THE USE OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT
IN THE NEW AND
OTHER ESSAYS

STUDIES IN HONOR OF
WILLIAM FRANKLIN STINESPRING

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THE MORAL TEACHING OF THE EARLY CHURCH

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My friend and colleague, Professor William F. Stinespring, is best known as a philologist, a teacher of Semitic languages and a translator of significant studies from modern Hebrew. But to those who share his daily life, he is also known for the warmth of his humanity. In particular, his colleagues have been made aware of his concern with the social and moral issues that have confronted this country. It is, therefore, not unfitting that in this volume there should be one essay dealing with the biblical grounds of that concern which has so much governed him. And it is a real pleasure for me to be able to offer in his honor, not a technical study, but one in which I seek to set forth the broad outlines of the moral teaching of the early church. My aim is to present, not so much a detailed analysis, as the way in which that teaching has impressed itself upon me after years of preoccupation with it.

I

The title of this essay—"The Moral Teaching of the Early Church"—is meant to suggest, rightly, that the term ethics, which connotes philosophic reflection upon human conduct, is inappropriate for a description of the moral teaching of the early church; but it implies that in the early church there was a clearly defined body of teaching on morality, which can be neatly described. Let me begin by emphasizing that this was not so. In its moral teaching, as in other matters, the early church presents a coat of many colors. The documents of the New Testament reveal varying emphases.

This essay is one of the Haskell Lectures which, along with Dean Krister Stendahl, I delivered at Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, in March 1968. Its companion lecture, "The Relevance of the Moral Teaching of the Early Church,"—which presupposes the contents of the present one—was published in Néostamentica et Semitica, Studies in Honour of Matthew Black, ed. E. Earle Ellis and Max Wilcox (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1969), pp. 30–49. Both lectures should be read together. It is felicitous in this indirect way to link together two such distinguished Semitic scholars to whom I owe so much. Any neat presentation of early Christian teaching must immediately be suspect. But having said this, it is possible to point out certain themes which do convey the moral seriousness of much of the primitive church, and I shall now attempt to point out what these themes are.¹

I begin with a central fact: through the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, early Christians believed that they were living "in the end of the days," in the time of fulfillment.² This conviction is to be understood, as is made evident in all the New Testament, in the light of the expectations, expressed in the Old Testament and in Judaism, that, at some future date, God would act for the salvation of his people.³ The life, death and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth were the fulfillment of these expectations. And this fulfillment did not ignore the moral content of those expectations. The ethical aspirations of the Old Testament and Judaism, the Prophets and the Law, were not annulled in the Christian dispensation; they were fulfilled.⁴ The early church consciously accepted the moral concern of Israel as it was illumined and completed in the light of the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus.

This acceptance emerges clearly in that in much of the New Testament the experience of the church was understood as parallel to that of the Jewish people. The emergence of the church was, if not the emergence of a New Israel, at least the entrance of Israel on a new stage of its history.⁵ In the creation of the church the

¹. The moral teaching of the New Testament in recent years has not been given the attention it deserves: "theological" or "kerygmatic" interests have led to its neglect. See J. M. Gustafson, "Christian Ethics" in Religion, ed. Paul Ramsey (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1965), pp. 537 ff.; and my Setting of the Sermon on the Mount (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 436 ff. V. P. Furnish, Theology and Ethics in Paul (Nashville, 1968), by far the most stimulating volume in this field in recent years, on p. 7 quotes Thomas C. Oden, who suggests that "the simple task of honest and clear exegesis may be the undiscovered beginning point for contemporary Protestant ethics"; see Oden, Radical Obedience: The Ethics of Rudolf Bultmann (Philadelphia, 1964), pp. 18, 21. For the works which have been found most useful, apart, of course, from the standard works on New Testament Theology and Ethics: See IDB, vol. E–J, on "Ethics in the New Testament." Furnish supplies a most helpful bibliography, op. cit., pp. 280–94.

². Gal. 4:4.


⁴. Matt. 4:4, 6–7; 5:17–18; Mark 12:28–37; etc.

