SPIRIT OF HOLINESS?
MORAL DECLINE IN 'CHRISTIAN' SOCIETY

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Abstract

Politicians commonly turn to religion to help deal with the modern decline in morality, only to be confronted with failure even among its leaders. To some extent, the contradiction between what the Church preaches and what it does can be explained by the fact that moral change is energised by the Spirit, who however does not work in society as a whole, does not force but prompts, and changes people only gradually.

1. Introduction

The decline in morality in Western society hardly needs to be documented; it is obvious to the most casual observer. And the same is true, perhaps even more so in South Africa, where both major and minor crime impinge on the lives of everybody. Wrong-doing is in evidence at the personal, individual level, and also corporately in the so-called "structural" sins, where the individual does wrong by participating in a system, but rarely has the ability to avoid doing so or to change the system; examples of this are economic oppression in a capitalist economy, or in *apartheid*. Not to be overlooked are the sins of omission, even if those perpetrating them are rarely brought to book in a legal way; indolence, blatant inefficiency, lack of punctuality, in short, lack of a concern for others and the running of society in general, qualities that should be summed up in the much vaunted *ubuntu*.

The fact that much of the problem lies outside of what can be legislated for highlights the problem for society. Despite strenuous efforts in law-making, policing, and in prisons, the problem only seems to deepen, and of course feeds on itself. Why should any one person struggle against the tide to maintain standards, when all efforts are undermined by others around?

As has been obvious for millennia, the problem is essentially within the human being. No matter what external motivation is suggested, and what sanctions are threatened, unless there is an inner desire to obey a standard of righteousness, it will only be followed under compulsion, and most likely every effort will be made to do what the individual actually wants. Despite enormous efforts in law-making, and vast expenditure on policing, human ingenuity continually finds ways to avoid them. There is of course such a thing as conscience, which does provide inner motivation, and provides its own sanction, but many people seem to be quite able to deaden its voice.

The existence of conscience has often suggested, most notably to Kant, that what is actually being heard is the voice of God. Certainly religion has in general been intimately connected with morals. "Morality at last resort depends upon the philosophy of life which underlies it" (Waterhouse, in Cave 1949:100). It is however striking that most religions advocate an essentially similar basic ethic, some version of what is often called the "Golden rule", that of care for those around. This is of course an argument for a pluralistic view.

The effectiveness of religion is that all faiths also promise reward for doing good, and

punishment for doing wrong. The details of these naturally differ, but the principle is the same, and very often there is indeed effectiveness. Religious people are in general said to be morally better than those who deny faith.

This focuses the South African situation. How can it be that a society in which nearly 75% of the population claim to be Christian can have such an experience of lawlessness? It is hardly possible to blame the rest of the population, who in any case mainly adhere to other major religions, mainly Islam and Hinduism. The perpetrators of crime, immorality (in the wider sense), and moral laxity, must be sought largely speaking within the numbers of those who claim to be Christian. To exacerbate the situation even further, moral lapses seem to be increasing even among ministers across the range of denominations. The scandal lies in the lack of correspondence between what the Church is preaching, and the quality of its lifestyle.

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the fundamental role of Christianity, and so the demand of Jesus, was not primarily to be good, but to be in relationship with him. Christianity is not an ethical code, but relationship, which is why it can preach essential freedom in the Spirit (Cave 1949:98). Its ethics must be secondary to this. It must also be added that, as with other religions, Christianity has always been subject to a measure of ethical syncretism (Cave 1949:102). The prevalence of asceticism in the early Church is a good example of this. Not least is the awareness of Christianity that sin is inherent in the nature of "fallen" humanity; despite Kant's belief that "I ought therefore I can" (cited in Cave 1949:104), its understanding is rather of *non posse non peccare*.

But even if not the key idea, it cannot be suggested that Christianity is morally indifferent. A fundamental attribute of God is his moral nature. In both Old and New Testaments, he is portrayed as being vitally concerned to advocate a moral standard. At the same time, it has been the case that whenever there has been a revival in Christianity, it has been associated with definite moral improvements. Examples can readily be suggested; a striking example is of the Welsh revival of the early twentieth century, in which not only were the churches and chapels filled, but the breweries went out of business and the police became redundant. Indeed, it has been suggested that an inevitable feature of Christian revival is a heightened sense of sin.

