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THE EXPLICATION OF THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC
IN THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH,
with Particular Reference
to the Congregation at Corinth.

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"The kingdom of heaven is like leaven which
a woman took and hid in three measures of meal,
till it was all leavened." Matthew 13: 33

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of Purpose

There is a certain fascination about investigating the source of an individual's way of life, and particularly so when it concerns his faith and work. This thesis is the product of a curiosity related to the early Christian and his pagan environment. Few people would question the fact that the deeds of a man are rooted in what he believes to be the essential motivation for living rather than in a knowledge about life in general. Doubt spreads out dangerous tentacles which, if not overcome, can strangle a man's relation to the Almighty. In the first years of the Gospel's outreach among people of varied beliefs, and many of little or no faith, the conflict between the Christian and the pagan ways of life raised a battery of questions demanding satisfactory answers. Christianity's continued growth can be attributed, in part, to the fact that "the defenders of the faith" were able to do their

"work" well, i. e. gave the right answers. At the time of the advent of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Mediterranean world was far from stable religiously. In general, many people were looking for something more than what was offered in the pagan cults, though not ready to make a complete break with the old ways. To become a Christian meant to make a radical change in faith and works.

The purpose of this presentation shall be to give a glimpse of the world of Christ's day, before, during and immediately after his life on earth, and to view the attempts made to present for acceptance a way of life superior to any known theretofore. The concern is to be with the application, or "living-out", of the teachings of Christ. Since our Lord's contact with the world of his day was very limited, it fell to men like the Apostle Paul to "distribute" the Gospel, and to explain its implications for persons who desired to become and remain disciples. This new "way" or ethic had many hurdles to get over, and produced a variety of problems for believers and non-believers. It is to the unfolding of the distinctly Christian ethic that attention will be drawn in the pages to follow.

Christians in the twentieth century are indebted to the Christians of the first century for the efforts made to define morality in accordance with, and stemming from, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

B. Limitation of Study

The more complete an investigation can be, the better will be the understanding of the specific problem or situation. To realize the impact of the Christian Gospel on a pagan society, it would seem best to study as much as possible of the history of the Mediterranean world in the first few centuries of the Christian era. Likewise, no accurate results could be forthcoming without viewing the turbulent centuries prior to the Lord's advent. The Persian, Hellenistic and Roman invasions imprinted indelible marks on the culture of the conquered peoples, and Christian missionaries could not escape facing the problems which all this produced. To treat adequately the whole sphere of the religious and cultural conditions of even the first century world, is beyond the realm of this thesis. For our purposes a cursory look will be made with particular attention given to the city of Corinth. Should some one ask why Corinth has been singled out, the answer is found in the fact that in that city one of the first occasions arose for the definition and the expression in practice of the Christian ethic. Thus, our study becomes narrowed down as we proceed. This limitation is necessary in order to give opportunity for a close look at one specific situation.

C. Method of Approach

As has been indicated previously, a survey of conditions in the world of the day will be made. Then will follow an

examination of the teachings of Jesus Christ which deal specifically with the moral conduct of a man's life. Because the Gospel reaches into all of man's existence, there is difficulty in categorizing Christ's teaching. However, to get at the more finely delineated principles relating to ethics the focus of attention will be directed to Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount.

To keep within the limitations of the study, two New Testament letters will be examined, namely, Paul's two letters to the Corinthians. When the ethical principles have been gleaned from these sources, all attention will be drawn to an examination of the Gospel's encounter in Corinth with the Jews, pagans and Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Thus, background materials such as the history just immediately preceding the Christian era, and the Gospel itself, constitute a long prelude to the chief point of the thesis, namely, the Explication of the Christian Ethic in the first century church, with particular reference to the congregation at Corinth. Should the prelude appear too detailed for the scope of this study, it must be borne in mind that the world scene for the entrance of the Christian ethic determined the nature of the approach necessary to put it in "orbit." Christ's parable of the leaven illustrates the subject. Into a large portion of "dough" came the tiny bit of "yeast".

D. Definition of Terms

1. Ethics.

Man has felt from earliest times that life in order to reach its highest fulfilment must have a standard by which to guide his daily course. That which is good has been considered the goal for attainment. The name given to this "good" is ethics. It implies a sense of duty, or an "ought". Ethics is determined by what men regard as good. Perfection in life is attained by getting as close as possible to the "good". For the Greeks knowledge was the highest good, but for the Jews conformity with the Law constituted the ethic.

2. Christian Ethics.

Jesus Christ and all that he is stands as the highest good in the sphere of Christian ethics. Man's moral duty or "ought" stems from the Gospel. This pertains to his relationship as far as fellow man is concerned, and also his contact with Almighty God. All of life falls under the ethic, so that a man is under obligation to God and man. "Abundant life" is achieved through a surrender to him who is the source of the ethic.

CHAPTER II

RELIGION AND CULTURE AT THE DAWN OF CHRISTIANITY

A. Introduction

The turbulent centuries leading up to the birth and ministry of Jesus Christ present a fascinating and varying stream of events which provides the student of research an opportunity to approach a study from differing angles. However, when the aim of the study focuses on the status of religion and culture of the time, all roads lead to the main highway.

This particular chapter seeks to point up the chief characteristics of the Mediterranean world's culture and religion of the time just previous to the Christian mission, as well as the heritage from the past, and to highlight the contributions to Christian belief from other sources. It seems wise also to show the readiness of the times for Christian influence and adaptability to the principles of the new faith.

Paganism controlled the greatest number of lives, and sought to impose its practices on the Jews, whenever possible. The Greeks, Romans and others did succeed in adding some "color" to the Jewish ritual of living. A brief survey of conditions within the religious and cultural existence of these various groups will constitute the body of the chapter.

B. Paganism

1. The Greeks.

a. Program in Conquest

No cultural group made its influence more felt in the Mediterranean world than the Greeks. The strength of Persia and the might of Rome had to yield to Hellenistic overbearance in matters touching man's life and thought.

Palestine and the surrounding nations had experienced an ever-changing governmental system through the centuries. Greece became a determining factor in the world situation with Alexander the Great's mighty conquests. When in 331 B.C. he "defeated Darius at Gaugamela, a little town near Arbela, in what justly merits the name, one of the fifteen decisive battles of the world,"-- (he) put to an end for ever the Persian supremacy".¹ With that victory Alexander "had effectually removed the barrier between East and West, and had brought the magic of Greek civilization into the Oriental world".² It is correct to say, then, that Alexander the Great took the first decisive steps toward the unification of the lands bordering on the Mediterranean. His strategy was of such a nature that East and West readily mingled with one another.

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1. Morton Scott Enslin: Christian Beginnings, Part I, p.6.
2. Enslin, op. cit., p. 7.

Alexander did more than merely overrun and annex vast territories: in the train of his armies went Greek culture and civilization. He planted Greek cities at strategic points in the east, just as St. Paul, centuries later, was to plant Christian churches at strategic points in the west.¹

The fact that Greeks and Jews were brought into close relationships with one another through Alexander's conquests, paved the way for a more rapid advance of the Christian mission later on in the first century A.D.

Though Greek culture and religion became rooted in the soil of neighboring lands in east and west, the civilization which resulted from its spread consisted of a mixture of Persian, Jewish, Egyptian and other nationalities which adapted itself to Greek language, customs and ideas. The Hellenistic civilization, which name was given the period, was far from pure Greek, but at least it was predominately Greek.

b. Program in Thought.

That which Greece had to offer the world in the way of wisdom found no match in other quarters.

One of the greatest debts posterity owes to the Greeks is that they first taught mankind how to think. The bold questions of the Greek philosophy made men enquire into the truth of that which customs had taught them.²

Men have sought from earliest times to devise and discover guideposts for the living of a full life. Likewise, men

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1. Bible Today, The. (described by Christian Scholars.)p. 68.
2. F.J. Foakes-Jackson: The History of the Christian Church, p. 14.

have tried to determine that which lies back of all created things.

Reason became the key-word in Greek thought.

The Greek, when he chooses to be good, is acting in accordance with reason. All his actions should be eminently reasonable, and Socrates suggested that evil is in the last analysis error.¹

Truth is good, and perfection in all is to be desired.

As we all know, the idea of a mixture, which contained various elements mingled in the proper proportions, permeated Greek art and philosophy. The serene balance of Greek statuary, the precise perfection of columns and temples, the dislike of the loose, the lawless, the exaggerated, the insolent, and the profane, all proclaim the ideal at which the Greek aimed.²

Reason is confined to this world, and the body is a hindrance to the welfare of the spirit. Plato, Socrates, Aristotle and the whole array of philosophers left a rich storehouse of wisdom for generation after generation to ponder. Whatever criticism may be levelled at the Hellenists, it is faced by the fact that "the Greeks formulated an idea of man which has served ever since to distinguish civilization from barbarism".³ What the Greeks meant to accomplish in their philosophical pursuits was "to provide a self-contained and self-justifying system of ethics".⁴

c. Program in Religion.