⁵. On this see now Peter Richardson, Israel in the Apostolic Church, Society for Ne
Exodus was repeated as it were. And as a corollary to the experience of a new Exodus, the church understood itself as standing under the new Sinai of a new Moses. This complex of ideas—Exodus, Sinai, Moses⁰—largely governs Paul's references to the New Covenant,⁷ Matthew's⁸ presentation of the Sermon on the Mount, and Mark's⁹ reference to a new teaching which John presents as a new commandment.¹⁰ In its vital contents the moral teaching of primitive Christianity must be understood in relation to the teaching which Judaism traced back to Sinai: this relationship is variously expressed, sometimes in terms of reform, sometimes in terms of antithesis, and sometimes in terms of fulfillment. What is clear is that "Law" is bound up with the Christian Gospel, as it was bound up with the message of the Old Testament and Judaism.¹¹ To put this in technical terms, the structure of primitive Christianity is, in some aspects at least, modelled upon, or grows out of, the structure of Judaism. This means that Law is integral to the Gospel of the New Testament as it was to that of the Old.¹²

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II

But in what sense can this be asserted? What Law is integral to the Gospel? This brings us to the motif which most governs early Christian thought on morality. I have already asserted that the early church reinterpreted the moral tradition of the Old Testament and Judaism in the light of Christ; and it is the Person of Christ that is normative for the understanding of morality, as of all other aspects of life, in the New Testament. Just as early Christians reinterpreted the temple, Jerusalem, the sabbath, and the series of lectures The Law and the Prophets: A Study of the Meaning of the Old Testament (New York, 1965), gives a fascinating account of the theme in scholarship; see also R. E. Clements, Prophecy and Covenant (London, 1965). On the prophets in Judaism, see my article, "Reflections on Tradition: The Aboth Revisited" in Christian History and Interpretation: Studies presented to John Knox (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 127 ff. Martin Buber in his work The Prophetic Faith (New York, 1960), pp. 24 ff., puts great emphasis on the influence of the Sinaic tradition on the prophets.

13. This essay was completed before V. P. Furnish's work Theology and Ethics in Paul (Abingdon, 1968), reached me. On p. 114, he writes: "In the discussion of Paul's preaching which follows, the traditional 'chronological-documentary' approach has been abandoned altogether. Instead, it is suggested, at least as a working hypothesis, that the heuristic key to Pauline theology is a whole [and therefore to Pauline ethics (my addition)] the point in which his major themes are rooted and to which they are ultimately oriented, is the apostle's eschatological perspective. Ethicology, therefore, is properly the first, not the last, section in an exposition of Paul's theology." Furnish refers in support of his position to H. D. Wendland, "Ethik und Ethokologie in der Theologie des Paulus," Neue kirdische Zeitschrift, 10 (1930), 757 ff., 793 ff.; and Henry M. Shires, The Eschatology of Paul in the Light of Modern Scholarship (Philadelphia, 1966). It will be noticed that I, too, have begun to discuss the moral teaching of the New Testament ethically, or eschatologically, and particularly with an aspect of that ethicology which most governs early Christian thought on morality. The Resurrection was not only a triumph of life over death, it was also a triumph of forgiveness over sin. The Resurrection was an expression, perhaps the expression of God's grace in Christ, because the Risen Christ came back to those who had forsaken him and fled, who had slept during his agony. He forgave their failure. The Resurrection as forgiv-
ness emerges clearly in Paul and elsewhere. The Resurrection, which reassembled the scattered disciples to form the church, was founded in the grace of Christ and of God in Christ. It was of a piece with the whole ministry of Jesus, and the morality of the community, like that of his ministry, was to be a morality governed by grace—that is, it was the morality of forgiven men who had known the Risen Lord as a forgiving Lord, and who in gratitude (the most ethical of all the emotions) gave themselves to the good life in his name.

But, third, the mode of the presence of this Risen Lord in the community was that of “the Spirit.” There have been attempts to maintain that the Spirit, in the earliest days of the church, had no ethical significance, that it was merely a wonder-working power, mysterious and nonmoral. But these attempts are vain. It was the Spirit that had inspired the greatest teachers of morality, the prophets, who had discerned between the precious and the vile; it was the Spirit that would create a new heart in the new Israel of Ezekiel’s vision, and inspire the messianic times with counsel, wisdom and righteousness. And, above all else, the Spirit was the inspirer of the Scriptures. This in itself implied the ethicization of the Spirit, because it was through these that Israel knew the demands made upon it. Through the Resurrection, the Spirit was again experienced.

