

Midwest Bits and Pieces

JANUARY 1, 1994

The figure of "Father Time" is related in folklore to Pope Sylvester I, whose memorial is December 31. New Year's Eve revelers sometimes are called "Sylvesters." He called all the days of the year *feriae*, feast days, in Christ. all time is now caught up in an endless festival.



WORK AND INTEGRATION by Daniel J. Ward, OSB

(Though this article is written for those in monastic life, there are points in it which may be useful to us in our planning for the Provincial Chapter. The article was submitted by Brother Paul Rosonke.)

Monastics are not mystics who do nothing but pray, nor are they mendicants who beg for the necessities of life. Rather, monastics, as envisioned by the Rule of Benedict, are persons who live an integrated life since it

enables monastics to support themselves and to avoid idleness. But work is to be integrated into the total monastic life. Work is not the primary purpose of the monastic life. Work is certainly not the main activity of the monastic day, according to the rule.

The Rule, nevertheless, is realistic about work. Work is a necessary part of human existence, for self-support, and to prevent idleness. The work schedule of the monastery may have to vary according to the seasons. At times, the monastics must work harder and longer hours than prescribed in the Rule, because of the economic condition of the monastery, but work times must be regulated and controlled with the context of the whole life and the rhythm of the entire day, which includes not only times for prayer, but also for food and rest.

Furthermore, the Rule indicates that on some occasions a monastic may have to work at some distance from the monastery. If a monastic is traveling or working far away and cannot return to the monastery for the prayer rhythm of the day, the monastic is still to keep this rhythm as much as possible.

Work in the monastic context, is not for the purpose of self-fulfillment. Rather, it is for the support of the common life of the monastery. Work is the way in which monastics support and serve one another.

Thus, whether a monastic is an official, a manual laborer, an artisan or a domestic laborer, the eye is not on self but on the common life: the working together to make the monastic life of love possible.

Work in the Monastery today

In various monasteries, it seems, work has

been, or is becoming, the primary feature of life. The monastics of a monastery can become so preoccupied responding to the needs of the Church, of society, of the institutions of the monastery, or of the individual monastics, that life simply becomes work: maintaining institutions, for instance, rather than seeking God through the particular rhythm of the monastic day. Monastics can acquire a mind-set for work, and in the process lose the important stance of keeping vigil.

The need to be individually fulfilled in work has caused some monastics to establish individualism as the first principle of monastic life. In other words, the need to be in a job which is self-satisfying determines the lifestyle, rather than the common monastics lifestyle determining the type of work.

On the institutional level, the members of some monasteries find themselves working tremendously long hours in a multitude of jobs so as to continue the many institutional commitments undertaken by the monastery during its history. The focus of life is centered upon maintaining these institutions and, in some cases, maintaining the institutional standard of living. Institutional considerations begin to outweigh the fundamental and underlying reason for joining a monastery: the peaceful seeking of God within the context of a balanced rhythm of cenobitic life.

When work becomes the most important part of a monastic day, or even the most important part of monastic life, the monastery ceases being a place of shared monastic living and, instead, becomes simply a place of common residence. Work is no longer related to the larger framework of monastic life.

Some Principles Concerning Work

From the Rule and tradition, there seems to emerge some principles which could be used to help establish the rightful place of work

within cenobitic life today:

First, the basic principle is cenobitic living: a rhythm of life where persons, with a common vision and meaning, actually live together and serve one another.

Second, Work is for mutual support and service within a particular monastery. Service to the larger Church and society is a result of this mutual support and service of monastics to one another.

Third, economic survival cannot destroy the rhythm of cenobitic living since, even during such times of need, the Rule teaches that all things are to be done with moderation. If work becomes so primary and overbearing, the very life which the monastics are economically working for is destroyed by its non-observance. A parallel can be drawn within the context of wealthier monasteries when greater income results in greater spending: a lifestyle is created which requires more hours of work simply to maintain the standard of living to which one has grown accustomed.

Fourth, it may be possible for some monastics to live the cenobitic life at the monastery yet work at daily jobs which are not at the monastery. Nevertheless, the jobs must be compatible with the monastic lifestyle, namely, the jobs cannot become the focal point of life. The jobs must be compatible with the ability to live, daily, the common life, including prayer, silence, private reflection and personal interactions. The monastery must not become merely a residence for commuters.

Conclusion

Monasticism is, at times, described as countercultural. The description serves, not so much as a judgment on society, but as an alternative way of viewing and living life. Perhaps today our society does need this countercultural alternative when it come to issues like work. Monastics ought to help contemporary society see that a person's true worth is not dependent upon social status, professional competency or earning power, which all seem to be derivatives and

driving forces of work. Rather, a person's true worth is based upon the wonderful miracle he or she is a unique gift of God. A monastic comes to the monastery to seek God, hopefully, and the result of this search should be that the monastic finds healing from brokenness, so that the monastic can move from focusing on self to focusing on God. It is then the monastic discovers God to be a wonderful gift-giver, and that the gift is the very person seeking God.

There is something beyond work in the monastic life. This something is the seeking of the Giver, and the seeking is the reason for monastic life, in fact, the reason for all life. And so, the monastic must look beyond work to the God who gives. The search for this God is done in monasteries within an integrated life involving more than work or the tendency to allow work to dominate life. Monastics can, and in fact must, live beyond work.

