

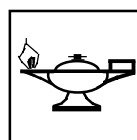
Church finds a place for them in its philosophy. Many Church leaders have joined their voices in the secular clamour for an end to the nuclear arms race. Catholic theologians have been formulating a 'Christian humanism' in order to slot previously unacceptable ideas into their theological framework. The pope now talks of the 'brotherhood of man' and the rights of the individual. In Anglicanism, the influence of humanism can be seen in its attitude to so many modern issues; for example in its increasing tolerance of homosexuality and the shift in its attitudes to women priests. The humanist argument that as

something becomes culturally acceptable it becomes morally acceptable is the argument that is used by the Church's liberal reformers.

The Church's acceptance of humanism has meant that, far from preaching that men should be content to suffer in this life, they have supported the cause of 'fair shares for all'. Such departure from Bible teaching is justified by proposing that the values of the first-century Christians and of the Israelites before them were only relative values, which have to be updated for succeeding generations.

So the tide of humanism rolls on.

(To be concluded)



Encounter

The Law given through Moses (2)*

Islip Collyer

IF WE COMPARE the two foundation principles of the Mosaic Law with the Ten Commandments, we find the difference between positives and negatives as bearing on human duty. The positives are far more comprehensive and in every way far better for those who can respond to them. The negatives are more explicit and are rendered necessary by human weakness. The positives present an ideal toward which men may continually climb. The negatives draw lines by which men may be judged. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour", says the Apostle, "therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10).

But the law of negatives might be kept quite well without any real love as driving force. A man might observe all the provisions of the Ten Commandments and yet have less real love for God and man than some others who through fleshly weakness have been guilty of obvious transgression.

Here we may note the startling significance of those words by the Lord Jesus which have seemed mysterious to many Christians: "A new

commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another" (Jno. 13:34). In view of the fact that the command to love is one of the oldest of Divine instructions, and was, as the Lord Jesus said, at the very foundation of the old Law, the question has been asked, In what sense could it be called new?

THE answer is surely on the surface. The ideal basis of the Mosaic Law was not included in the rules by which men were judged. It was impossible for mortals to adjudicate on an issue so completely hidden from mortal eyes. The judges under the old Law were guided by the sight of the eye and the hearing of the ear. If a man made idols or turned to alien worship, his sin could be attested by human witnesses and condemned by a human judge. In the absence of such external signs, no mortal witness could declare that the love of God was not in his heart. If one committed murder or theft or adultery, if he bore false witness or tried to obtain possession of other

* First published February 1947.

men's property, human witnesses could prove his guilt and a human judge could administer punishment. But if there were no such outward signs of faulty feelings, no man could say that love was not in his heart. The ordinary judge could only deal with negatives.

With the Divinely appointed King of the future age it is different. Even in the days of his flesh, he knew what was in the heart of man and needed not that any should tell him. It is written that when he comes to judge the world he will not "judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge" (Isa. 11:3,4). He, the Divine judge who can look into the very heart of man, makes this new test for disciples: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another" (Jno. 13:34). We must not only keep from all manner of wrongdoing, but the reality of love must be in our hearts.

MUCH could be written regarding the Ten Commandments, but it might be in the nature of obvious commentary. One thought, not too obvious, may be offered on the third commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain" (Ex. 20:7).

This was a necessary warning, for men have revealed an extraordinary tendency to use oaths in a light and vain manner. Restrained by this clear command, the Jews found other oaths, making foolish distinction between those which were supposed to be serious and binding and those which were meaningless. The Lord Jesus condemned all such forms of speech: "Swear not at all . . . But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (Mt. 5:34-37).

It is strange that so many Christians have assumed that only serious oaths were condemned by Christ. They have supposed that his words did not apply to such meaningless expressions as those with which modern speech is interlarded. Surely if there is any distinction to be drawn, it is all the other way. If an oath is ever legitimate for Christians, surely it is one demanded by the law and given in serious attestation of truth. We may be thankful that an affirmation without an oath is now accepted in British courts. Surely if a man has ever had opportunity to compare the gabbled oaths with the solemn declaration of one who chooses to affirm, he could have no doubt as to which is the more impressive. But while disciples of Christ may thankfully accept this

liberty and avoid the use of oaths such as the law at one time demanded, it is a mistake to suppose that the words of Christ referred only or even primarily to such matters. It is a tragic incongruity when one punctiliously avoids the serious oaths but continually uses vain oaths in ordinary conversation.

