

MODERN CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIAN

MORALS

By Carl Spain

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(199)

200 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

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In this discourse we are using the word "challenge" in its original meaning. It is derived from the Latin "calumnia," meaning to defy, to falsely accuse, to deny, and contest. Serious challenges are being hurled at the defenders of the morals of the Christian faith, the faith once for all delivered

to the saints and faithfully recorded in the New Testament, the only book on Christian ethics which has the divine imprimatur of our heavenly Father.

"Moral" Defined

Our English word "moral" is derived from the Latin "mores," meaning "custom," "manners," "habits." The Latin "mores" is akin to the Greek "ethos," from which we get our word "ethics." We are accustomed to making a clear distinction between the "religious" and the "moral" areas of human behavior. We recognize the validity of such a distinction in our efforts to communicate with each other in modern terminology. However, I feel that there is something vital in the import of the words of the Spirit, as they are employed in God's message to man through Christ and the New Testament revelation of truth.

We are accustomed to thinking of the "moral" as pertaining to man's relationship with man, and the "religious" as pertaining to man's relationship with God. A study of the two words as used in the Scriptures reveals a very important truth concerning Christian faith and morals. The words which pertain to "religion" have much moral

201 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

meaning and value. And the words used in reference to "ethics" or "morals" sometimes have "religious" meaning and value.

In Acts 26:5 Paul speaks of "the straightest sect of our religion" (threskos). James uses the same word (threskos) when he says: "If any man thinketh himself to be religious, while he bridleth not his tongue . . . this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:26, 27) .

In the New Testament, religion is related to the moral life of the Christian. Even the true worship of God is related to the moral life of God's child. In Romans 12:1 the Spirit says to the Christian: "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your spiritual service." The word "service" is from a Greek word meaning "worship." We honor and reverence God, and show our devotion, by offering our lives daily in service to others to the glory of God (I John 3:16). Religion that is unrelated to moral conduct is "vain," and worship that is not related to life in social or moral situations is not true worship of God. This is not the "social gospel," but it is the gospel with real social and moral emphasis.

One of the Bible words for "religion" is *eusebeia*, meaning piety, reverence, and godliness. Sometimes it is used with reference to piety toward the divine being (e.g. Acts 7:23), and again it is used in reference to piety toward our fellowman, as in I Timothy 5:4: "If any widow hath children, or grandchildren, let them learn first to show

202 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

piety towards their own family, and to requite their parents: for this is acceptable in the sight of God."

Christian "faith" and "morals" are vitally related to each other. You cannot have one without the other. Some systems of ethics are irreligious from the Christian viewpoint. Some systems of religion are unethical from the Christian viewpoint. I find it impossible to consider Christian ethics apart from what we usually term the "religious faith" of true Christianity. The relationship is so essential, we repeat, that even the Bible word for "manners" and "customs" and "morals" is sometimes given a religious value, and the Bible word for "religion" is given a moral content.

Christian Faith and Morals

The Christian endeavors earnestly to walk by faith in moral and religious matters. He believes that there is but "one faith" (Ephesians 4:5). But it is clear, from the Roman letter, that there are two aspects of the Christian faith. In Romans 10:17 the Spirit testifies that "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." In the context the faith here referred to is to be proclaimed with urgency and insistency and shared with others to the salvation of every man's soul. But in Romans 14 the Spirit also testifies that there is an area of conscience and conviction which is not determined by a "thus saith the Lord." There is an area of "faith" which concerns Christian morals which God has not regulated by revelation. When God speaks on a moral issue, the faithful Christian listens and does the will of the Lord as He has revealed it. In moral matters there is an area determined by the mind of God as He has expressly revealed it. But there is another area

203 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

which God has not bound by an express revelation of His will, which is determined by the culture in which we live and by the conscience of those whom we are seeking to save.

In Romans 14 the Spirit moved Paul's pen to write concerning the aspect of Christian faith that pertains to "scruples" (Romans 14:1). After a discussion concerning "scruples" about matters on which God has not legislated, Paul said: "The faith which thou hast, have thou to thyself before God. . . He that doubteth is damned . . . whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:22,23).

In light of what has been said, we conclude that the Christian faith and conscience is regulated by two things: (1) What God has spoken on the issue. This area we usually describe by the phrase "bound in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). (2) The culture pattern in which we live with other people and the conscience of the unsaved with whom we mingle day by day. This is the area of faith and morals which we usually designate as "loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

In this area of faith and morals the Christian remembers the words of the Spirit in I Corinthians 10:23-33, where we find that there are areas of conscience and conviction which are determined by the social situation in which we live. There are some things from which Christians abstain, not because God has said "Thou shalt not," but "for conscience' sake: conscience, I say, not shine own, but the other's" (I Corinthians 10:28,29). To this rule some may ask as Paul did, "Why is my liberty judged by another conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I evil spoken of. . ." (I Corinthians 10:29, 30). To which Paul

204 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

answers: "Give no occasion of stumbling. . . even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking mine own. . ." (1 Corinthians 10 :32, 33) .

