

Norbert Fabián Čapek

CESTOU K OBRODĚ

(On the road to revival)

first edition 1921

syllabus written by
Petr Dolák Samojský

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The General Overview:

Čapek published this work shortly after coming to Czechoslovakia from the USA. Its purpose was to address as many liberal people as possible and to create a large circle of those interested in organizing a new non-traditional church. With this book Čapek attempted to target especially the unchurched people out of the rank of traditional Christianity and atheism.

Čapek starts with strong criticism of conservative and inflexible attitudes of churches, and clearly argues for separation of church and state. One of the most important aspects of his book is his strong emphasis on social reform.

Note:

This syllabus may serve as an overview of Čapek's writing to those who cannot read his texts in the Czech language. It is not intended as an objective summary of the book, but it still may provide an insight into the Čapek's thoughts. The book can be found in Wiggin Library at Meadville Lombard Theological School under the call number BT 790 .C3 1921

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Introduction

Čapek begins with introductory explanations of why he and other people, who enthusiastically participated in international revolutionary work and emphasized the maturity and high development of the Czech State, came back home to help finish uprooting the rest of feudal clerical traditions. The Czech nation, Čapek explains, has to fulfill its historical mission. People should cut off the chains and shackles that prevent them from being on forefront of progress. People should not just follow other countries if they can be the pioneers of a revived humankind.

Čapek's book was written in this spirit. Čapek admits the revolutionary aspect of his message. He says: "It is something brand new, I have even destroyed the opinions which I myself used to proclaim, but it is natural to have different opinions at the age of fifty than a man of the age of eighteen years."

1. Work in the Mirror of Church Tradition

We have to re-evaluate our attitude toward work. Our nation is the first state in Central Europe that has started to deliberate itself from harmful, conservative habits. This is clear especially if we compare Europe and the USA. We need new, effective working methods and organization of society's structure.

Our ignorance and unwillingness are not the biggest obstacles in our progress; instead, these obstacles are created by old-fashioned habits and education forced by church on our

culture.

Čapek summarizes the fundamental doctrinal teaching of Christian churches: work is punishment for Adam and Eve's sin. There was no work in Paradise, and in heaven there would be none either. In between Paradise and Heaven, there is our world – the valley of tears with a hard life. Redemption is not within human power but happens in a mystical process between three persons of God. In order to be saved, one has to believe this doctrine.

The church's teaching is totally contradictory to our modern knowledge about the universe, the human race and the laws of nature. Religious revival means work with God. We have to help our revival toward a new religious human; we have to work with God.

2. Are Churches the Principle of Unity?

A very bad phenomenon in the life of our nation is that we constantly divide ourselves into categories, and our intolerance. Nevertheless, to differ is not as harmful as our intolerance that leads to hatred, inequality, the loss of power, and putting one's party and dogmas above humanity. The Slavics are particularly intolerant.

Churches have misused this Slavic character for its worldly political goals. It agitated Slovaks against Czechs; Croats against Serbs; Poles against Ukrainians; Catholics against non-Catholics; and rich Catholics against poor Catholics.

Roman Catholic unity requires submission of reason and will to the Church's authority. Therefore no state can be loyally Catholic and, simultaneously, free and enlightened. Protestants protested against authority of such a kind but they have not yet found anything that would unify them.

Any religion based on authority of a person or a scripture, recognized as unmistakable, has to be intolerant. If people within such a religion yet are tolerant, then it is because of their cultural maturity, not because of their confession.

From a historical and evolutionary view point, the orthodox churches represent a certain level of development upon which various groups of people stopped and stayed.

It would be impossible to want to have just one church body that would express the evolutionary level of all the Czechs. We have to learn tolerance and how to live in harmony.

3. About Making Life Real

We want to be brothers and sisters, Čapek says, but to manage this task we have to remove the obstacles. Intolerance is one obstacle and two-facedness is another. It is possible to observe the two-facedness in many places. We institute a law and then we do not accept it but circumvent it, or we explain it in another sense instead of canceling such a law. We have double truth, morality, action, and so on.

