WORK, LEISURE AND COMMUNITY

By JOHN F. CLARKSON

JUST A TWO or three-minute walk from the busy road that leads out of relatively quiet, suburban Kamakura towards Yokohama and Tokyo, one can enter into the little wooded valley where the Kotokuin Temple is situated. There, in the silence of a natural setting of unusual beauty and serenity, sits the meditative figure of the Great Buddha of Kamakura. A centuries old patina makes the colossal statue, which reaches to a height of more than forty feet, seem made to match the verdure of the surrounding hills. The figure represents the buddhist deity Amitabha, the japanese *Amida-Buddha*, who vowed to forego personal enjoyment of the bliss of Enlightenment until all creatures would find the hope of re-birth in the Pure Land. About the same time that St Thomas Aquinas was working out the articles and questions of his *Summa Theologiae*, a now unknown band of artisans was at work on this gigantic sculpture which has influenced the religious life of Kamakura for seven centuries. The name of the artist who conceived the serene countenance, the graceful hands in prayerful rest, the elegant flow of the motionless drapery, has been lost in the mists of history. But the peace and composure of spirit that his work breathes live on and are communicated to the hundreds of sightseers and worshippers who still come daily to view his handiwork in Kamakura.

To produce a work of art such as this, man requires leisure. It is not just that he needs to be free from the necessity of 'making a living' in order to have enough time to produce a masterpiece of the proportions of the Great Buddha. It would, of course, be unthinkable to devote the time, effort, and manpower needed to produce a work like this during a period of misfortune, in war or famine. Peace and a considerable height of prosperity were surely necessary conditions for it to come into existence at all. For anyone to conceive and elaborate within his own soul the depth of feeling and conviction, the understanding and harmony of life, that are captured in an expression like this, much time must have been needed: time for experience without anxiety, time for reflection,

time for assimilation, time for growth. Only on that supposition could it ever be expected that a man might project into an objective symbol like the Great Buddha the personal synthesis of his own life-view.

Today, Japan's prosperity is one of the economic miracles of the century. Everywhere, in Japan itself, in Europe and America, in the developing countries of Africa and Asia, japanese manufactured goods pile the counters of retail stores. Radios and television sets, fabrics, cameras, trucks and automobiles are dazzling the world with their bright, uniform splendour. Japan is famous for its products. Nevertheless, these fruits of the present-day technological civilization actually say very little about the japanese soul to anyone. Mass-produced, they are uniformly identical. Not a single trait in them bears any resemblance to the personalities that wrought the products. The shiny typewriters that line the shelves of Los Angeles department stores give no hint of the bitterness and frustration of the underpaid operators who handled them on the assembly line. The gay giggles and high spirits that enlivened the shop where the transistor circuits were assembled by junior high school graduates are never heard nor dreamed of by those who listen to the radios. For these are mere *things*, simply the products of necessary, almost mechanical work, produced without soul and without feeling. They say nothing of the personality of their makers; no creativity nor personality was required or permitted in those who produced them. One wonders whether Japan has not paid too dearly for its prosperity.

Modern society exhibits a startling degree of de-personalization and de-humanization even in aspects of life that we regard as somehow personal. In fact, many of our meetings with persons are not inter-personal events at all. It really matters little, for example, whether we buy our cigarettes from a salesperson or a vending-machine. It used to be the practice in japanese department stores for a whole staff of attractive receptionists to bow and smile an endless litany of 'thank you's' and 'goodbyes' to customers descending from the escalators or leaving the elevators. Now, in many places, personnel shortages have led to replacing the young ladies with electronic devices which simulate the auditory, if not the visual, charm of the receptionists. The possibility itself of this substitution demonstrates how de-personalized and humanly meaningless their occupation really was.

The harried office-worker is often no more than a function of his

boss's whims or, more impersonally, of 'the company'. What he does and says in no way come from the depths of his own being and understanding of life; they are only necessary responses to stimuli imposed from without. He has little or no time to be himself, because he always has a patterned, programmed role to act.