With Greek philosophy came also a rather well-defined

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1. M. C. D'Arcy: Christian Morals, pp. 84; 85
2. Ibid., pp. 73; 74.
3. Ibid., p. 73.
4. C. H. Dodd: Gospel and Law, p. 10.

system of mythology. However, the two were not in agreement. The mythology allowed for many gods and goddesses with varying functions. The philosophy taught the oneness of the divine reality, though its forms were many. Alexander the Great's sudden death at the early age of thirty-three affected the spread of Greek philosophy and religion in such a way that its influence became ever greater. His empire crumbled with his death, but, to cite one example,

the Jewish people in Jerusalem and the country round about - - were subject, not only to the military and political overlordship of one or other of the neighboring great powers, but also to the steady pressure of the ideas and ideals of Hellenistic culture and civilization.¹

For two centuries previous to Christ's coming the Jews had struggled against the persistent attempts of Hellenism to win a footing. Their success did not continue, as a later discussion of the subject will reveal.

The change of ruling masters over the Mediterranean lands gave differing religions an opportunity to confront the conquered peoples with the claims of the respective faiths. The learned and the unlearned were influenced by strange new beliefs. Numbered among the group were the Eleusinian Mysteries of Greece. In Corinth there flourished the worship of Aphrodite, whose ritual was so ordered that in the performance of the exercises prescribed virgins lost their chastity. In some unknown

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1. Bible Today, The. p.p. 68:69

way the majority of the religions became mystery cults to satisfy the desire for important rites and a link with immortality in a new world.

In general all the mystery religions assumed the existence of a Lord, which had passed through various experiences on earth and finally been glorified and exalted. He had left behind the secret of obtaining the same reward, in the form, partly of knowledge, partly of magical ceremonies. His followers knew this secret, and admitted into it those whom the Lord was willing to accept. The initiated obtained protection in this world, and a blessed immortality after death. The Lord was probably not usually identified with the Supreme God.¹

By the time of Christ's birth a great change had taken place in the make-up of the various cults, and a great synthesis had occurred. Greek, Oriental, and Roman religions had produced a new form which prepared the way for the introduction of Christianity.

2. The Romans.

a. Military Might

Whereas Alexander the Great had taken the first decisive step toward the unification of the lands bordering on the Mediterranean Sea, it was the Roman Empire which solidified the union. Following the fall of Alexander's empire, Palestine and nearby territories experienced domination in turn by the Egyptians, Syrians and Romans. It was in the first century

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1. Kirsopp Lake: Landmarks in Early Christianity, p. 71.

B.C. that Caesar's army arrived to guide the ways of countless thousands.

-- it was not until 63 B.C. that the Romans deliberately interfered in Palestine with their customary effectiveness. In that year Pompey took advantage of a dispute as to the rulership, entered the Temple, and established Hyrcanus as king with Antipater, father of Herod the Great, as virtual ruler. The Hellenistic period was over, and the rule of Rome had begun.¹

In 46 B.C. Caesar sent his forces to rebuild the city of Corinth which had been destroyed to a large extent by the Roman army one hundred years earlier. To Corinth as well as to all other cities in the Empire came men from all parts of the world of the day -- Greeks, Latins, Syrians, Asiatics, Egyptians and Jews.

The work of Rome was to unite and organize the world, to destroy nationalities, and to improve communication. Under her rule men began to move freely from place to place.²

The wealth of Rome in the fields of government, trade, the arts, fashion, and gardening was brought into the provinces and accepted, at least in part, by many of the citizens. In the course of one hundred years the outlying districts had become completely Romanized. Trade between the countries was a determining factor in the conversion which took place. But Rome gained much for herself through her military conquests. The best which the lands of the Mediterranean had to offer was shipped

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1. Bible Today, The. p. 14.
2. Foakes-Jackson, op. cit., p. 14.

to Rome, and there enjoyed by the officials of the government, and people in general.

The Roman Empire was wealthy, and gloried in her fortune. But she used people for her own glory. Human life and dignity were not honored. Slavery was widespread, and demands were great. And, as has often been the case, the fortune of wealth became the unfortunate road to destruction. Rome's conquest was an expense in military might and money, and the occupation demanded constant vigilance. The taxes paid by the conquered peoples came from contemptuous hands. In the view of her eventual fall, Rome's wealth in power and peoples proved a far greater expense to her national pride than the wealth with which the glory of conquest had enriched her.

b. Spiritual Scene.

To the many religions already flourishing in Palestine and Asia Minor, Rome added one more when she became governing ruler. In her history existed an elaborate mythology, but by the time Roman legions had begun the conquest of other nations, the traces of the old beliefs had been replaced by a religion of emperor worship. Individuals were permitted to practice whichever form of religion they desired, just as long as they accepted the cult of the emperor.

The Roman policy was to allow as much freedom as possible for the use of native laws and the practice of the native religion, provided that Roman interests were not imperiled or

Roman standards of behavior gravely violated. Special concessions were made to the Jews on account of their religious scruples, and wide discretion was allowed to the Sanhedrin as a legal tribunal, though it is probable that they were not permitted to inflict capital punishment.¹

However, the spiritual needs of the empire people were not being met. The Graeco-Oriental mystery cults met the hunger of some, the philosophical pursuits of the Greeks satisfied still others, but the Egyptians, who had lost all sense of belonging to a living nation, and the Greeks who desired important rites, waited for more than was offered. The constant upheaval of government for the Greeks, Jews and Egyptians generated unrest and unwholesome confusion. One writer comments on the situation by stating that

all that can be proved from a detailed study of the mystery religions of the Roman Empire is that there was widespread spiritual discontent and deep-seated yearning for salvation in the first century A.D.²

No one can nor will deny that the Roman Empire played a leading role in the preparations required for the entry of Christianity on the world scene. Never intended to be a contributory element in the spread of the new faith, Rome, nevertheless, was used as an instrument for preparing the ground for the seed of the Word.

The unification of the Mediterranean lands by the Roman Empire, with the security that it afforded to traders, the

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1. Bible Today, The. p. 70.
2. William Foxwell Albright: From the Stone Age to Christianity, p. 396

good roads along which soldiers were always on the march, the wandering teachers, making for a common philosophy, the intermingling of the races in the towns, the majesty of the Roman law, the opening of Roman citizenship to the provincials, the importance acquired by educated slaves -- these factors prepared the way for a universal religion. In addition there were religious influences at work which ultimately tended in the same direction. The old religions were losing their grip. - - - In a hundred ways society in the Roman Empire was being prepared for the emergence of a new idea - conversion - and of a sacramental religion which would give to the individual a secure basis for facing his inner anxiety and outward terrors. - - - One element in the situation was of primary importance, the Jewish religion.¹

3. Others.

The Stoics and Epicureans each contributed a part to the general picture of man's welfare previous to Christianity's emergence. Stoicism had appropriated as its own the teachings of Plato -- "prudence or wisdom, fortitude, temperance, and justice".² "Popular Stoicism -- with its theistic turn, its popular monotheism, corresponding hostility to polytheism, and belief in divine retribution, was highly acceptable,"³ at least to the Jews. "Epicureanism was to every Jew an abomination on account of its reputed atheism and emphasis on pleasure as the 'summum bonum' of life."⁴ Each of these two camps had its own following. The movement which stirred up a great deal of controversy was Gnosticism, and continued its battle well into

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1. Bible Today, The. pp. 110:111.
2. Enslin, op. cit., p. 86.
3. Ibid., p. 86.
4. Ibid., p. 86.

the Christian era. Lebreton summarily describes it in the following way:

Gnosticism, in point of fact was a great religious movement before Christianity, to which it was opposed in its most profound tendencies. In the first centuries of our era, it invaded the whole Greco-Roman world, coming into collision with the Hellenic and Jewish religions before attacking Christianity. Its origin must be sought in the religious syncretism which, from the time of the conquests of Alexander, and still more since the Roman conquest, had mingled and fused together the Oriental cults. The name "gnosis" indicates the object aimed at: the knowledge or rather the vision of God; it is a divine revelation which almost always claims to be based upon some ancient message transmitted secretly by a chain of initiates, through this mysterious tradition, one is linked with primitive peoples such as the Egyptians, and through them, to the gods. - - Gnosticism claimed to be a doctrine of salvation as well as a revelation, it taught the soul how to free itself from the material world in which it is imprisoned, and to ascend once more towards the spiritual and luminous world from which it has fallen. This liberation is brought about by the communication of a heavenly revelation, accompanied often by magical formulas and rites. - - Gnosis is reserved for initiates.¹

Important points to keep in mind relative to Gnosticism's teachings are the emphasis on the pre-existence of the soul and that fate determines the course of a man's life.

Mithraism and Iranian influences were felt factors on the world stage, but not of great enough significance for further details in this study.

C. Judaism

1. Its Tribulations in Freedom and in Bondage

Close to a thousand years of unrest and instability

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1. Jules Lebreton and Jacques Zeiller: The History of the Primitive Church, p. 356.

constituted Jewish history previous to the introduction of Christianity. King Solomon's death triggered the start of Judaism's tragic chronicle. At that time (933 B.C.) the United Kingdom split, with Israel taking the dominant role on the scene. Two hundred years later came Israel's collapse at the hands of Sargon of Assyria. And at last the southern kingdom fell before the might of Babylon in 586 B.C. But in 538 B.C. Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon, and for the next two hundred years the Jews enjoyed quite a bit of freedom. Cyrus allowed the people to return to Palestine and to rebuild the Temple, but he showed no interest in restoring Israel to the status of a nation, nor did the Persians in general.

Then came subsequent conquests by Alexander the Great, the Egyptians, the Syrians and the Romans. Judaism struggled hard and long against the inroads of Hellenistic religion and culture. Wherever the Jews travelled or established new homes, the danger of Hellenism faced them.