THE MUSIC OF RETIREMENT

Brother Pedro Haering, CSC

(The following article has been submitted to the Criterion, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis newspaper, to run as a part of the series on the retirement fund for religious. We print the article here as an example of how a hobby can become a way of ministry. Thomas Moser.)

I have read the first two of this series of articles on the "Retirement Fund for Religious" printed last month in the CRITERION. This will be similar to those. So it is with a bit of hesitancy that I accepted the request of my Provincial that I write this.

Some Cathedral High School graduates of the 50s and of the latter half of the 70s may recall that I had some interest in popular music. It was, in fact, a hobby that began in 1934 when I was still in grade school. The fascination of the popular songs of the 30s and 40s absorbed a great deal of my interest

and eventually developed into a life-long hobby. What I did not realize back in the 30s and 40s is that I was privileged to be part of a pop music scene which was enjoying the halcyon days of its contribution to American music. A music scene dominated by the talents of the Gershwins, Rodgers and Hart (later Rogers and Hammerstein), Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Harry Warren, Harold Arlen, Indiana's Hoagy Carmichael and Cole Porter, Johnny Mercer, Sammy Cahn, Johnny Burke, Jimmy VanHeusen -- I could go on with Juel Styne, Sammy Fain, Victor Young, Lerner and Loewe, Frank Loesser, and others. You must look long and hard to hear the music of these talented composers and lyricists today.

Occasionally a public television special documentary may remind some of us that a music heritage has been slipping away. In a few populous areas a radio station may still bring us what they call the "Music of Your Life". Maybe the big bands will never die but many of them have faded away.

Avant garde therapists are discovering what many have "known" for a long time without identifying it: the importance of music which was once a part of our lives and what it does for the spirit. Nearly five years ago I had an opportunity to play (over the air) the great non-rock music of the half century that extended into the 60s and 70s. For two hours each Friday night, on Notre Dame's public radio FM station (WSND), I played the music of those great composers and lyricists I mentioned earlier -- and commented on it. About a month into the program I received a call from a gentleman who was crying. It was because of a Harry Warren song ("Summer Night") which he had not heard for fifty years and which brought back memories he thought he had forgotten. He thanked me saying, "I couldn't believe I would ever hear that song again." Similar calls and letters became almost commonplace.

My program was a summer (1989) 'fill-in'. But by September it had such a favorable following that I was asked to continue it and

move it into "prime time".

A few people who simply needed someone to talk to would call about the music and then later talk about other things. A man in a nearby correctional institution wrote often requesting particular artists and songs and telling me the program was the only bright spot in his week. By Christmas of 1989 I was asked to add a similar program of two hours on Sunday evenings. After a couple years the Sunday program was expanded to three hours and the Friday show to four hours.

By now we have had hundreds of cards and letters and thousands of telephone calls. Many of them are from elderly persons who are not able to find this music any longer in the sort of programming that is aired by most radio stations. We are fortunate in that we are a commercial-free station and my three or four hour programs have three or four hours of music: minus my introductions and anecdotes, the acceptance of which never ceases to amaze me as I constantly expect someone to call or write to say, "If you'd spend less time talking we'd get to hear more music." That has not happened. Perhaps listeners are too kind.

About a year or so ago one of my regular callers "let's say "Mr. X) asked me how old I was. I told him I would no longer see the sunny side of seventy. And he took me a bit aback by saying, "Well, you'd better live longer than I do because I don't want to go on without being able to hear the music you play." Over the next few months he called several times, each time repeating this same admonition. I didn't know what to respond. I think I mumbled something to the effect that neither of us had much to say about that. Just before Friday midnight early this fall I received a call from a friend of his telling me that "Mr. X" had a heart attack that afternoon and died before they could get him to the hospital -- he thought I would like to know. I learned then that Mr. X was several years younger than I.

One lady calls me at least once a month. She and her husband live alone in southern Michigan. She is 85 and he is 89. They talk about the music as though it were a long lost friend who had come back.

Sometimes you can tie seeming opposites into the same package and make it work. Last December I announced that on the Friday before Christmas we would do a program of songs about home, centered on the song "I'll be home for Christmas". (As you know, there are dozens of songs about home.) I received a call the next day from the South Bend "Center for Homeless" asking if I could promote their work and their fund-raising on that program. It was almost like a special grace. We contrasted the many songs about the pleasures of home with the fact that many were not fortunate enough to enjoy these pleasures. We plugged the Center for the Homeless and urged our listeners to contribute to that cause. We even played Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Everybody's got a home but me".

I mentioned earlier our public radio station is commercial-free. The other side of the coin is that we volunteer our services. Aside from an occasional stipend for a special service the income of our announcers is 'zilch'. Religious communities today have large numbers of persons like us, men and women no longer on the 'sunny side of seventy', the measure of whose good work does not come in dollars. Most religious communities are badly in need of the generosity of those they have served so that their women and men religious (who served God without the opportunity of putting away for a rainy day) can find that God has filled their rainy day needs through you.

I thank you for reading my story and I thank you for your generosity. I still have the happiest of memories of my twelve years assigned to Cathedral High School in the 50s and again in the late 70s.