Man today cries out for meaning. Caught in a whirlwind of activity that is often not of his own choosing, overwhelmed by the kaleidoscopic speed and multiplicity of impressions and events that impose themselves through communications media, he lacks time to think, to find order or put it into the world about him or into his own participation in it. He is 'carried along', often unwillingly and without the satisfaction of controlling his own destiny. From this plight many are seeking liberation. They often do so unconsciously and in ways that only lead to their further enslavement. Instant solutions are sought in the easy refuge of comfort, uncreative entertainment, irresponsible sex. The hippie movement attracts attention as a humorously bizarre phenomenon of our times, but more than one critic has pointed out the serious dissatisfaction with the so-called Great Society that inspires it. Unable and unwilling to throw themselves into the turbulent current of activity that the production-orientated society demands of them, the hippies have opted out. Still, not all of them are mere drop-outs. Besides those who seek escape into an unreal world of chemical happiness or degenerate into infantile hedonism, there are undoubtedly those who are genuinely turning towards their fellow-man and looking for meaning in inter-personal relationships. The mere fact that their quest is sometimes wanting in realism and oblivious of certain important dimensions of human responsibility, should not blind us to the value of inter-personal love which it glorifies. The wholesome aspect of the hippie revolt is exemplified much better by the many young men and women today who resolutely pass up opportunities for prominence, either as producers or consumers, in our materialistic society and, instead, devote their talents to the betterment of people and whole social classes.

Modern man has been characterized as an organization man, and the expression encapsulates a good deal of truth. However, the pity of the matter is that the extensive actuation of man's sociality that is indicated by the phrase refers largely to the organization of human resources for the purposes of economic production. The typical unit of this type of organization is the modern 'company'. It is an agglomerate of practically anonymous stockholders who do

not know one another; its highest decisions are made by directors who may never meet except at its board meetings; and its day-to-day management is administered by professional technicians who may disclaim or ignore responsibility for the social consequences of the policies they execute. The company's goal is production for profit and, notwithstanding some customs and civilities that superficially mitigate its impersonality, no bond of personal concern unites those who take part in its life and work. The union of the employees in their work is almost wholly task-orientated; the associations they form are largely concerned with the conditions or remuneration of their work. Work-centred organizations like these are numerous and their demands occupy a large percentage of the time and psychic energy of men and women today. They are, however, of minimal value as means to unite men into the community of spirit in which they find their fulfilment. Often, they produce quite the contrary effect. They exercise a dehumanizing influence, precisely because they deprive men of the opportunity to express their personality in their work and thereby enter into significant communication with their fellow-men. The immense effort directed to the ever more-efficient satisfaction of material needs continually creates fresh needs that clamour to be satisfied, and so man becomes his own slave. He is brought together for a common work, it is true, but the value that has motivated the task – the profit-motive — is itself a value that is incapable of uniting men. Instead, it sets them against each other, and its ultimate effect tends to be the exploitation and enslavement of the weak by the strong.

It is not to be wondered at that man reacts against such a society and yearns for leisure and the opportunity it affords him to find himself and express himself, to give himself to others and win acceptance by them, and in the mutual self-giving and receiving of personal *koinonia* to find meaning for his existence. He is the image of his Maker. The eternal Father himself realizes his being in the everlasting act of self-expression by which he generates the Son, the perfect image of the Father's nature. The perfection of the happiness of the Father and the Son is realized in their mutual communication in the holy Spirit. Self-expression that is self-giving, acceptance and reciprocation, perfect union in love: this is the life and happiness of the holy Trinity itself. God's perfection requires that there be a society of three Persons. It is the mutual relations among them that constitute their perfection as Persons. Without their mutual self-giving and communication, they could not consist in their eternal

happiness and perfection. Is it surprising that God's created image, man, should seek the perfection and fulfilment of his personality in something analogous?

The communication of the Father, Son, and holy Spirit is the eternal leisure of the holy Trinity, a leisure that is not otiose but intensely active and infinitely meaningful. Indeed, it is the source of all meaning and life. For this leisure does not preclude external operation, the work of creation. It is, rather, the condition and the ultimate principle that gives meaning and purpose to God's creative activity. For in creating the world and the men to whom he has entrusted it, God's purpose was not only to give expression to his own perfection, but ultimately – this is the mystery that has been revealed to us – to communicate himself to them and let them share in the life and eternal leisure of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Leisure, therefore, does not preclude work. Quite the contrary, all meaningful work supposes a leisure in which the value of the work can be contemplated and found desirable. From the activities of leisure, above all from contemplation, have sprung the greatest achievements of the human spirit. We only need to think of St Thomas's *Summa*, of Kamakura's Buddha, of Bach's *Passion*. Preparation for the activities of life has always been associated with the *school*, a word which took its origin from the *leisure* that is necessary in order to cultivate the arts and sciences. However, the value of leisure, although it gives meaning to work, transcends the value of the products of work, for, in its highest realization, leisure always goes beyond mere expression to communion of persons. In the moment of this achievement, the purpose of expression in symbols is accomplished. Perfect leisure is timeless – endless communication in the Spirit. Human communication, however, given the time-space limitations of man's nature, can only take place in a series of partial realizations, and that is why man's work, even his leisure work, is never finished in this world. He always has more to say than his symbols have been able to express; yet it is not in the expression, but in the inter-personal communication it mediates, that his spirit longs to rest. If men could, like the eternal Father, express their whole personality in one Word, this would suffice for perfect communication.