In moral matters the Christian seeks first to please God. Secondly, he seeks to please others. Where the will of God conflicts with the will of others, he chooses to please God, and in so doing truly bless others. Where the will of God and the will of others do not conflict, he pleases God by pleasing them. In this way the Christian finds his own true happiness.

The True Basis of Morality

The naturalist contends for a morality that is based on human nature. The atheistic naturalist believes in a natural morality that has been developing within human nature through millions of years. The theistic naturalist believes in an instinctive morality that was planted in man and which works without supernatural guidance and is based on intuition rather than revelation.

We cannot be certain as to the exact measure of moral instinct which man possesses by virtue of the fact that he was created in God's image. To what extent has the sin of Adam and the sin of the human race marred that image? How much basis is there in human nature for Christian morality? To what extent is human nature morally inclined?

It is evident that man from the beginning, as recorded in Genesis, possessed a capacity for a high level of spiritual and moral conduct. But it is also evident from the beginning and before man sinned that God taught him on certain basic moral issues which man would not have known

205 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

instinctively and which human nature would not have known had God not spoken. There is grave danger that our interpretation of "nature" in Romans 2 may involve us in ethical contradictions. Notice Romans 2:13-15:

Gentiles that have not the law do by nature the things of the law, these not having the law, are the law unto themselves, in that they show the works of the law written in their hearts, their

conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them.

Before we conclude how much of the law the Gentiles did by nature, let us remember that Paul also said:

Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet . . . For we know that law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin . . . For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not (Romans 7:7,8; 14, 18).

In the above passages the Holy Spirit makes it right clear that human nature alone is incapable of Christian morality and needs divine help and guidance. This is especially true since sin entered the experience of the human race, and death by sin. But there is good evidence that Adam and Eve, even before the fall, needed instruction in righteousness. A quick glance at the inspired account of man's fellowship with God, before sin disturbed that fellowship, will bear this out. Carl F. H. Henry suggests:

Even though Adam had a certain morality written into his nature, there was still need for specific instruction and commandments conveyed externally by supernatural disclosure. In man's primal state the basic elements of morality that were his by creation were insufficient to define the whole content of human duty. His spiritual nature doubtless bound man to act in the spirit of truth and right, but he could not derive all the commandments of a dutiful life

206 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

from his inner constitution. The Genesis account contradicts any idea that the law engraved on man's heart gave him detailed content from which he could deduce every factor of the moral claim.¹

In our interpretation of "nature" in Romans 2:14 we must not contradict what Paul says in Romans 7. If the Jews could not fully know the moral law of Moses by natural instinct, or by innate conscience, then we must not conclude that the Gentiles could.

But, in any event, it is evident from the book of Romans that neither Gentile nor Jew could attain unto the lofty plain of Christian ethics without leaving the level of ethics based on human nature and rising to the level of ethics based on divine nature. Simon Peter stated it precisely and concisely when he said:

Seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us to glory and virtue; whereby he hath granted unto us his precious and exceeding great promises; that through these ye may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust (II Peter 1:3, 4).

Jesus Himself said: "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). This means literally "born from above." Our Lord continued by saying: "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5, 6).

Without exception, the New Testament teaching concerning Christian morality is based on the fact that Christians are children of God by virtue of a new birth. As Paul reasons with the Corinthians about the level of their moral attitudes and conduct, he bases his plea on the fact that

207 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

they are children of God and are partakers of the divine nature. He reminded them that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them for they are spiritually judged" (I Corinthians 2 :14). Then the apostle moves on to moral principles based on the love of God as demonstrated in Christ, and he reaches his grand conclusion in I Corinthians 16:14: "Let all that you do be done in love!"

Likewise the apostle John, dealing with the lofty principles of Christian ethics in I John, starts out in the very beginning by establishing the true basis and source of Christian morality in the nature of God, whose children we are. Because we are partakers of God's nature, our moral standards are based on the proposition that God's nature is imparted to His children. This most certainly has moral implications and consequences in his dealings with his fellow man.

The "Golden Rule" or "Royal Law"

The relationship between Christian morality and the divine nature is set forth very clearly in the word of God. In the past I have thought that the highest level of morality was expressed in the language that we often refer to as "The Golden Rule." I was shocked when I discovered that this was the law and the prophets before Jesus lived and died.

All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye unto them: for this is the law and the prophets (Matthew 7:12).

In the same sermon Jesus said: "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

208 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

The Apostle Paul by the Spirit adds his witness:

Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, . . . is summed up in this word namely, Thou

shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8-10).

Then, Paul adds a few verses later: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." He goes on to give "love" the new content of the New Testament and makes of it a new commandment (compare I John 2:7,8) by giving it a fuller and richer meaning.

The word "Golden" still applies to the ethics of the law and prophets. It is also the Royal Law of James 2:8. It is still a royal law that is part of the new commandment of the New Testament. When the mathematician moves from algebra, trigonometry, and geometry into calculus, he does not throw the former into the waste basket, but jealously cherishes it so that he may build upon it and reach to loftier heights. He doesn't even dare throw away his multiplication table.