The coming of the Spirit in primitive Christianity should never be separated from the Resurrection as grace. Like the Resurrection itself, the coming of the Spirit is “an energy of forgiveness.” Thus it became the source of morality because gratitude for forgiveness is the ground of Christian being. Love, joy, peace, righteousness, and every victory “in the moral sphere” are the fruit of the Spirit.

The enthusiasm of the Spirit, much as it was open to more superficial expressions, found its true fruit in love.

When, therefore, we say that for the early church the Law had been Christified, we recognize that the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Risen Lord, and the Spirit—inextricably bound together as they are, so that often what was uttered in the Spirit could be ascribed to the earthly Jesus himself—that all these together became the source of the demand under which the early church lived. Christian morality, in short, always has as its point of reference the life, Resurrection and living Spirit of Jesus Christ. And it is this that determines its manifold dimensions. These can be conveniently gathered under two main heads: its vertical dimensions and its horizontal dimensions.

III

The vertical dimensions of Christian morality

As we have seen, then, the ground on which the early church stood was the life, death, Resurrection and Spirit of Jesus Christ. To put the matter geometrically, it was their relation vertically with the Risen Lord, the participation of the early Christians in the experience of being forgiven by the Risen Lord and the Spirit, that lent to them a common grace wherein they stood. They had been grasped by him and their response was primarily, through the promptings of this Spirit, to him. All Christian fellowship was rooted in a particular event—immediately in the Resurrection and behind this, in the life and death of Jesus, with which the Resurrection, as we have seen, as an expression of grace, was wholly congruous. The ethic of the community is linked to the understanding of an event—the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus. In this the church saw the act of God himself in history.

Now in much of the New Testament, though not in all, morality is understood in terms of the appropriation of this event, the recapitulation of it in the life of the believer. To put it in other words, the moral life is a life “in Christ”; it is the living out in daily conduct what it means to have died and risen with Christ. This is true of Paul and, it is arguable, of Matthew also.23 For Paul, morality is inseparable from the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus. He divided his own life clearly into two parts: first, his life under the Law when he was a Jew, and second, his life in Christ. The two parts were distinctly separated by his experience on the road to Damascus. The act by which a Christian acknowledged his faith embodied a death to the old life under the Law and a rising to newness of life “in Christ” or “in the Spirit.” By baptism24 the Christian through faith had died, had risen, had been justified: he was a new creation. And what was now necessary for him was to become what he was. His moral life is rooted in what he is—a new creation in Christ. Just as we call on each other to “play the man,” so Christians are called upon to “play the Christian”—to be what they are. To use theological jargon—the imperative in Paul is rooted in the indicative. There is a vertical dimension to Christian living—an attachment to the fact of Christ, his life, death and Resurrection.25

