A Clergyman's View of the Changing Morality

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said that cases of pregnancy from rape are rare. In the case of clearly established rape, there can naturally be a conflict between a strong emotional appeal on the one hand and on the other the ineluctable eternal law, "Thou shalt not kill". Of course all measures should be made available by social and governmental agencies, where indicated, for the care and comfort of the mother during and after pregnancy and for the maintenance of the child after birth, because the mother has no legal obligation in this respect.

VIOLATION OF FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF LAW

So we may say that, quite aside from the moral principle, the ALI provisions are an exhibit of faulty draftsmanship, in violation of fundamental principles of law for the protection of life.

It is pertinent and shocking to compare the usual treatment of human life under the proposed abortion laws, with the legal protection afforded those guilty, or suspected, of crime for which the law imposes the penalty of imprisonment or death.

The Supreme Court of the United States, in a series of decisions within the last few years, gives protection to one who is accused or suspected of crime. From the moment of being taken into the custody of the police, the services of an attorney must be supplied. He is advised of his legal rights. If indicted, he has a right to appear in court with his lawyer, to have a jury, to test the qualifications of the jury, to be confronted by his accusers, and to cross examine witnesses himself or through his attorney. In the case of any error in the trial he has the right of appeal. And the rights proclaimed by the court in these cases also apply to minors.

In the case of the unborn child, however, with striking contrast, the innocent child is afforded no protection of the right to life - no attorney to advise him, no guardian to appear and plead his case before this bizarre court composed of two doctors, one of whom can become the paid executioner, no one to appeal the decision of this court.

RESPONSIBILITY OF LAWYERS AND DOCTORS

In joining in the defense of the City of God against the attack on the life of the unborn, we will be saving the lives of children as truly as those were rescuing them from drowning or fire. Our position must be maintained unflinchingly, that intentional abortion is an "infamy" and an "unspeakable crime." This is not exclusively the Catholic position for it should be joined in by all those who believe in God as the Creator of life and who respect the moral law. Some Catholic laymen, unfortunately, including doctors, lawyers and legislators (some clergy, indeed) evade their responsibility by failing to speak out publicly. They seem to take the attitude that, "This is a pluralistic society and if the majority want it, let them have it" or, "Why should we impress our morality on others." This is all wrong, of course. Catholic doctors and lawyers have a special responsibility to present the defense on behalf of unborn children, and to oppose any concessions in "liberalization" of the abortion laws.

When I first received the invitation to talk to you, the subject given to me was "A Clergyman's View of the Changing Morality." In the program which I later received, the subject was listed as "The Clergyman's View of the Changing Morality." Just as I am sure that there is unanimity in this convention on certain basic principles of medicine, so I feel just as sure that there are a great variety of techniques used. I feel confident, therefore, that you will accept my talk as "A Clergyman's View of the Changing Morality."

Perhaps I can make this clearer with an analogy. I once heard a story from an Austrian doctor in China about an incident that happened when he was a medical student in a class on Gynecology. Delivering by forceps was the instruction in this particular class. The young student who was chosen to deliver the doll went about the task in all seriousness. When he finally had the baby dangling from the forceps, the instructor paused a few moments, and then calmly said to the student, "Son,

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I suppose you take those forceps and crack the father over the head. Then you will have wiped out the whole family."

The point I wish to make is that the student probably had the same respect for life - and the preservation of mother and child as did the instructor. But due to ignorance or the lack of proper skill and technique, he was not able to preserve the basic value-human life.

A physician also has the same basic will - to heal, to save, to make whole, but even the most successful among you will perhaps shudder when he reflects back upon some of his earlier operations and lack of acquired skills.

So, too, in the area of morality, we know from divine revelation and/or human reason that there are basic and absolute moral values such as "Do good and avoid evil" or in a more religious context, "Love God and your fellow man." God's revealed Will, however, does not give man a blueprint for every conceivable situation, nor is man, wending his pilgrim way through this world, always or perhaps ever fully attuned to God's revelation or to His Spirit. Man's moral decisions, therefore, are relative to his
knowledge of God's Will, to his openness to the Spirit of God and to his own conscience, and, to a great extent, relative also to his life situation.

Where, however, do we find the basic moral values, values which are changeless and unchangeable. And, specifically, in our context, with what is Christian morality concerned?

Christian morality is the study of Christ and the revelation in Christ as a Way of life.” I am the Way, the truth and the Life.” Christ is both the manifestation of God to man, and an invitation to man to give himself to God. The study of Christian morality concentrates on man's response to God in Christ through his life and behavior.

I Moral decisions, i.e., man's behavioral decisions must, first of all be God-centered. God invites; man responds. Sounds simple, doesn't it? - but here is where the problems start.

God invites: But - he knows of this invitation through His Word - but a Word given to us in the words of men.

- we know of this invitation through His Church, a human as well as a divine reality.
- we know of this invitation through the voice of conscience, fallible and at time erroneous.

Man responds: Yes, but - he responds in his own life situation which is so different for different men in different times and places.