The most important step toward the Hellenization of Jewry after Alexander's Conquest was taken during the reign of Ptolemy Logi, about 300 B.C., when many thousands of Jews came to Egypt, either as voluntary immigrants and mercenaries or as slaves.¹

During the third century B.C. when Egypt controlled Palestine, the Jews migrated to Alexandria. During the second century B.C. when Syria dominated Palestine, the Jews migrated

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1. Albright, op. cit., p. 348.

to Antioch. During the first century B.C. when the Romans took possession of the Holy Land, the Jews moved around to such an extent that they could be found in all parts of the Roman Empire. Thus, in Paul's time, he found countrymen wherever he travelled.

Each conqueror left a mark on Jewish life, and as was the case with the other subjected nations, too, the Greeks' influence was most impressive. But in the

two centuries of Persian control Judaism underwent many changes, and changes which were no less real because they were the result of conscious borrowing than of stimulation. Ideas were in the air; and Judaism accumulated a good deal which was alien to her early inheritance.¹

Iranian influence became felt in the second century, B.C.

The Jews, more than other peoples, felt a distinct sense of community. They desired to be left alone, and to carry on their cherished customs and practices unhindered.

It became natural for the Jewish communities to take precautions to avoid any contamination from the false religions and the low moral standards of heathenism.²

However, even Judaism's determined stand against infiltration weakened under pressure. Her tribulations in bondage were painful.

2. Its Position as a Faith among Other Faiths.

Judaism as a faith held to ethical purity, the world-

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1. Enslin, op. cit., p. 5.

2. Bible Today, The. p. 75.

wide destiny of the worship of Jehovah, and the truth of monotheism which she viewed as a replacement for all other religions. These tenets of faith were a matter of life or death to the devoted Hebrew. "To the Jew life consisted in the relation of human ends to divine purposes."¹

The conquest of Palestine by foreign armies raised havoc with the practice of the faith. The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem was an "abomination of abominations." We can hardly imagine the joy of the captive people when they learned that Cyrus of Persia would permit their return from Babylon with the right to rebuild the Temple.

Though Hellenism had tried in vain to make its influence felt, it is a fact that "the first traces of the impact of Greek thought on Jewish theology appear in the late third century B.C."²

More than three centuries of conscious, and at times militant, resistance to the infiltration or imposition of Greek customs and Greek religion had made the Jewish people intensely aware of themselves as a compact community closely bound to God and sharply distinguished from all other nations by their possession of God's law and their adherence to it.³

When a man realizes that his religious beliefs are grounded in a power which extends beyond mere human existence on earth, and that he is part of something which lies above mankind's absolute control, he cherishes the gift he possesses. The

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1. D'Arcy, op. cit., p. 84.
2. Albright, op. cit., p. 350.
3. Bible Today, The. p. 73.

Jews did that.

To the Jew his own law differed from the laws of all other nations in that it was not merely a code of behaviour, but was also the supreme revelation of the character and will of God. - - The whole duty of man was to know it, to understand its principles and its purposes, and to apply it rightly to all the situations that arise in life.¹

For Judaism to witness pagan practices at close hand, and to know that the weak in faith were being led into the Graeco-Oriental cults, was to be tormented without the opportunity to raise much of an offensive. When "on December 15, 168 B.C. a heathen altar to Zeus was erected on the top of the great altar of sacrifice, and ten days later a hog was sacrificed upon it,"² Judaism knew that the height of abomination had been committed against her. Hellenism did affect the course of Judaism, for both Sadducees and Pharisees came under its sway.

In spite of the fact that it was the Sadducees who first came under strong Hellenistic influence because of their patrician connections, it was the Pharisees who eventually became more thoroughly Hellenized. In fact, we are hardly going too far if we say that the Pharisaic movement represents the Hellenization of the normative Jewish tradition.³

Judaism's firm stand in the midst of a variety of pagan religions was undergirded by the presence of synagogues throughout the Graeco-Roman world. The dispersion of the Jews had made the development mandatory. In the end the synagogues "provided the pattern for the early Christian commun-

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1. Ibid, p. 72.
2. Enslin, op. cit., p. 15.
3. Albright, op. cit., p. 354.

ities which resulted from the missionary enterprises of St. Paul and others."¹

Reluctantly, but surely, a synthesis became a reality. No doubt, Judaism yielded the least, but gained the most. It was to her advantage that the Greeks opened her eyes to the fact of reason and a certain adaptability to modern times.

All the emphasis on the value of systematic study and on the widest possible scope of education was foreign to early Israel and to the ancient Orient in general, but was part and parcel of the liberal Hellenistic ideal. Again, Pharisaic insistence on the need of extending the operation of the Law to suit new conditions and to cover all possible eventualities was thoroughly Hellenistic.²

Judaism, on the threshold of Christianity's mission, and after nearly a thousand years of struggle and unrest, had prepared mankind for a new experience in the spiritual realm, i. e. prepared people in such a way that they desired a new experience of God.

D. Summary

The civilizations of the Greeks, Romans, Persians, Egyptians and Hebrews, in particular, became intermingled over the course of several hundred years just prior to Christianity's emergence as a distinct faith among other faiths. Hellenistic culture with an emphasis on reason in its philosophical thought,

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1. Bible Today, The. p. 74.
2. Albright, op. cit., p. 355.

Rome's elegance in peace and war, Persia's lenient control in conquest, Egypt's strange religions and Judaism's determined stand relative to God's Law, are but a few of the factors which played into shaping a field for the Christian missionary effort. Pagan religions ranging from pure mythology, as in Greece and Rome, to Oriental mystery cults and Roman emperor worship, failed to satisfy the pressing needs of people for a wholesome way of life.

Hellenism, which exerted the most profound influence in all of the Mediterranean world, even penetrated Judaism's staunchly guarded wall. The Jews regarded life as a series of acts, whereas the Greeks looked upon a man for what he was, rather than for what he did. Early Christianity held itself more to the Greek view at first, but later moved over to the view of Judaism.

Greece gave systematic thought to the world of the day and expressed it in a language unsurpassed, Rome solidified the union of the lands bordering on the Mediterranean and the Jews pointed men's thought to God and the Law. Christianity could use these factors in the interest of the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER III
DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES OF THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC

A. Introduction

The attraction of men the world over to Jesus Christ and all that pertains to his person and teaching has not lessened through the years. To the contrary, interest has grown and continues to develop. This can be said also with some degree of accuracy relative to those individuals and groups opposed to the Christian mission. Nobody can deny the expansive outreach of the gospel message. History has been, and is, tied directly to the advent of Christ on earth. World history was changed at the point where God the Father crossed man's path as God the Son, And, when God, the Father and the Son, became manifested as the Holy Spirit, there was no possibility of stopping the Christian gospel's infiltration into all areas of man's daily life. With the lofty and determined promise of Christ that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," the Holy Christian Church has shown the way for mankind through the centuries. Nations have been built on the principles enunciated by Jesus, and empires have fallen due to a denunciation of his teachings. Corrupt peoples have been cleansed and wayward individuals have been directed to life's righteous path.

The drama connected with the rise of a Christian civilization presents one fascinating act after the other. Behind

the entire drama rest the living principles given to the world through the preaching and teaching of Christ in word and deed. Some of what he said and did differs but little from that of the Jews and Gentiles. However, the main body of his message is of such a nature that other teachers hold a minor second place.

This chapter attempts to present the distinctive qualities of the Christian ethic, i. e. - the Gospel in action. Jesus' main teachings on the moral conduct of a man's life as found in the Gospel according to Matthew and particularly in the Sermon on the Mount comprises the first section of the study. Secondly, an examination of the Apostle Paul's concept of man's moral responsibility is conducted in his two letters to the Corinthian congregation of believers. No particular analysis of the material examined is made in this chapter. Such a study is incorporated in the chapter which follows.

B. As Taught by Jesus in the Gospel according to Matthew

I. Concerning Love

The need arises at the outset to define the meaning of "love". How to do so can be a problem. Jesus both defines and clarifies what love is, but he does it mostly through illustration. Without mentioning the word "love" he cleverly describes its content in what he said to the disciples relative to the coming judgment:

Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' - - - 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'¹

There is no separation possible between love as it relates to God and to man. Love is a relationship which demands undivided attention and unreserved devotion. God demands that, and his first commandment bears witness to it. Jesus, in desiring to explain man's responsibility to his creator "sought continually to show that the touchstone of ethics must always be the character of God."² When asked: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" - - he said to them:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.³

"For Jesus the two commandments are in themselves sufficient, without any supplement whatever, as a complete guide to anyone who wishes to live."⁴

There is but one direct reference to love in the Sermon on the Mount, and it is as lofty as all other references in the Holy Scriptures. Jesus is quoted as saying,

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1. Matt. 25: 31-36, 40
2. Lindsay Dewar: An Outline of New Testament Ethics, p. 17
3. Matt. 22: 36-40
4. T.W. Manson: The Teachings of Jesus, p. 305

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven.
- - - You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly
Father is perfect.¹

God will not lower his standards, and Christ puts emphasis on
that point with the last verse. Martin Luther defined Christian
love as follows: "to be a Christ to our neighbors."²

The perfection of God's own love is best exemplified
in that which John writes about when he says, "God so loved the
world that he gave his only Son."³ Christ in his teaching and
preaching, and in the manner of his life brought mankind face
to face with life's highest ideal, perfect love.

