

GOOD GRIEF

P.F. JENSEN

"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

There was a murder on television the other night. A young woman was run down in the street and left to die. She was a policeman's wife. Nothing unusual in that, you might say, and of course you'd be right. It was actually entertaining because it provided us with entertainment.

What got me, though, was a scene a bit later in the drama. They had to have some sort of funeral, so they placed the tough-but-likeable senior cop outside a church, walking away. Some other character came up to talk to him, and the cop growls a few words about the service he's just been to.

Now, no-one expects originality in our T.V. entertainment. If an American cop-show failed to have a car-chase scene people would complain. If Perry Mason failed to win a case there would be an outcry. If Quincey couldn't discover what was wrong the T.V. station would be put under seige. We all know that our favourite T.V. characters are nothing but cardboard puppets dragged and pushed around by their creators, saying and doing predictable things. And we wouldn't have it any other way. We even like the sound of canned laughter.

So, I wasn't surprised by what the T.V. policeman said about the church. 'They are always at you to go to church ...' he grumbled, 'and when they get you there they talk about wickedness and corruption', or words to that effect. Thus dismissing the whole business, he stalked away. Now I wasn't offended by this; not at all. Script-writers have to write in what they think their characters might say, and even if it is wildly inappropriate what does it matter?

You could never watch T.V. with any serious intent anyhow. Even the news programs are entertainment.

But it made me think. Quite clearly the script-writer had never been to a Christian funeral. Oh, he may have attended a few church funerals - I've been to those often enough, and they are rather sad and pathetic affairs. But being buried from a church and by a clergyman doesn't turn you into a Christian, any more than I could turn my cat into a Christian by dipping it in water.

A Christian funeral is the funeral of a real Christian - one whose trust and confidence is in Jesus Christ alone. I have been to a number of those. Now that's a rather different matter. There is mourning, grief and tears of course. But there is something else as well, something which cannot be manufactured or mistaken: Joy. Yes, the funeral of a Christian is a celebration. Strangely enough, this is not because we are focusing our attention on the dead person. On the contrary, the attention is focused on Christ, the risen Christ, Lord of life and death, Lord of heaven and hell. What a difference that makes - or, rather what a difference He makes.

Forgive me asking this rather personal question - what is your funeral going to be like?

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