It is tragic that Christians have such difficulty living up to the law and prophets in the life of love. But it is even more tragic that we have not walked on higher ground, "having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God which liveth and abideth" (I Peter 1:23). As new creatures, born of God, we have purified our souls in obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, and are called upon to "love one another with a pure heart fervently" (I Peter 1 :22).

209 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

Paul concludes his great book on love with these words: "Let all that you do be done in love" (I Corinthians 16: 14). The book of I Corinthians is a great book, more than just chapter 13, on the practical ethics of Christian love. No one can really understand I Corinthians 13 without reading the entire book, because it is in the book itself that the new content of the new commandment is really defined.

Paul moves beyond the law and the prophets on the Golden Rule and gives love its new content when he says: "Be ye therefore imitators of God' as dear children. And walk in love as Christ also hath loved us" (Ephesians 5: 1, 2). Jesus Himself said to His disciples: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

The Jewish Spirit of Anti-Christ

Modern antagonism toward the ethics of Jesus is inseparably identified with the denial of His Divine Sonship. One basic reason why men deny His divinity is the fact that they do not agree with His moral attitude. The Nazi and Communist and Jew have one thing in common: they all despise the ethics of Jesus.

Representative of the spirit of anti-Christ among many modern Jews is Rabbi Joseph Klausner. In his book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, he hurls his blasphemous indictments against our Lord. It all adds up to the bold accusation that the morals of Jesus are unworthy of the respect of decent people.

The Rabbi hurls his challenge on the following counts. We will do no more than state them.² You who know Jesus, and who understand the moral and religious and political

210 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

conditions of the Greek, Roman-Jewish world in which Jesus lived, will make your own reply in your own enlightened hearts:

- (1) The Rabbi says that Jesus abstracted religion and ethics from the rest of social life, in His efforts to establish a kingdom not of this world.
- (2) He accuses Jesus of rashly setting aside all the requirements of the national life in an effort to set up an ethico-religious system based on His own perverted conception of the Godhead.
- (3) Jesus, he says, ignored the religious and national culture in His effort to abolish it, rather than seeking to reform and improve the nation's knowledge, art, and culture.
- (4) Jesus, says the Rabbi, invited social chaos by substituting the foolish principle of nonresistance for civil justice. In this respect, the Rabbi stumbles over the Cross of Christ.
- (5) According to Klausner, Jesus took no interest in labor, or in political and economic achievement, and foolishly recommended the "un anxious, toiless life of the birds and lilies"!
- (6) Jesus, he accuses, ignored the requirements of distributive justice by refusing to become a judge or divider in the case of the man who said "bid my brother divide the inheritance with me."
- (7) Jesus, according to the Jewish Rabbi, ignored everything concerned with material civilization.

Having hurled these and other challenges, he concludes

211 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

that the Jewish nation was very wise in rejecting Jesus of Nazareth, and he adds, "two thousand years of non-Jewish Christianity have proved that the Jewish people did not err."³

It is a fact that Nazism and Communism have been viciously Anti-Semitic in our century. How strange it is that the Semitic-Anti-Christ and the Anti-Semitic Anti-Christ join hands, like Herod and Pilate, and become ethical friends when they face the question: "What, then, shall we do with Jesus?"

Rabbi Klausner defends the Jewish nation against Jesus with the same charge that the atheist Celsus brought against Christians in defense of the Roman Empire. Christians were accused of

contributing to the fall of the empire by their lack of concern for Rome's materialistic defense and reconstruction. In modern times Marx and Lenin have accused Christians of showing too little concern for life on earth, and too much concern for life eternal. The death cries of millions under the Anti-Christ rule of Communism give ringing evidence that Christians have good reason to give much thought to the life hereafter. The only alternative for men of honor is to bear a cross instead of a sword. The sword will only spread the destructive disease of greed and hate. The cross burns in a healing way and destroys the disease without destroying the person.

The Challenge of Modern Naturalism

The subject of morality is being diligently studied by modern atheists who deny the existence of God. On the basis of logical materialism they deny the Christian doctrine of divine revelation and regeneration. Many distinct and conflicting ethical systems have marched under the

212 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

banner of logical materialism. Outstanding among them in our time are the advocates of Behaviorism with its emphasis on naturalistic morality in an atheistic society. According to this theory of morals, man is not responsible for any of his actions. What he does or says or thinks at any given moment is the result of chemical and physical forces within his own physical nature and in the physical world around him. He cannot do right or wrong because these natural forces determine his choice, and he, of his own free will, really has no choice. If man cannot choose, he has no choice. If he has no choice, he is not responsible for his actions. Behaviorism is one of the modern Goliaths who hurls his atheistic challenge at the children of God. He stands with arrogant confidence, trusting in his materialistic armor. He laughs at the Christian soldier who stands with no shield—Goliath cannot see the shield of faith that only faith can see. Behaviorism boasts its scientific attitude and has good reason to be embarrassed, because there is no scientific proof that consciousness or conscience is nothing but physical and electrical motion.

