

“Faith and Fantasy”

One of the reasons for the remarkable survival of the Christian religion is that it has always known how to combine fact and fantasy in its grasp of reality.

The religious understanding of the real world involves free play or interplay between fact and fantasy with no clear lines of demarcation.

Being Americans and Puritans and possibly Freudians, the fantasy part of religion “spooks” is. We are not at all certain that there is this other side of reality. Ordinarily we operate on the principle that “facts are facts,” that the real world is the one we see, hear, touch with our nerve endings and manipulate with our brains and hands to make families, factories, farms and over which we have all kinds of feuding and fun. And then we die. That’s the world of facts, we say. Whereupon, come coffin time, we indulge ourselves in a little bit of fantasy, a few imaginings about immortality, life beyond the grave. But we only let such fantastic ideas in just so far and then firmly shut the door. After all, the work must be done, the food cooked. And besides that fact world of football, golf, even riots, crime and revolutions seem a bit safer than fantasy. Less spooky.

This fact-oriented, down to earth, no nonsense, feet on the ground crowd have produced a great, workable, material civilization- a marvelous array of tools, instruments, all the way from the sickle to the most sophisticated electronic gun-crack. From the early man’s discovery of fire to the latest laser beam, this group have kept shouting some version of “Eureka, I have found it.” And humanity has kept replying, “Bravo, We needed it. You’ve fed us, clothed us, housed us, transposed us, and cured us of disease and we thank you!”

These fact oriented people, however, have been one-sided. High on civilization, they’ve been low on culture. These static mechanical types don’t sing very well, don’t soar with the violin. Don’t paint Sistine ceilings or prophecy. Don’t dream dreams and see visions. They’re just too busy with the hammer and the nail. They keep the world together, keep it going, keep it steady- but they’re often dry, brittle, uneasy, unhappy, unbending people and they come apart rather easily at the seams.

They have forgotten – or tried to forget the other side of reality. They have forgotten that among their ancestors there was not only the man who put the first fire to practical use but also the man who first danced around it, rejoiced in the mystery of it, dreamed in front of it, crated myths with it, recreated it in wall paintings and mask and found that fire was for something else besides cooking meat and keeping warm. It evoked another side of reality. It founded a stronger depth in him. There was another world within this one. There were facts beyond. So he says, painted, danced. He also prayed. In short, he became an artist, a priest, he reached toward the hidden side.

Now God deliver us from a world that's filled with nothing but violinists, singers, poets and priests. We'd all starve. If I had my choice, I'd choose the hammer and nail carpenter over the dreaming clown any day.

But I'd prefer them both if I could get them. I'd rather be both if I could. And that's exactly what you got in the Xty. Jesus as Nazareth as "carpenter," we accept and understand. He was. He was born. You can grant him history. And he was a hammer and nail man. No one more practical than he in teaching. No one more perceptive of life together and living it well. His feet firmly planted in the village soil. A man for the workers, the farmers, the fisherman, everyday families- as plain as his homespun clothes and country . We love the carpenter. That's our side of the world. It's the side we know best and believe in. The creeds bow to this – he was "made man. "

But from the start, Jesus of Nazareth had another side to him, the way life has another side. The real world, reality, is not so "plain and simple" as we like to say it is. There is also the part that fantasy recognizes, sees with the inner eye. It is the part of reality least acceptable to us, the element we steer away from, being "practical man." (I think of the man who will not come to church because, says he, the music of the organ opens a strange door to him, as to another world, a door he must keep firmly shut to keep his sanity. He is an engineer and afraid of fantasy.)

Jesus of Nazareth, however, was more than a carpenter. He was more than a fact man. He opened strange doors. He was fantastic. He dreamed dreams and saw visions as the prophet job said. This is why Roualt saw him as clown. Not a silly, not as foolish, but as visionary, dreamer, seer (see-er) of God. He was a man of the imagination. He saw Evil walking, the Satan, angered him tempted by him. He talked to the creator of the universe as though he was his own Father. He listened to his heavenly Father's unspoken voice, proclaimed his inaudible word, envisioned an apocalyptic new day for man. No wonder the creeds called him "Glory God of Any God."

And he was not afraid of the other side of reality. Not the way we are. In fact, the only way some of us can approach it is to make spoof of it- as at Halloween, with prankish "ghostlier and goolies and things that go in the night." But when light comes, "it's back to facts." Or we can tolerate it only in the most ramified forms- as in music- classical or rock or in art. Or we induce it artificially in drugs, "drinks or various kinds of smokes" in psychedelic colors and lights, etc.

Not Jesus of Nazareth. He lived with total reality. He lived the interplay of fact and fantasy in faith. For him, faith was a combinations of both. The presence and will of God was as real to him as his hammer and saw. He put the two sides together again and again. "Get up and walk, your faith has made you whole." His was a walking faith, a faithful walk. Life for him was a factual fantasy- a fantastic fact.

He wasn't just man's carpenter or God's clown. The people who were just that crucified him. Instead, he was a worker who dreamed dreams. He put his dreams to work.

And that's what Christians are to this day. We are carpenter, not clown. As soon as you repeat after Jesus, "I will love my neighbor, even my enemy. I will forgive you 70 times 7 times. I will turn the other cheek. I will give you my cloak and coat also. I will bless you if you curse me. I will sell all I have and give to the poor. I will be pure and see God. I will make peace and be a child of God. I will be merciful and will receive mercy." Repeat these after Christ and what will the world call you? It will call you some sort of dreamer, some sort of visionary, some sort of clown. Why? Why because you've opened a strange door. You amuse people or you scare people. They may laugh at you. They may hurt you---"for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

But the Christian just takes out his carpenter's tools and quietly puts the fantastic to work in his factual life. He can even "rejoice and be exceedingly glad," and if you think he's just clowning, you don't understand.

You see, dreams are not separate from, but they are a part of reality. You just hammer away at making something out of them.

It takes work. It takes giving. It takes time. It takes you.

I do believe that's what all this talk about stewardship and serving and giving and pledging is all about.

It's making the dream we talk about, sing aloud, and pray about here on a Sunday morning- come true.

Let us pray:

O Lord- some of us are just dream people and we've got no real world to build. We just sing and pray and talk and go back to the same old ways. And some of us are just fact people. And so we've got no dreams to go by- No inspirations, no imagination, no joy. Help us to put the two together - that we may be working saints, builders of a better kingdom. For Christ's sake. AMEN.