THE Apostle Paul was assuredly an example to be followed—zealous for the Law in early days and equally zealous for Christ when his understanding had been enlightened. He used a form of oath in one of the most serious and solemn proclamations of his life, when he told the Galatians of the facts concerning his miraculous conversion: "Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not" (Gal. 1:20). We cannot imagine the Apostle interlarding his conversation in ordinary life with the kind of meaningless oaths heard so often from Christian lips now, "By Jove" or "Gosh" or "Golly", or whatever similar corruptions may have been popular in his day.

In England the Ten Commandments have been given a place of honour in addition to the teaching of the New Testament. The third commandment has often been cited, but it seems to have been assumed that no expression would be regarded as an oath so long as it was meaningless, and such language was not reprov'd so long as it was accounted 'genteel'. A century ago men who wanted to use such oaths without shocking Christians would change the pronunciation or shorten the word, as if God would have no objection to His Name being taken in vain so long as it was mispronounced or presented in a corrupted form. A series of expressions followed each other with changing fashions, but all of them with little-concealed reference to the most sacred of truths.

With the weakening of Christian faith there has been less restraint. In these days, those of us who are thrown by circumstances into the presence of worldly men may often be pained to hear the constant use of the words "By God", even in describing the most insignificant events of ordinary life. Christians may shrink from this, but they very easily fall into a similar habit of speech with expressions which really invoke the Name of God, although the oath is so completely vain that the speaker has no thought of God in his mind. The many—the very many—offenders who ought to know better may find in this matter an opportunity for continual exercises in the

way of righteousness. The possibilities of reform are with them every day and almost every time they speak.

ONE other comment on "the Ten Words" may be appropriate. The fourth commandment, to remember the sabbath, to keep it holy, was correctly stated to be related primarily to the first great law of God, for if the people kept the sabbath in the manner required by the law, the love of God rather than the love of man was the driving force. It was, however, a law which conferred great blessings upon man. The complete cessation of ordinary activities, the concentration of thought on higher things every seventh day, had moral effects of great value. The more men depart from this custom, the further they relapse into barbarism.

Unfortunately the halfhearted attempt to observe the Ten Commandments in a country for which they were not designed has resulted in compromises which have deprived the laws of their force and have opened the way for complete departure. Everyone can see that in Christendom there has been no attempt to keep the second commandment, which forbade the making of images. Every man who can read and reason can see that there has been no real attempt in Western lands to maintain a sabbath such as the people of Israel were required to observe. The seventh day was the holy one, not the first. On the sabbath the people were to do no manner of servile work, neither were they to kindle a fire through all their habitations. If we were really under the Ten Commandments, all our statues would be utterly condemned and every week we should be at fault in the matter of the sabbath.

THE New Testament tells us that Christ was the end of the Law for believers, that the "ministration of death, written and engraven in stones", although it was glorious, was abolished for us in Christ, while a more glorious ministration of life remains (2 Cor. 3:7-11). We are less under the restricting laws of negatives, and more under the comprehensive and compelling positives, which include all negatives suited to our day and the land in which we live, and which go much further than negatives in their call to righteousness. The passage describing the setting aside of laws written and engraven on stones clearly refers to the Ten Commandments. They were written on stones, and, although they were glo-

rious laws, they condemned the rebellious Israelites and so became a ministration of death. We know of nothing else which could be so described.

In place of the Ten Commandments we have the Christian elaboration of the law of love. In place of the old sacrifices we have the 'burial with Christ' in the waters of baptism, and the weekly remembrance of the Lord's Supper. Instead of the old restrictive sabbath we have the free following of apostolic example, for we are told that they met to break bread on the first day of the week.

If Christians had taken their stand on the New Testament, recognising the changes wrought by Christ and not admitting the validity of any attempts of later days to alter New Testament rules, they would have been in a much stronger position. By claiming the authority of the Ten Commandments and yet departing so completely from laws which seemed difficult to apply, they have opened the way for that consistent loosening of all restraints which is such a noticeable feature of this age.

THERE is one more matter in connection with the sabbath which may call for further attention later. There was a sabbath of years as well as of days, a command to give the land a rest every seventh year. This was one of the Mosaic provisions which assumed, and which needed, a Divine control. God promised to give a special blessing to the sixth year to enable the people to make provision for the year of rest. The increased fertility of the sixth year would not come naturally. It would rather be the reverse, especially if similar crops had been grown year after year. Then in this connection they had the seven sevens of years leading to the year of jubilee.

A student soon becomes convinced that the elaborate rules regarding the sabbath suggest that there was another meaning which does not appear on the surface. We may call to mind the words of the Apostle Paul, who, in a sentence, tells us that Christians are not under the Mosaic law of the sabbath, and at the same time indicates the deeper meaning to which we have referred: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come" (Col. 2:16,17). We may well remember those last words, for they apply to so many matters in the Law given through Moses.