

That ol' noonday devil

By Katharine Bird
NC News Service

No one has a monopoly on boredom, as Benedictine Father Thomas Hillenbrand sees it. He is prior of Blue Cloud Abbey in Marvin, S.D.

During a recent trip, Father Hillenbrand met a 17-year-old girl and was struck at once by the bored expression on her face. Though surrounded by comfort in her fine home, he explained, the girl's attitude said: "Why should I even get up? The world's not interesting."

Father Hillenbrand also found some "terribly bored" people at Fort Totten Indian Reservation in North Dakota where he was a pastor from 1978-1982.

He explained during an interview that many Sioux Indians on the reservation found their lives challenging and worthwhile.

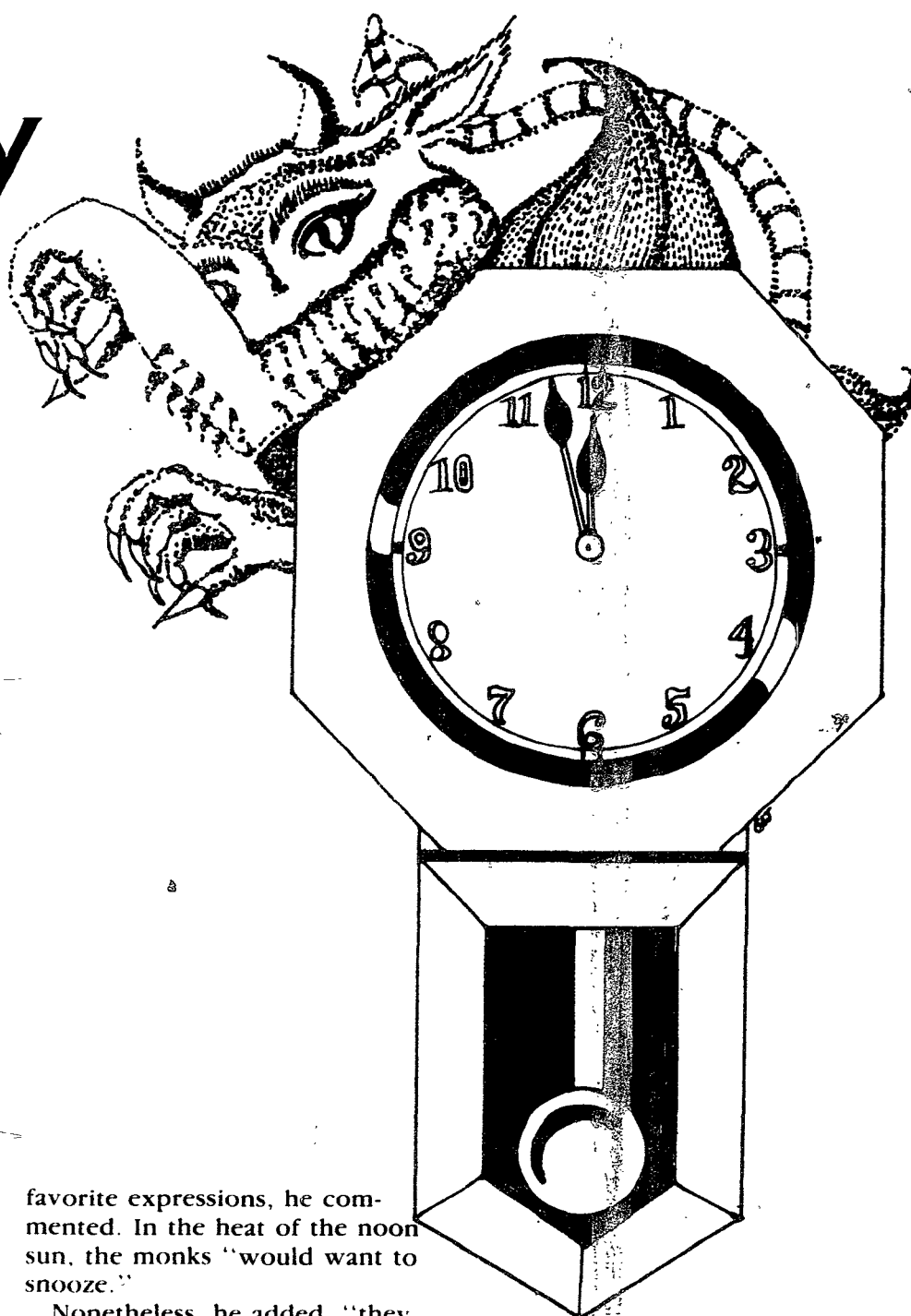
But, he also met some, especially unemployed teen-agers and young-adults, who felt they "had no purpose in life."

