

## THE CHRISTIAN'S FAITH

In Anton Chekhov's play, Three Sisters, Masha says: "I think a human being has got to have some faith, or at least he's got to seek faith. Otherwise his life will be empty, empty ... How can you live and not know why the crows fly, why children are born, why the stars shine in the sky! ... You must either know why you live, or else... nothing matters ... everything's just wild grass." (Act II)

Now, you know you think you can, but you really cannot give scientific answers to questions like these – "like why do crows fly?" – "why are children born?" – "why do the stars shine in the sky?" – much less – "why am I alive?" For these are not scientific questions. These are faith questions, arising out of the need, the want, of the soul, the deep, hungry places of the heart – not out of the mind, not out of intellectual curiosity. We are starving nowadays for faith answers that answer the empty soul. We have a surfeit of scientific answers – that is not our problem. It once was, but it isn't any more. So, we ask now, "why do crows fly?" – and I get the answer, "come let me tell you about \_\_\_\_\_." "No, no – that's not what I want," I say. Or when I ask "Why are children born?" and I am told, you mean you don't know? Let me give you the facts about obstetrics..." "No, no," I say, "that's not what I mean. And I plead, "Why do the stars shine in the sky?" And the answer comes back, "Take course in astrophysics." No, no, I say again, "that's not what I need." What I want to know is "Why am I alive?" And the answer is the same, "Here, I'll explain the physiology of cells." "Again, no – no, no," I shout, "I thank you for your investigation, your information in the fields of study, the world certainly needs ornithologists, obstetricians, astronomers and physiologists – along with quite a few others – to answer the questions of the mind and the body.

But when I ask questions like "Why do crows fly? And why are babies born? And why do the stars shine in the sky? And why am I alive?" – I'm asking different questions and I need different answers. I'm not asking for knowledge now. I have that. I'm asking for faith. It's my empty heart now; not my empty head that wants to be fed its bread. That's why I want the church this morning, not a class, to feed my brain. Not a cafeteria to feed my body. It's the soul of me that wants to be fed.

But when Charlie Brown explains his soul's hunger to Lucy, his yearning toward an ultimate sanity that has nothing to do with "practical things" like laboratory facts – and food –



and plumbing – and clothes – and cars – and the stock market – and foreign wars – and the social revolution – and sex and politics – and everything Lucy knows about – when he tells her his need for faith, faith in the beyond all this, faith to feed his hungry life, faith to find himself in the universe and ends up by asking her, “Does that make any sense to you, Lucy? Do you think it means anything?” Lucy replies flatly, “Certainly, it make sense, Charlie Brown. It certainly does. It means you are cracking up, Charlie Brown!”

Of course. At the next bridge part, at the next board meeting, at the next 18<sup>th</sup> hole, indeed – at the next church buzz-session: Ask the faith questions out of real need for faith – and see what answers you get: either scientific ones that don’t come anywhere near your wanting – or – when you want to know what life means, what you life means – you will get dismissed by some cartoon character, who pronounces, “It means you are cracking, Charlie Brown” – for asking such religious questions in church in the first place.

But Chekhov was right: “A human being has got to have some faith, or at least he’s got to seek faith. Otherwise, his life will be empty, empty....”

And that’s what the church is for. The Organization Man (Whyte) about whom we are tired of hearing needs more than his organization. Did Jesus really say, “Except ye learn and become a little more organized, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”? Sometimes I think that what the Presbyterians think he said. But is that enough? Faith to go on. Faith in the W.S.A., the C.I.A., the H.R.A., the K.K.K., the K.A., the N.A.M., the U.D.C., the U.P.U.S.A, the G.O.P., the S.A.E. the S.A.C., the O.P. or spelling theologically the H.E.L.L. with the world, \_\_\_\_\_ alphabetic soup of the organized society! Or maybe it’s just “the club that drinks together sinks together” as they club each other to death. Or maybe the second generation of the organization man in despair gets on the road, jeans, motorcycle, long hair, beard and \_\_\_\_\_ because part of the angry \_\_\_\_\_ the great moving herd of \_\_\_\_\_, faceless floaters, join the whole hectic, maniacal, hyped-up, frenzied rest of goof-offs, whose only family – the only ones they stick with – are those they get their kicks with – with a no-faith faith or, “God is a livin’ doll” (to quote Jane Russell) – or “God is a Pooh Bear.” (To quote Kerovac) or “God is dead.” (To quote practically everybody).