2. Concerning Man

Nowhere in the Bible does Christ deviate from the
ideal. Sinful man is never permitted to rest secure in his present
state. This point is fortified by the Lord's warning in the opening
chapter of the Sermon on the Mount where he says,

Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments
and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of
heaven, but he who does them and teaches them shall be called
great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your
righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you
will never enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴

Christ would emphasize man's uniqueness as an individual with

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1. Matt. 5:44-45, 48
2. Paul Ramsey: Basic Christian Ethics, p. 21
3. John 3:16
4. Matt. 5:19-20

responsibility toward God and fellowman. Man is not to flee in the face of the Almighty's imperatives. As the Scriptures point up clearly, God created man in his own image, but man wilfully destroyed the harmonious relationship.

Sin is, in short, the consequence of man's inclination to usurp the prerogatives of God, to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, thus making destructive use of his freedom by not observing the limits to which a creaturely freedom is bound.¹

In comparison to pagan conceptions of man's worth Christ's view of the individual creates a tremendous gulf between the two. This can be said to some degree also relative to the Jews. "It was Jesus who first brought to light the infinite value of every personality in the sight of God, and in so doing he made his profoundest contribution to ethics."² To his disciples and others Christ said, "You are the salt of the earth - - - You are the light of the world."³ At one point Jesus said to those gathered about him, "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep."⁴ Though that particular reference is used most often in speaking of the Pharisees' legalistic observance of the sabbath, the point of man's infinitely greater value over other created beings receives attention. D'Arcy, in

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1. Reinhold Niebuhr: Faith and History, p. 121
2. Albert C. Knudson: The Principles of Christian Ethics, p. 79
3. Matt. 5: 13, 14
4. Matt. 12: 11, 12

discussing this particular point, states:

I said that the pagan moral did not take sufficient notice of what we mean by person. We now think in terms of person and liberty and rights and private conscience. These are the gifts of Christian morality. The Gospel made it clear that the old distinctions of slave and citizen of a State were inapplicable, for we were citizens of no mean city and all free as the sons of God. And so from an external ethic of conduct the emphasis changed to a law of interior holiness. Each man is unique, an edition de luxe, and his worth is beyond all price.¹

Christ's mission on earth had to do with the preservation of man's eternal worth. His preaching, teaching and manner of life and death were purposely directed toward man's salvation. His ethical teaching reaches all the way into man's most protected corners of the soul. To be as God wants man to be he must exercise God's will in everything with everything. Self-will and self-directed matters lead to man's certain destruction. The Lord admonished his hearers to "beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them,"² "and when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men."³

Whoever reads through the "Woe to you" section in Matthew 23 sees clearly how relentlessly Jesus strikes out at truth and purity in men's thoughts and deeds. Hypocrites have

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1. D'Arcy, op. cit., p. 97
2. Matt. 6:1
3. Matt. 6:5

no place in God's kingdom, and to the scribes and Pharisees the words were hard put: "So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."¹ As a reminder that the core of an individual's life finds expression in his thoughts, words and deeds, and that purity is essential for the soul's well-being, Christ said,

What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man.²

Christ has left no doubt in other's minds relative to his ethic for the moral life of man. Purity in deed springs from purity at the source.

3. Concerning Idolatrous Worship

Although the Gospel according to Matthew contains very little which is related directly to the worship of idols, the insertion of this particular section will serve its purpose in the general picture of man's situation in a pagan-controlled civilization. The Apostle Paul faced the problem wherever he travelled in Asia Minor, while Jesus rarely encountered it. Mystery religions and pagan cults flourished in the Pauline territory. The Jews in Palestine struggled with the observance of the Law and the indifference of people to its harsh demands.

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1. Matt. 23: 28
2. Matt. 15: 18-20

However, there exists in the Gospel sufficient evidence to show that Jesus was concerned about and wished to guide his people in worship of the One, true God. His very first utterance on the subject came early in the Sermon on the Mount: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."¹ As in all that the Master said and did, God was to have the glory. This but reiterates the first commandment of the Mosaic Law. Who can deny the fact that the Lord's Prayer is an ethical admonition for God's glory?

The ethic of Jesus Christ spreads itself beyond a particular form of idolatrous worship known to the world of the day, as we have seen already. Other evidence of that fact comes to light through these words, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth - - - but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. - - - For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."² Though men have sought to please both God and self-interests, the attempt has proven itself to be frustrating. Jesus warns: "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."³

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1. Matt. 5: 16
2. Matt. 6: 19-21
3. Matt. 6: 24

Again, let it be said that Christ eliminates idolatrous worship in any form by directing men's thoughts, words and deeds to the glorification of God Almighty.

4. Concerning Relations with Fellowmen

When Jesus was asked to state which was the great commandment in the law, he answered that it had to do with the love of God. Rather than leave the matter there, he said a second commandment like the first and great one was, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."¹ There is stated the ethic for man's conduct relative to fellowmen. By tying the two commandments together as he did, there need be no doubt as to the connection between the first and the second. A man's relationship to his neighbor hinges on his own relationship to God. The individual man is incapable of fulfilling the commandment alone.

Christ is the supreme moral authority of human life. He inspires a new ideal of character and conduct, which it has been found impossible to realize except by His aid.²

Love consists of many things, but one of its components is the willingness to forgive. Because man is incapable of a sinless existence, strife and misunderstanding arise often between individuals. Christ has endowed the world with ethical principles which establish and maintain workable relations among men in general. As often as the Lord's Prayer is uttered, many lose

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1. Matt. 22: 39

2. H. R. Mackintosh: The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ, p. 326

sight of what is asked of Christ: "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."¹ God's right to forgive is conditioned by man's forgiveness of his brother's wrong. And when Christ was asked about the extent of forgiveness, he answered in such a way that man's patience is tested severely:

"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven."²

Men might see it possible to forgive friends, but when Christ said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven,"³ the teaching, without doubt, was adjudged as impractical.

Jesus did not release the Christian from a single social obligation. He even, to the dismay of some moralists, went on talking about rewards for good conduct. Yet the spirit had changed.⁴

The prelude to the Sermon on the Mount, often referred to as "Blessings of the Christian Life," contributes a worthy chapter in the whole matter of man-to-man relationship. Three verses are applicable to this section.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.⁵

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1. Matt. 6: 12
2. Matt. 18: 21, 22
3. Matt. 5: 44-45
4. S. L. Greenslade: The Church and the Social Order, pp. 11, 12
5. Matt. 5: 9-12

Christ would have all men to live at peace with one another. Evidence of that has been produced already. But there remains yet more to support the point. He said at one time, "But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment."¹ At the same time he admonished:

If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.²

Love consists of more than a willingness to forgive. Perhaps it is better to say that man cannot love without being humble. No discussion of ethical principles can be conducted without a recognition of Jesus' clear statement that "whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave."³ A summary of the Lord's teaching concerning relations with fellowmen is found in the well-known "Golden Rule": "whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."⁴

5. Concerning Man's Body

There is not very much in the Gospel according to Matthew relative to what Jesus has to say about the use of the body. A great deal is implied in what is said on other subjects.

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1. Matt. 5: 22
2. Matt. 5: 23, 24
3. Matt. 20: 27
4. Matt. 7: 12

When the Lord defined the first great commandment, and the second one, too, he established once and for all time a connection between God and man's body. Love of God envelops all that is created. Therefore, man shall honor and glorify the Father in and with the body.

In order to abate fears of inadequate providence, Christ felt moved to assure men:

"Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' - - - seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."¹

At only one point is any mention made in the direction of man's sexual life. Christ recognized the human situation well, and, undoubtedly was aware of the serious problems which existed. He expanded the sixth commandment of the Law by saying "that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."² In relation to that, and to all other human matters, Jesus said, "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."³ The ethics for the use and preservation of man's body relates directly to God, and in that way differs not one iota from the Christian ethic in general.

6. Concerning Marriage

The person who seeks to put his finger on what Jesus

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1. Matt. 6:31-33
2. Matt. 5:28
3. Matt. 26:41

Christ has to say on the matter of what constitutes a valid marriage will discover that "our Lord is not recorded in the New Testament as having said anything on this subject."¹

However, he has several things to communicate on the matter of the sanctity and responsibility of marriage. Strange as it may seem, the subject of divorce became the focal point for clarification of the validity of the marriage contract. It was the Pharisees who raised the question,

"is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder." - - - "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery."²

Our Lord lays the foundation of the family by plainly teaching the doctrine of the indissoluble nature of marriage. - - - Moreover it was a complete novelty in the world. It had no parallel in the Hebrew, the Roman, the Greek, or the Egyptian civilizations.³

Two things bear mention before the discussion is ended.

The first concerns a husband's and wife's position in regard to respective parents. Christ's reply to the Pharisees contains a clear statement of fact that the claims of husband and wife override those of father and mother. A second point centers on the prominent place given to children by the Lord. Dewar says that

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1. Dewar, op.cit., p. 97
2. Matt. 19:3-6, 8
3. Dewar, op.cit., pp. 87, 88

"he (Christ) is the only one among the founders of great religions who has done so."¹ To think so highly of children implies that the sanctity of marriage be upheld at all costs.