25. II Cor. 8:9; 12:1; Phil. 2:5-8; Rom. 8:11; and especially Rom. 6:1-7.6. On the history of the emphasis on what is generally referred to as the “Indicative-Impressive” motif in Paul, see the excellent appendix by Furnish, pp. 242 ff.: “A Survey of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Interpretations of the Pauline Ethic.” Like him, I, too, found the work of Maurice Goguel in The Primitive Church, trans. H. C. Snape (London, 1964), especially original and provocative. In the discussion at Oberlin, Stendahl objected to connecting the motif of “dying and rising with Christ” with morality, on the grounds that while the tense of the verbs referring to dying with Christ is in the aorist, that of referring to rising with Christ is in the future. The matter is discussed by Furnish, pp. 171 ff. The future tense in Rom. 6:5, 8 are important: “we shall be united in his resurrection”; “we shall also live with him.” But, as Furnish also makes clear, the newness of life is associated with the Resurrection. Rom. 6:4 reads: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life.” The power of the future life is already at work in the present. The Christian is to walk in the power of the Spirit. His candidate for death is the cross of Christ. They may “have part with Him” (μεῖκρος ἐκείνου μετ᾽ ημῶν, xiii. 8). They are to be bound together with the ἑφίσματος which is a reflection, or reproduction, of His...
But this vertical dimension of morality in the early church has another aspect which is simpler to understand. Not only the imitation of God's act through dying and rising with Christ, but also the imitation of the Jesus of history (if we may so put it) played a real part in the moral development of the early church. Early Christians looked up to Jesus of Nazareth—so a modern educationist would put it—as their "identifying figure." Part of the reason for the preservation of stories about the life of Jesus, such as we have in the Gospels, was the desire to imitate Jesus in his acts. During his ministry, Jesus had demanded readiness to enter upon his way of suffering; his followers were literally to take up the Cross (Mark 8:34 ff.). In the life of the early church, while persecution (walking the way of the Cross literally) was always a possibility, more often Christians were called upon to imitate their Lord, in the witness of the common way, less spectacular perhaps, but no less arduous, than readiness to die—in love, forbearance, patience, mercy—in messianic grace. Luke's change of Mark 8:34 in 9:23 is significant. The degree to which the imitation of Jesus informed the lives of early Christians has been variously assessed. But it is difficult to deny its presence. Christ is an object of imitation to Paul as Paul expects to be such an object to his own followers (I Cor. 11:1). The apostle holds up certain qualities of the historic Jesus which were to be imitated: he points to Jesus who pleaded not himself (Rom. 15:3), to his meekness and gentleness (II Cor. 10:1), and he commands liberality through a reminder of him who was rich and became poor (II Cor. 8:8–9). The description of love in I Cor. 13 which is probably based upon the life of Jesus, is, in short, a character sketch of him. There can be little question that for Paul every Christian is pledged to an attempted moral conformity to Christ. So also is it with the Fourth Gospel (John 13) by death between Him as branches of the true Vine (xxv. 1–9), and the fruit which the branches yield is once again δύναται proceeding from the δύναται of God revealed in Christ (xxv. 8–10).

27. It has been pointed out that Paul and Peter and other figures in the early church were regarded as "models" to be imitated; see Julius Wiegmann, Die Stellung des Apostels Paulus in den Quellen (Gleisern, 1926), pp. 52–76. To Paul of the three pastors who finished his course—was a "model." John 15 makes clear that specific acts in the life of Jesus were "models"; 13:15 reads: "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." Moody Smith referred me also to John 14:12 where "imitation" of some kind seems to be involved.

28. Again in the discussion at Oberlin, Stendahl raised the question whether the Cross, as such, was made the ground of an appeal in the moral life in the New Testament. If we exclude all moral considerations from discipleship, such a question might be answered in the negative. If we do not, as is surely more likely, then as Harold Riesenfeld has pointed out, it is significant that discipleship is closely related to the Cross not only in the synoptics, but in the Fourth Gospel. (Compare Matt. 16:21–27 and parallels; John 12:31 ff.). See his Gospel Tradition, trans. E. Margaret Rowley and R. A. Kraft (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), The obedience of Christ in death (Rom. 5:19; cf. Phil. 2:8) is an "act of righteousness" (Rom. 5:18), and preeminently an expression of God's love (Gal. 2:19 ff.; 5:6 ff.). Christ crucified becomes "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption for us" (I Cor. 1:30–31). God's love revealed in the Cross forgives, renews and sustains (II Cor. 5:14). See further Furnish, p. 168. It is difficult to divorce the appeal to the Cross from an appeal to the good life.

Furnish, rightly in my judgment, thinks that Paul's use of the hymn in Phil. 2:5 ff. is at least partly used in a hortatory sense; some have denied that the Cross has moral implications even in Phil. 2:5 ff.; see, for the literature, R. P. Martin, Carmen Christi (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 68 ff., 84 ff. 29. On this question, see Johannes Welin, Das Nachfolge Christi und die Predigt der Gegenwart (1895); Edwin Larson, Christus als Vorbild (1962), pp. 29–47; Anselm Schulte, Nachfolgen und Nachahmen (Munich, 1962), pp. 270 ff.; W. P. deBoer, The Imitation of Paul: An Exegetical Study (1962); Eduard Lohse, "Nachfolge Christi," in RGG, 3rd ed., IV, cols. 1268 ff.; D. M. Stanley, "'Become imitators of Me': The Pauline Conception of Apostolic Tradition," Biblicalia, 40 (1959), 859 ff.; J. J. Tracey, The Imitation of Christ (Philadelphia, 1960). For further details, see Martin Hengel, Nachfolge und Charisma: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Studie zu Mt 8:21f. und Jesu Ruf in die Nachfolge (Berlin, 1968), p. 1, n. 2, and a forthcoming volume on Imitation and Tradition in Paul by Donald Williams (Fortress Press). Furnish discusses the matter acutely and with a wealth of bibliographical detail, pp. 217 ff. He speaks of the Cross as "paradigmatic for the believer's new life in Christ" (p. 218), but rejects any reference in this paradigm to "any particular qualities of the earthly Jesus with the insistence that they be emulated" (p. 223). He endorses Dibelius's view that "when Paul speaks of following Christ, he is not thinking first of all of the historical person Jesus of Nazareth, but of the Son of God who emptied himself and lived and died for others (RGG, 2nd ed., IV, cols. 395–96)," p. 224 n. It is this so sharp dichotomy which is difficult to accept: it was precisely in Jesus of Nazareth that early Christians saw the Son of God: it was the actuality of his life that lay behind their Christological and Mythological assertions about him.
and I Peter 2:2. The life of Jesus is a paradigm of the Christian life.