Often the difference between the two groups, in the Benedictine's view, could be traced at least partly to employment possibilities. The Sioux reservation is in an economically depressed area without enough jobs for all available workers.

Father Hillenbrand is convinced there is a direct relationship between satisfying work and finding meaning in life. If people can't find work, he said, it's easy for them to become bored with life.

'Father Hillenbrand is convinced there is a direct relationship between satisfying work and finding meaning in life. If people can't find work, he said, it's easy for them to become bored with life.'

But boredom isn't a strictly modern phenomenon, the Benedictine observed. He recalled that the desert fathers also "had to fight boredom" in the third and fourth centuries. Beware "the noonday devil!" was one of their



favorite expressions, he commented. In the heat of the noon sun, the monks "would want to snooze."

Nonetheless, he added, "they always fought boredom with vigor." Sometimes they would redouble their efforts at prayer. Often, however, a favorite antidote for the monks was to get busy working, Father Hillenbrand remarked.

The Benedictine considers that advice pertinent today. He often advises bored youths "to look for a job." And he tells them that any job — working at a factory or cutting grass — can be "meaningful if you approach it right."

He suggested that a person approach a boring job creatively, perhaps by thinking: "How do I relate to these people?" "Can I bring some cheer to the job?"

Asked what he does if he is bored, Father Hillenbrand laughed and said he "gets his mind in gear," not letting it spin aimlessly. He finds that this works for him. "If I get interested in something, and really dig in and find a challenge," boredom disappears.

But, he added, "I don't find myself bored very often."

Some people consider monastic life very repetitive and quiet, Father Hillenbrand admitted. But not him. "I find it tremendously

challenging," he said, because of "the whole search for God."

He explained: "Each stage of my life, each day is different. So my concept of God will be different too" day by day.

In his view, boredom is a "kind of dying, a closing down, which stifles growth" spiritually and otherwise. There is a sense in which bored individuals are "turned in on themselves," not living as fully as they might, he suggested.

He considers Christ's example instructive. "Jesus wasn't bored, he was alive," Father Hillenbrand said. And Jesus showed us how to combine prayer and service in a nicely balanced way.

Following Christ is a "dynamic process," Father Hillenbrand said. For Christ constantly "is calling us to stay alive and grow by going out of ourselves to others."

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)

When bore

By Father David K. O'Rourke, OP
NC News Service

Back in my college days I had a philosophy teacher who had a way of making us all sit up and pay attention.

"You know what's wrong with you people?" he asked one day. "You're all bored. You've got no purpose in life. You roar around like you're going somewhere. But deep down you're all bored stiff."

A master of public relations he wasn't. But he got to the heart of things. That day he made a connection I never forgot. People who see purpose in life, are not bored.

Boredom is no small matter. Over the centuries, the church's writers have considered it among the leading spiritual problems. Today professional counselors often report that boredom brings many a person to seek their help.

Several years ago I came across a man working as a lay missionary, a volunteer catechist in rural America. He was about 60 years old and ailing. But his outlook was exceptionally positive, so upbeat that it commanded attention.

Intrigued, I asked how he had come into his work. He told me that in his younger years he had decided to become a real master in his profession, a branch of

Searchin

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

What do you give to the person who has everything? What does such a person want? Chances are he cannot tell you. Not that he is completely satisfied. His life may even seem quite empty and he may be bored to tears. But why?

A man like that entered Jesus' life. He "had many possessions" but he sensed he did not have the most valuable possession: assurance of eternal life.

Not only was this man wealthy; he was good, too. When he asked Jesus what he must do to share in everlasting life, Jesus suggested that he keep the commandments. He was able to respond without hesitation: "Teacher, I have kept all these since my childhood."

He was so sincere that "Jesus looked at him with love" (Mark 10:20-21).

He looked at him with keen discernment and realized what really was bothering him. So Jesus made another suggestion: "There is one thing you must do. Go and sell what you have and give to the poor; you will have treasure in