Among those of Naturalistic persuasion there are those who keep company with Marx and Lenin, marching under the standard of the camp of Dialectical (Logical) Materialism and Political Naturalism. They, too, are atheistic and Anti-Christ. Reviving the ancient philosophy of Plato's Republic, and adding a modern flavor with the pen of Marx and Lenin, they have marched in arrogant pomp and pride in the spirit of Friedrich Nietzsche under the banner of Nazism, raping the land and the people of Belgium, Norway, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Then the circumstances reversed as "Beelzebub cast out Beelzebub," and the Marxian Communist, with the spirit of Lenin and lead by Stalin,

213 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

marched back through Poland and the other countries that had been tortured by the Nazis. They slaughtered and imprisoned "naive, simple-minded Christians" who could not fight back because

they were under the influence of the opiate of pure and undefiled religion! And, under the Communist banner, they continued to march with giant strides across China and Korea and even now cast a black shadow over the borders of India, breathing threatening and slaughter with the spirit of Anti-Christ. The Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx lived on in the heart of Lenin and reached Goliath stature in the Machiavellian ethics of Stalin. This same spirit of political naturalism also found expression in the 20th century in Mussolini of Italy. And in our own beloved America, under the banner of white supremacy, it marches with burning crosses across our nation cursing the doctrine that all men are born free and equal. Robed in the un-American garb of the Ku-Klux Klan, or in the robes of governors and senators and legislators it intimidates and legislates with utter contempt for Christ who sits as Judge in the Highest Court of Appeals in questions concerning the bill of human rights.

Political naturalism has as many faces as Nikita Khrushchev. It wears one face in the corrupt political and religious pressure groups in our country. It wears another face in Russia, and still another in China. Its beastly character takes the form of a Bear or a Dragon. It becomes a wolf in sheep's clothing, piously pronouncing the name of Christ with the tongue of Khrushchev, who added insult to injury when he replied to Mr. Skourzo, a Greek immigrant in Hollywood: "The Greeks and the Russians are brothers in Christ!"⁴ To such atheistic politicians, evil is good when it accomplishes one's goal, and good is evil

214 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

when it obstructs their path to power. It is the philosophy of Plato, who insisted that the superior, stronger man has the right to get the advantage of the inferior, weaker man. It is right and good for the most powerful to legislate in their own interest.

Whether we are willing to admit it or not, there are some dark chapters in the history of America in which are recorded deeds of Political Naturalism as vile as have ever been perpetrated on the face of the earth. Marching under the standard of the god of mammon and bluffing his way with ballots and bullets, the white man put his big white foot on the Negro's neck, quoted the pledge of allegiance to the flag, and piously recited platitudes about all men being born free and equal.

What right have we to talk about the two faces of Khrushchev, when we guard the ballot boxes with guns and pass laws that deny native Americans the right to vote on the basis of their color and social background. Like Khrushchev, many Americans just don't agree with Jesus about His moral code. The ethics of Jesus are foolish to many church goers.

I shall never forget how Christ was crucified by "His own" in a southern community where I grew up. A few law-abiding, humble-hearted Negroes wanted to attend a service of the church of Christ. They had listened to me preach on the radio. These souls didn't know anything about an organization for the- advancement of colored people. They traded with my beloved step-father, who seemed to be interested in their souls. They loved him like a mongrel dog would love a man who fed him and spoke kindly to him when he was accustomed to being cursed and kicked.

215 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

When our colored friends timidly asked if they could attend a service of the white folks and learn more about the church of Christ, I made the mistake of telling them that they would be more than welcome. And they trusted me. They came in timidly and took the seats that were as far back as they could get and still be inside. I shall never forget the agony on their faces when white Christians made it very plain to them that they were out of place and glared at them like a Jew would have looked upon a "Samaritan dog." The Negroes left the assembly of the saints. It seemed that the saints couldn't pray or sing just right as long as there were "niggers" in the church house.

A few years later, the Negroes of the community got to hear the gospel from a man of their own race. But the Lord didn't seem to understand about the white folks' problem, or if He did, He didn't seem to care. And the gospel seed that a white man had sown in the Negro heart was watered to life by a Negro preacher. - And the Lord gave the increase, but He didn't time it just right. He forgot that the poor Negro folks who were to be baptized didn't have anything but a tent, and the white folks had the only available baptistry. So, in the excitement of becoming the white folks' brothers and sisters in the Lord, the happy preacher didn't see anything wrong about asking if they could come over and use the baptistry.

The Lord had moved in the hearts of a few white Christians in such a powerful way that they said that their Negro friends would be more than welcome. But the blue-blooded members of the Royal Order of the Master Race, including many members of the church of Christ, the Baptist, the Methodist, and Presbyterians protested violently.

216 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

They preferred death to a fate such as this. Before the baptismal service was over, police came to put a stop to it. Just like the Communists broke up services in Warsaw, Poland, last year. The local paper took up the fight in good old "Democratic" style. Police patrolled the area around the church building. The Lord's church was branded as a communist front organization where whites and Negroes socialized as brothers. The community systematically boycotted the business establishments of some of the Christians for months, nearly causing them to go bankrupt.