It is not only man's being but his whole way of living and acting that bears the image of the holy Trinity. If God himself works in order to express and so communicate himself to others, so does man. He does so in a great variety of ways, at various levels, within various

social groupings. In these activities there is always apparent a certain tension between the potentially de-humanizing influence of work done for selfish motives and the eminently humanizing, personalizing influence of the union of persons that begins to be realized in cooperative effort. Sometimes it may seem (as in the case of the modern companies described above) that man's association has no purpose other than that of getting some task done in common. Yet, as a matter of fact, no work-orientated union is devoid of all inter-personal relationships, or at least of their possibility.

Still, it remains true that when association is motivated only by the need for cooperation in order to get some work done, something produced, then the opportunity for communion is reduced to a minimum. Instead of controlling, man then tends to be controlled by his work and the products of that work. His activity is not a freely chosen one but something forced on him through some necessity. He is not producing a *symbol* to reveal himself to another person with whom he hopes to enter into communication. He is addressing himself only to some object, as a means alien to himself and somehow opposing his freedom. This is the characteristic of much of the work done in our industrial society. Even here, however, there are levels at which creative self-expression is realized. The designer of a new automobile model is conscious of the contribution his creation will make to the comfort and convenience of countless people who will use it. For those who work on the production-line, however, the matter is quite different. They may have little or no idea of how their particular task contributes to the perfection of the whole. They put nothing of their own thought or creativity into doing their repetitious task, and it affords them no opportunity for communication with the users of the articles they produce. Whatever inter-personal relationships arise are accidental to the work itself (for example, a friendship with a worker at the next bench, social contacts within a labour union, etc.).

This is not said in order to condemn the works of technology. Work itself is necessary to carry the plan of creation forward to its perfection, and it is a powerful instrument in man's own self-development. St Paul told the christians of his day to work for their living. The efficiency of technology is certainly good as long as it is reasonable, but it must not be allowed to tyrannize mankind and take away his personality and freedom. To prevent this from happening, men must not only have free-time but they must find community with one another in leisure. Meaning is not to be found

in an endless round of 'getting and spending' to satisfy transitory needs that repeat themselves endlessly. It takes leisure for man to think, to interpret the world and himself, and to give to his interpretation the expressions that constitute what we know as culture.

The freedom with which leisure pursuits are chosen is itself an expression of personality at a deep level and can constitute an open invitation to communion with others who share the same interests. A high level of expression is realized in the creative arts, which give man's personality scope to expand and objectify itself in symbols that speak to other persons. An artist puts his soul into his painting, a musician expresses and fulfils himself in his composition or his performance. In doing so, he speaks to others at the same time and goes forth to meet the possibility of an answering self-revelation from another person.

The measure of value of the various pursuits to which men devote themselves is ultimately the perfection of the self-expression that they reflect and the intimacy of communication to which they lead. In the gamut of existing associations, those that unite men for freely chosen leisure pursuits are by that very fact more humanizing than the work-orientated associations. The members of a football club do not come together precisely for personal fulfilment in *koinonia*, but it is evident that there is a better chance for friendly contacts to develop among them than among the workers on a production-line. More deeply meaningful relationships tend to arise in the shared creativity of, say, a flower-arrangement society or an artists' club. A literary or philosophical circle illustrates the element of personal sharing at a level that is, perhaps, still richer and deeper.

