

The New Morality

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (Isaiah 5:20,21)

The definition of the true and the good does not depend upon the passage of time, else they must remain undefined until the whole process has run its course, in which case they will no longer be serviceable to mankind. (Dr. Carl F. Henry)

Morality is changing. Accepted norms of ethical conduct are being questioned. We are rapidly becoming a permissive society. Old standards are dying or being declared dead. Our society is involved in a dramatic upheaval. The new attitudes are seen most prominently in the arts, in the increasing nudity and brutal frankness on the film screens, in the blunt and often obscene language of popular novels, in the crude pornography openly sold in the corner drug store, in the lyrics of many pop songs, in the free swinging living of the addicts in the drug cult, in the increasing popularity of the occult, the bizarre, the ancient mystery religions, in modern advertising which uses sex to sell everything from lawn mowers to water mattresses, in the advocacy of pre-marital sex as wholesome and virginity as Victorian, in the request of a group of high school girls in Toronto to have birth control devices available in the schools, in the demand for easier abortion laws.

People are concerned about the swiftness of moral decline. But there is no longer a consensus on what is right or wrong, permissible or forbidden. Many psychologists, sociologists and churchmen see a dangerous swing towards a hedonistic and irresponsible society. Others see the new permissiveness as a sign of hope, a trend towards becoming a more mature society.

"We are just beginning to discover what morality is all about," says theater critic Kenneth Tynan. "It is concerned with how we behave toward each other, not with how much of our bodies we happen to display." Historian and columnist Max Lerner says, "I think it's good to have an expressive, free and imaginative society. But it's not enough to break things down. New values must be found, and I believe young people are trying to find these values. That's where I place my hope." And theologian Marty asks, "Is man essentially a hedonistic, pleasure-loving, self-indulgent type? Or is he essentially a purposeful, work-orientated, self-denying creature? We simply don't know yet." And Billy Graham tells in a sermon about a New York clergyman who, when he was about to give copies of the pornographic book *Fanny Hill* to his congregation, was advised that doing so he would be breaking the law. And Billy Graham adds, and rightly so, "May God have mercy on us!"

What is the background and cause of this moral confusion, even within the church?

There is a tremendous thirst for freedom. Our world has come of age. Man has become emancipated. He feels no longer the need for God and wants to find his own

way in the jungle of life. This man become of age has also become a secular man. In this technological age, in which man is in control of so much power, the presence of God is no longer felt. The philosopher, Nietzsche believed that a world without God would be a better and freer world. His philosophy "freed" many from God and led in Germany to the slavery of national socialism. Secularism leads to nihilism. There are no longer absolutes. Man and man alone is the sole standard of what is right or wrong. He himself is the highest court of appeal and his own law-maker. Dr. Van Riessen says that secularism absolutises the world and takes away from man the belief that the world has a purpose. Secularism takes away man's direction in life. He no longer knows the road which he can and must take.

If man has become the sole standard of what is right or wrong, it is no wonder that there is so much moral confusion. Each man is then his own law-giver and his own judge.

Unfortunately, the church has not been able to protest loudly and clearly these modern trends. The church, instead of resisting secularism, the thinking of the world, has absorbed much of it. It has tried to make the gospel palatable for modern, secular, sophisticated man. Modernistic theologians are doubting or denying the authority of the Scriptures. There is much theological confusion. The Book, the infallible Word of God, has been traded for the shifty quicksand of humanistic thinking. New theologies develop so rapidly nowadays that by the time you have finished studying the latest in modern theology, you have become outdated. A new theology has blossomed up with its demand for attention, and it swiftly disappears again in the theological novelty library.