I grew up in that community. I saw firsthand the kind of social paranoia that caused the Jews to hate Jesus and nail Him to a tree.

There is little to be gained by preaching against the immoral actions of Communists, unless we as Christians are willing to repent of our own idolatry and murder. The word of the Lord identifies covetousness with idolatry, and hate with murder. We have so defined "moral" and "immoral" in our modern times that a covetous idolater and hateful murderer can go to church and be in full fellowship because he doesn't smoke, chew, drink, or dance. These latter things we

ought not to do, but we need to expand the borders of our moral realm and condemn certain areas that have been condoned.

In correcting social evils, we must resort to the educational approach before we attempt legislation. We must preach righteousness and educate in a Christian way before any legislation will prove effective. Education without legislation is usually more effective than legislation without education. But when people insist on using the Bible to support an un-Christian system of ethics, one can

217 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

expect that social revolution will follow, with its usual attending evils. God forbid that churches of Christ, and schools operated by Christians, shall be the last stronghold of refuge for socially sick people who have Nazi illusions about the Master Race. Political naturalism, in the cloak of the Christian priesthood, must not be the ethical code in the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

I feel certain that Jesus would say: "Ye hypocrite! You say you are the only true Christians, and make up the only true church, and have the only Christian schools. Yet, you drive one of your own preachers to denominational schools where he can get credit for his work and refuse to let him take Bible for credit in your own school because the color of his skin is dark!"

Our moral attitudes are so mixed up that we use the story of Philemon and Onesimus to justify refusing a Negro admission to study Bible in our graduate school of Bible.

A Methodist college will admit our own Negro preacher brethren and give them credit for their work. Baptist colleges in Texas will do as much. Our State universities will admit them. There is no law of our State or nation that will censor us. The Bible does not rule against it. Why are we afraid? The integrated schools of San Angelo, Texas, ninety miles from Abilene, are rated at the top in our nation. Are we moral cowards on this issue? There are people with money who will back us in our last ditch stand for white supremacy in a world of pigmented people. God forbid that we shall be the last stronghold among religious schools where the politico-economic philosophy of naturalism determines our moral conduct.

We fear the mythical character named Jim Crow more

218 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

than we reverence Jesus Christ. In the name of "discretion" we make un-Christian and un-American rules like some states do in the name of "State's Rights." To complacent Jews who boasted that they alone were acceptable to God, Jesus said: "Outwardly you are like whited sepulchers, but inwardly you are full of dead men's bones." Let this be a warning to any people

who say they are the only Christians in the world. The surest way to seal the doom of this nation is for the only Christians to be the only ones with un-Christian attitudes.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day had developed a code of morals by which they could safely parade their piety before men. They reduced morality to certain matters like tithing mint, anise, and cummin, and "omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (Matthew 23:23). They became blind guides that strained at gnats and swallowed camels (Matthew 23 : 24) .

Some say it is the church, not the school, that must lead out in such matters. We have just said that education is the best approach to the solution of any problem. Our only excuse for existing as institutions of Christian education is to make better citizens of the kingdom of Christ and better citizens for service in a free society.

We reject even our own preachers, and refuse them credit for their work in Bible, on the grounds that we do not have separate facilities for them to sleep and eat. If that is the only issue, then why reject someone who doesn't ask that we provide a place for him to eat or sleep?

Brethren, we are not recommending revolutionary legislation. We are merely suggesting that we offer Christian

219 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

education to all Americans without respect of persons. If the problem is one of room and board, then let us consider that we have no problem if we do not have to provide room and board.

*Idealistic Ethics*⁵

Rivaling naturalism for the mastery of Western thought is idealism. Idealism asserts that man is able by rational processes to discover the good life. As there are many theories among the naturalists, even so the idealists have many theories. But all of it has led to speculative rationalism which insists that human reason has unlimited power to discover the good life without divine revelation and without a naturalistic study of sensory experiences.

Time and space do not permit a discussion of the rational idealism of Plato, Aristotle, and Hegel, nor of the Categorical Imperative and postulational idealism of Immanuel Kant. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant opposes any effort to reduce knowledge of good and evil to mere sensory perception. The idealists insist that man's knowledge extends by the power of the mind into the invisible spiritual and moral order and that by pure meditation man can furnish rational proof of the moral discoveries of the mind.

There have been three strong opponents of rational idealism in the Western world. (1) The Christian faith based on revelation of God's will in the Bible; (2) the irrational, super-naturalistic

and religious naturalism of which Soren Kierkegard is representative; and (3) the naturalistic and anti-religious systems of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche with their irrational methods of approach to the good life.

220 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

The first of these is a protest based on a faith delivered by God to man by supernatural intervention through revelation. The second and third are forerunners of modern existentialism. We shall consider the ethics of existentialism, but, before we do, let us bear in mind that two of the "founding fathers" of existential ethics were the supernaturalistic and religious Kierkegard, and the naturalistic, anti-religious Nietzsche! Two ethical philosophies that were uncompromisingly opposed to each other have, through the fickle fellowship of modern minds, given birth to the popular philosophy of existentialism.