So why the moral problem today? It must be associated with a fundamental lack of belief, or more charitably, a lack of commitment. In the former case, although Christianity has traditionally preached a most definite sanction in the existence and nature of heaven and hell, how many really believe in their existence, particularly of the latter? Of course, part of the issue is a pervading scientific world-view, and the lack of empirical evidence for the existence of hell, or even of life after death. If there is no sense of ultimate justice, conformity to Christianity's moral norms becomes less likely. Complicating this is that belief in hell has become unfashionable even among Christians, with many replacing it by a belief in universal salvation, or perhaps of conditional immortality, a denial of permanent torture of the wicked in favour of their annihilation. The former has a tough job advocating righteousness at all, the latter only a little less. In both cases however, there may be a belief in a so-called "intermediate state", in which punishment for sin could well occur on a temporary basis. This does give moral "teeth", and what should be effective ones, in view of Jesus' description of the state of Dives in Hades (Lk 16:23f), but the concept seems to lack the impact of hell, possibly because it is much more complicated, and still empirically unproven.

It must be added that the whole Christian message of salvation by grace has also had

moral repercussions. Not only is there a belief by most that moral perfection is actually impossible, which naturally dampens enthusiasm, but there can even be a belief that it is wrong! As Paul had to discuss in Romans 6 and 7, there is at least some logic in the idea that if salvation is by grace through faith, then moral obedience can be argued to be irrelevant, or at worse wrong; God must want sin so that he can do what he wants, forgive it! (For a later example of this aberration, cf Gaybba 1987:93.)

The scandal of the moral collapse in the "Christian" West, and particularly in South Africa, is heightened by the fact that Christianity not only advocates a moral standard, and preaches the consequences of disobedience to it, but alone among the major religions, also says that God provides the means by which he may be obeyed. It gives not only negative sanction, but claims to give positive power, through the Spirit. It is this that so excited the writer of Romans 7; just saying what is right is one thing, but the failure of the Old Testament law was that it is powerless; it can motivate, but that is all.

Religion, such as Christianity, thus commonly provides a knowledge of the good, correct conduct. There is a vast amount of literature that discusses the Christian attitude to various issues, such as nuclear warfare, abortion or AIDS. It provides the "what" of morals. Then religion also provides sanction, motivation for keeping those morals. This is not so commonly discussed today; certainly the promise of heaven and the threat of hell are not fashionable topics, but nevertheless, even in a theology of grace, reward and punishment should not be excluded altogether. Religion then provides the "why". Even less discussed, indeed almost totally absent from Christian ethical writing, is that Christianity also provides the power for obedience, the "how". Are we in danger of fulfilling the promise of the writer of 2 Timothy 3:5 concerning the "last days"; of "holding the form of religion but denying the power of it"?

But in this case, why on earth is there still a moral problem? Is Christianity actually false, reflecting a belief system that does not correspond to reality? But if it is real, and the power of God almighty is available to enable obedience to what he himself desires, why does it not happen?

2. It is the Spirit who enables moral obedience

It is striking how few references there are to the Spirit in works on Christian ethics, despite Paul's emphasis. Of course it must not be overlooked that this gift of the Spirit must also involve a new "what", as Christians are subject not only to law or the results of moral discussion, but to the Spirit, and even a new "why", seeing that it is the Spirit who enables and nurtures the relationship between a Christian and God. Just as the approval, or otherwise, of those with whom we have relationships is a powerful incentive for doing what pleases them, because it affects the quality of those relationships, so the presence of the Spirit both motivates conduct and affects the quality of the relationship with God.

