

FREE-TIME

THE Council has exhorted us to 'read the signs of the times'. Among these, the rise of the working-class has an evident primordial place; and the 'theology of work' has been increasingly studied. But the growth in importance of *free-time* calls for complementary studies, since the worker is not just a worker, but a man whose life has to be considered as a whole.

Free-time is of particular relevance to young workers, although it concerns more or less everybody. To workers, in the first place, because it is a phenomenon of modern industrial civilisation. Before the industrial revolution, in an agricultural or craft's context, there was far less possibility of deciding freely how to divide a day or year between working-hours and free time, since this was largely determined by natural factors, such as light and weather. It is only technical progress which has made it possible for free-time to assume the problematic importance it already has today and which will increase with the growth of man's mastery over natural conditions. For this latter reason, it is yet more relevant to the young.

Free-time should be sharply distinguished from *Rest*. Resting-time is *not* free-time. Rest is a vital necessity like work, a biological necessity like eating. The amount of rest proper to man can be determined by purely scientific criteria, like the amount of nutrition required, both naturally variable within limits according to circumstances. Free-time exists when there is time left over after these vital necessities like work or rest have been met – time which can be devoted to activities which are not strictly necessary for biological survival, without which life might be miserable, but could go on. Games, art, contemplation are typical of free-time activities precisely because they can be omitted without dying, unlike sleep. Free-time is the time man has available for these activities which are not strictly necessary for his physical survival, but which are above all others enjoyed for their freedom by human beings.

I. FREE-TIME IN THE LIFE OF YOUNG WORKERS

How much free-time do today's young workers have? What use do they

make of it? What are the problems they face? What are their aspirations? What follows is a summary of the answers to these questions which emerged as the result of inquiries conducted by young workers themselves.

1. HOW MUCH?

The answer is that it *varies* enormously but that, for various reasons the majority do not have as much of it as is often thought. The reason for these differences in the amount of free-time is that free-time is a *Conquest* of the working-class; it is not automatically achieved with the advent of industrialisation. It has to be fought for, and not all have fought for it, or fought for it with equal success. Hence the present inequalities in the amount of free-time at the young worker's disposition. The young workers naturally demand that there should be not only an end to these gross inequalities, but more free-time for all. And there is no doubt that the progress of industrialisation, in particular with the increase of automation, will bring with it a constant increase in free-time.

2. WHAT USE IS MADE OF IT?

The use of this free-time is marked with ambiguity. Although a positive use is made of it by many, there are many factors which lead to a negative use.

(i) POSITIVELY

Among the many uses to which free-time is put and which contribute to the human development of the person, perhaps the most significant is for *Socialization*. Not only do outdoor activities, like sport or hikes, contribute to physical development and compensate to some extent, for the ill-effects on health of many forms of modern work, but they are usually carried out in *Groups* and help to create friendships, teamwork, and human inter-relationship. Likewise, there is an increasing tendency among the young to seek their intellectual and cultural development not on an individual basis, in isolation, but through discussion groups, team work and study, and collective initiatives, like the organisation of cine-clubs, study-groups etc. Free-time affords the possibility of selecting one's companions, who share a common interest, whereas at work these are usually imposed. Free-time also affords an opportunity to run these activities as the group wishes and to compensate to some extent for the imposed rhythms and systems of work or study. But this only takes

place when there is enough energy left over for it. Generally speaking, it must be admitted that free-time is far from providing an adequate compensation for dehumanizing work, and it is those whose work is least depersonalised who manage to make the most positive use of free-time.

