"THE NEW MORALITY"

TEXT: "The whole law is summed up in love" Romans 13:10

INTRODUCTION  A great deal is being said and written about the state of morals in America at the present time. Numerous articles have appeared in our magazines concerning what has been called "The New Morality". Common to practically all of these articles is the finding that the standards of personal morality are low, that more infants are being born out of wedlock than ever before, that the divorce rate is rising steadily, that in this nation there are millions of children who are the innocent victims of broken homes.

Older people, recalling the years after the First World War, may feel that there really is nothing new about this new morality. Then, too, "flaming youth" was in revolt, moral sanctions were disregarded and press and pulpit alike complained of broken marriage vows, promiscuity among the young, and pornography in literature. Today, however, the revolt is more widespread. Not only is promiscuity commoner, the attitude to it has undergone a major change. Says Bishop Kennedy of California, "In my day they did it but they knew it was wrong". In other words, when he was young there were still moral fences. Admittedly, they did not always prevent trespass, but at least the fences were there. Since then, most of the fences have gone.

THE CAUSE  For the most part, I think we know what has stimulated this revolt. In a way that it not true of many other countries, our American society is sex saturated. Sex is everywhere. It's exploited in advertisements, magazines, books, plays, films and television. For Hollywood and for Broadway, it is always a money maker. It is glamorized and vulgarized.

The reasons for the revolt are varied. Sometimes the old conventions are attacked and much is made of their hypocrisy and prudery. Sometimes Puritanism is attacked and much is made of its rigorism and its distrust of pleasure. In the main what is resisted is any appeal to authority and tradition. And hand in hand with a decline in religious convention has gone a rejection of moral standards. More and more people no longer consider that the traditional moral standards are binding on them. To speak of moral laws as laws of God makes little impression on them. To speak of violations of them as sin, sin that will be punished by God, does not keep very many of them awake at night. Some even maintain that in matters of sex the moral issue does not arise. In their view, the question should not be: "Is it morally right or wrong?", but "Is it socially feasible - is it personally healthy and rewarding - will it enrich and enhance life?"

SOME CLAIM: IT'S RELATIVE AND PRIVATE  The growing emphasis among so many of the younger generation is that morals are private and relative matters. It's argued that what people do about sex is a personal matter and nobody's business but their own. "We'll do what we please and what happens between us is our concern and only ours". This is in a large part the current attitude and practice of many young people. The claim is to determine for oneself, independently of any authority or norm, what may or may not be done. The determination frequently arrived at is that love - the word that has to do duty for so many different sentiments and states - is the great justifier. And to be in love is held to justify pre-marital and extra-marital sex, provided nobody else gets hurt. Sexual freedom and impatience with any codds governing sexual relationships - this is the growing trend.

Of course what we should not overlook is that this also can be a convention, a narrowly personal one, often self-centered and with no guarantee that other people will not get hurt. And the problem of living by it is that it attempts the impossible. For the attempt has to be ringed with secrecy and furtiveness. Sexual relationships cannot
easily be kept purely private and personal. In their nature they are essentially social and they involve and affect the whole tone and texture of society. No two persons can behave as though society - which includes their relatives, friends, and associates - does not exist and that fact is sooner or later forced upon them.

I have done enough counselling in my ten years in the ministry to know that those who make this attempt have their difficulties. And I think it's a mistake to suppose that those who claim sexual freedom for themselves can best handle sex and have no trouble with it. Much of the tension and the anxiety which characterizes our time has its source here. Many who break loose from the moral tradition in which they were reared are deeply disturbed in mind, emotions and nerves. Some are frustrated or disillusioned and end up feeling cheated. They no longer have the old laws and they need something to take their place. Many of them, if they can afford, haunt the consulting rooms of psychiatrists. T. H. Huxley made the point, and I think it is well worth remembering - a person's real difficulties begin when he or she is free to do as he likes. The moral sense is rooted deep in the awareness of us all.