It must be wrong to divide the action of the Trinity totally, restricting specific activity to specific Persons. With Augustine, it must be affirmed that *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*. Nevertheless there is a measure of real appropriation; after all, it was only the second Person who was incarnate. What Augustine was emphasizing was that all the Persons are necessarily involved; there is concurrence and participation. More than this, as is commonly done, it is appropriate to relate the first Person specifically to creation, the second to redemption, and the third to sanctification. In this case, it must seem to be the case that it is the Spirit who provides moral power.

A climax of Paul's epistle to the Romans is that after arguing at length that obedience to God is impossible and the attempt to do so leads only to frustration, he suddenly bursts into Romans 8 with the message that the Holy Spirit is given to the Church to give power to do what is right.

The descent of the Spirit onto the Church was at Pentecost (Acts 2). The timing of this must be significant, not just an arbitrary period after the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is also associated with a specific festival, in that case the Passover, which then gives meaning to the event. Pentecost was closely linked to Passover, but had very early become linked to the giving of the law at Sinai, no longer being just a first-fruits celebration. In fact the details of what happened, notably the wind and tongues of fire, can well be seen in terms of the manifestations at Sinai. Philo, in his description of what happened, writes that "God created sound more marvellous than all instruments, changed air to flaming fire ..." (*de Decalogo* 33-5, quoted in Montague 1976:278).

Then although the law was recorded in the Pentateuch, the prophets are vitally concerned with preaching what is right. Earlier prophets, possibly to distance themselves from ecstasy, almost never refer to the Spirit; one who did, Micah, makes a direct link with morals (Gaybba 1987:8). The later prophets, Jeremiah and particularly Ezekiel, then refer to a new covenant in which the law would be internalised (Jer 31:31-4), which is made possible by the giving of the Spirit (Ez 36:27). So even if the Old Testament primarily characterises the Spirit as "the Spirit of prophecy", this must include a strong ethical sense (Turner 1996:20). Gaybba (1987:7) cites several Old Testament indications of the growing importance of this link.

The connection between the Spirit and ethics is also highlighted by the term "holy". This must be qualified, insofar as the term "holy" in the Old Testament carries a sense of apartness, rather than the ethical. It is then not really necessary as the very term "spirit" indicated divinity. The word "holy" only occurs twice with "Spirit" in the Old Testament (Ps 51:11, Is 63:10). However, those two occurrences do carry an ethical connotation. Gaybba (1987:11) suggests that the term was also used to avoid pronouncing God's name; this is more relevant in the New Testament, however, where the word serves to identify the third Person in contrast to the plethora of other "spirits" (Jenson 1982:11). Nevertheless, it would seem to bear an ethical connotation more commonly than the transcendent aspect.

Thus the immediate result of the presence of the Spirit in a Christian is ethical, the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), where, significantly, the first listed, *agape*, only became a meaningful concept in the Greek-speaking world with the rise of Christianity, and therefore with the presence of the Spirit. Love, which is fundamental to morals, is intimately linked to the Spirit, reflecting either the nature of his person, or the results of his presence (Gaybba 1987:134).

This means that our holiness is motivated by his. "But as he who has called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, 'you shall be holy, for I am holy' " (1 Pet 1:16). "The 'Spirit of prophecy' is very much the power and life of the church.... It is the means by which the heavenly Lord exercises his cleansing and transforming rule over Israel ..." (Turner 1996:55).

In this case, the paradox of moral decline and indifference can be traced back to the nature of the activity of the Spirit. It is not that his power of sanctification is inadequate, but that he works only in the Church, that even there he does not force change, and even then, change is gradual.

3. The Spirit acts only within the Church

The word "holy" in the Old Testament mainly has the connotation of apartness from the world. Things and people so designated have a particular relationship to God. It cannot then be argued that in the Old Testament, the Spirit acts in the context of the world or universe, as does Thomas (1913:185), who then immediately contrasts this with a restriction of the Spirit's activity to the Church in the New.