This situation has been caused by the Catholic Church. This Church has educated us in hypocrisy and two-facedness. We were forced to confess what we did not believe. The other Protestant churches are not any better. For instance, a brand new Czechoslovak Hussite Church proclaimed the first seven church councils as its dogmatic foundation. The bishops, who recommended this reactionary superstitious foundation (belief in Adam's fall and original sin, God's trinity, Jesus' virgin birth and resurrection, hell and devils, miracles, and so on), proclaim to take a stand of modern liberalism. Isn't this a great two-facedness? – Čapek asks.

Čapek quotes Masaryk and Radl to illustrate the negativism of traditional churches, focusing on the emphasis that: The churches should clearly explain their teaching and theology, so that their members would know if they can agree with their churches or not – and to take the consequences. We have to deepen our argument against Rome and fight its superstitions and

demagogies. Earlier, we could not do anything else than to follow the orders of rulers. Our task today, when we elect our rulers, is to be clear and honest about who we are and what we believe. We have to uproot the feudal spirit and be democratic. First of all, we must eliminate our two-facedness.

4. To Whom Did Churches Serve?

We should learn American practicality in order to eliminate poverty. However, America cannot be an example to us in solving our social problems.

Today one hundred families work hard for one family to have a comfortable life. If we use technical inventions and natural powers, all of us could live well. In this area, let us hope that soon America will learn from us.

The churches are supposed to be the conscience of a society. If they were, we could be closer today to the situation which might be called the "kingdom on earth." Unfortunately, churches have focused too much on blaming individuals for their sins rather than to care for them like Christ. They did not care about being society's conscience.

The churches stayed on the side of the rich. Čapek quotes Radl's quote of Napoleon: "Religion is a superstition adapted by laws that protects the rich from being murdered by the poor." Further many other quotes were used to illustrate the churches' support of social injustice, namely toward the poor workers. Nevertheless, the poor are standing up for their rights, and starting to deal very seriously with the religious issues.

Religion is a dynamic mental energy. It is possible to utilize, misuse, or circumvent it. Tyrants and greedy people misused it, Bolsheviks circumvented it, and we should start utilizing it. Until then any effort to solve the question of social injustice will be in vain. The new society can be created only by new, better people with religious devotion.

5. New Religious Orientation

If a normal individual claims to be against religion, what he or she means is usually a certain church or religious activity or attitude, not the substance of religion. Many people confuse the natural religious substance with the "papal governing the masses" and harmful superstitions.

Anything obsolete has to pass away, according to the law of evolution. The new life looks for new forms. Our new nation, in searching for its modern constitution does not use ones from the middle ages, similar to technicians and scientists, exploring their problems, do not travel to read ancient books or the signs inside of the Egyptian pyramids. We have to do the same. For our modern religious thinking we cannot use the notions of the ancient Biblical people. Masaryk is closer to us than Moses.

The priests confused people so much that, on one hand, they are willing to believe the wierdest nonsenses if these are labeled as God's revelation, and, on the other hand, they despise the most common truth if it is proclaimed by "just a human". They trust repeatedly uprooted dogmas more than other people, despite the fact that no human can be more harmful than any of these dogmas. Our entire society is based on the assumption that a human being is not trustworthy.

We must change this system, we must have faith in humans - in ourselves. The differences among us are not as big as it seems. It is time to return the faith to its original mission. There are many faiths in our society; nevertheless, the society lacks such a belief which is necessary for human living in Jesus' spirit.

God may be called by various names: Father, Mother, Friend, Love, Soul of the universe,

and so on. God is All and even much more. If a person renewed his or her relationship to God in his or her conscience, he or she could start a new life, trusting the higher powers that are hidden inside him or her, and that are substantially divine. The idea of God – as a world order, the supreme intelligence, and so on – has been present in every culture and in the mind of every normal human being. This idea is not only necessary for revival, but having it, we have enough of what we really need.