There is a limit, however, to what men can do. Despite human efforts, the record of history would seem to show that men cannot bring about their own happiness, either by individual or collective endeavours. Image of his Maker, man is made for the communion of persons in love. Yet it happens again and again that a basic selfishness and self-centredness that is opposed to true community appears to take control of human activity. The Good News of salvation is that the desired union of men can be brought about, not through human efforts, but as God's own gift in Christ. As the Second Vatican Council says in its Constitution on the Church, 'it has pleased God. . . to save men not merely as individuals, without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people'.[1]

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[1] *Lumen Gentium*, 9.

The centre of this God-made community, the New Israel, the Church, is not man's selfishness but God's self-giving. It is a 'people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the holy Spirit'.[1] The Church is a union of persons, united first of all with the holy Trinity, and, consequently, intimately united among themselves.[2] The value and the good that they possess in common is not an economic one, nor is it activated by the productive forces of economic action. It consists in common sharing of faith and hope, of love in the Lord and joy. Such community is non-productive and it is enjoyed at its fullest only in leisure. But precisely because it is not productive nor based on the profit motive, it is the most truly humanizing in the sense that it allows men to develop to the full stature of their humanity and even to transcend it in the direction of the common sharing in divine life to which they are invited through Jesus Christ. The community among men which it is the Church's mission to actualize is the real good which alone can set man free from his enslavement to himself and enable him to be the master of his own technology.

It is significant that the characteristic activity of christians as members of the Church is the 'work' of the liturgy. This is a wholly unproductive work, having nothing for its purpose but the union of men with God in Christ. It is significant that the Council has said that 'all education in the spirit of community must originate in the celebration of the most holy Eucharist'.[3] To this work of leisure 'all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their goal';[4] and, when it is celebrated in the ideal conditions of a numerous gathering of the faithful, actively participating in prayer and sacrifice with the hierarchical ministers at the altar, the nature of the Church itself is exhibited in a splendid way.[5] A work of leisure, the eucharistic liturgy is especially appropriate to the Lord's Day, the day that continues in christianity the tradition of the sabbath rest of judaism. This liturgy, moreover, prefigures the eschatological rest, in which the people of God will participate eternally in the perfect *koinonia* of the blessed Trinity.

In the life of the Church as a whole, and in its task of leading all men to this *koinonia* in which their salvation consists, religious communities have an important role to play. The true essence of

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1 *Lumen Gentium*, 4.
2 Cf 1 Jn 1, 3.
3 *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 8.
4 *Sacrosanctum Concillium*, 10.
5 *Ibid.*, 41.

the Church as a community of believers united in Christ, though vast in its world-wide extent, lacks the easy visibility that would make it impressive. There is another, easily accessible model of community in charity in the christian family, but its evidential value as community founded on the divine self-giving in Christ is somewhat obscured by the fact that, even apart from faith, men and women can have adequate reason for devoting themselves to each other in a community of love. Religious community, on the other hand, with its renunciation of the positive values of marriage, clearly manifests a love that reaches out in hope to a transcendent good. These visible communities, small enough in scale to be easily identified and recognized, and accessible enough to be known as communities where renunciation is practised for the sake of greater love, are clear signs of the presence within the Church of the community-making power of the Spirit. The serene confidence of their members should show clearly their hope in surpassing personal fulfilment, and the personal integration of their lives should prefigure the eschatological good they hope for.

In their haste for renewal and *aggiornamento*, there is danger that religious communities themselves may forfeit the better part that is their rightful inheritance. Education, nursing, social welfare, etc. all have their meaning in religious life only in the perspective of charity. Charity is the primary value on account of which the various tasks of the apostolate are undertaken at all. This charity is first of all the gift of the Spirit. But it must be received and experienced in leisure, in silence and contemplation, in interpersonal union with one's brothers in Christ.

The origin of the belief in Amida-Buddha's vow to help all creatures attain to the bliss of enlightenment is not known with historical certitude. The fact is that, through the centuries, the belief has summoned countless men and women in Asia and elsewhere to pause in their works and to hope for the leisure of the Pure Land. It may not be amiss to wonder if this hope did not perhaps spring ultimately from some hint given by the same Spirit who taught the Psalmist to sing, 'Return to your resting place, my soul, Yahweh has treated you kindly'.[1] In the same Spirit, our Lord himself invited us all most graciously: 'Come to me, all you who labour and are over-burdened, and I will give you rest'.[2]

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[1] Ps 116, 7. [2] Mt 11, 28.