WHAT ARE THE CHURCHES SAYING

What are the churches saying about this revolution in sex that is taking place. In some quarters there have been expressions of dismay and alarm as you might well expect. "The religious sanctions are losing their strength; the moral landmarks are disappearing beneath the flood; the nation is in danger; the fathers have rejected the doctrine; the children have abandoned the morals". This is what one pulpit recently said. Yet, by and large, comment has been restrained, surprisingly so, since the subject is being debated in secular journals and in theological seminaries. Some pulps are all but silent about the revolt that has taken place. Nevertheless, in an area in which there is so much confusion, so much sincere questioning, people without guidelines; and yet groping for something to hold on to - instead of avoidance and silence there should be open and frank discussion.

This was brought home to me in a very real and dramatic way quite recently. Every Wednesday evening, I put on my clerical collar and make my way over to Inwood House on East 82nd Street - a lovely home for unwed mothers - where I serve as Chaplain to some 40 young ladies who are in this predicament. I eat supper with them and then following supper we hold a religious service, Bible study and discussion. This was my first night back with them following vacation and so they were promoting my coming with a poster on the elevator. I stepped into the elevator to go down to the dining room and saw there a large attractive poster with the words, "All are invited to come and hear Rev. Philip Clarke speak on the subject 'The New Morality' and 'Is God Dead'". I had not been tipped off that this was the case, that this was the subject for the evening. I was prepared to move in other directions, but to speak without preparation to 40 some young ladies ranging in age from 15 to 40 was not something for which I felt well prepared. People are groping, questioning, asking, looking for something to hold on to. What has the church to say to them?

I would approach it this way. First, we need to emphasize that in this matter of morality Christianity is not a legalistic religion. It is not like Judaism, a religion of law, but rather a religion of grace. An external control is replaced by an inner one. We talk about the Christian moral code but there is in the New Testament no tabulation of precise, detailed, specific legal enactments such as there are in the Old Testament. Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount, did not give us a set of rules governing every relationship of life and covering every conceivable contingency such as one finds in the pages of the Old Testament. He did something quite different. He laid down great guiding principles and left men and women the task of working out the application of them in particular situations. He gave us principles, broad, universal and timeless principles and honors us by entrusting to us the responsibility of applying them in specific situations.
LOVE: SUPREME PRINCIPLE

For Christ, the supreme principle is the love principle. With a simplicity that was profound, He summed up in few words the essence of both religion and morality in love of God and love of one's neighbor. Love is the great absolute. Christian morality is a total, unconditional commitment to love. "The whole law" said Paul, "is summed up in love".

You see the love of one's neighbor lifts behavior to higher than legal levels. If we love a person we will care for him, we will not wrong or hurt him, defraud or exploit or use him. We will not treat him as a means to an end. Love is the source, the motivating source of all virtues. It inspires those fine and fair qualities of mind and action against which, as the New Testament says, "there is no law". The man who has it has no need of legal enforcement. It was Paul who said in his letter to the Romans, "We are discharged from the law - to serve in the spiritual way, not in the old, literal way". To the Corinthians he wrote, "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty". Later on Augustine was to say provocatively, without qualifying his terms, "Love - and what you will do". This was not to deny the need of moral laws or their validity; to every sound moral rule, the Christian says, "Of course".

To be sure - people inside and outside the churches are ill at ease over such teaching. They're troubled by its vagueness. It is lofty teaching, but is is specific enough. Don't the masses of people need more than a supreme moral principle? Love is the cardinal virtue, but as a principle it is an abstraction and what the average person requires is specific direction, in other words detailed and precise rules and regulations. I feel that we have not yet matured to the point where we can disregard the entire Old Testament with its Ten Commandments. And another concern is that the love principle can be so readily perverted and abused; it can lead to laxity and license. In our society this word, LOVE, is constantly associated and identified with sex in its physical aspects. People who are "in love" may say and great numbers do say, that this of itself justifies the sexual relationship, whether before marriage or with a person other than a husband or wife.