Many books from the popular religious press have been circulated in recent years in the Western world. Many of them have been translations of the writings of European existentialists who have been influenced by the anti-religious and religious philosophies that have influenced the thinking of Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If existentialism perplexes one, and he finds within it seeming contradictions, he will do well to remember Kierkegard and Nietzsche, both of whom made their contribution to existentialism.

Existential Ethics

Let us consider briefly this philosophy which repudiates all forms of systematic morality. Carl F. H. Henry's observations on existentialism are clear and concise in defining this modern moral philosophy:⁶ "Decision, rather (than reason), constitutes the warp and woof of life for existential ethics." The existentialist scorns every endeavor to define moral and spiritual claims by rational criteria. Such realities, he contends, are grasped solely by "practical-existential" decision.

221 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

It seems that in the chaos of thought in the pre-existential philosophy faith was dethroned by reason, and rationalism reigned in Western thought. The cult of rationalism paraded proudly under the influence of men like Descartes and Hegel. There was nothing in reality that man could not attain by pure reason.

Then agnosticism and evolutionary thought dethroned reason, and, under the influence of David Hume, even Kant was somewhat inhibited by the terrific impact of agnosticism. But Kant helped to prepare the world for existentialism because he, in agreement with Hume, "denied any possibility of knowing the spiritual world conceptually. Abandoning the religious grounding of morality, he oriented the discussion of ethics to the practical reason and to immanent value-experience."

Henry continues to point out certain "observable influences" that contributed to the modern existential mood:

Both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard have made their contribution. Whatever their differences, each repudiates the attempt to grasp reality rationally, and each seeks instead to do so from the standpoint of Existenz, or subjective immediacy.

Henry's observation concerning existentialism's pragmatic attitude is worthy of note: "It cuts reason off from any ontic relation to universal essences and changeless absolutes, and indeed, denies the very reality of such." This has serious implications to the Christian who accepts a divinely revealed system of moral conduct. If there is no

"universal essence," there is no God who is immutable and changeless, and there are no principles that are eternal. Let Henry continue his analysis of the ethics of existentialism:

222 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

The moral life needs no clarification of the metaphysical hinterland before posing the question, 'What ought I to do?' Such inquiries as 'What kind of a universe is this?' or 'What life-view is demanded by this world-view?' only divert the individual from the task of living passionately at the moment.

Existentialism scorns the attempt to formulate a world-and-life view.... Thus the entire moral tradition of the West, except for occasional strands influenced by postulational ethics, is repudiated as speculative rationalism.

The existential moralist proposes, instead, a 'practical morality.' He inquires: 'What shall I do in this concrete predicament in view of its specific alternatives?' and not, 'What is the nature of duty?' or 'What is the nature of the self that it should be required to do anything at all?' . . . In dynamic decision man creatively makes his own tomorrow in a context of existence which is neither bound by necessity nor hemmed in by reason. The problems of life are psychological, not logical. Hence ethical decision must be ventured on the existential-practical plane, rather than from the theoretical point of view.⁷

All of this helps to explain the modern philosophies of Nazism and Communism. Friedrich Nietzsche (19th century), who is admittedly one of the predecessors of existential ethics, was a younger contemporary of Karl Marx. Both were atheists and accepted the materialistic view of the universe. Nietzsche's power-ethics harmonizes with the Marxist contention that the world's greatest need is economic power. Marx believed that the only real malady of the human race is an economic one. This fits neatly into Nietzsche's theory that the ultimate reality can only be understood from the powerful forces of man's immediate environment.

Those who have jumped on the existential band-wagon will do well to remember that it was a man with an existential mood who said in his *Ecce Homo* that Christian morality is the most malignant form of all falsehood. He

223 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

denounced it as poisonous, decadent, and weakening. And in his book, *A Genealogy of Morals*, the same Nietzsche said the "Golden Rule" contradicted man's natural instinct and that Jesus Christ was a seductive Jew whose Cross was a subtle means of obtaining power.

William Barrett, the author of *Irrational Man*, gives a popular definitive study of existential philosophy.⁸

. . . this philosophy derives from concrete and everyday human experience rather than from abstract or specialized areas of knowledge . . . Its method is to begin with this human existence as a fact without any ready-made preconceptions about the essence of man. There is no prefabricated human nature that freezes human possibilities into a preordained mold.... 'Existence precedes essence', as the formula puts it.⁹

Barrett also insists that the existentialists of this century are the heirs of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In Kierkegaard we catch the flavor of Kant's idealism, and in Nietzsche the flavor of Marxian-Lenin ethics of political and economic power.

The existential theory is espoused by theists, atheists, and agnostics with equal passion. Barrett, in defending the fact that existentialism attracts all types of ethical philosophies, writes:

These men have different problems, attack the problems by different methods, and on a number of points are in disagreement. Hence some critics declared that existentialism is not a unified movement at all, with the implication that it may not even be a definite philosophy. On the contrary, a movement is alive and vital only when it is able to generate differences among its followers; when everybody agrees, we may be sure that it has declined into the stereotyped rigidity of death.