Leaving aside the ideas of Hegel, whose pantheistic conception of spirit cannot really be said to be Christian, the concept of the universal action of the Spirit is a common one. It naturally finds Biblical support in the reference to the Spirit in creation (Gen 1:2, Ps 33:6, 104:30), and so in the belief that the continued action of the Spirit is essential for very existence, a panentheism. Pinnock (1996:49) therefore cites Pope John Paul II with approval; for him, the Spirit is "the breath of life which causes all creation, all history, to flow together to its ultimate end, in the infinite ocean of God". Likewise he cites Kuyper, who he says follows Calvin, that the Spirit exercises a steady influence on creation, leading it to its destiny, giving gifts and talents to humanity (Pinnock 1996:54). However, even if the Nicene creed does confess the Spirit as "Lord and giver of life" (Pinnock 1996:50), this need not imply universal activity. It is true that "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), and that the Spirit, as God is omnipresent (Ps 139:7), but this again need not mean the active presence of the Spirit, but only that God created us. It is significant that the writer to the Hebrews ascribes upholding the universe to the second Person (Heb 1:3). The work of the Spirit is not coupled with creation, but the Old Testament texts are rather connected to the giving of life (Gaybba 1987:10). Thus he is the agent of new life, of redemption, an idea that is distinct from creation, even if they are obviously related (eg. 2 Cor 5:17). Calvin then, although he does see some general action of the Spirit in providence (Gaybba (1987:101), distinguishes between the general and special action of the Spirit; the latter is confined to Christians, and includes sanctification (Ferguson 1996:247-8). Stendahl (1990:4) actually comments that the Church does pray "come Holy Spirit", which is strange if he is believed to already be active in everything.

Indeed, the Genesis 1 text, as others where the word *ruach* is used, bears a notorious ambiguity between "wind" and "spirit" (and also "breath"), and the former makes sense, especially to those who want to deny any incipient Trinitarianism so early in the Bible. In any case, the Spirit has rather an obvious connection with life, as in Genesis 2:7 and Ezekiel 37, and all the supposed references with the material creation can rather be interpreted in this way. Barrett (1947:21) comments that the Rabbis nowhere thought of the Spirit as the creative activity of God; he rather recreates and revives in the days of the Messiah.

This immediately means that the Spirit need not be linked with the inanimate, a conclusion very consistent with the moral aspect of the Spirit, seeing that the inanimate has no freedom of action. Moreover, even if the Spirit is the necessary initiator of life, this need not mean that he must continue to act to sustain it. Life can well be understood as self-sustaining, transmitted from one generation to the next by the natural process of procreation. It is again hard to see any moral activity in much of life. But there is not even any necessity to see the necessary action of the Spirit in humanity; even the *imago Dei* texts are unlikely to demand this. In this regard, whereas the "image" was believed to lie in the "spiritual" nature of humanity for over a millennium, it is rather felt today that it has reference to dominion over the material creation and other forms of life, or, with Barth, in human plurality, ideas which complement each other well.

Nevertheless, even if the Spirit is to be understood primarily as the initiator of new life, the nature of life is to develop and grow. A plant naturally grows towards the sun, and down to water, both necessary for its survival; an animal constantly seeks to get close to the source of its food. A Christian should likewise grow towards the source of spiritual life, which is God alone (1 Tim 6:16), which implies moral change. In all cases, in this growth comes development and the possibility of further growth.

Thus the Old Testament perception that the Spirit acts only intermittently in some people, but not in all, is consistent with the New Testament belief that he is a gift to the Church. Indeed, he is never used as a cause of things in the Old Testament except in respect of Israel, and then of the new Israel in the New Testament (Wood, in Humphries 1917:224). Montague (1976:86) points out that the prophecy of Joel is restrictive, to "your" sons and daughters. There is no hint that the outpouring at Pentecost was any wider, a belief reflected elsewhere, such as in John 14:17, "whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him". Ferguson (1996:224) therefore puts the world and the Spirit in antithetical relationship, citing also 1 Corinthians 2:12-4 and 1 John 4:3. Gaybba (1987:26) likewise says that the early Church felt that any action of the Spirit outside the Church was restricted to drawing people into it.

