

COLUMNISTS

Leisure ordained from creation

I do most of my work on a computer now. Much of what I do involves writing, and I can get much more work done in far less time using the computer than I did when I used only a typewriter.

I also have a speed-dial phone. This great little device saves me time where I had never even imagined one could save time — dialing seven or 11 phone numbers!

I even have a machine in my kitchen that chops vegetables for me. Incredible time saver, there.

I am, in fact, surrounded by tools that save me time. Judging from the number of gadgets I use and considering all the time they save, you might suppose that I have freed up time enough to have quite a few hobbies, visit often with family and friends, and contribute to my church and community in worthwhile volunteer activities.

Not so. I'm too busy.

In fact, I seem to have much less time now than ever before — without doubt, I'm much busier now than I was before I came into contact with the latest wave of time-saving gadgetry. I go through most days with the sense that I have to accomplish a great deal and that there isn't enough time to get it all done.

I don't think I'm alone in this feeling,



the moral life

BY PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

either. Most of the people I know comment about how busy they are, how little time they have, and how pressured they feel to accomplish the tasks before them. The fact that we have so many time-saving devices has not, it seems, freed up much leisure time for us. Instead we seem to fill up every possible free minute with chores and tasks and demands of every sort.

Oddly, there's a kind of wisdom in Christianity that would challenge our need to be busy all the time. If we assume that "religion" is primarily a set of rules urging us to be hard workers and put duty before pleasure at all times, we can find some pretty strong evidence to the contrary! In fact, right from the first chapter of Genesis we are reminded that God built leisure time into the very order of

creation itself! We read in the very first Bible story that "on the seventh day, God rested." God seems to want to ensure that time itself contains a rhythm that includes time off.

Even Jesus appears to have sought out time away from it all to spend with his friends or by himself. And all the great literature — religious and otherwise — that deals with how to live a good and worthy life includes some advice about spending time "for relaxation of spirit and the strengthening of mental and bodily health."

The source of that quotation may come as a surprise to some of you, as it did to me. It comes from one of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, "The Church in the Modern World," number 61. Ordinarily, I wouldn't think to look in a church document for advice on making time for leisure activities; I more readily associate church documents with duty than with leisure. But an extended section of this very great Vatican II document actually is devoted to discussing our need for genuine leisure.

In fact the document talks at some length about allowing "sufficient rest and leisure to cultivate (our) family, cultural, social and religious life." The document relies on passages from other works of

philosophers and theologians, who also recognize that without time spent apart from the tasks we need to accomplish, life becomes dulling and trivial.

So Gabriel Marcel says that "Recreation ensures that our lives will be thoroughly human. Joseph Pieper advises that "The full and integrated person is one who directs free time so that it becomes the locus for creativity, the developing of skills, the gaining of insights."

James Empereur, SJ, sums it up in this way: "Much that advances our humanity takes place in leisure time: the coming together of companions, a needed balance to our usual activities and professions, and the psychological space to be ourselves. Leisure is the special time of engagement for husband and wife, children, and lovers."

Even the Buddha, never imagining a culture as bent on economic gain and frantic activity as is our own, is said to have given this counsel to his followers: "Don't just do something! Stand there!"

Our faith encourages us to examine our lives and determine how we can move beyond this frantic pace to regularly dedicate some time to what we might call the important duty to relax.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

Daily life offers its own piety

It took me a long time to admit it, but I am not a very pious person. I'm not big on formal prayers, don't talk to God a lot (except when I'm upset or scared about something), don't often meditate, go on retreat, attend Mass except on Sundays, participate in novenas, say the rosary, or listen to religious music. When others talk about their "personal relationship with Jesus" or describe their mystical religious experiences, it mostly makes me uncomfortable.

Yet I have also found that my Christian faith is very important to me. It gives me a way of looking at the world, making sense of things and choosing the basic values by which I live my life. It allows me to deal with the joys and tragedies of human existence, and gives me the motivation and courage to stand up for what I believe and to try to make the world a bet-



faith & work

BY GREGORY J. AUGUSTINE PIERCE

ter place. I like the community that I find at church and appreciate the religious symbols and ceremonies that mark the important milestones in my life and those of my loved ones.

The question that I've had to struggle with is this: Is Christianity (and specifically Catholicism) necessarily about pi-

ous practices, or is there a place in it for people like me — not non-pious or anti-pious or un-pious — just, shall we say piously impaired?

For years I felt guilty about my lack of piety. Was there something wrong with me that I didn't get excited about Marian appearances or angels or miracles? Was I just too lazy or undisciplined or self-righteous to get down on my knees for hours at a time? Did my lack of enthusiasm for devotions like Benediction and First Fridays and Forty Hours mean that I wasn't a very good Catholic?

I tried to become more pious. I read the Bible and the great spiritual writers. I tried to perform various religious practices and techniques on a regular basis, but I found them unsatisfying and ultimately gave them up.

It was only in the last 10 years (I'm now

48) that I found a spirituality for me. It's not a very formal — or pious — spirituality. There's not much written on it, and in many ways it seems to run counter to most of the other types of spirituality I've encountered.

It's called "the spirituality of work" or "the spirituality of daily life," and it's based on the idea that God can be encountered in the events, places, people and materials of ordinary life — on our jobs, with our families and friends, and in our communities.

The spirituality of work or daily life is not for everyone — just as the more traditional spiritualities are not for me. I was happy to discover, though, that there is even a spirituality for the piously impaired like myself.

A native Rochesterian, Pierce is the co-publisher of ACTA Publications, Chicago.

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