So far we have noted two aspects of the vertical dimensions of Christian morality in the early church: The Christian is raised up with Christ to newness of life and is to live out his resurrection daily; and he looks to Jesus as an object of imitation. There is a third aspect to this vertical dimension. The Christian is taken up into the purpose of God in Christ. To be a believer was to be directed to and by Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. That is, there is always an eschatological reference to Christian living: the Christian shares in the purpose of God in the salvation revealed in Jesus. This comes out most clearly in Paul's understanding of his call to be an apostle. This meant for him that he was taken up by God's grace to share in the redemptive activity of God now at work through Christ in the church. True, the apostolic consciousness of Paul was more intense than that of most Christians and his calling as the apostle to the Gentiles, perhaps, unique. But the whole community also was called, that is, caught up into the large counsel of God. Christians were delivered from futility; they shared in the work of salvation (including their own) inaugurated by Jesus and to be completed in the future. In the light of the redemptive purpose revealed in Christ, they made their decisions, they discerned the things that further and that hinder this purpose, and they became fellow-workers with God. The life of early Christians was a life born of the grace of God in the Resurrection and sustained by the memory and an anticipation.

The horizontal dimensions of Christian morality

So far, in describing the moral life of early Christianity, I have emphasized what I have called its vertical dimension—its attachment to the Risen Christ who was one with the Jesus of history; its contemplation of him in imitation and its participation in the Divine purpose in him. But the early Christians were not exclusively oriented to these vertical realities, and early Christian morality contains an horizontal or, if I may put it, a human, societal dimension: it is the morality of a community born of the grace of the Resurrection. The New Testament knows nothing of solitary religion and it knows nothing of an individual morality: it points to a community with a life to live. This community was not to luxuriate in grace, absorbed in irrelevant, vertical privileges. As a community of grace, it took practical steps to give expression to grace in its life. How was this achieved? We may summarize the answer to this question under two main heads.

The emphasis on the Christian community. First, there was a constant concern among early Christians for the quality of their common life. This it was that led to the experiment usually referred to as the “communism” of the early chapters of Acts. This experiment of having all things common was the natural, spontaneous expression of life in the Spirit with which the neglect of the poor was incompatible. This appears from the naivete of the experiment. Owners sold their property and handed over the proceeds to the apostles, who administered a common fund from which the needs of the poor were met, presumably in the form of common meals. The contributions to the common pool were voluntary (Acts 5:1-11). The experiment failed, not to be repeated in this form; but it witnessed to the societal or communal morality of the primitive community in its realism and its impracticability. That experiment took place in the light of an absolute demand for love informed by the intensity of the church’s experience of forgiveness and, therefore, of grace.

And the emphasis on the communal nature of the Christian way persists throughout the New Testament. It is rooted in a communal emphasis found in the ministry of Jesus himself who gathered the
Twelve as the representatives of the new community of Israel to follow him. 34 It is from this probably that there developed Paul's "Christ-Mysticism" which issued not in "a flight of the alone to the Alone"; but in the building up of the church, the new community. 35 Along with rationality 36 and the recognition of personal integrity 37 Paul sets forth as the criterion of Christian action the building up of the church. 38 Similarly, in the Johannine literature one finds the love of the brethren as the mark of the church. "If you love not your brother whom you have seen how can you love God whom you have not seen?" 39