Even the Rabbinic identification of the Spirit with wisdom is not only doubtful, as there is a link with the second Person. This doubt also applies to Calvin, who teaches that all truth comes from the Spirit (Hoekema 1986:190). This would include the idea of conscience, a result of the *logos* (Thomas 1913:187). Even awareness of moral values can have several sources apart from God's direct teaching. Wisdom would in any case be restricted to those who fear God: "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 1:7).

Rather, as Augustine stressed later, the Holy Spirit is the "gift", an idea very apparent in both Testaments (eg Neh 9:20); so not automatically present. Then the gift is to the Church, granted in the complex of conversion-initiation (Turner 1996:155). Cyprian thus believed that sacraments practised outside the Church were invalid (Gaybba 1987:42). He is given by the Son (Jn 15:26), and, again with Augustine, is the *vinculum amoris*, the bond of love linking the Christian to him. This automatically restricts the recipients of the gift to those, to use the Pauline phrase, "in Christ". H Berkhof adds the tantalising thought that Jesus carried the Spirit into the world.

Indeed, if the Spirit were given to the world in general, and not a restricted gift to the Church, it would raise questions on how the creative Spirit is intimately involved in a world in which there is an inherent increase in entropy, a natural move towards chaos, and connected to that, how evil seems to be such a feature of it.

A restriction of the Spirit to the Church then means that those outside the Church do not receive anything of God's help in obedience. It does not mean that they are amoral, but that ethical sensibilities need not be attributed to any indwelling Spirit, but on the contrary can be traced to the universal action of the *logos*, the second Person, or, which could well amount to the same thing, to social conditioning, an explanation obviously attractive to the modern world-view. Paul makes a well-known contrast between "flesh" and spirit (Ferguson 1996:133f).

This need not mean a "demotion" of the Spirit (Pinnock 1996:63), or a fundamental divide between secular and sacred. Especially it does not necessarily demand that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, in the sense that visible membership of the Church is necessary for salvation, and so for the gift of the Spirit. The much debated "latent" or "anonymous"

Christianity of Rahner and Tillich must at least be suggested by the Biblical ascription of salvation to some from the Old Testament context. Indeed, if the Spirit does "convict the world" (Jn 16:8), this does mean at least some relationship with the world, but this may be seen as mediated through the Church, or possibly through other personal agency, such as angels. Carson (1979:565) argues that the action of the Spirit is not upon the world as such, but on the Church, the disciples, who are themselves convinced of the wrongness of the world, which is part of their empowering to confront its evil. In any case, the action of the Spirit described there is far from sanctifying; the Spirit is rather in antithesis to the world (Ferguson 1996:244).

What this must mean is that the Spirit cannot be seen as a force for the improvement of society as a whole, and neither for those who might call themselves "Christian" but who do not have the relationship with Christ. He works to sanctify only Christians, which could perhaps be extended to include such as Cornelius (Acts 10), those with a determination to follow and obey God according to the understanding that they do have (also cf Rom 2). This of course puts a tremendous responbility onto the Church, but then one that they do not have to meet without God's empowerment by the Spirit. It is not for nothing that a common translation of *parakletos* is "helper".

Perhaps even more encouraging to a Church so often painfully aware of its own failings and impotence is the effect that it has on the world simply by being there. Jesus likened it to salt (Matt 5:13) and to yeast (Matt 13:33), where the presence of even a little has a big effect. Even if standards of morals in a post-Christian West are declining, the evidence of a previous "Christianisation" is still decidedly present.

4. The Spirit does not compel obedience

Before the rise of Pentecostalism and its successors thrust the question of the Holy Spirit to the forefront of Christian interest, he was quite commonly referred to as the "shy member of the Trinity". Not a few theologians even denied his existence, seeing rather the work of the risen Christ. Part of the reason for this is that despite the exuberance of Pentecost and the excesses at Corinth, his activity has not been that obvious.