6. A Proposed Confession

1. I believe in a human –
in his or her unexpressable value
and capability of unlimited evolution.
I believe that any societal systems
are originated by people,
are for use by people,
and can be changed by people –
if they do not serve their needs any more
and delays their progress.
I believe we need new better people
for creating a new better society.

2. I am an apprentice of Jesus from Nazareth,
the teacher of God's love and the Path of Life.

3. I submit to the only God,
my Father and friend.

4. I respect every honest conviction,
and in everybody I first see a human
regardless of his or her religious
or other affiliations.

5. I always look for more truth,
and using my powers and understanding
I want to work for the revival
and reconciliation
of humankind.

This confession only offers directions for the nearest educational goals of revival. Our diversity can be great yet we can come to agreement and cooperate, because the breakdown from the old conservative religion to the new liberal one is so great that our area is clearly differentiated.

The old world and its religion focused on miracles, the devil, and how to appease an angry God. The new religion focuses on human knowledge and respect for natural laws, capability, progress, and development. The old religion is negative and obsolete; we must live the new one.

This confession is an inspiration which shows us how to fight with the orthodox, ignorant churches. After the basic truths, which old churches overlooked, have deep roots in

people's minds, we can continue to clarify other tasks and goals. This will require completing or re-creating of the accepted confession.

7. The Middle Path

All of the churches in our state, both Catholic and Protestant, including the Czechoslovak Church, stand on the same dogmatic foundation which includes Adam's fall and original sin, bloody sacrifice of the second God's person given to the first God's person, resurrection on the day of Judgement, hell and devils, miracles, and so on. There is no progressive religious society based on a non-dogmatic foundation and which is in harmony with science. Some people even think that there is no possibility of walking on the path between heaven with angels and the emptiness of atheism.

We should think seriously about our situation and make an effort to change it. Let us create a new organization – the best one which we are able. There are already many people willing to support such an organization today, but some of them are afraid of its eventual decline to another institutional decay, conservatism and sectarianism. We do not have to worry. If this organization will require an improvement or even abolishment in the future, it will be the task of those who come after us.

Let such an organization be an open home to everybody who has grown away from conservatism and orthodoxy, but who are not materialist atheists. This would serve the orthodox churches as well as our nation because it would not address those who believe, but those who tend to be double-faced in order not to compromise their churches.

Such an organization would challenge every part of our society which is still influenced by the old feudal attitudes to modernize. It would be nationalist in a progressive and honest sense, but in intense connection with other similar organizations. In organizations of this kind we find the best thinkers, artists, inventors, politicians and other activists, and they would be the best challenge to us.

Sectarianism and hatred have their roots in dependency and non self-reliance. If every local religious society is independent in its orientation and finances, there would not be the difficult problems we see today. Therefore it is recommended that we establish these new organizations on a democratic and independent basis.

8. The Name

The name of the new organization is not important. Every local organization could have its own name like individuals do. Also, contemporary existing organizations that have in their programs some of the main goals of revival could join us and keep their names. Our name might be "The Society of the Friends of Revival," if the majority will agree.

If we, the Czechs, succeed in this goal to establish such an all-national revival religious organization which would, for progressive people, replace churches, it would be as significant as the movement of the Czech Brethren in our history. (A Protestant church body formed in Bohemia in 1457, and driven out in 1722 by persecution. One branch of the Church has been established in North America under the name the Moravian Church. The Church was significant for the history of the Czech state particularly because of Johannes Amos Comenius (1592-1670), who was one of the leaders.

A NOTE (Written at the last page):

Let all who agree with the principles mentioned above or are interested in the organization of "The Friends of Revival," write to the address: Dr. Norbert F. Čapek, Praha 1,

Dlouha Trida 49.