But the same impulse which led to the experiment in communism, the awareness of the horizontal significance of the life in grace, in part at least, led to other developments:

The emphasis on specific moral teaching. (a) At first, in the awareness of its resources in grace, the church attempted to live in the light of the absolutes, in messianic license, as Stendahl has characterized this. The absolutes constitute the peculiarity, though not the totality, of the teaching of Jesus. For certain elements in the early church, the commandments of Jesus in their absolute form were guides for conduct. But under inevitable pressures, it became necessary for the church to apply these absolutes to life. There began that process which tended to transform the absolutes into practical rules of conduct, Christian casuistry. 40 The classic example is the way in which the prohibition of divorce was made practicable by the addition of the exceptive clause: "except on the ground of unchastity" (Matt. 5:32 ff.). Because it is Matthew that reveals this best, it has been claimed that the words of Jesus as such played a significant part in the moral development of the church only in Jewish Christian circles. But this is not so. The Pauline letters also appeal to the words of Jesus as authoritative. These words were at least one source for Paul's moral teaching. The extent to which the Pauline letters are reminiscent of the tradition as represented in the synoptics has been insufficiently recognized. The matter has been the subject of acute debate and continues to be so.

Two factors emerge clearly: first, Paul interweaves words of Jesus almost "unconsciously," as it were, into his exhortations, which suggests that these words were bone of his bone. The following parallels are clear:

Rom. 12:14
Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Matthew 5:43
You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy."

Rom. 12:17
Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

Matthew 5:39 ff.
But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also;

Rom. 13:7
Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

Matthew 22:15–22
Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. (22:21b)

Rom. 14:13
Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Matthew 18:7
Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes!
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Rom. 14:14
I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for any one who thinks it unclean.

1 Thess. 5:2
For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

1 Thess. 5:13
and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

1 Thess. 5:15
See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.

In addition to these clear parallels there are many other possible or probable ones. The evidence for these is given elsewhere. 41

Second, there is also clear evidence that there was a collection of sayings of the Lord to which Paul appealed (Acts 20:35; I Cor. 7:10; 9:14; 11:23 ff.; 14:37; I Thess. 4:15-16; see especially I Cor. 7:25). Not only in matters of a legislative character does Paul find guidance in the words of Jesus, but also in more personal matters (Romans 7), where possibly his discovery of the supreme importance of motive goes back to Jesus. In I Cor. 7:25 he refers to a word of Christ as a commandment; in two places, once explicitly and once implicitly, he uses the very words "the law of Christ" 43 where the reference is, in part at least, to the teaching of Jesus. This is no declension on Paul's part to a primitive legalism, but the recognition of the fact that his exalted Lord was never, in his mind, divorced from Jesus, the teacher, that the Spirit is never divorced from the historic teaching of Jesus. And, although in the Fourth Gospel the moral teaching of Jesus as such plays little part, the function of the Spirit is to recall the words of Jesus. 43 The same emphasis appears in I John, where there is constant appeal to the commandments of the Lord and frequent echoes of them. 44

Matthew 15:11
not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.

Matthew 24:43-44
But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Mark 9:50
Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.

Matthew 5:39-47
But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you .... (5:44)

41. See my Paul and Rabbinic Judaism.

42. Explicitly in Gal. 6:2 and implicitly in Rom. 8:2. I Cor. 9:20-22 reads:
To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

Furnish points out that there is only one certain rabbinic reference to "the Law of the Messiah," that from Midraha Qoheleth 11:8 (52a). But it is surely implied in other passages. See The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount, pp. 172 ff. And, in the recently discovered Targum Terumahini to the Pentateuch of the Codex Neofiti I of the Vatican Library, the contents of which have been traced by Diez Macho to the second century A.D. at least, Isa. 11:3 reads:

Behold, the Messiah who is to come shall be one who teaches the Law and will judge in the fear of the Lord.