BISHOP ROBINSON

These are concerns of which Christian thinkers are quite aware and with which they are wrestling. If as yet you have not read Bishop Robinson's book, "Honest To God", I suggest you get a copy and read the chapter on "The New Morality". This is how he deals with the problem I have been touching on today:

"To the young man asking in his relations with a girl, 'Why shouldn't I?' it is relatively easy to say, 'Because it is wrong, or because it is a sin', and then condemn him when he or his whole generation takes no notice. It makes much greater demands to ask, and to answer the question, 'Do you love her?' 'How much do you love her?' - And then to help him to accept for himself the decision that, if he doesn't, or doesn't love deeply, then his action is immoral or if he does, then he will respect her far too much to use her or take liberties with her. Chastity is the expression of charity - of caring enough. And this is the criterion for every form of behavior - inside marriage or out of it, in sexual ethics or in any other field of human relations".

It seems to me that Bishop Robinson's statement comes close to the mind and the spirit of Christ. For him the love principle, the love of God and the love of one's neighbor, was the supreme principle. For Him, the major distinction was not between the law observer and law breaker, but between the loving and the loveless. To be sure, this way demands more maturity and a greater sense of personal responsibility and accountability. For Christian love, as Christ proclaimed, is still the antidote to all vices and the source of all virtues. He judges us not by our goodness or badness, but by the height, depth and breadth of our love.
LET US PRAY

Open the eyes of our understanding, O God, as we try to interpret thy word to us. Keep our minds clear, our imaginations alive, and our hearts pure and humble, that we may turn to the great Book in which we find thy Word revealed to us, knowing that in it thou wilt somehow speak to us and to those issues and problems that daily confront us.

In the spirit of Christ, we pray. Amen
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ORD: S R OF JORISH P
11 a.m.

ORGAN "La Fete Dieu" T. Dubois

CALL TO WORSHIP

HYMN NO. 4 "O worship the King, all glorious above"

PRAYER OF CONFESION (Seated)

Most merciful Father, we have done little to forward thy kingdom in this world, to foster the brotherhood of man, and to establish love as the law of life. We have allowed self to blind us, pains to embitter us. Pardon our shortcomings; forgive our neglect; give us a pure heart intent on pleasing Thee. Help us in all our seeking to seek first thy kingdom and thy righteousness. And make us to come, as came Thy Son, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. We ask this in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen.

SILENT MEDITATION - WORDS OF ASSURANCE - LORD'S PRAYER

RESPONSIVE READING "The Secret of the Lord" Page 606

GLORIA PATRI

APOSTLES' CREED

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SCRIPTURE I Corinthians 13

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF CONGREGATIONAL CONCERN

OFFERTORY SOLO Aria from "Abraham" R. Molique
(Mr. John White, tenor)

PRESENTATION OF THE OFFERING WITH THE DOXOLOGY

HYMN NO. 11 "Praise the Lord! ye heavens adore Him"

SERMON "The New Morality" Mr. Clarke

HYMN NO. 180 "Breathe on me, Breath of God"

BENEDICTION

ORGAN "Allegro Maestoso" J. E. West

*** Interval for ushering

WELCOME

We give hearty welcome to friends old and new who worship with us this hour. The coffee hour that gives us such a fine opportunity for fellowship has been discontinued for the summer. Our handshake, however, is just as real and warm as if it were given with coffee or tea cup in hand.

USHERS

The ushers for today's service are Mr. Johnson, Mr. Arwood, Mr. Jordan, Mr. Osborn, Mr. Scott, Dr. Snart, Mr. Wolf, and Mr. Quintero.

CHILD CARE

Child care service is available from 11 to 12 on the fourth floor for those parents with infants or preschool children. Mrs. Pauline Levy is in charge.

YOUNG ADULTS

Young adults in the congregation are invited to share in a Dutch Treat lunch in a near-by restaurant today. The group will assemble in front of the church after the service. The first evening program is scheduled for next Sunday evening at 7 p.m. in the fourth floor lounge.

CHOIR TO BEGIN REHEARSALS

The first choir rehearsal of the season will be held Wednesday night, September 21, at 6:30 p.m. If you are interested in singing in our choir, plan to attend this rehearsal.

HOMECOMING SUNDAY

Homecoming Sunday will be celebrated next Sunday. This service is always one of the great services of the fall season; we hope you will plan to be present.