

The Challenge of Leisure: Onus or Bonus

The thoughts of most people at this time of year turn to long awaited vacations from the daily grind and routine of work which consume our energies for 10 months of the year. July and August are welcome moments of recreation for those who longingly await this grace of renewal for their exhausted bodies and spirits.



It is seasonal, then, to write about the challenge of leisure — intended by God to be a blessing but for many who lack moral and spiritual orientation it has become a source of barren boredom.

Much thought has been given to the subject of leisure in recent years because of changes in work patterns, earlier retirement ages, and an increase in the average life-span. Many writers refer to a New Age of Leisure as a reality of American life. But they express their own doubt as to whether it comes to us for better or for worse.

Some social scientists are predicting the day (perhaps 10 to 25 years away) when, with the acceleration of automation, 2 per cent of the total population of our country will be

able to perform all the work needed to provide the food and consumer goods for all America. They foresee a day when state governments will establish departments of leisure to balance departments of labor and schools will be called upon to teach four R's basic to education — reading, — 'riting — 'rithmetic and rest.

Philosophers of ages long past reflected on the value of leisure. The wisdom of ancient Greece preached that contemplation was the highest form of life and leisure was more noble than work. Their culture fostered men of leisure as a privileged class—a community of noble-born — an elite who relegated labor to slaves so they might enjoy freedom to serve the state or to devote themselves to reflection and contemplation while others did menial work. And Roman society had its wealthy Maecenas who was able to give Horace the leisure and the estate to write his classical odes.

But the leisure of Americans today is offered not only to an elite, but to the masses of people who used to be chained to toil. In fact, some believe it is often the leaders of our society who are forced to work the hardest today. Yet the masses who are liberated from endless toil are still slaves to constant and feverish activity in a desperate effort to enjoy their new found freedom. They seem

to be chained now to a tyranny of trifles as they work so hard to be distracted from distraction by distraction, with nothing to do and all day to do it in.

And this condition of the tyranny of leisure has challenged theologians and philosophers to analyze its intended blessings and to point out to us how best to find in it a welcome gift. As a matter of fact, we even have a non-profit organization at work in this country to help Americans to a solution of problems arising from excessive 'time on their hands'. It is called 'Leisure Studies, Inc.'

For generations leisure has meant non-work — intervals between work periods or time after working hours. It has never been seen as a value apart from work. It was always a rest from it, a reward for it, an escape from it or a preparation for more of it.

Walter Kerr in "The Decline of Pleasure" speaks of this association of leisure with work when he writes: "We are all of us compelled to read for profit, party for contracts, lunch for contracts, bowl for unity, drive for mileage, gamble for charity, go out for the evening for the greater glory of the municipality, and stay home for the weekend to rebuild the house."

(To be continued next week.)

Guest Columnist

By Father George S. Wood

Where Have All The Converts Gone?

During the past five years many changes have taken place in the Catholic Church. A notable change has been the tremendous decrease in the number of "converts" to the Church.



In the past, every parish priest spent hours in instructing those who were interested in the faith. Today, it is a rare occasion to have an interested person or persons.

Our Divine Lord gave us the commission to establish His Church and proclaim the Gospel of salvation. The Apostles understood this evangelical mandate, and their successors saw the Church increase and spread throughout the world. The Church flourished.

Twentieth century priests and missionaries feel the same mandate to proclaim Christ and

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to seek men who will believe in Him. If a change has occurred in our times it is that since Vatican II the Catholic Church officially recognizes the ecclesial reality of Protestant churches. It follows that the work of evangelism and conversion in the strict sense must be directed to the unchurched, the unconvinced, the unbaptized, rather than to Protestant Christians.

A "convert" is properly one who has recently progressed from a life of sin or unbelief to one of personal reform and belief. For this reason "convert" work does not mix well with ecumenism. Ecumenism seeks actively and prayerfully the unity of all Christian people; it is concerned with people who already profess in some way to believe in Christ.

This is not to say that individual Protestants should not be encouraged, should they be interested, to join the Catholic Church. They can do so without jeopardizing the local ecumenical effort. We have noticed in recent years that Protestant Christians who have become Catholics are usually not referred to as "converts". They are simply Protestants who have been received into the Catholic Church after a series of instructions. They have been received into "the Catholic communion".

Our mission has not changed. We still have to establish the Church of Christ on this earth and proclaim His Gospel. Maybe the techniques have changed. Maybe there has been a new understanding. Call it something else if you like. No matter how you spell it the active seeking of believers will always be the rock-bottom concern of the priest. After the first Easter and Pentecost it can't be any other way.

Editorial

Credibility a Factor in Three News Events

Seldom has there been such a concentrated onslaught of news as happened last week. And at least three of the happenings are directly connected with trust, or lack of it, in the public.

First, was the battle between the Justice Department and various newspapers, particularly the New York Times, over publication of the Pentagon papers. So many publications had gained possession of the documents that their significance became academic along side the real issue—freedom of the press.

An added fillip to this situation is found in the fact that a government which

has not taken its people seriously enough to tell them the truth sought public approbation for keeping a supposedly free press from doing just that.

The newspapers' victory is really the public's.

Probity has been taking it on the chin for so long that a mobster such as Joseph Colombo Sr. can form a national organization with one of its premises that there is no such thing as the Mafia.

Who was behind the Colombo shooting and for what reason probably never will be clear. For even if the police come up with the answer an organization such as

the Mafia which has such contempt for the truth that it can publicly deny itself will distort the findings.

The third instance which calls credibility into consideration is the tragic deaths of three Cosmonauts. The conjectures given by the Soviets seem plausible and are probably true. But because a world has become used to Moscow half-truths and lies many people cannot accept the explanation and would rather gossip and rumor.

There is a clear lesson in this for our own government. That is, make a habit of telling the truth or some day when it is doing just that nobody will believe it.