Nevertheless, there is a difference of emphasis (but only of emphasis) in Matthew and Paul, as over against the Johannine literature. The words of Jesus appear in the former two over their wide range. But even there they are summed up in one word, 

agon Newspapers, past the oral tradition which prevailed in the early church and which finally coalesced, in part, in the Gospels? Here the method employed by H. Riesenfeld, in his articles, “Parable Language in the Pauline Epistles,” and “Paul’s Grain of Wheat” Analogy and the Argument of I Cor. 15,” and “The Parables in the Synoptic and in the Johannine Traditions,” all to appear in a forthcoming volume, The Gospel Tradition (Fortress Press), is more appropriate or sensitive in dealing with tradition. The detection and dismissal of allusions are not as simple as Furnish suggests, particularly in a milieu where the reception and transmission of tradition were so living. The work of A. M. Hunter, Paul and His Predecessors (London, 1940), and P. Carrington, The Primitive Christian Catechism (Cambridge, 1940), Furnish refers to only in bare footnotes. See pp. 38 n., 261 n. A very useful and balanced discussion by E. H. Dungan under the title Legio Kyrie and Community Regimen in forthcoming under the imprint of the Fortress Press. As for the imperative participle the thesaurus demands more attention than is given, to see p. 39, n. 33. The role of Jesus as moral teacher is less difficult to understand in the light of the recent brilliant work of L. Finkelstein, New Light from the Prophets (London, 1960). Dr. Finkelstein writes that “to the magnificence of the prophecy of the Prophets and the inspiration of their rhetoric, must now be added the greatness of their academic teaching which raised disciples who became teachers of succeeding generations of teachers” (p. 1). They are the precursors of the Sages of Israel. (Ibid). His work should warn us against thinking that the prophetic, charismatic, eschatological aspects of Jesus’s ministry precluded his role as patient teacher. His work should warn us against thinking that the prophetic, charismatic, eschatological aspects of Jesus’s ministry precluded his role as patient teacher. His work should warn us against thinking that the prophetic, charismatic, eschatological aspects of Jesus’s ministry precluded his role as patient teacher. His work should warn us against thinking that the prophetic, charismatic, eschatological aspects of Jesus’s ministry precluded his role as patient teacher.

The primitive Christian Catechism

Thus the climax of the Sermon on the Mount at Matt. 7:12 is the Golden Rule. And Paul and John, like the synoptics, emphasize the centrality of “love” (Rom. 13:8–10; I Cor. 8:1; 13; Col. 3:14; John 13:34–35; I John 3:1; 2:7–10; 4:7–16). The meaning of love again has to be carefully noted. Partaking more of active good than of emotion, can be commanded, as emotions cannot. In I John it is used in a “down-to-earth” manner as involving willingness to share one’s goods (I John 3:17). For Paul it is the fulfillment of the Law and the principle of cohesion in the Christian community. The expression of love is multiple (I Cor. 13), but its essential nature is revealed in Christ’s dying for men. It is this kind of act that is demanded of those who love.

The necessity which led to the application of the absolutes of Jesus to life led the church to take over for its own use codal material whether from Hellenism or from Judaism or both. Most of the letters reveal a twofold structure: a first part, dealing with “doctrine,” is followed by a second, dealing with “ethics.” Romans is typical. Chapters 1–11 deal with doctrine, 12:1 ff. deals with ethics, and it is casually connected with chapters 1–11. The ethical sections of the various letters reveal a common tradition of catechesis, which may have been used in the instruction of converts, especially at baptism (cf. Rom. 12:1; Eph. 4:20–6:19; Col. 3:8–4:12; Heb. 12:1–2; James 1:1–4:10; I Pet. 1:1–4:11; 4:12–5:14). This common tradition must not be regarded as having a fixed pattern, but the similarity in the order and contents of the materials in the above sections is too marked to be accidental. The presence in them of the imperative participle (e.g., Rom. 12:9–19), a form found, but not common, in Hellenistic Greek but familiar in Hebrew legal documents, suggests that Paul, and other Christian writers, drew upon codal material, such as is found in the Dead

The Moral Teaching of the Early Church

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Sea Scrolls (The Manual of Discipline, 1:18 ff. actually has the imperative participle), Mishna Demai and Derek Erez Rabba and Zuta. They are also parallels to the tradition in Hellenistic sources. The church probably took over much pagan moral convention from the Jewish Diaspora. Whatever the exact source of the material, the church found it necessary to borrow from non-Christian sources. It not only domesticated the absolutes of Jesus; it also took over domestic virtues from the world.

