

# Lonely Hearts

## Or the Modest Newsletter Written by People As Yet Unwed

### Leisure and the Christian

*By Philip Barnes, a Young Man, Single and Working Only Forty Hours a Week*

As a young man, single and working only forty hours a week, I have almost as much free time as did the princes and queens of Europe in the 1500's . Instead of the common seventy-hour industrial work-week marked by the rising and the setting of the sun, I spend no more than eight hours a day, five days a week, in my little cubicle at work. The rest is all my time to fill. And fill it, I must; for time is one of those few commodities even the modern man has not been able to store and use at will. This explains why Lee remarks that leisure has always been a fringe benefit in the history of mankind, but now is moving into the center of life, threatening to replace work as the basis of culture.

Of course, this statement stands true only if leisure is understood quantitatively as time away from work devoted to activities that are inherently pleasurable (Leland Ryken). The problem with this definition is that it does not account for any distinguishable difference between Christian and non-Christian leisure apart from a short exception list of activities for the Christian perhaps. Nor does it explain why some find their leisure enjoyable and many others don , why more and more people are becoming increasingly desperate in their search for new ways to fill time or to relax, or why some of the most restless people are those who have retired after years of work, only to find themselves to be empty and discontent. Indeed, it should not surprise us that leisure, if understood as time away from work, is still viewed in relation to production and means nothing when detached from the active life. The leisure is ours, but not the skill to use it (MacIver). I would argue such leisure is really no leisure at all.

A fresh, new understanding of leisure is needed, especially considering what is available in the marketplace of modern assumptions. Indeed, we may not run to modernism to find the answer we seek. For it was Kant, that great German philosopher of modernism, who turned even the theory of knowing into a process of intellectual labor, thereby excluding with one broad sweep the concept of *intelligo* which had ruled for centuries. For Kant, one could know nothing if it was not the result of labor, contrary to the ancients for whom *intellego* (or knowing) was the seeing of the mind. For the ancients, knowing was likened to looking at a rose; the eye is at rest while it gazes with delight at the rose, feasting on its colors, its sparkle, and the graceful swoop of the petals. To Kant and to all of us moderns who follow in his footsteps, the psalmist command to rest and know that I am God makes very little sense.

We must therefore return to the teaching of those men who lived before the dawn of modernism, to the time of the Scriptures and of the Church fathers and there find our answer. In Greek, the term for leisure is *skole* and in Latin, *scola* from which we get our word school. Leisure was a part of the individual educational process. It described the atmosphere in which cultivation of the mind, body and soul could take place, an atmosphere of calmness and of serenity.

Josef Pieper develops this traditional definition of leisure in his excellent book, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*. He begins by describing the code of conduct meant by idleness (*acedia*), known as the root of all evils and one of the seven worst vices. Idleness meant especially this: that the human being has given up on the very responsibility that comes with his dignity: that he does not want to be what God wants him to be, and that means that he does not want to be what

he really, and in the ultimate sense, *is*. According to Pieper who, I quickly add, is summarizing not innovating, the opposite of *acedia* is not simply the industrious spirit of the daily effort to make a living (Is not the world just as well capable of this quick-fix?), but rather the cheerful affirmation by man of his own existence, of the world as a whole, and of God. True leisure, as opposed to utilitarian or time-away-from-work leisure, then, is a state of the soul—a calm, an ability to remain quiet, a desire to contemplate and enjoy the whole of reality for its own sake. True leisure is an ultimately *human* pleasure. Leisure, then, is more than an absence from activity; it is affirmation. One finds such celebration in the first pages of the Scriptures when God, on the seventh day, saw that all He made was good while He rested from all the works He had made. Just as God did not rest because He was tired or because there was nothing to do but to affirm and to enjoy, so does the leisure of man include within itself a celebratory, approving, lingering gaze of the inner eye on the reality of creation and revelation.

The highest form of affirmation is the festival and worship, Pieper points out. For the people of Israel, the weekly, monthly, and yearly schedule was full of such opportunities for leisure. During those holy days, labor, travel, and even unnecessary food preparation were set aside for celebration, for thought, and for discussion. In the New Testament, while the emphasis is on the internal nature of the Sabbath rest, Christians in the early church continue to set aside time for church *agape* feasts and worship. And as a result of the influence of Judaism and Christianity over western civilization, the church took over the days previously given to pagan celebrations and turned them into Christian festivals or what we now call holidays.