(ii) NEGATIVELY

There are many forces at work which lead to the negation of the possibilities of free-time for human development, even for those who have enough time left over after work. Among these the following may be briefly listed as being perhaps the most important:

- (a) *Escapism*: For many, free-time is an opportunity for an escape into an unreal world which they inhabit mentally for a few hours to forget the harsh realities of their real existence. The dangers to the development of an integrated personality inherent in this flight from reality are well-known to psychologists.
- (b) *Passivity*: An industry has been created to supply the means of this flight. Very often, the same capitalists who have been forced by the workers' action to pay good wages succeed in re-pocketing this money by creating artificial needs, by the use of the techniques of mass-persuasion and advertising, among the young especially, for trivial products which do not correspond to real needs but for which the demand is created by the producers. The commercialisation of free-time confirms the tendency to use free-time the easy way – i.e. by the passive consumption of entertainment for the masses, rather than by creative effort of a personal kind.
- (c) *Emptiness*: Due to the lack of means, – financial, organisational, or other – many of the young who have time fail to use it fully. It is largely wasted.

3. CONCLUSION

Although the increase in free-time, like the progress of science, creates greater opportunities for human development, yet these possibilities are being very frequently frustrated by factors impinging on the freedom of its use.

II. THE CHRISTIAN VIEW

A. FREE-TIME IN THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

1. The Book of Genesis speaks in a mysterious way, which does not

allow us to infer too much information, but it does give us some indication as to the will of God with regard to man's use of his time. One of these indications is the absence of any distinction between working-time and free-time.¹ Adam before the Fall 'tills the garden' (Gen. 2, 15); but is it work, or is it play? It would be anachronistic to call it either; it is just an image of the divine creative activity. It is the free and spontaneous use man makes of his energy for the glory of God. It is not, for him, a necessity in order to survive. It is the putting into play of the dynamism God inbuilt into human nature. It is the sign of man's free acceptance of God's free gift to man of the possibility of participating in God's own activity. Man is active simply because God has willed him not to be idle. His activity is the sheer expression of human life, still undivided and uncompartimentalised, serving entirely, and exclusively as a reflection of God's own. Work is play, literally, for Adam.

2. The Fall introduces the distinction between work and free-time activity. Now work is necessary for survival. 'That which man's will would have freely embraced as an agreeable exercise has become, after *Sin*, a necessity imposed as expiation and accompanied by suffering'. (*Rerum Novarum*). Nonetheless, man's time is not all occupied by work.

¹On the other hand, the distinction between work and rest is a sign of man's creaturehood. Although God is said to have 'rested' on the seventh day, this is an anthropomorphism. It cannot be univocally speaking, true of God, for God is constant dynamism. God's 'rest' is an example set for man, a revelation of what God meant man to do: to alternate activity with rest. It pinpoints the paradox of man's nature: *subject* to conditioning, but capable of rising, by his thought and free will, to *sovereignty* over it. The sign of man's sovereignty is his linguistic power; the sign of his subjection is the conditioning of his life in accord with the cyclical process of activity and rest. Man is capable of not allowing this cycle to be merely *repetitive*: every turn of the wheel can be made into a forward move, because man is *inventive*. (This becomes much clearer in an evolutionary picture). Still, the need to divide his time between work and rest is the sign of the limit of man's dynamism and of his dependence on another, unlimited, source of vital energy.

²'Stupidity' is mentioned by Christ Himself, thirteenth and last, in the list of 'evil things which defile a man' (Mark, 7, 22-23). The Greek word used (*afrosyne*) corresponds to the Hebrew 'nabal', about which *The Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (ed. by Brown, Driver and Briggs, Oxford, 1952) says that it is used 'especially of the man who has no perception of ethical and religious claims', of religious insensibility. The 'fool' is the man who does not know God and does not want to know him (as in Psalms 14, 1; 53, 2). This appears to be also the sense the word generally has in the New Testament (as for instance in Matt. 5, 22).