7. In General

Christ's primary concern so far as man is concerned lies in the direction of an abundantly rich and fruitful life. Again and again he refers to a meaningful existence. The way to the best in life finds formulation in these words, just to cite one example,

"For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?"²

Christ directed his entire ministry toward making the moral life a result of man's wholehearted submission to the will of God. He did all that was possible to make the Christian life a life of common sense, i. e. a life which derives its actions from understandable principles. Jesus reacted against the legalism and formalism of Judaism. As a result of the Lord's teachings

the moral ideal for Christians lies not in a code, nor in a social order. It lies in a life where love to God and man is the spring of every thought and word and action: and for Christians the sum of all morality is to have the same mind which was also in Christ Jesus.³

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1. Dewar, op.cit., p.89
2. Matt. 16:25,26
3. Manson, op.cit., p.312

There are many places where a starting point can be made when the essentials of Christ's ethical teachings are to be examined. The opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount define so well the fruit of a life fashioned according to Jesus' ideals. Near the top of the list of the Beatitudes "is the first feature in the characterization of the Christian ideal":¹ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."² As has been mentioned previously, the willingness to submit to God's will makes possible a productive result in day to day living.

For the Christian it is still true that the moral supremacy of Christ, in its majestic gravity, covers the length and breadth and depth and height of human experience, and subjection to it is not a question of less or more, but a question of life and death.³

Man is placed under judgment regardless of the stand he takes to the Gospel. However, the judgment differs in that the obedient are allowed to taste the goodness of the Lord, while the disobedient break themselves apart by their own hardness of heart.

Christ's method of bringing men in under his ethics is unique, and quite opposite to that practiced by the legalistic Jews. Georgia Harkness states it well by saying that "he made the kingdom of God and not the triumph of Israel the supreme note

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1. Dewar, op. cit., p. 44
2. Matt. 5:5
3. Mackintosh, op. cit., p. 327

in his teaching."¹ The way in which Jesus sought to make his ideal live in man then is the same as he would have it develop today.

The law of Christ works by setting up a process within us which is itself ethical activity. His precepts stir the imagination, arouse the conscience, challenge thought, and give impetus to the will, issuing in action. In so far as we respond, holding the commandments steadily in view, reflecting upon them, and yet treating them not merely as objects for contemplation, but as spurs to action; there gradually comes to be built up in us a certain outlook on life, a bias of mind, a standard of moral judgment. The precepts cannot be directly transferred from the written page to action. They must become, through reflection and through effort, increasingly a part of our total outlook upon life, of the total bias of our minds. Then they will find expression in action appropriate to the changing situations in which we find ourselves.²

Jesus wished to instill in men a free-will adherence to God's basic command of love.

C. As Expressed by Paul in his letters to the Corinthians

1. Concerning Love

No one defines the meaning of love more eloquently than the Apostle in the thirteenth chapter of his first letter to the Christians at Corinth.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

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1. Georgia Harkness: Christian Ethics, p.49
2. Dodd, op.cit., p.77.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecy, it will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.¹

This is not the place for a discussion of the significance of such a definition for the bewildered Corinthians, but it does bear saying that Paul did the people an outstanding service through his act.

For persons whose environment consisted of the best and the worst in a variety of cultures, a clear and somewhat understandable presentation of the way of the Christian moral life was an absolute necessity.

Agapé takes us to the heart of Pauline ethics. It sums up for St. Paul the character of Christ and, in consequence, is the criterion of Christian conduct. "For me to live is Christ" St. Paul once said, expressing it all in a single sentence.²

As the leading interpreter and teacher of the Gospel as proclaimed by Jesus Christ, Paul's task became that of winning followers to the Way by showing people in varying situations how and why love is "a still more excellent way"³ than their old approach. Paul holds that agapé is the chief Christian virtue. And what is agapé ?

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1. I Cor. 13
2. Dewar, op.cit., p. 133
3. I Cor. 12: 31 b

It seems to be reasonably clear from I Corinthians 13 that it is, in fact, the naming of that supreme quality of personality which was manifested in the Incarnate life of the Son of God.¹

C.H. Dodd says this:

Provisionally, we might say that agapé is energetic and beneficent good will which stops at nothing to secure the good of the beloved object. It is not primarily an emotion or an affection, it is primarily an active determination of the will.²

It is utterly impossible to understand love apart from the Gospel.

Thus, for Paul, faith and love are inseparable. Faith implies a denunciation of the self. The Greeks in Corinth boasted of their "knowledge" and of their ability "to know". All this centered on the self. To offset such thinking, Paul said, "'knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up."³ It was the Apostle's desire to cement a firm fellowship between believing persons. For "it is those who share the Spirit and are bound in mutual love who make up the body of Christ, the Church."⁴

Thus, for Paul, man's moral life, or rather, man's entire being, cannot live productively apart from love.

The great achievement of agapé, according to Paul, is evidently to produce that oneness of mind which blesses any community where it is found - a oneness of mind which comes from the Spirit of Christ, or, in other words, the Holy Spirit.⁵

2. Concerning Man

There never needs be question of man's degradation

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1. Dewar, op.cit. p.127
2. C.H. Dodd: The Meaning of Paul for Today, p.42
3. I Cor. 8:1
4. Rudolf Bultmann: Primitive Christianity, p.205
5. Dewar, op.cit., p.130

after reading the Pauline epistles. The individual who avows that man is not a sinner, or enjoys the pleasures of evil, avoids acknowledging known facts. Dewar has categorized the vices which are to be found in the Pauline writings, and notes the seven lists which exist: Romans 1:29-31; ICor.5:11; I Cor.6:9; II Cor.12:20; Gal.5:19,20; Ephesians 4:31,5:3; Col.3:5-8.¹

Comparing the lists, then, we find that three vices occur in five of the lists. These are: fornication, which heads the list each time it is mentioned; covetousness, and idolatry. Wrath occurs in four of the lists. It seems to be a fair inference to conclude that the Apostle regarded these as the most prevalent vices in the church. It is noteworthy that in each case fornication comes first.²

In his Corinthian correspondence Paul does not say directly that man is a sinner, but all that he writes about man's behavior shows clearly his belief. He admonishes individuals profusely: "Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God,"³ "Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,"⁴ "be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature,"⁵ "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,"⁶ "be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong."⁷

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1. Dewar, op.cit., pp.147-149
2. Ibid., p.150
3. II Cor.7:1
4. I Cor., 5:8
5. I Cor.14:20
6. I Cor.15:58
7. I Cor.16:13

In what the Apostle says can be seen quite clearly that the approach is to the individual. This is not group action so much as it is the result of each particular person assuming responsibility for what happens. Paul himself "is free because he has been made free by the grace of God, and has surrendered freely to his grace."¹ But Paul wishes to assure men who are bothered by the condition in which they find themselves: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man."² Then, too, he feels constrained to say: "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men."³ Paul would have all men to know Jesus Christ, and held that the goodness of God makes such possible.

This individualizing of man's relation to God has its roots in the Psalms and Wisdom literature, and above all in Jeremiah. But its full implications were never realized until the time of Paul with his radical conception of the grace of God.⁴

3. Concerning Idolatrous Worship

Paul was compelled to formulate ethical principles relative to idols and that which directly stemmed from or belonged to the worship of such. Previous mention has been made of the influx of pagan religions in the Asia Minor territory. Therefore, all of that which the Apostle talks about in the Corinthian letters is the result of the particular problems there.

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1. Bultmann, op. cit., p. 186
2. I Cor. 10: 13
3. I Cor. 7: 23
4. Bultmann, op. cit., p. 188

The first statement on the subject is strong and unconditional: "neither the immoral, nor idolaters - - - will inherit the kingdom of God."¹ The Apostle can say what he does because the first commandment of the Law gives most positive support to him. He even asks in the second letter, "What agreement has the temple of God with idols?"² At another point it is as if Paul restates the Lord's admonition, "You cannot serve God and mammon," when he says,

I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.³

In Corinth the situation developed often that a Christian found himself as a guest in the home of pagans. Meat and other food which had been offered to the idols was served at mealtimes. What a Christian should do in such cases needed clarification, and Paul sought to do that in the best way he could.

