

Social Morality.

OUR moral and social ideals will depend on our conception of man's vocation and destiny. If some amongst us are persuaded that his starting point was the jungle, we are bound to think of man in the present context of his varied relationships. Neither biology, economics, nor sociology comes anywhere near exhausting human personality. There are also "trailing clouds" of some glory which indicate a spiritual birthright. Man's supreme destiny, we believe, is to be found in the Christian revelation. And if we are to take our stand here on Christian values, these values must apply to the whole of man's life. We must not esteem the soul at the expense of the body—this "earthly tabernacle" in which man himself lives and moves. If we know nothing greater than the soul, then a like, if transitory, "greatness" belongs also to what Paul calls the temple of the spirit.

It is being urged upon us that our social world is in revolt against the generally accepted moral standards. Many voices proclaim that the old-time moral restrictions are passing and are waiting to be buried. But we had better be careful, lest we bury the living with the dead. After the long way by which we have come, there must be some things that remain, however shaken. There are foundations which no man can lay other than what is long ago laid. Christian ideals and standards are being challenged and discredited. New experiments are being made in social and domestic life. Much of our present-day drama and fiction represents family fidelity as a joyless and repressed existence, and flaunt the free and the promiscuous. Canon Barry declares that the "whole atmosphere of our society is drenched and saturated with sexuality. The stage, the film, the novel and the daily press are preoccupied with crude sex appeal. All the massed suggestions that play upon them are such as to lead boys and girls to imagine that this is the main interest of adult life." This one-sided emphasis, however, he thinks, is giving way to cynical satiety, and is begetting a wistful disillusionment. Those who despise and distrust love are becoming sceptical about life.

In a situation such as this the Christian Church must aim at being helpful and constructive. She must offer some clear guidance on these inevitable difficulties and problems of youth.

Our young people seldom turn to us for the help they need in those personal and social crises of the psycho-physical life, thinking possibly that Christianity has little else than "taboos" to offer, and that the Church would only be surprised and shocked instead of being ready with understanding and guidance. No doubt this is a mistaken idea of our attitude, but as Canon Barry insists, Christian moral standards of social life must be reasonable; they must needs be relevant to the facts of life, and commend themselves to the moral judgment as well as the feelings of the rising generation. We may add, however, that our Christian negatives are there because of the positives. Some people may not take kindly to "Thou shalt not," but then, the shadow of Sinai *does* rest on the love and light of Calvary.

In our insistence upon Christian ideals of moral conduct—ideals which shine with the utmost clearness and definiteness in Him who is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life"—the whole man healthy, body, soul, and spirit, comes within the scope of our teaching and ministry. And at once, therefore, we find ourselves in opposition to much of the social psychology of our day, with its fragmentary explanation of life, and its "bogey" of repression, and its so-called "gospel" of expression. "I want, and I must therefore have," is simply not good enough for human personality. The social revolt which goes by the name of Humanism is altogether too much life Hedonism. The way here is too broad, ever to lead us into a life "more abundant." "Narrow is the way that leadeth into life," but the *life* itself ranges wide. Human personality must express itself! but what "self"? The animal, the vagrant and undisciplined ego, the man with his varying lusts and desires? "Where there is no restraint the people perish." This Freudian philosophy, with its supposed dangers of repression, is unworthy of the personality it seeks to explain, and carried to its logical issue would make social life impossible. If the culture of character be an essential of our social life it must involve the restraint and repression which alone make possible all happy and healthy expression.

Part of the Church's ministry to the social life of our time is to re-establish Christian standards of living, and to redeem social life from these degenerating influences. There is need of more definite Christian ministry in this direction. The younger members of our Churches, and often the older as well, are wrestling with some of those intimate problems of personal conduct and domestic relationships. In our teaching and preaching we might get a bit closer to those more intimate difficulties of daily life and conduct, and become the guides of those who hardly dare ask the better and higher way. We can,

at least, in our homes and in our family life show by example what Christian love can be and do, and how the more intimate relationships of life can only yield their finest fruit as they become sacramental. As Herbert Spencer used to say: "You cannot get golden conduct out of leaden instincts."

As ministers of the gospel, many of us must often wish that we were given the opportunity of offering some Christian guidance to our young people in the moral enterprises of life. It has been said that the Christian fellowship of a church is as really committed to every betrothal as much as the State is committed to every contract. That may be stretching our responsibility beyond its limits; but at least we can assure those who are "made one" in the bonds of marriage, of our prayerful interest and of our friendship and fellowship with them in their new life.

There is need for such a ministry of Christian help and guidance if we can render it with all the wisdom, tact, and sympathy it demands. Here are some sentences from the letter of a young man—the kind of letter which is rarely written: "I was born one of a large family of boys and my father and mother brought us up in the fear and love of God. Both were very earnest Christians . . . and I and my brothers owe everything to them. And yet, in the vital matter of sexual education nothing was done, with the result that to-day, at the age of twenty-five years, I can see nothing ahead but a life of misery or a suicide's grave." And this from another who signs himself, "Struggling": "I find myself disillusioned and in a mental, moral and spiritual rut. At school so brilliant, in life so weak." In our Discipleship Campaign half the battle is often won if we can gain the confidence of the would-be disciple; if he sees that we know his life at its depth and height, at its lowest desires, and its highest dreams and ambitions, and are able to share the inner problem of his life, and understand his moral struggle.

We have a gospel which can solve all the problems of our personal and social life. The only true Humanism is Christian Humanism. The cleansing and renewing of our minds, the redemption of our social life from its every taint and foulness is in Him who is the Life and the Light of the world. Through Christ we may attain a life "temporal yet eternal, instinctive and spiritual, divine and human—the physical sustaining the life of the Spirit, the life of the Spirit redeeming the physical." "Do you not know your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you—the Spirit you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought for a price; then glorify God with your body."

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