His energy is not all exhausted in providing for the necessities of survival. He has still a surplus left over which he can devote to free activity and he still has time left over after his daily labour for self-expression in the various forms of activity which man carries out for their own sake — such as games, song, contemplation. These free forms of activity remain in man as a sign that his original nature has not entirely lost its freedom in the servitude of sin. For the man with no promise of redemption they could not be anything but the expression of a vain nostalgia for a lost paradise. To the believer in a future redemption, they are the sign that not all is lost and that paradise may be regained. Of this we find an early expression in the words Lamech says of Noah: 'He will relieve us of our labours and of the painful work imposed upon us by the work which the Eternal has cursed'. It is the imposition of an excessive load of work such that there is no time left over for free-activity which constitutes the inhumanity of the treatment Pharaoh metes out to the Jews in Egypt. Their 'slavery' is constituted not by the absence of political freedom, an anachronistic concept, but by the absence of free-time. 'Let these people be borne down with work; let them be over-charged with it' (Ex. 5, 9) are Pharaoh's words, to which Yahweh's are an exact counter-reply: 'I want to free you from the labours with which the Egyptians bear you down, and to rescue you from their slavery'. God wants to give them back their free-time, the sign of the possibility of paradise regained.

3. In the life of Christ, the new Adam, again we find an absolution of the distinction . . . between work and free-time. Christ is the only man who is born freely, and hence whose whole life is free: if he works, and if his work is physically tiring, nonetheless it is the result of a free choice and free activity. This is true of the whole of Christ's life.

If then, we turn to Christ's 'work' *par excellence*, the 'work of the Redemption,' the 'works of Him who sent me which I must accomplish' (Jo. 9, 4), the 'works which I do (which) render witness on my behalf that the Father has sent me' (Jo. 5, 36) corresponding to the prophecy of Isaiah: 'the work of the Eternal will prosper in his hands' (53, 10), the freedom with which it is accomplished is still more apparent.

If, next, we examine the Gospel accounts of Christ's use of his time in his public life, we find it impossible to distinguish between working hours and free-time. At any time he is accomplishing the 'work of the Redemption'. All his time is at his disposal; and he disposes of it always in the service of the accomplishment of his work. His freedom

in disposing of his time is evident in the often underlined absence of hurry (for instance, Mk. 2, 21-43) and its total dedication to his work in the generosity with which he responds to the demands made upon it (for instance, Mark 3, 20). 'He who comes to me, I will in no wise cast out' (Jo. 6, 37).

4. What is the meaning of free-time to the Christian, living in the age of the Church, i.e. between Pentecost and the Second Coming?

In itself, it gives the possibility of anticipating the life of glory, it affords the possibility of a foretaste of heaven, it is already a partial sharing in the bliss of eternal life. It can be a sort of sacrament of the future. If, for the pagan, free-time and the free activities it made possible could not be more than a vain nostalgia for an unrealisable state of affairs, perhaps some sort of memory of a golden age now lost for good, to the Christian, it is already a participation in the life which is promised to the redeemed to be enjoyed in its fulness at the end of time and for eternity.

Nonetheless, this possibility may not be actualised for various reasons which can turn free-time into a time of enslavement rather than liberation. The value of free-time in the age of the Church therefore hinges on the use made of it.

Evidently, the 'good' of free-time activities, as of all human activities, may be spoiled by the development of an inordinate attachment or addiction to them. The sports-fan who cannot bring himself to stay away from a match when more important things require this of him is an example; but this is not a danger specific to free-time activities: it is inherent in all the good things of the earth. However, there are a number of factors, specifically related to the corruption of free-time, about which a few brief remarks are made further on.

5. The picture of the future life which the Bible presents is as mysterious as that of the pre-Fall human condition. Nonetheless again, some things are clear. It will not be inactive, and the activity will be free. In other words, the distinction between work and play will be totally abolished once more. All time will be free-time, and work will be play.

B. VALUE-JUDGEMENTS

In this section, an attempt is made to deepen our judgement as to why, in the light of the Biblical view of free-time, the facts are judged positively or negatively.