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth - as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords" - yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through being hitherto accustomed to idols, eat food as really offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not

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1. I Cor. 6: 9, 10
2. II Cor. 6: 16
3. I Cor. 10: 20, 21

eat and no better off if we do. Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling-block to the weak. For if any one sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol's temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.¹

Knowing the weakness of man, and particularly the situation as it existed with the recent converts from paganism, the Apostle's admonishments are summed up best in his short statement, "Therefore, ye beloved, shun the worship of idols,"²

4. Concerning Relations with Fellowmen

A distinct problem existed in Corinth relative to the Christian congregation, its members and people in general. The believers had divided themselves into parties, and the rivalry had worked itself up to strife. The desired unity of the group was absent. It fell to Paul through his letters to unify the body, and to motivate the individuals to better behavior in regard to all people in general. From the Epistles it becomes quite clear that "the Corinthians failed in fellowship with each other largely because they had failed in fellowship with God."³

In the light of that known fact Paul says, "I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."⁴

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1. I Cor. 8: 4-11

2. I Cor. 10: 14

3. W.G. Robinson: The Gospel and the Church in a Pagan World, p.54

4. I Cor. 1: 10

Paul was very anxious that the Christians should use every opportunity to advance the mission of Jesus Christ. There are constant reminders of the individual's responsibility to God and man. Strife and envy, deceitfulness and falsity could only bring harm. Fellowship cannot come without man's effort to live harmoniously with other persons. In keeping with Jesus' own teaching, Paul says, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor."¹ Because of his approach to men in the interests of furthering a certain feeling of brotherliness, Stead prefers to say that "The work of this apostle was much more social than ecclesiastical. Wherever he went he founded communities rather than what we conventionally know as churches."² Unity and sanctity are important factors for the health of any fellowship of people. To guard against one common human fault Paul was prompted to warn the people that "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven ferments the whole lump of dough?"³ This applied to much else also. Paul said, for example,

We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute.⁴

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1. I Cor. 10: 24
2. Francis Herbert Stead: The Story of Social Christianity, p. 32
3. I Cor. 5: 6
4. II Cor. 6: 3-8

The Apostle became disturbed at reports that certain Corinthians were going to court with lawsuits against another. He reminded them that "to have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you."¹ He wondered why they could not settle such differences among themselves, instead of employing unbelievers to straighten out the differences. Paul wanted very badly to show the outsiders that Christians had a better way of doing things. He himself kept close to the Master in all things. Thus, he said, "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. - - - Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."² And how did Paul serve the Lord in his relations with other men? Here it is:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became 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. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.³

No one can question the pattern of ethical conduct in such a profession. Lebreton interprets Paul correctly when he states the Apostle's intentions in these words, "we must be generous, after the example of Christ, who being rich became poor."⁴ The companionship of men with men, to be productive, calls for the existence of the love

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1. I Cor. 6: 7
2. I Cor. 10: 31, 11: 1
3. I Cor. 9: 19-23
4. Lebreton, op. cit., p. 338

of God in each heart.

5. Concerning Man's Body

The Pauline ethic reaches into all areas of mankind's existence. Paul even has specific principles to apply relative to man's own body. He says, for example,

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.¹

The misuse to which pagans subjected their bodies presented a serious problem when the Christian mission was launched.

Promiscuity in sex relationships was held to be of no account in those days. - - - St. Paul warns the Corinthians that initiation into the Christian Society will not of itself ensure that all is well. The fact that these ideas sound well-nigh incredible to a Christian today is a measure of the greatness of the ethical triumph of Christianity.²

Paul saw that the only approach he could use was to impress upon the people the fact that the body was a creation of God to be used to his honor and glory. To profane the body was to sin against God. "The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."³

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never. Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her?⁴

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1. I Cor. 6: 18-20
2. Dewar, op. cit., pp. 151, 152
3. I Cor. 6: 13
4. I Cor. 6: 15-16

Apparently the diversity of promiscuity was great.

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. And you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.¹

From his other letters as well as from the Corinthian letters, it is shown clearly that the Apostle was fully aware of the weakness of the flesh. As to his own life he said, "I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."² Christians of today need have no doubts as to the magnitude of the task which confronted Paul, nor of the determined effort he made to bring glory to the name of Jesus Christ. The church of today needs to recognize that "the banner of personal purity was first raised in the pagan world by Christianity, and the first Christians did not find it by any means easy to follow it."³

6. Concerning Marriage

Much of what Paul has to say on the question of marriage is colored by his own opinions on the subject. He states at several points that what is being written is not that of Christ, but of his own thinking. The restlessness, uncertainty of the times and looseness of morals in general influenced his expressions to a large degree. An individual has no difficulty in concluding that Paul

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1. I Cor. 5: 1-2
2. I Cor. 9: 27
3. Dewar, op. cit., p. 150

opposed divorce, i. e. within the fellowship of believers, and that he believed persons would do best not to marry.

"St. Paul states that the tradition of our Lord's teaching which he had received knew no permission of divorce."¹ And, from what can be gleaned from various sources, "there was never any tradition in the early Church approving divorce for adultery."² Paul, apparently sanctions divorce if an unbeliever desires such from a believer.³ The reason he gives for consenting is that God desires men to live in peace, and not strife. This, then, is the sum total of what he mentions about the right to divorce. Paul also talks about the action desirable for believers who are married to unbelievers. He says,

If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband.⁴

In the second letter to the Corinthians the Apostle says in short, "Do not be mismated with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity?"⁵

In looking closer at the view on marriage, it is easy to grasp Paul's contention that as conditions were then, a man and woman could serve Christ better without being married. He says,

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1. Dewar, op.cit., p. 93
2. Ibid, p. 95
3. I Cor. 7: 15
4. I Cor. 7: 12-14
5. II Cor. 6: 14

It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.¹

Another side of the picture is presented when he says,

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.²

Since cares of the home and interest in the well-being of the spouse takes time and attention, the Apostle used such situations to warn against marriage, i. e. for those who seek to do the Lord's work.

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband.³

In conclusion it must be said that Paul's approach to the question of marriage lacks definite statements against and for marriage. He seeks to discourage it without causing offense, and permits marriage through compromise. He says at one point, "but if you marry, you do not sin."⁴

7. In General

Paul's attempt to shed light on the essentials of Chris-

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1. I Cor. 7: 1-3
2. I Cor. 7: 8, 9
3. I Cor. 7: 32-34
4. I Cor. 7: 28

tian conduct has its roots in that which he continually emphasized: "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."¹ "The religious ethic of St. Paul was entirely Christocentric."² But it must be said, too, that Paul's extremely well-grounded faith, which had firm roots in the Law of Moses, became clear and was evident in his ethical teachings. For him "the righteousness of God" "is the basis of all morality, and it is to be found in the Jewish Law."³ Faith in God through Jesus Christ is an absolute essential for a right moral life. From the Christian faith grows virtue. It is interesting to note the list of virtues as found in the Pauline epistles, and how often they occur:

Joy - 19 times; peace - 33 times; longsuffering - 6 times; kindness - 6 times; goodness - 3 times; meekness - 4 times; temperance - nowhere else; compassion - 3 times; humility - 6 times; forbearing - 3 times; forgiving - 5 times.⁴

Let it be noted here, too, that "faith - (with meaning as a virtue) - occurs with this meaning no less than 87 times within the brief compass of St. Paul's letters."⁵ The ethical principles of Christianity's greatest interpreter are steeped in the strenuous message of love which Christ lived and died for. "Paul's greatest service was to make clear once for all that religion must be ethical and that ethics must be rooted in religion."⁶

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1. I Cor. 3: 11
2. Ramsey, op.cit., p. 18
3. Dewar, op.cit., p. 122
4. Ibid, p. 145
5. Ibid, p. 146
6. Harris Franklin Rall: According to Paul, p. 261

D. Summary

The words of Christ's message to men, and the interpretation of the message through the genius of the Apostle Paul have been cited very often in the course of the present chapter. A reading and study of the texts lays bare the quality of the ethics taught by Jesus and Paul. Both men have much in common, and particularly the mutual desire to bring honor and glory to the Almighty God.

The prime difference between the ethics of Christ and those of the Apostle lies in the realm of application. Jesus had to deal with fellow Jews, while Paul had Jews, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians and much else for an "audience." Man's conduct in regard to God, to idols, to fellowmen, to man's own body and in the area of marriage bears fruitful and lasting results when motivated by the love of God.

The Apostle Paul, by the help of God, imitated Jesus Christ. To the Corinthians and all others he preached, "I urge you, then, be imitators of me,"¹

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1. I Cor. 5:16

CHAPTER IV
THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC AND ITS EARLY ENCOUNTERS;
AT CORINTH IN PARTICULAR

A. Introduction

The Christian mission, with its irresistible message of love and its penetrating code of ethics, began when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"¹ The strength of Roman, Hellenistic, Persian, Egyptian and Jewish culture swayed before its advance and in time fell "victim" to the news of God's love and mercy. People in Palestine and Asia Minor and other parts of the world lent a ready ear to the men and women who zealously proclaimed the Gospel wherever and whenever the opportunity presented itself. Results of the proclamation became visible and felt by degrees. "In general, it may be said that the fruits of the gospel in first-century society were conservative but not reactionary, revolutionary but not iconoclastic or fanatical."² A great deal of discussion was aroused by Christ's teachings and Paul's interpretation of them. Agreement, disagreement, misunderstanding and gratitude say but little in regard to the reception given the Gospel. Though the spirit of the age consisted of a Greek-Roman culture, a pagan society and a fervent

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1. John 1:14
2. Harkness, op.cit., p.81

religious temper among the Jews, evidence has shown that people in general were tired of the old and ordinary way of life and expectantly waiting for something better to come in its place. When the humble man from Nazareth began walking in the streets and pathways of everyday life preaching and teaching by word and deed in a most authoritative way, the confused and meaningless existence of many people was turned suddenly into a most exciting adventure. Jesus spoke of love - and the word was new to the majority.

This love was more intense, more inclusive, more dominant than anything to which the pagan world was accustomed. - - - It was a self-denying love, a love directed toward the help of the needy.¹

The fire of love spread from the Galillean hills to Jerusalem to Antioch and westward to Rome within a generation or so after the death of Christ. The new faith was a gift from God which depended upon the Holy Spirit for life and growth. Believers belonged to a fellowship, a community known as the Church. Within this fellowship men found the new order of life. For the New Testament writers,

the whole ethical life of Christians takes place within a social organism which is not self-contained or self-complete; a community which is a body only because it is Christ's body, depends upon Him, and serves His ends.²

Paul adopted the term "in Christ" to express what is most characteristic of the life lived as a member of the Church. Since

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1. Albert C. Knudson: The Principles of Christian Ethics, p.42
2. Dodd, op.cit., p.34

the day God's Holy Spirit brought the fellowship of believers into existence, believers "in Christ" have experienced a transformation of their social relationships. The Christian ethic lays its gentle but firm demands upon each Christian.