From the above statement we can see that the liberal mood and the existential mood are very much alike. And

224 ABILENECHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

we are familiar with the consequences of liberalism in the social and political morals of our day, and also in the theology of modernism. There are, however, at least two moral philosophies that are not welcome in the existential house: (1) Behaviorism, with its absolute emphasis on chemical and physical forces in man and his environment in determining moral conduct, and (2)

New Testament Christianity, with its emphasis on the eternal principles and definite standards of moral conduct for all ages as long as man lives on the earth.

As long as Christians insist that the Christian ethic is revealed to us by God, an Absolute Being, through Jesus Christ, and that in Jesus we find the perfect divinity and perfect humanity, just so long Christians will find the existential fellowship an unfriendly one. And as long as we insist that the New Testament is the only book in the world on Christian faith and morals which has the imprimatur of the Spirit of the one true God and His Son Jesus Christ, just so long will we be unwelcome in the liberal fellowship of the existentialists.

To the atheistic existentialist, the absence of absolute values means unlimited and unthwarted freedom. To him the only sure thing is death. And the true meaning of life is determined by the present act alone. To the theistic existentialist, it is the philosophical spirit that should prevail in the magic moment of decision. To a theological existentialist, like Karl Barth, the magic moment of immediate decision is influenced by divine revelation, not Biblical, but a special communication from God; not from within man subjectively, but from God outside of man. The existential magic moment is determined by God Himself, who thus confronts man with the moment of decision.

225 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

With another theological, revelational existentialist, Emil Brunner, there is the doctrine of a subjective "twilight knowledge" of God's will in the human conscience which speaks to man in the moment of subjective immediacy.¹⁰

Even neo-orthodoxy fits into the pattern of existential ethics. This modern school of theology has developed an ethical theory which insists that Christian ethics require Christian faith. Then, as Henry puts it, neo-orthodoxy attempts: ". . . to identify revelational ethics with the existential and to repudiate the theoretical. Two important elements cut neo-orthodoxy loose from the historic Christian view of Biblical ethics. One is the rejection of propositional revelation, thus denying the rational base for theology and ethics. The other is making revelation to be an immediate encounter only. This by-passes an inspired and authoritative Scripture."¹¹

The Threat of Worldliness

No challenge to Christian morals is quite so subtle and so dangerous as that which comes from the unconverted members of the Christian fellowship itself. There are many practical atheists among us who are morally loose because they do not really believe that the earth and the works therein shall be burned up and that they must soon stand before the judgment throne of God to give an account of their moral conduct upon this earth. They secretly nurse in their bosom, or openly profess, that they do not really believe there is a place of outer darkness reserved for rebellious, disobedient men who will exist together in hateful contempt for each other, forever banished from the glorious light and love and spirit of Gods presence.

The worldly members of the fellowship resents the fact

226 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

that love is associated with law in the revealed ethics of Jesus Christ. The Corinthian saints were lustfully loose and lawless in their relationship to each other. God called them to the nobler life of love and obedience. In the divinely revealed system of Christian morality, the end of the charge is "love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned" (I Timothy 1:5). This great ethical commission is expressed by John in these words:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the vain-glory of life, is not of the Father but is of the world (I John 2:16, 16).

In personal relationships love is the divine command. Worldliness creeps into the church when God's children live by lust rather than by love. The grace of God is forced by their materialistic logic into license for lawless conduct. Paul protested vigorously: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid" (Romans 7 :1, 2). John pled earnestly with God's children saying, "My little children, these things I write unto you that you may not sin" (I John 2:1), and he continues his urgent plea:

Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God . . . Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness. and sin is lawlessness. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sin. and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not . . . Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil (I John 3:1, 4, 6, 9, 10).

There are many modern philosophers, scientists, and theologians, of whom Albert Schweitzer is representative, who interpret the ethics of Jesus in light of His teaching on "last things" (eschatology). They call it an interim

227 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

(in between, temporary) morality which is too severe and strenuous for prolonged life upon the earth. They say that Jesus' ethics are based on fear concerning the end of the world and the judgment of the soul after death, rather than on love. They interpret His moral code in eschatological terms, rather than in the terms of abiding love.

What happens when men wrest the Christian morality out of the context of the second coming of Christ, the day of judgment, and the end of the world? What happens when love is so loosely

defined that it is not compatible with law and order and obedience? The answer is found in a parable of Jesus:

But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, 'My Lord delays his coming', and shall begin to smite his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of (Matthew 24:48-61).

Brethren, notice the moral effects of unbelief in the life of the man who loses faith in the promise of the Lord to return. This attitude of worldly immorality is also reflected in the language of Peter:

In the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for from the day that our fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth . . . which . . . perished (II Peter 3:3-6).

To all who thus willfully forget, Peter has a warning:

The day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with a fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up (II Peter 3:10).