Even the Old Testament prophets significantly rarely mention the Spirit at all, and certainly do not suggest that their activity is under compulsion. Jeremiah was seduced (Jer 20:7), but not forced, even if the pressure on him was intense, likened to "fire in his bones" (Jer 20:9), a metaphor which must remind of the Spirit. In fact it is likely that he experienced more pressure than average due to the nature of his calling. Other prophets referred to their message as a *massa'*, a burden, but there is no hint that it could not be refused. Prophets had freedom of choice; Ezekiel in particular was given the role of a watchman, but then warned of the consequences of not fulfilling it (Ez 3:17f).

Unlike the Jews, who were bound by covenant to obey its ethical requirements, Gentiles are not subject to the law, hence the decision of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). On the contrary, the Christian life is described more in terms of liberty (Moltmann 1992:99f); "if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (Jn 8:36), "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17).

It is Moltmann who is particularly noted for the observation that self-limitation is a fundamental attribute of God (1981:109). The very act of creation implies his self-restriction, just so that what is created has a measure of freedom. Likewise the second Person limited himself, even if the notorious *kenosis* (Phil 2:7) must not be understood as

an inherent restriction. It is hardly surprising that the Spirit likewise limits himself. Congar (1983:5) understands this in respect of his personality, which is appropriate if the Spirit's aim is to influence and encourage without the much more forceful impact that personal confrontation must have.

The Christian life does not consist, as does Judaism, of obedience to a rigid code, but involves constant ethical choice, which may even, very exceptionally, involve positive disobedience to the written norms. The law is still there, and still has a function of demonstrating, in general, what is right and wrong. Jesus, so annoyingly to the Pharisees of the day, seemed happy to disobey the law, but only if good would result. The Christian is not under law, but is led by the Spirit.

The action of the Spirit, respecting this freedom, and therefore not forcing, is rather to motivate. He affects our spirits, in effect our consciences (Rom 8:16, 1 Cor 2:11). Paul was goaded (Acts 26:14), and certainly this is refusable. Job 27:3 connects moral correctness with the Spirit, but Job still makes his own commitment. Paul's admonition, "if we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:25) immediately means that the opposite is possible. If the filling with the Spirit (Eph 5:18) is commanded, it is subject to human choice. Paul is well aware that Spirit-filled Christians still need urging to lead holy lives; these could be far from ideal (Gaybba 1987:27). This of course means that it is very possible to disobey his voice, and possibly not even to hear it, or to suppress it. It is possible to "quench the Spirit" (1 Thess 5:19). Possibly most Christians need to be more aware of the promptings that the Spirit gives, but this should come from a determination to obey.

However, this freedom of being able to choose whether to conform to the promptings of the Spirit necessarily results in the possibility of refusal to obey. This is the same in essence as the old problem of evil; God can stop it, and presumably wants to, yet it continues. This apparent paradox can be understood as due to human freedom. This must be better in the sight of God than the perfect morality of the robot. Augustine had a slightly different perspective when he said that the good of redemption outweighed the problem of sin, but the result is the same. God puts a high value on freedom, again probably because this is more consistent with humanity as *imago Dei*. The result of this is likewise the possibility, even the probability of Christian failure, simply due to freedom. God does not force.

But if there is wilful disobedience, it must follow that the result is death, for the Spirit who prompts obedience is the same Spirit who animates life. The life-giving Spirit is also the Spirit of judgemental fire. Hildebrandt (1995:83) draws attention to the connection made in Genesis 6:3, where human lifespan is limited because the Spirit will not contend always.

5. The Spirit changes people gradually

In the original Pentecostalism, influenced by the Holiness movement, sanctification was seen as the result of an instantaneous crisis, producing, depending on the particular beliefs of the group, partial or complete perfection (Sproul 1990:137). The influence of the Wesleyan view of achievable sanctification is apparent. This doctrine in not common today, being modified either to victory over wilful or deliberate sin; the description of the moral struggles of the "saints" make such an idea fairly untenable.

More importantly, the "second blessing", however it is referred to, is more commonly understood today, especially in charismatic groups, not as a crisis of sanctification, but as an empowering for service, and the bestowal of gifts; Sproul (1990:138) alludes to the moral lapses of some prominent neo-Pentecostals!

