

Why are we on earth?

Within a week of each other Princess Diana died in a tragic accident and Mother Theresa of old age. In the same week hundreds of people in Algeria were brutally slain by terrorists. Reflecting on these events led many people to wonder whether has any purpose. Does life have meaning? An important question. So many in our time feel helpless and powerless. They feel that they are walking on an endless treadmill, working hard while going nowhere. Because of the rapid advance in technology many workers find *it* difficult to take pride in the product in their factory. Assembly line work tends to make a worker feel like a small cog in a machine. The work itself is useful, but what meaning does it give to one's Life? When life draws to an end what does such a worker feel? What was he able to do with his talents?

Today many are skeptical about politicians and are discontent with present-day society, which seems unresponsive, cold and impersonal. They also sense a vacuum of values. In our post—Christian times formerly obvious norms no longer seem convincing. With the decline of the Christian faith in the Western world, parents, who once viewed child-rearing as imparting knowledge and values and moral standards to their children, no longer seem to know what values they really believe in. They worry about the future. Will pollution make this planet inhospitable for the next generation? How can drug addiction be overcome? What can be done to halt the deterioration of family life and the rise of divorce? Another upsetting question for the adult world is the increasing suicide rate among young people.

One of the key reasons for the much lamented loss of meaning among the younger generation is the departure from the Church. For the first time a generation of Canadians is growing up in a society, which no longer can be regarded as Christian, which only has memories of the Christian faith and only knows the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments from hearsay. But since mankind is incurably religious, people (Especially youth) Look for new gods to serve. In North American society these new gods are "sex, car and career" or some alternative religion. And since for many this world is the only one there is and death ends all, the hue and cry is, "We want everything and we want it now!" For the followers of the new gods the individual and the small group they may belong to is all what counts. They find it difficult to make a long-term commitment to marriage, state, family or church and develop such values as duty, responsibility and loyalty. The American historian and social critic, Christopher Lasch, described our entire age as "the culture of Narcissism." within the context of our discussion on the purpose of life; the latter term characterizes exaggerated self-centeredness, a tendency to boredom narrow limitation of the ability to enter into deeper relationships, a pressure for immediate satisfaction of needs, an escape into endless rounds of entertainment, and excessive concern for me; myself and I, an exclusive orientation on

material things. But the cult of narcissism has never been able to fully satisfy. If it could fill the longing heart with bliss, counselors and psychiatrists would be out of work. Materialism has left untold people miserable, depressed, and without peace of mind and a meaningful purpose in life.

What is the meaning of life? Is there hope for the future? Who has answers for life's deepest questions? Modern secular philosophers have not been able to give an answer. In French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905-1980); first novel *Nausea*, Roquetin walked in a park one day and was overcome by the meaningless of life. Looking around him, he concluded, "Every existent is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness and dies by chance." He was forced to conclude that the key to life is its "fundamental absurdity." Sartre surmised that "man is a useless passion." And this is precisely what happens to an individual who abandons God, he knows only loneliness and despair. This sense of alienation and hopelessness is brilliantly described in Yoko Ono's *Single Poem's in Grapefruit*. All of them are variations of the meaninglessness of life. *Map piece* reads, "Draw a map to get lost." Another called *Lighting Piece* reads, "Light a match and watch it till it goes out."

Political ideologies promised to satisfy the quest for meaning in life. Their focus was on creating heaven on earth. The German poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) summed up the criticisms of the thought of heaven as our hope with these lines: "The heavens we can safely leave to the angels and to the sparrows." In other words, the hope of heaven is detrimental for life's well being on earth." This is exactly what Karl Marx taught. He wanted to bring heaven to earth. Through revolutionary activity a classless socialist society would be created, the realm of freedom and of happiness here on earth. Lenin, the practitioner of revolution, wrote: "The class-consciousness worker of today ...leaves heaven to priests and bourgeois hypocrites. He fights for a better life for himself here on earth." But Marxism and revolution as ideologies have lost their importance as they could not deliver the promised heaven on earth. In April 1980 a 23 year-old female factory worker and a male university student wrote a letter in *China Youth News* under the pen name Pan Xiao. These two young people tried to discover meaning in life but none of the answers they were given satisfied them.

If you say we are here for revolution; the idea is too abstract and far-fetched...if you say we live for fame, it is out of reach of the ordinary people-if you say we live for mankind, it doesn't match with reality. We break heads for a few work points, we argue furiously over the most trivial things ... If you say we live to eat, drink and be merry, then we are born naked and we die as empty shells. But coming into the world for one go-round seems meaningless, too.

The answer to the question “ Does life have a purpose?” cannot be provided by ourselves. The ultimate question about the meaning of life is religious as it focuses on issues pertaining to the reason and future of our existence. The answer to the question “ Why we are on earth?” is beyond our human horizon. John Calvin’s Geneva’s Catechism of 1542 asks, “What is the main purpose of human life?” The answer is: “ To know God.” And the only way we can come to know God is through Jesus Christ (John 14: 6) He is the very heart of the Gospel.

The meaning our Christian existence is found in our Lord crucified; risen and ascended. Through Him the world has been created and in Him all things hold together. Through Him we can become reconciled to God as He made peace through His blood shed on the cross. (Colossians 1) And Jesus Christ taught us the coming of God’s Kingdom, which He described as a “ merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.” (Matthew 13: 45) when a person seeks the Kingdom he can no longer live for me, myself and I. In obedience to the Gospel’s call to discipleship he takes up the cross for to know God is to love and to serve Him. And he fervently prays for the coming of God’s kingdom. He knows that God is in control of history. The Bible and the course of history show how foolish it is to think that we can bring heaven to earth. Perfection will never be found on this side of the grave. King David wanted the best for his people but his rebellious son Absalom wrought havoc in his kingdom. And so throughout history emperors, kings, presidents have had their obstructionists. The evil of the world cannot be overcome by political means because man’s heart is evil. With this in mind Christians pray for the coming of God’s Kingdom, the Kingdom of righteousness, perfect harmony and peace.

Jesus Christ puts all of creation in the service of God’s Kingdom. And He also abides in every believer throughout this life (John 15: 1-4) and welcomes him/her into God’s heavenly home upon death. (John 14: 1-4) It was through His love and the power of the resurrection that the early Christians were able to put His teachings into practice. And this power of Christ is still available today to deal with life’s problems, show love for one’s neighbour, justice for the oppressed, and care for the poor. Those who are in Christ bear witness that His reconciling love has replaced despair with hope and peace through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Christians love life as a gift from God. They love life before death because they have certain hope for a life after death. Because they hope for heaven, despair will not have the last word. What makes life meaningful in the right here and now and gives hope for the future? When we confess that we belong to Jesus Christ, and know that we shall live forever God’s presence, and wholeheartedly serve Him in whatever situation we may find ourselves, we will have found the answer to the question “ Why are we on earth?”