The key to our present confusion about what is right or wrong lies with the attitude so many have towards Scripture. One scholar said, and rightly so, Without an authoritative Bible even the authority of Jesus Christ is eroded; deep down all the major problems involve the question of Biblical authority, for it affects all the realms of doctrine and life, including the life and witness of the Church." When theologians leave the Word of God, they open the church for every wind of doctrine and an un-Biblical way of life. Consequently, it is not surprising that Rev. Ernest Harrison, a liberal Anglican, can write on *The Immorality of the Bible*. He says that the Bible contains "fables" which have some value, like "Grimm's grisly Fairy tales." About the immorality of Scriptures he says, "Modern North American society for example, values hard work; laziness is considered a vice, especially when accompanied by poverty. In these matters, the Bible presents no acceptable morality. Genesis describes hard work as a punishment, an opposite description.. While Esau is hard at work, Jacob is making arrangements to steal his birthright. . . . Mary is supported, while the hardworking, faithful Martha is left to do the dirty work and, quite rightly, grumbles about it. Jesus came through to the leaders of society as a rebel, a drunkard, and a mocker of religion." Why can and does he say this? He does not regard the Bible as the infallible Guide for life. "Whatever our agreements and disagreements, we can only meet the Bible if we take it as a whole; and this can only be done honestly when we have been given the unconditional freedom to accept or reject any of its parts."

In the Netherlands, Dr. Kuitert has stirred up much controversy with his views of Scripture. It is not the purpose of this paper to deal with this theology. I only want to direct your attention to his view of Scriptures. He rejects the historicity of Genesis 1-3. He has a worshipful attitude towards science, and hammers on the idea that the Bible is time-conditioned. As the Bible is time-conditioned, we can no longer go directly to Scriptures for our directions for morality. Kuitert says that you cannot consult the Bible like you do a civil law code or a telephone guide. In the Old and New Testament you find teaching models for obedience. Kuitert leans towards the new-morality (situation ethics). In *Anders Gezegd* he says that we should perhaps resort to situational ethics. Therefore, he can say in his chapter on "Theology and Ethics of Revolution" that the alternative whether or not to use violence in order to change the structures of society must be decided in each situation anew on the basis of information and analysis.

The term "New Morality," or to use another phrase "situational ethics" has been popularized by the Anglican bishop John T. Robinson in his famous book *Honest to God*. He has presented in a popular way what modernist theologians had been saying for a long time.

1. What is New Morality?

Dr. Fletcher, quoted in *Honest to God* said "Christian ethics is not a scheme of codified conduct. It is a purposive effort to relate love to a world of relativities through a casuistry obedient to love." This means that love is the only basis for ethics. Compassion for the person overrides all law. And Bishop Robinson believes that this is "the only ethic for man come of age." There are no longer absolutes for right or wrong. We are told that the difference between the old and the new morality is in the approach. The old started with accepted PRINCIPLES, the new with PERSONS. Thus, there are no ready principles to guide a given situation. The bishop believes that law and love clash. This new approach to morality has serious consequences. A conspicuous example is the issue of marriage and divorce. Love is the basis for every decision and not principle. Therefore, Robinson can make this revealing statement: "For nothing can of itself always be labeled as 'wrong'. One cannot, for instance, start from the position 'sex relations before marriage' or 'divorce' are wrong or sinful in themselves. They may be in 99 cases or even 100 cases out of 100, but they are not intrinsically so, for the only intrinsic evil is lack of love."

Douglas Rhymes, canon of Southwark Cathedral of the very diocese of which Robinson is in charge, preached a sermon in which he said "Christ nowhere suggested that marriage was the only place where sexual relationships could take place. . . . A great deal of the prejudice against homosexuality is on the grounds that it is unnatural. But for whom? Certainly not for the homosexual." In the philosophy of the New Morality there is a clash between law and love. Stealing can be justified if your motivation is right. Premarital sex can be right, if you have the right attitude. But New Morality is dead wrong. Law and love do not clash. Love is the fulfillment of the

law. We obey God's law because we love the Lord. There are absolute principles which must be obeyed for our own good. "For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour." (1 Thessalonians 4:2-4)