What I’m trying to say is – The Organization man can not answer the faith questions any more than the scientist. Neither can The Angry Strangers.



Well, what about the old time religionists? Can they? Their children's children look back on them wistfully today – not rebelliously anymore, not bitterly – for these grandchildren have never been under the super-ego of the creed, they've never been conditioned by the tenets, the doctrines of orthodox Christianity. So they aren't rebelling anymore. How can you rebel against something that never had you in grip? How can you deny what you were never taught to believe? You only drift –with a full stomach, a full brain and “an empty soul and you look back in longing in a generation of Rembrandt \_\_\_\_\_ who had faith – and you realize that all your freedom, all your intellectual honest, can give you no greater security, no richer resources, than those in the old tradition. “I believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord” -- “and the Holy Spirit” -- “the Giver of Life” -- There is sadness for the sensitive modern in the Church's ancient creed. He says it – but he missed it and wishes he believed it – and wants to – and – can't. It is his sadness.

So he reinterprets it – and says – “At least I believe in love and justice and so on.” But the Spirit, spelled with a capitol S, is missing – and he grows weary with his noble principles. Love and justice become a burden to him carrying them all alone. They become a cross too heavy for him to carry. For he can't be as loving as he wants to be. And in an unjust system, he can't be just (as just as he sees he should be.)

And in his soul's hunger and weakness, he stumbles under the weight of his noble cross purposes, his conflicting ideals that are self-crucifying – and in an agony over the \_\_\_\_\_ world he wanted so much to be his delight, he, too, cries out, “O my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” But in that cry – in that very descent into hell – in extremis – just when he thought nothing mattered – that everything was just “wild grass” – he named the name of the God he thought he had gotten over – “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” – and the life that to all appearances was over was just beginning. It wasn't that he gave up his head full of scientific facts. He had those still and would have more. He was also something of an organization man – that was necessary to work and to eat. And he supposed he would never get over being a bit of The Angry Stranger either, for he never wished to feel smug in the universe. Smugness was a silly posture for a man. But now he had something else. He felt he had the faith of the old Christians. Not too pt, to be sure, not all neatly wrapped in tenets and tied with just the right string of word – not too much talk of dogma. For when men talk dogmas, they begin to talk of



heretics. "They watch each other, instead of watching God." (Zsolt de Harsanyi, The \_\_\_\_\_ - Part III). What he had was more like Handel's noble air, "Great God, who yet but darkly known." But he had that – and the figure of the Christ was real to him, for reasons he did not know – alive to him, making right right and wrong wrong – so that he knew where he was in things. He was no longer the twilight drifter. There was light and there was darkness. And he knew the difference. Strangely enough, he did not feel that he had been connected to faith – no, that was not it. Not the word for it. Rather, he had reverted to it, returned to it. It was like being at home. Yes, that was it, finally, his soul was at home with itself. That he knew the love of God, and the judgement of God was to him a tremendous mystery -- \_\_\_\_\_ -- and always would be. Sometimes now he spoke God's near name, not his far name, Yahweh, etc, but his near name – "Jesus" – he would say "Jesus" just that. No more. It was his and he knew he was no longer lost. He was found. That was the truth. From here on out, he would trust in God. He would do his level best for his fellowman and he would never be afraid. Never again. Never. That, I think, is the work of the Church for the modern man. Amen