs to be done in education, conservation, social work – the areas we call the public sector'.⁴ So most of our present day apostolic commitments will be ones we will need to share with our fellowmen, christian and agnostic alike. In the face of this we may well have to examine these very commitments, and the scope and purpose of the whole of our religious vocation.

Cox continues in the spirit of the whole of the present issue of *The Way*, by stressing that

¹ *Ibid.*, pp 67–68.

² Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (London 1965), p 186.

³ *Ibid.*, p 188.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 187.

The call which comes to man from the Bible, the *vocatio*, summons him not to a job, but to joy and gratitude in whatever he is doing. It is equally relevant at work and at play – or in the ‘new leisure’ in which work can become endowed with the quality of play.¹

In this new era of leisure, the question of liturgical developments takes on fascinating possibilities. Perhaps in that day and age we will truly be able to practise that *eutrapelia*² which is a lost art of christian living. As members of a christian community, religious will have unrivalled opportunities to experiment and create new forms of prayer and worship, within their own walls and in the wider social units that religious sociologists predict for us. Meanwhile, a more urgent problem remains, that we must examine, if only briefly, before we end.

Leisure for the religious of today

Now that members of active religious orders have begun to be emancipated from the pseudo-monastic structures of the past, far more scope presents itself for recreational activities, for individuals and small groups alike. Within our own walls we can have access to television and radio, record-players, possibly introduced for cultural and educational purposes, but now available for pure entertainment. These activities need not be divisive within a community, and can be shared by groups of different sizes and ages, provided that they are not confined to a merely passive absorption. They can readily overflow into discussion and evaluation, an activity that in itself appeals particularly to the younger members of our communities and is being increasingly used in formation programmes. The young are less likely to sit for long in front of a television screen in the mute and reverent manner of their elders, interaction with whom would be most welcome if it were forthcoming.

It is the younger members who are possibly more in need of a variety of forms of physical exercise, though this is as necessary in its way for the middle-aged, especially those of us increasingly involved in high-powered mechanical and academic work. The older members can still share in such activities in the role of spectators, which has

¹ *Ibid.*, p 189.

² Rahner, Hugo, *Man at Play: or did you ever practise Eutrapelia?* (London 1965).

always been a means of identifying oneself with the activities of others. Relaxation and bodily skills, both for the individual and the group, can provide what the conciliar document calls for as 'the natural means which make for mental and bodily health . . .' so essential to the right exercise of chastity. They can also be a means of fostering a true community spirit, for, as the document continues, ' . . . the more a true love flourishes among the brethren in their community life, the more easily is chastity safeguarded'.¹

Outside our own communities we have increasing access to museums and art galleries, swimming pools and tennis courts, even cinemas and theatres, and as our religious habits take on a more secular appearance, our presence in such public places will pass more or less unnoticed. Religious who live near centres of cultural activity may even feel free to join in local enterprises such as amateur dramatics, choral and orchestral groups, as well as to follow courses in the local night school, pursuing hobbies such as pottery, woodwork, learning a new language, etc. The scope is limitless, not only for apostolic contacts at a new level, but most of all for that individual expression of recreational needs that was stressed at the beginning of this article as the real break-through in the norms for renewal of religious life. The continuing demands of professional and spiritual duties will do much to ensure that none of the opportunities is abused, for there still are only twenty-four hours in the day.

But there still remain seven days in the week, and it is the abuse of Sundays that is perhaps the biggest scandal in our religious communities. For many of us it is an eagerly seized opportunity to catch up with a back log of work, rather than a day of prayer and peace in which to relax. The armaments factories in the first world war soon discovered that output fell when they kept their machines and workers in production on the traditional day of rest, and that it increased as soon as the sabbath was restored. There may well be catechism classes to be given, but why could these not be transferred to the day before, giving the children a break as well as their hard worked teachers?

This is possibly top-priority in our campaign for the right use of leisure, and one we must tackle before we can obey the call of the psalmist of old, bidding us relax, take it easy, before we can hope to 'Have peace and know that I am God'.²

¹ *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12.

² Ps 45, 11.