Secondly, we must be wary of thinking of morality as a mere system of laws of behavior. Such a morality of law or code morality totally ignores the personal dimension of morality, or the autonomy and competence of the educated conscience in the area of practical moral judgment. Ignored, also, is the fact that the basic moral law is love, and this is found, not primarily in any external code, but in the heart of man, living in union with God.

Finally, (in speaking of a changing morality), we must not allow it to be based on any self-orientation of life, as if there were no such thing as an objective moral law. Such a self-structured morality would be pure moral anarchy.

However, excluding all humanistic, authoritarian, or subjective bases of morality, we come back to God speaking to us in Christ through His Church.

The authentic teacher of Christian morality, the Church, proclaims the Gospel to us in terms of the basic law: “Love God above all things, and your neighbor as yourself”.

The authentic Christian is the one who freely consents not only to accept but to live that message of love.

The Church proclaims this message anew to each succeeding generation and to every nation and culture. Evolving and developing as she is, (which is the nature of every living and non-static being), and doing so in a world that is ever-changing, she is constantly beset with new questions.

More specifically, in the field of morality, the Church's proclamation of the love of God in Christ provides...
the antidote to the introduction into the world of any non-Christian culture or morality. She is the perennial voice crying out in the wilderness upholding the honor of God and the dignity of man.

And yet, even within our Christian culture, new questions arise because of a better understanding of God’s Word as given to man in the Scriptures and because of scientific advances in the knowledge of man himself and of the universe in which he lives.

Because of scientific advances in methods of interpretation, we understand better today what the sacred writers were really saying to the men of their time, and can better appreciate the relevance of this teaching for our times and culture.

Because of technological advances, new moral problems arise from man’s legitimate aspirations to a better life on earth.

Because of medical and surgical advances, new questions are asked as to what is morally permitted when dealing with human life. For example, there came a time in the history of surgery when amputations became morally permissible because of the acquired ability to cauterize surgically. There came a time in the history of surgery when appendectomies became morally permissible because of the moral certainty of being able to save the patient’s life. Recently, organ transplants have become permissible for the same reason.

The same may be said when we enter other areas of scientific and professional competence. Advanced scientific knowledge raises new moral questions.

For the Christian seriously striving to answer any given moral problem, the authentic and positive teaching of the church should be in first consideration. If the specific answer to the specific problem is not found there, the basis of the answer certainly be discovered in scripture. Put in another way, the Christian is obligated to form and express his conscience according to the positive moral teaching of the Church. Conscience is supreme as the final arbiter in making a practical judgment on the morality of one’s actions. Man makes these moral judgments, however, in the realization that God is the ultimate judge and that he is the only and the final moral guide — the Church — according to whose teaching he should form his conscience.

The moral teaching of the Church must always be understood in the light of the Gospel proclamation. It is very understandable, therefore, because of what has been already said, that there is a development in this teaching. In our day, the more positive elements of the Gospel message and its social implications, (love, justice, peace, responsibility) are being given the pre-eminence due to them. This emphasis on the message itself creates an atmosphere of changing morality.

When one stresses the Gospel teaching of love and justice, is it not natural that the necessity for social justice and individual rights will be more clearly seen? Will not the immorality of unbridled capitalism be made more apparent?

When emphasis is given to Christ’s teaching about peace, can we be content merely to talk about conditions for a just war? Are we not all involved in our government’s decision to wage war? And even if we are engaged in a just war, what are we doing for the cause of peace?

When the New Testament teaching on the sanctity of married life is understood, is there not a greater appreciation of the importance of the family to society? Are not the positive values of human love and sexuality thereby strengthened?

When we read what God has revealed about the dignity of human life and the human person, can we ever treat man simply as an object?

And while this teaching on the personal dignity of man is addressed to all men, it has a very special relevance to men in your profession and in mine.

The priest mediates the Church, and therefore Christ, in preaching the Kingdom of God and Christ, and the means whereby citizenship in this Kingdom may be acquired, strengthened and completed. But it is the hearers of the message who decide, because of their dignity as free persons, to accept or reject the message. The ultimate moral responsibility is theirs, not that of the priest.

So, analogously, the physician, whose life is dedicated to the use of scientific skills to preserve human life, has a service to offer. His primary moral decision concerns the necessity of the procedure and his ability to perform it with reasonable chance of success. However, since he is dealing with human life, the decision to have the operation is the moral right of the patient. Except for an operation that would be intrinsically evil, the moral responsibility of submitting to an operation belongs to the patient.

In conclusion, I should simply like to say, that, instead of speaking of “the Changing Morality”, I would rather we spoke of the changing climate or atmosphere in which moral decisions are made. The basic moral law “Love God and your fellow-man” is changeless. Our understanding of the obligation of love does undergo constant development according to our advance in the understanding of God’s revelation in Christ and our increasing knowledge of man and the universe. Guided by the teaching Church in her ever-growing awareness of God’s revelation, and by the Spirit of God to Whom our consciences must ever be open, we encounter life’s situations and problems optimistically and without anxiety, with the words of St. Paul in our hearts, “Lord, what do you will that I do?”

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