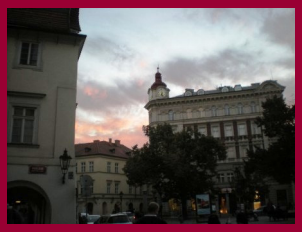
August 2010
Volume 6, Issue 8

Who would die for someone else's sins?



Text enclosed in quotation marks is from the novel *The Widow Killer* by Pavel Kohout. Picador: NY, NY, 1995.

A novel I read several years ago featured a protagonist who was a young Moravian (Jan Morava) policeman working in Prague. He falls in love with a young woman, Jitka, (also of Moravian birth) who works as a secretary at the police station. They conceive a child and are very much in love; they plan to marry as soon as the war travel restrictions will allow.

The novel takes place near the end of WWII. The Germans still occupy Czechoslovakia, but the Russian front is advancing from the east and the Americans, from the west. The war is in its death agony.

Morava is pursuing a serial killer, a Czech who ritually murders women in a twisted fantasy of purification. Jitka offers to lure the killer into a trap, "a trap that could not fail" in Morava's mind. He allows her to act as bait; the killer finds Jitka and attacks her.

A pure creature

The scene in the hospital, as Jitka and her unborn child cling to life is heart-rending. Morava is in despair. "He tried to staunch this new hopelessness, willing himself to the faith he had always used since childhood to quell his fear of death." Yet he does not feel comforted.

He asks himself why he hasn't asked God for help until this moment. "Because, he admitted for the first time, he was angry with Him. If this was punishment for his sins, then why Jitka and not him? Or was this a test of his humility? In which a pure creature, carrying a child untouched by sin, would meet a cruel death?"

A cruel death

In that passage, the parallel to Jesus' death is unmistakable.

The author describes the agony of a man who watches the senseless death of the woman he loves and their unborn child. What's more, her death is not simply undeserved; it's actually monstrous, in that Jitka was sacrificially trying to stop a killer.

In the same way, the death of Jesus is monstrous. He was innocent, yet he suffered a cruel and painful death. He sacrificed His life to stop the killer of mankind: sin.

A monstrous injustice

The author of the novel was a committed Communist for the first part of his life, so it's safe to say he's not a committed Christ-follower (unless he's recently converted, and I can find no evidence of such an event). It's safe to say that Kohout's strong reaction against the idea of innocence, purity and sinlessness being destroyed by evil is not theologically inspired.

In fact, it seems to be a universal belief among people, be they religious, anti-religious or indifferent to religion, that there exists such as state as purity and sinlessness, and that this state does not deserve to suffer for the sins of other people.

You could say that the entire concept of justice rebels at the thought of one person suffering for the wrongdoing of another. *To p. 2*

SERVANT LEADERS

International Leadership Institute
Providing Leadership Development Services and Programs in the US and Europe since 1985

Servant Leaders

Volume 6, #8
Sara Tusek, Editor
www.ili.cc

International Leadership Institute Publishing House Publications

Newsletters at www.ili.cc:

- *Leaders to Follow; Servant Leaders; Careers; continuous conversion; A Lesson on English*

Blogs:

- jbt-yournextjob.blogspot.com
- praguepies.blogspot.com
- nomorecountingsouls.blogspot.com

Books at www.ili.cc:

- *21st Century Jobs*
- *Three Things You can't Do in Prague*

....someone else's sins

continued from page one

What is justice?

One organization concerned with the concept of justice, the Center for Economic and Social Justice, defines justice as follows:

> ***One definition of justice is "giving to each what he or she is due." The problem is knowing what is "due." Functionally, "justice" is a set of universal principles which guide people in judging what is right and what is wrong, no matter what culture and society they live in. Justice is one of the four "cardinal virtues" of classical moral philosophy, along with courage, temperance (self-control) and prudence (efficiency). (Faith, hope and charity are considered to be the three "religious" virtues.) Virtues or "good habits" help individuals to develop fully their human potentials, thus enabling them to serve their own self-interests as well as work in harmony with others for their common good.***
>
> ***The ultimate purpose of all the virtues is to elevate the dignity and sovereignty of the human person.***
>
> ***From cesj.org***

By this definition, justice is a virtue , recognized by all people in the sense of deciding what is right and what is wrong.

It's not just to die for someone else's sins

It seems that there is a great deal of agreement among humans that it's unjust to ask someone to die for someone else's sins.

Fairness dictates that each person is given what he or she is due, and no one is due to suffer for someone else's misdeeds.

Morava was in despair for two reasons: first, that Jitka and his child were dying, and second, that he had caused this dying by allowing her to put herself in danger so that the killer could be caught. The pain of watching someone die is an inevitable part of human existence, but to feel guilt over the dying is almost unbearable.

Why die for someone else's sins?

As Morava sits with Jitka in the hospital, he begins to feel doubt. "Doubt filled the void. Maybe there is no God. What a frightening thought. Or maybe God exists, and would let Jitka and their child die, leaving him alive."

This is the very heart of the meaning of Jesus' death. Jesus was God, but he became a human, so that he could die for someone else's sins—in fact, for everyone else's sins. He was pure and sinless (because He was God), yet he died sacrificially. He took what was due to every person who sins—that is to say, every person—and took their punishment upon Himself. He satisfied justice by suffering for someone else's sins.

Jitka, in the novel, symbolizes Jesus in her purity; her unborn child symbolizes Jesus in its sinlessness. Jitka and the child die. Morava's despair turns into resolution, and he finally catches the killer.

Jesus' death brought justice into the unjust world. Jitka's death gave Morava the impetus to find the killer and bring him to justice. Both deaths were harsh; both were unjust; both created justice. Both died for someone else's sins.