This brings us to the last aspect of New Testament moral teaching with which we shall deal here. That the church was able to draw upon moral teaching from Judaism and Hellenism means that there was a continuity between the moral awareness of Christians and of the non-Christian world. Wherein did this continuity lie? It lay probably in the doctrine of creation which the early church held. It cannot be overemphasized that creation and redemption are congenial in the New Testament, as indeed in Judaism. The messianic age had cosmic dimensions for Judaism. So too in the New Testament the Creator and the Redeemer are one. It is this that explains the ease with which Jesus can discover redemptive, spiritual truth in the natural order as in Matt. 5:43–48 and in his parables; it explains how Paul can find in Christ the wisdom—the creative agent—of God, and how John and Hebrews can find in him the Word by which all things were made. For the New Testament writers the life of God is the truly natural life. Morality is rooted in creation.

But Ardrey has another emphasis which seems to contradict this. In African Genesis (New York, 1961), p. 316, he claims that “man is a predator whose natural instinct is to kill with a weapon.” Man like the animal has an innate compulsion to gain and defend his property—this is the major motif of his work, The Territorial Imperative. For this emphasis he has been severely criticized by M. F. Ashley Montagu in “The New Litany of Inmate Depredity” or Original Sin Revisited in Man and Aggression, ed. M. F. Ashley Montagu (New York, 1968), pp. 3–16. Montagu takes an even more sanguine view of man than is implied in the first quotation given above from Ardrey: “It is not man’s nature, but his nurture, in such a world (overcrowded, highly competitive, threatening) that requires our attention.” (p. 16). See further H. Loewe, The Rabbinic Anthology, selected by C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, p. ix: “What is true in nature is true in religion: what is false in science cannot be true in religion. Truth is one and indivisible. God is bound by His own laws. . . . It is indeed ironical to note that the unity of the 19th Psalm has been impinged by some people for the very reason that it asserts, first, God’s supremacy alike in the natural and in the religious, spheres and, secondly, the congruence of the two.”

The sun, in going forth on its daily round, is fulfilling Torah as much as is a human being who worships God, as much as is a Jew when he performs the commandments, which are ‘pure and enlightening to the eyes.’ Ps. 19.8.” He refers to Sylve Dent. on 32:12: “We can recognize that the New Testament something of an antimony: there is on the one hand the belief that through the fall, creation itself has been affected, and on the other, the belief that in creation is visible “the eternal power of God.” Cf. J. C. Weiss, The History of Primitive Christianity, trans. four friends and ed. F. C. Grant (N. Y., 1937), 2: 597. Both views are native to Judaism. Stendahl reminded me that there is a certain “unnaturalness” in the operations of grace in the parables of Jesus, as when the seed in the parable of the Sower increases a hundredfold. But, in fact, this is not so much “unnatural” as “the natural enhanced, or intensified.” I suggest in my companion essay that it is the understanding of creation that provides a bridge between the moral teaching of the church and the world. See Notestamenta et Semitica, pp. 35 ff. The work of Teilhard de Chardin and, before him, of C. E. Raven, who have both emphasized the cosmic continuities in Christian theology may be connected with this. The danger in the position of both is a possible neglect of the sense of the transcendental and of the antithesis to which I have referred above. See Christopher F. Mooney, Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ (New York, 1966), p. 207, who notes that while the concept of the transcendental is never absent in Chardin’s work, the sense of it gets lost; and my critique of Raven in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism, p. 190, and the reply to it in Raven’s Gifford Lectures. The rich words of Donald M. Mackison, Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays, ed. G. W. Roberts and D. E. Smucker (New York, 1968), pp. 44 ff., on the significance of Raven and Chardin, deserve serious consideration. On Law and Nature in Plato and Hellenistic Judaism, see H. A. Wolfson, Philo, 2: 170 ff.; for Philo the law of nature and the Mosaic law, being derived from the same source—God—are in harmony, Wolfson, 2: 192. This is why God makes the world as preface to his laws in Genesis 1:31: προειδολογία ("Providençe") and γόμα γῆς φύσεως are interchangeable. Philo’s sense of the Law and order of nature is keen (Mos. ii. 48). He commands living according to.
Christ, the Risen Lord, and in its horizontal concern with the community and its cosmic affinities. We have not touched upon the relevance of this teaching to the life of the world outside the church, but that theme is dealt with elsewhere in a lecture which, as previously indicated in the first footnote, presupposes this, and to which the reader is referred.