Rather than a crisis, sanctification has to do with the so-called "fruit of the Spirit", love, joy, peace and so on (Gal 5:22), which could rather be seen as connected with conversion, the bonding, by the Spirit, to the sinless Christ, and so the gradual conformity to his nature. "Fruit" does not appear instantaneously, but grows and develops. Thus, while there is undoubtedly the possibility of a crisis reformation in individual cases, the growth of sanctification is gradual, and lifelong, perfection never, almost by definition, being achieved. Indeed, the greatest of saints are those most aware of failure. Perhaps the experiences of the early monks and hermits are a case in point. Notably, such "saints" (holy, or sanctified) commonly testify to the fact of battle with the powers of evil, so that sanctification is the result of ongoing victory. A prime example of this is Luther. Packer (1995:110f) therefore characterises the experience of holiness as one of conflict; he also cites Paul's picture of a race (Phil 3:13-4). It is not surprising that not everybody is prepared to make the effort, or perhaps sufficient effort.

Indeed, sanctification must primarily be a matter of will, so cannot be expected to occur without a measure of determination. It is for this reason that it is an action of the Spirit, which affects the human "spirit" or will (Gaybba 1987:214).

Thus the *metanoia*, change in mind, or repentance, which must be a feature of the conversion experience, is just that, a change in mind, which initiates and motivates a gradual change in behaviour. Paul urges a Christian to be transformed (*metamorphousthe*) (Rom 12:2), where the present tense of the verb indicates a process; likewise the plea of John (1 Jn 2:1) that a Christian should not sin has also the idea of habitual and persistent sin.

The Christian life may be likened to the marriage relationship (Eph 5:23). Here there must be a contrast between the initiation of a relationship, symbolised in the wedding, with the lifelong adjustment to living together.

In any case, sanctification is by the new life enabled by the "life-giving Spirit". As life by its very nature involves growth as a process, and gradual change, it would be expected that sanctification also is essentially a gradual growth process. It is this point that so impressed Luther; while believing that justification, the declaration of righteousness, and so salvation, is an event, he believed that sanctification is a process. His well-known affirmation is that a Christian is *simul iustus et peccator*.

Once again, it is apparent that the nature of the action of the Spirit provides an explanation for moral problems in Christians. In this case, because sanctification is a process, it may be understood, even if it is not acceptable, that moral imperfections occur even while the Christian is still improving.

6. Conclusion

The attempt has been made to explain why in a so-called Christian society there can possibly be a situation of rampant lawlessness and anti-social behaviour. The remedy from this perspective is to draw attention to the moral standard that God has put forward and to insist that the law is still valid as a way of demonstrating, in principle, what that standard is. At the same time, those who do claim that they are followers of God need to be aware that the Christian message is not simply a list of moral demands, but that it includes the means for moral change, the availability of God's transforming Spirit.

Immediately this puts a heavy responsibility on those who are leaders in the Church to show that this is not just empty words, but that there is a reality behind it. Otherwise people will not just ignore the lifestyle of the gospel, but they will desert the gospel itself, as

indeed is increasingly the case. It is therefore not speeches that underlie a Christian social programme, but the motivation that the Spirit gives (Taylor 1972:147). Interestingly, Taylor (1972:123) quotes the atheist philosopher Nietzsche, "his disciples will have to look more saved if I am to believe in their Saviour".

This also does not remove the responsibility to take direct action against the problem, and to think clearly and in a Christian way what the right approach is. One may find fault with the ideas of "reconstructionism", but at least it is an attempt in this regard. To give one immediate example: it is very hard to justify the prison system from a Christian perspective, and certainly it cannot find direct Biblical warrant. If anything, it is hardly a deterrent, and rarely correctional, but thinking of a valid alternative falls outside of the ambit of this paper. This of course is only one aspect of the problem, albeit an essential one. Even if it cannot deal with the root of the disease, the band-aid of direct social action is still needed for the time being while the antibiotic of genuine conversion is taken and steps are taken to avoid a repeat of the problem in the future.

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