In the beginning

the Church was not in a position to influence society through pressure upon the administration, local or central. Nor did it think much about influencing society, except indirectly through the better conduct of individual converts. Besides worship, the first duty of the Church was to grow, without compromising its own faith and moral demands. Confronted by a pagan society, lacking social prestige, unrecognized and frequently persecuted by secular authority, the Church was bound to distinguish itself sharply from the world. Conversion meant renunciation.¹

Within the pages of the present chapter an attempt is made to shed light on the encounter between the Christian ethic and the Jews, Gentiles, Jewish and Gentile Christians, particularly in the city of Corinth. Though the Apostle Paul's letters to the Corinthians give but a glimpse of his attempt in the explication of the Christian ethic, history since that time has proven again and again the triumphant victory of Christian over pagan and Jewish moral principles.

We must keep clearly before us the fact that Christianity is not primarily a system of ideas or an ethical ideal; it is an historical movement into which ideas and ideals enter, but which is first of all the redemptive action of the Eternal working in time.²

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1. Greenslade, op. cit., p. 15
2. Rall, op. cit., p. 253

B. With the Jews

The Christian ethic was first presented by Jesus to his own people at services of worship in the synagogue. Shortly after he began his ministry, the Lord is reported as speaking to crowds gathered in observance of the Sabbath. The Gospel accounts of his life also make it clear that scribes and Pharisees questioned his words and deeds at many points because he went beyond the limits of the Law. The average Jew was bound by the Mosaic Law and the ordinances grounded on it. Within the Jewish community was a party known as the Pharisees.

The Pharisee kept himself apart as one who would observe to the letter each commandment contained in the Law, and each separate interpretation expounded by his scribes. If the rule said that a man must not break the sanctity of the seventh day, he would define every possible way of breaking it, and avoid them all. - - - The terms "religious" and "righteous" were simply equated for him. ¹

Jesus, and later Paul, reacted strongly against such a practice. Conformity to the Law, regardless of inner motives, was mere form, and form had little or nothing to do with love, Christian ethics grows out of love, and apart from love there can be no such ethical principles to follow.

The crucifixion is ample proof of the result of Christ's encounter with the Jews and pagans. However, that historical event was used by God the Father to further his redemptive activity among men on earth. Paul's conversion and subsequent missionary

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1. George Johnston: Paul's Certainties. The Expository Times, Vol. LXIX, p. 240

activity brought him into many contacts with Jews in all parts of the Mediterranean world. Conditions were such that Paul found his countrymen wherever he travelled. Persecution and unrest had made it so that "by the time of the rise of Christianity by far the greater part of the Jewish people lived outside the boundaries of Palestine."¹ In the dispersion they held to their point of view of ethical purity, the worldwide destiny of the worship of Jehovah and the truth of monotheism which was to replace all other religions. As zealously as the Jews held to their beliefs and practices, their contacts with the Greeks and Romans produced changes.

The influence of Greek culture told heavily upon them - - as the Judaeo-Alexandrine literature eloquently attests. They used Greek even in their religious services; they read the Bible in Greek, and they adopted Greek names, and to some extent Greek organization in their communal institutions. Above all they were animated by an intense missionary zeal to win over the pagan population to the higher monotheistic religion of which they were the chosen representatives. The Jews of the Diaspora were possessed with the conviction that they were destined to realize the prophetic word, 'I have set thee for a light of the nations.' Isaiah 49:6.²

Like Jesus, Paul preached in the synagogues. But, the situation had altered a bit since Christ's time, as the foregoing paragraph has shown. In the beginning the Apostle was well received. It is stated in the Acts of the Apostles that "he argued in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks."³

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1. Abingdon Bible Commentary, p. 847
2. Ibid, p. 847
3. Acts 8: 4

This has reference to the city of Corinth to which he had come from Athens. While there Paul made his home with a Jewish couple who had fled from Rome. Both Aquila and Paul were tentmakers by trade. In his preaching to the Jews the Apostle would start with material from the Old Testament and God's plan for Israel. Gradually he would introduce the Christian interpretation of prophetic passages, and end on an exhortation to repent quickly while there was time. The fact that the fellowship of believers grew is evidence that he won many. But he stirred up a considerable number who even went so far as to enlist the Gentiles in opposing him. After a stay of eighteen months the wrath of the Jews had been raised to such a point that they drove Paul out of Corinth. What must not be forgotten is that

in the Graeco-Roman world of the first century, the Christian Church was not the only agency which aimed at elevating the moral standards of society. Judaism had long been a missionary religion. Hellenistic Judaism in particular had worked out a technique for approach to pagans, mainly on ethical lines.¹

Surely, then, the appreciation for the Christian effort at evangelizing the Jews was not very great.

Luke points up the fact in the Acts of the Apostles that "when Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus."² Together with that fact and the ethical code proclaimed

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1. C.H. Dodd: Gospel and Law, p.22
2. Acts 18:5

by the new faith, the conscientious Jew felt motivated to reject the greater part of the message. The previous chapter has highlighted the principles enunciated by Christ and Paul who felt moved to say what they did because

the Law promoted external compliance, but it could not deal with that spiritual center of the self where motives are generated and from which ambition spurts. It circumcised the flesh and left the heart untouched.¹

The Jews in Corinth, together with Jews in all other parts, were content to let good conduct be a part of religion rather than a product of religion.

C. With the Gentiles

In approaching the Jews Paul had the advantage of his ancestry and religious background to use as an entering wedge. The only favorable factor he could use in introducing himself to the Gentiles, or pagans, was his Roman citizenship. To be sure, only a limited number fully appreciated him for that, especially the Greeks. With Asia Minor under Roman rule at Paul's coming, sympathy for the conqueror was rather low.

Relative to what has been said in a previous chapter about conditions in Asia Minor, and particularly in Corinth, there can be no doubts raised as to the complexity of the social and religious situation. A gifted and competent teacher and preacher such as Paul must have found the missionary task extremely difficult

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1. Johnston, op.cit., p.243

and trying, but challenging. The mixture of pagan religions brought to the area from Egypt, Persia and Rome afforded individuals more opportunities for spiritual and physical exercise than they could afford. The environment fostered within many a pagan heart the desire for something new and better, carrying with it a deeper satisfaction for the hunger of the unruly soul. Previous beliefs had carried with them far too many disillusioning features.

The chief objects of pagan religions were to foretell the future, to explain the universe, to avert calamity, to obtain the assistance of the gods. They contained no instruments of moral teaching analogous to our institution of preaching, or to the moral preparation for the reception of the sacrament, or to confession, or to the reading of the Bible, or to religious education, or to the united prayer for spiritual benefits.¹

The mystery religions did nothing about relating belief to actions. Instead they prospered the belief that once an individual had been initiated into the mysteries, he could not be affected by anything which he did with his body. The natural result of such teaching was prostitution, both for male and female. As a matter of fact, a part of the worship in the temple of Aphrodite involved the loss of virginity and continued prostitution. Such worshippers, in their opinion, were neither immoral nor were they influenced by immoral motives but by religious impulses.

The forms of pagan worship were many and varied. A great number of people believed in good and bad spirits which could take possession of, or obsess, human or inanimate objects.

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1. William E.H. Lecky: History of European Morals, p.2

As a result, people took part in religious ceremonies to avoid evil spirits and to gain possession of good ones. These ceremonies made a sort of communion possible. It became necessary to consecrate food or drink to a higher power, and that implied that no evil power could approach such. Good spirits were gained by eating with or of that spirit or in the spirit's presence. Cannibalism resulted. This was superseded by eating the flesh of a representative of the god. Naturally, then, the pagans believed the Christians were engaged in immoral practices when they assembled because all types of people were admitted. Misuse of wine at the "love feasts" caused considerable drunkenness. Thus, what Paul had to say to the pagan crowds had to be explanatory and instructive.

The Gospel had to be preached in terms intelligible to Hellenistic audiences and their mental outlook, while at the same time the audience themselves were bound to interpret the gospel message in their own way, in the light of their own spiritual needs.¹

Many Corinthians accepted Christianity as a "mystery religion" which really could do what the other "mystery religions" pretended to do. Jesus was to the Corinthians the Redeemer-God, who passed through death to life, and offered participation in this new life to those who shared in the mysteries which he offered. These mysteries were baptism and the Lord's Supper, and there was unanimity in Corinth as to their central importance.

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1. Bultmann, op.cit., p. 176

The code of ethics which Paul placed before the Jew and Gentile of Corinth directed thoughts and deeds to the sanctity of all which God the Father had created. Man was to use his body and soul to the glory of God. Monotheism, the sacredness of the body and faith in Jesus Christ as God's Son constituted the larger part of the Apostle's message to the Gentile populace. Idolatry, pride in "knowledge" and possession of mysteries fell before the "sword of the Spirit."

D. With the Jewish Christians

Christ's own people were the first to hear the "good news" of salvation, but not the first to be readily receptive to it. Legalism had built up a strongly fortified wall against any attack on the Law. In defense of an accusation that he had come to destroy the Law, Jesus sought to make it understood that he had been sent to "fulfill the Law," instead.