Peter pleads for Christian morality on the basis of the

228 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

doctrine of last things and urges us to live in the strength of the abiding love of God.

Seeing that these things are thus to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God. . . Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in his sight (II Peter 3:11-12,14).

In our modern world men are losing sight of moral principles and spiritual values in their feverish competition for economic and political control of the world's affairs. Capitalists and Communists have crucified Christ and Christian virtues in their mad race to the moon. The superior man is the man who gets there first with the most money to stake out his claim. Billions of dollars are being invested in this effort to reach the moon and win worldly prestige. Materialistic, worldly men are boasting that they will soon conquer the limitless expanse of space, which they can never do until they put on immortality, a doctrine which they confidently deny. Traveling at the speed of light, it will take man four and a half years to reach the nearest star. Verily, he will have to become immortal to search to the ends of God's universe. The moon

is within easy reach, it seems, but even on the moon man cannot escape from the inevitable reality of facing God in judgment. Only heavenly love will abide in that day when

. . . the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matthew 24:29, 30).

We call to a great city—not Moscow, nor Washington, nor earthly Jerusalem—but the city of God, the New

229 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

Jerusalem, whose builder and maker is God. This city "hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb" (Revelation 21:23).

What is a nation profited if it gain the moon and lose its soul. And, to all of us who are too proud and worldly to live "soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world," we must hasten to say: "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Behold the spiritual and moral tragedy of Americans who strive for money so they can pick up the check for admission and cover charge in the carnal atmosphere of gluttonous dining, lascivious dancing, and lustful conversation over cocktail glasses. All of this dining, dancing, and drinking in smoke-filled lounges and dens of homes and the underworld is the ugly outbreaking of the deadly disease of worldliness. It is a disease that cannot be controlled and destroyed by salving the sores with a few sermons on each ugly manifestation that meets the eye. It must be conquered by creating in men a new heart and a spiritual mind.

As long as church members are carnal-minded, we shall continue to see the ugly manifestations of worldliness. We shall not correct the evil of worldliness until we do two things: (1) Call for a new birth, and put a stop to the evil of baptizing carnal-minded, unregenerate people who join churches rather than becoming children of God by the new birth, and (2) discipline with all the power of truth in love those who are members of the Christian fellowship. We live in an undisciplined age. We must train people in the right way. Lawlessness is on every hand. We must, as an act of love, withdraw fellowship and refuse "to keep

230 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat" (I Corinthians 5:11).

But, in harmony with the moral law: "Let all that you do be done in love" (I Corinthians 16:14). And, if withdrawal of fellowship is necessary to save a soul from death, let us have the courage to do it. But God forbid that we do so hatefully. Paul says: "Note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed. And yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (II Thessalonians 3:14, 15) .

In conclusion, we direct your thoughts to Paul's words to Titus:

The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works (Titus 2:11-14).

"Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilements of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7 :1) .

1 Henry, Carl F. H., *Christian Personal Ethics*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdman's, 1957), p. 241.

2 Niebuhr, H. Richard, *Christ and Culture*, (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1951), pp. 2-4.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 4, Quoting Rabbi Klausner.

4 *Newsweek*, September 28, 1959, p. 45.

5 See Henry, *op. cit.* pp. 97-119.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 120-142.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

231 ABILENE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE LECTURES

8 Barrett, William, "What Is Existentialism?", *Saturday Evening Post*, November 21, 1959, p. 45.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

10 Henry, *op. cit.* pp. 124-135.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.

Morals are based upon philosophies first proposed prior to and during Christian influence on the world, and morality will continue to evolve when Christianity is a fringe cult again. The "ten commandments" are pretty much a truncated version of earlier Egyptian injunctions, and notably miss out rape and child abuse, among other immoral acts. Christians love to Continue Reading. Loading

The assumption that Western morals are derived from Christian morality is quite open to challenge " the two things have developed hand in hand, and who is to say which more influenced the other? Certainly there are a lot of moral rules in the West that cannot be related specifically to anything in the Bible. Moral Issues Confronting Christians. Discerning The Truth On Various Moral Issues. This material is from ExecutableOutlines.com, a web site containing sermon outlines and Bible studies by Mark A. Copeland. Authority In Morality Sexual Immorality The Institution Of Marriage Divorce And Remarriage Homosexuality Abortion Domestic Violence Euthanasia Gambling Alcohol Tobacco Dancing Immodest Apparel Dishonesty. 3 5 8 11 14 17 21 23 26 29 31 33 37 40. Moral Issues Confronting Christians. 2. Mark A. Copeland. Moral Issues Confronting Christians. The modern scientific project was not conceived or born as a morally neutral quest after facts. On the contrary, launched in the seventeenth century out of frustration with the barren philosophies of the European universities, modern science was a profoundly moral enterprise, aimed at improving the condition of the human race, relieving suffering, enhancing health, and enriching life. Francis Bacon argued that a search for knowledge driven solely by "a natural curiosity and inquisitive appetite" would be misguided and inadequate, and that the true aim of a genuine science should be "the glory