11. The New Morality and the Concept, of Sin

When we discuss the New Morality, we must also deal with the concept of sin. To preach about sin, lawlessness and standing as guilty sinners in the sight of a holy and just God is not "in" today. The whole concept of sin has become a problem and the knowledge of sin has declined during the last years and, as a result, the fear of hell. The real essence of sin is guilt before God. Man has broken the laws of God. As it is written, "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Romans 3:10). "For all have sinned, and come e short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) There is a lack of knowledge of sin. And the removal of the penalties for sin promotes the new morality. Yet, the Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) Nowadays, we have become more concerned about the criminal than the victim. We spend more money to rehabilitate the criminal than to aid the one who suffered through the criminal act. The whole relationship of crime and punishment is now a matter of debate. The crime rate is spiraling and our crime prevention is no longer forceful. For example, in Boise City, Oklahoma "A 14-year-old boy who had admitted that he had shot his mother 10 times with a rifle has been found not guilty of murder because he was not advised of his rights to a lawyer before he confessed to his father and two officers. The prosecutor assailed the acquittal as the 'worst miscarriage of justice I've ever seen'. . . . The judge said he based his 'not guilty' ruling on a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision. He said he disagreed with the high court's ruling but that he had 'no alternative'." What is sin? What is law? The advocates of the new morality say:

"Thou shalt not covet, ordinarily.
Thou shalt not kill, ordinarily.
Thou shalt not commit adultery, ordinarily."

Dr. Joseph Fletcher says: ". . . for me there are no rules – none at all . . . anything and everything is right or wrong according to the situation – what is wrong in some cases is right in others . . . a situationist would discard all absolutes except the one absolute: always to act with loving concern."

III. Scripture and New Morality

What is the basis for our knowledge of right and wrong? The answer on this point is clear. The inspired Scriptures! Our belief in Divine revelation does have practical implications for the whole life of morals and behaviour. We are not 'blind people groping in the dark for something which is not there. The "word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light upon my path." (Psalm 119: 105) We have absolute principles to follow. We have a firm foundation for our principles. God has made His will known to us through His Word. The prayer Jesus taught us contains this petition, "Thy will

be done in earth, as in heaven." (Matt. 6:10) The glory of the Hebrews was that they were people who knew God's will.

"Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approved the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law." (Romans 2:17-20)

The Heidelberg Catechism has the law in its third part "Gratitude." Out of gratitude for the great salvation provided by Jesus Christ we try to keep the law. Dr. Carl F. Henry writes "In the context of salvation by grace, the Law serves as the external criterion of virtue, as the rule of moral good and evil for the believer's walk and conversation. It sets forth the will of God in terms of what ought to be accomplished and avoided" Proverbs 6:23 says "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life." Roman 3:31 states "Do we then make void the law through faith'. God forbid: yea, we establish the law. The Bible speaks of the law a "perfect" (Ps.19:7), "Imperishable" (Matt. 5:17f.), "holy an good" (Romans 7:14). The law does not cease to be an expression of the will of God. Christian living ought to be based on the revealed principles of conduct. A Christian is not lawless, but law abiding.

We live in a confused world. The church is confusing to the world. The voice of the church is so uncertain. We are afraid to stand on the Word. Theologians forget that the cross has always been a stumbling block, the preaching of the Word "foolishness" and the obedience to God's law a nuisance to the pagan. In our bewildered world with its swift decline of morals, the church must retain its moral integrity, practice what the Scripture teaches, and have the mind of Christ and not the secular thinking of our age. We can direct our young people to a sure guide - the Bible. And we must live as Christian adults according to the Word. Whosoever shall lose his life for Christ's sake shall gain it in Him. Whosoever is a slave of Christ is truly a free man. Whosoever comes as helpless sinner to the cross, will be more than a conqueror through Christ. God grant that we may not be swayed by the pagan ideologies of our days, that we will never become ashamed of the gospel, that we will never be fearful to speak out for truth and righteousness. May our confession I be:

How I love Thy law, O Lord!
Daily joy its truths afford;
In its constant light I go,
Wise to conquer every foe.
Thy commandments in my heart
Truest wisdom can impart;
To mine eyes Thy precepts show
Wisdom more than sages know.
While my heart Thy Word obeys,
I am kept from evil ways;

From Thy law, with Thee to guide,
I have never turned aside.
Sweeter are Thy words to me
Than all other good can be;
Safe I walk,
Thy truth my sight,
Hating falsehood,
loving right." (Psalter Hymnal 248)

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