All the recorded teaching of Christ on the subject of the Jewish Law makes it perfectly clear that this (thoughtful obedience in the spirit and not merely in the letter) was the main burden of his ethical teaching.¹

Conversion of Jews to the Christian faith did not make any noteworthy progress. As a matter of fact, the hope of Jewish Christians' winning Gentiles to the faith had to be changed. Within a relatively short time it became apparent that Gentile Christians would be instruments for conversion of Jews. With Peter as the

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1. Dewar, op.cit., p. 17

apostle to the Jews and Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles, the Christian mission had become a growing reality.

It became necessary at one point for Paul to make a journey from Antioch to Jerusalem for a discussion of the problem relating to requirements for Gentiles becoming Christians. The Jewish Christians of Jerusalem insisted that a man become a Jew first through observance of the rite of circumcision. The Apostle refused to accept such a decision, and as a result "it is Paul more than any other man who was responsible for the fact that Christianity was not a Jewish sect, but an independent body with an independent life."¹ The triumph of the Apostolic Council at Jerusalem foreshadowed the worldwide development of the Christian Church. The success of Christianity and the failure of Judaism in their attempts to conquer the Roman Empire largely depended on the outcome of the Council's deliberations.

Christianity gained all those of the Graeco-Roman world who had felt the attraction of Jewish monotheism, Jewish ethics and Jewish eschatological hope, while Judaism failed to do so. In writing to the Corinthians Paul emphasized that which mattered most.

Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised?
Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision.
- - - For neither circumcision counts for anything nor
uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God
Every one should remain in the state in which he was called.²

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1. Arthur Darby Nock: St. Paul, p.246
2. I Cor. 7: 18-20

Previous mention has been made of the fact that Paul met Jews wherever he travelled, and not least in Corinth. To Paul's dismay a variety of parties had arisen within the church there, and one group owed allegiance to Peter and the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem. In spite of the limited number in the "holy city," the church there sought to exercise control over all other churches in the world of the day. In an attempt to win adherents from Paul, the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem debased him and attacked him gravely. The end result was nothing worthy of mention. Paul's insistent message of love, in all its forms, triumphed.

Jewish Christians had a richer heritage on which to build a Christian faith than Gentiles. They had a tradition to follow which guided their instincts because of experience.

In passing beyond Jesus to the first Christians, we have only to notice, as far as ethics is concerned, that Jesus has become "the righteousness of God" for them. Instead of simply saying, "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Moses and the covenant," Christians add a significant reference to "the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."¹

As has been shown in a previous chapter, the burden of the definition of the new ethic lay in setting the Jew free from his legalistic bondage to the letter of the Law and bringing him in under the ethics of the spirit.

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1. Ramsey, op.cit., pp.16-17

E. With the Gentile Christians

The Christian ethic found its most fertile field among the pagans who sought a new and better way for life. But, in that the harvest was waiting, the problems were there, too. The larger part of the Pauline correspondence to the Corinthians had to be focused on the topic of the day. Pagan practices, Hellenistic thought, Roman rule and Egyptian "mysteries" could not be pushed to the side because of the introduction of a new faith. Paul reminded the congregation that "I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh."¹ His entire ministry was filled with persistent efforts at interpreting the Gospel to men and women whose thoughts and deeds had been centered for a lifetime on the pleasures of the mind and body.

Earlier treatment of the situation in Asia Minor at the time of Christianity's entrance as a new faith has shown that the Greeks gloried in the attainment of wisdom, and that they regarded the body as a burden whose death would set the soul free; that the Romans demanded recognition of the emperor as the object of worship; and that the Egyptians offered power through initiation into the "mystery religions." Paul's code of Christian ethics came as a result of his meeting with the various pagan moral codes.

To meet the problem of the misuse of the body, Paul

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1. I Cor. 3: 1

pointed out that the body is the temple of God. "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body."¹ The full implications of the Gospel and the meaning of the responsibilities of membership in the Church were not grasped by the majority.

I Corinthians shows clearly that some Hellenic Christians held that having secured immortality, they were free to do as they liked with their bodies. Paul insisted on the observance of that morality which was central in Judaism. He had rendered his task difficult by his rejection of the Law, but he won his fight and the permanent association of Jewish morality with the Christian Church and its Hellenic Christology and sacraments was the result.²

Because the Graeco-Roman-Oriental religions saw no connection between belief and ethics, the new-born Christians needed constant guidance by word and deed to show the unity of religion and morals. Thus, it was necessary for Paul to speak as he did about idolatry, relations with fellowmen, the sanctity of marriage and the sacredness of the human personality. With no tradition to fall back on, the Gentile Christians felt they could do anything. Conversion often brings with it a new sense of power. These Christians believed themselves to be altogether superior to the unchanged men around them. It took a man of the Apostle's stature to rescue the situation. "Paul claimed full authority to regulate the lives of the churches which he founded, and expected these churches to obey the men who took the lead in

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1. I Cor. 6: 19, 20
2. Lake, op. cit., p. 90

them."¹ He spoke out against factions within the congregation and pointed men to the essentials. "We preach Christ crucified - - - to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."²

Paul knew his Corinthians and he knew the situation in which they had to live as Christians and as Church members. He had no illusions about the difficulties which faced them and the pull of the old environment. They lived against a background that was so black that it was not easy for them to realize when their conduct was "off-white." They lived among people whose standards were so lax or so non-existent that they could easily persuade themselves that their own slackened standards were good enough. They were confident that they knew what it took to be a Christian and were capable of being Christians. Paul's letters recall them to the true standards, warn them of the dangers of complacency, and point them to the sources from which alone can come that power to live life as Christians must live it.³

F. Summary

Time must pass before an assessment can be made of the value and reception given a new order or way of life. Not much time needed to pass to prove the validity and worth of the Christian faith and ethic in the first century after Christ. The right man at the right time with the right message resolved a trying situation. Paul's own words best describe how it came about. "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."⁴

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1. Nock, op. cit., p. 51
2. I Corinthians 1: 23, 24
3. Robinson, op. cit., p. 21
4. I Corinthians 9: 22-23

Whereas the Gospel was intended for the Jews, who in turn should share the good news with the Gentiles, the process had to be reversed. The Jews, except for a minority, rejected the Gospel and its ethic. The Gentiles in large numbers welcomed the new faith, but tended to mix old and new ethical principles. Paul's love of God and Christocentric message, and his persistence in proclaiming the Gospel to all, led to the eventual transformation of society. Christianity soon gained a dominant role among the religions of the world.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The religious and cultural situation at the dawn of Christianity can be likened to the average Spring flood with slowly rising water but not beset with any rushing current. Contributions have been received from a variety of sources, some good and the large part bad. Just what the outcome is to be cannot be determined until some sign appears to show that the waters are to disappear and life to begin anew. Palestine had been overtaken by several foreign powers over the years, and each conqueror had left his mark in one way or another. The Persians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans moved their armies in, but the solidity of the Jewish faith was not influenced much by their religions and culture. Such was not the case in Asia Minor. There the oriental mystery religions found fertile ground in the pagan Hellenistic culture. When the Romans came, they demanded prime allegiance to the emperor, but tolerated other worship as long as the emperor was afforded that due him. The flood waters left much to be desired, and men and women longed for something more wholesome and pure as guide and counsellor for life's complicated order.

With the birth of Jesus Christ came the sign needed to give new hope to the disillusioned masses. His ministry consisted in a call to men that they direct their undivided attention toward the Almighty God, and serve him with heart, soul and mind,

His ethic called for a man to conduct his life as his conscience directed him, and not in obedience to a set of formal rules. Action was to spring out of a personal relationship to the Almighty.

In the interest of spreading Christianity beyond the borders of Palestine, Paul was commissioned an apostle to the Gentiles. He fought his way through the debris-filled "waters" of Asia Minor as the greatest interpreter of Jesus Christ and won for the Christian Church a host of eager converts. His task was a delicate and formidable one. Again and again the flood waters rose to bring damage and raise problems for him. But, again and again God's Holy Spirit gave him wisdom and vision and strength to meet and overcome Jewish and Gentile opposition forces. A rainbow arched itself over the receding waters, and world history has experienced the realization of the hope envisioned by the early Christian leaders.

Why did the Christian Church succeed as it has? The foregoing chapters have sought to answer that question. The Church spoke to the needs of the people in a way which was impossible for Judaism and the religions of the Roman and Greek cultures.

Thus the challenge of Jesus with its insistence on repentance, with its content the impending change, pitched in terms intelligible to Judaism, would have fallen on deaf ears in any portion of the Mediterranean basin except Palestine. The Greek and Roman, like Gallio, "cared for none of these things" Salvation, a feeling of security, hope amid the crumbling ruins of the older religions which had been hamstrung by the merciless criticism of the philosophers - - after all these did the Gentiles seek. And it was because this new movement was able to break away from - - or be thrust outside of - - Judaism that Christianity triumphed as it did. Unhampered

by a traditional past, it was farsighted enough under the guidance of such men as Paul to see that the aims and longings of every human heart were legitimate, that it was not necessary for gentiles to banish their hopes and longings or to express them in the terms of Judaism, but that the gospel of Christ was broad enough and deep enough to meet and satisfy the longing of every human heart. This was the profoundest lesson the early church could have learned.¹

The same lesson faces the Church of the present and the Church of the future. God's love in Jesus Christ is eternal.

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1. Enslin, op.cit., p. 182

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