(i) ESCAPISM: SYMPTOM OF THE INNER DIVISION IN MAN

Although Sin is at the root of the distinction between work and free-time, this does not mean that they have become completely independent of each other. On the contrary, the improvement of the worker's condition at work improves his free-time possibilities not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively. The less tiring the work, the more energy left over for free-activity; the more self-developing the work, the more scope it affords for the development of intelligence and initiative, the greater the resources brought by the worker to his free-time activities. Hence, the progress made in the sphere of work is multiplied in the sphere of free-time. On the other hand, if his work is dehumanising, it is extremely difficult for the worker to make a positive use of his free-time. If his work is such that it enslaves his mind and his will, the most likely use he will want to put his 'free-time' to, will be escapism.

Why is the escapist use of free-time bad? Precisely because it sharpens the dichotomy between work and free-time activity. While the sense of the divine plan should orientate towards the re-fusion of the two, the re-assimilation of the one and the other enslaving work and escapist free-time turn them into contraries growing ever more apart from each other. The compartmentalisation of life, the disaggregation of human activity, the disintegration of the personality, are aggravated. This breach of the inner unity of man is precisely one of the symptoms of the Fall and the threefold division it brought about: between God and man, between man and man, within man.

(ii) PASSIVITY: SYMPTOM, OF THE DIVISION BETWEEN MAN AND MAN

The second 'division' resulting from the Fall – the antagonism between and exploitation of man by man – can also be aggravated by free-time. Free-time, as has been noted above, is a privileged time for socialisation, and the trend towards an increase of it is one of the positive signs of our times. But a counter force is at work, corrupting it, turning the group freely formed to carry out free activity, into a depersonalized herd driven by outside pressures often unbeknowingly into passive consumers of mass entertainment. The power of the means used for this end result in the small group who hold them under their control exploiting the mass of men: thus the opportunities of free-time are turned into an instrument not of socialization, but of class-exploitation.

(iii) EMPTINESS: SYMPTOM OF THE DIVISION BETWEEN MAN AND GOD

The availability of free-time does not imply that it will be put to good

use; it may be misused – even through its non-use. Lack of means, financial or organisation, may be responsible for it; but most of all, lack of education or training in the exercise of judgement.

This would fall perhaps in the category of the sin of stupidity. About this, St. Thomas Aquinas says: 'Stupidity implies a certain stupor of the sense of judgement, in particular about the highest cause which is the last end and supreme good. One can suffer from "stupor in judgement" in two ways: by natural indisposition, as in the case of the insane, which is not a sin; or by the immersion by man of his sense in earthly things, by which it becomes ill-adapted to perceive the divine – as St. Paul says: "the animal man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (I Cor. 2, 14) – just as a man whose taste is diseased will not relish sweetness. And this stupidity is a sin'.

Further, Aquinas considers that stupidity is a sin against the precepts about the contemplation of truth, viz. to search after knowledge and to develop one's intelligence; and that it is 'born mostly out of lustfulness and is rightly called its daughter, 'because this vice concerns the greatest pleasures which most absorb the soul'. (2a, 2ae, q46).

It is a sin which one expects to find in our affluent society flooded with triviality, given disproportionate attention, especially when sex is concerned. This blunting of the sense of judgement is perhaps the commonest form of the corruption of free-time activity in our time, and its result is the turning away of man still further from God.²

III. PASTORAL CONCLUSIONS

1. 'Review of life' has always been considered a means for achieving the integration of life, of breaking down its compartmentalisation.

2. The Christian view of free-time required a greater elaboration and more frequent presentation, just as much as the Biblical view of work, to remove certain misconceptions about free-time, parallel to those about work ('a curse for sin'), which ignore its positive significance in the divine plan of salvation.

3. Because of the interdependence between work and free-time, it is impossible to aim at the full development of the human personality in free-time, without the present dehumanising nature of industrial work being also altered.

4. Nonetheless much can be achieved by developing the sense of judgement of the young, through proper training particularly about the

mass-media, which should form a very important part of education for life.

5. To carry out creative action in one's free-time is a means of sharpening one's intelligence and training one's will, disposing oneself for the perception of spiritual things and the reception of God's gifts.

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