Protestants have been understandably wary of the pageantry that accompanied these festivals and developed a theological understanding of work. Unfortunately we have not spent the same energy keeping up with the rapid societal changes in the area of leisure and have lost the premodern split between work and leisure. The result has been the unhappy marriage of work and leisure where leisure is nothing more than the miserable, clingy wife of its abusive husband, Labor. While rightly embracing the New Testament emphasis on the internal state of the soul, we have assumed that, unlike God, we were capable of celebrating God and creation at all times and places *equally* and have failed to take hallowed time seriously.

I suggest we redeem the time from insignificance by seeking to cultivate the lost art of restfulness and delight in the whole of creation. I suggest we follow the example of Christ who did not reduce his time to evangelism or discipleship sessions, but attended a wedding celebration (with such gusto that his opponents accused him of being a glutton and a drunkard), ate with many people (Mat 9:10), and often retreated from crowds to meditate and pray (Mk 6:45-47). We will affirm our existence as unique creatures made in the image of God when we celebrate the creativity and imagination with which He has endowed mankind. We will affirm our identity as Christians when we cultivate our mind, bodies, and souls as only Christians can do. Unlike Martha, who remained troubled and anxious about many things but let us choose, like Mary, the portion which will not be taken away—the time set aside for restfulness of the soul in the presence of God.

I realize I have provided few specifics on how this endeavor may be carried out with success. My consolation is this: nor does Josef Pieper (though you may find one idea in the excellent film, *Babette Feast*). My aim (and his in *Leisure: the Basis of Culture*) was merely to shed a little light on a matter which seems very important and very pressing, but which seems to get lost behind the tasks of the day so much in the forefront of our attention. And after all, is not the time spent contemplating how one should employ our free time itself a small step towards making leisure the very basis of our life and culture?

### **Some Questions for the Bash**

*By Deborah Forteza, a Young Woman, Single and Only Indifferently Employed*

- 1 Who is the real hero in *The Illiad*? Achilles or Hector? Why?
- 2 Why is story-telling so important in *The Illiad*?
- 3 Is Achilles' mourning of Patroclus appropriate?
- 4 What is the main thrust of Homer in *The Illiad* and *The Oddyssey*? What does he want the reader to feel in each case? How does he accomplish this?
- 5 At the beginning of the *Oddyssey*, we're told that *Oddysseus* suffered much on his long journey homeward. Why did he go through so much trouble?
- 6 Why does *Oddysseus* want to return home? Why doesn't he want to live forever with the goddess?

### **On John 13.12**

*By Augustine, an Elder, Unmarried, and Craving More Leisure Than He Had*

Let us return and see what this John saith: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom;" she is not my bride. And dost thou not rejoice in the marriage? Yea, saith he, I do rejoice: "But the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the voice of the bridegroom." Not because of mine own voice, saith he, do I rejoice, but because of the Bridegroom's voice. I am in the place of hearer; He, of speaker: I am as one that must be enlightened, He is the light; I am as the ear, He is the word. Therefore the friend of the Bridegroom standeth and heareth Him. Why standeth? Because he falls not. How fails not? Because he is humble. See him standing on solid ground; "I am not worthy to loose the latchet of His shoe." Thou doest well to be humble; deservedly thou dost not fall; deservedly thou standest, and hearest Him, and rejoicest greatly for the Bridegroom's voice. So also the apostle is the Bridegroom's friend; he too is jealous, not for himself, hut for the Bridegroom. Hear his voice when he is jealous: "I am jealous over you," said he, "with the jealousy of God:" not with my own, nor for myself, but with the jealousy of God. Why? How? Over whom art thou jealous, and for whom? "For I have espoused you to one husband, to present a chaste virgin to Christ." Why dost thou fear, then? Why art thou jealous? "I fear," saith he, "lest, as the serpent beguiled Eve by his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the chastity which is in Christ." The whole Church is called a virgin. You see that the members of the Church are divers, that they are endowed with and do rejoice in divers gifts: some men wedded, some women wedded; some are widowers who seek no more to have wives, some are widows who seek no more to have husbands; some men preserve continence from their youth, some women have vowed their virginity to God: divers are the gifts, but all these are one virgin. Where is this virginity? for it is not in the body. It belongs to few women; and if virginity can be said of men, to few men in the Church belongs a holy integrity even of body; yet one such is a more honorable member. Other members, however, preserve virginity, not in body, but all in mind. What is the virginity of the mind? Entire faith, firm hope, sincere charity. This is the virginity which he, who, was jealous for the Bridegroom, feared might be corrupted by the serpent. For, just as the bodily member is marred in a certain part, so the seduction of the tongue defiles the virginity of the heart. Let her who does not desire without cause to keep virginity of body, see to it that she be not corrupted in mind.