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## OUR MORAL STANDARDS

BY

NEIL MacNEIL

Assistant Managing Editor of The New York Times

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National Council of Catholic Men  
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## OUR MORAL STANDARDS

Open-minded observers of the American scene are deeply concerned over the steady decline in moral standards, especially in recent years. They see alarming evidence of this decline in most phases of American life and of American culture. Nor does there seem to be any improvement in prospect; on the contrary the decline has indications of accelerating its pace.

Let us take a quick glance at some of this evidence.

At this very moment the nation is in the grip of a crime wave. Crimes committed in 1945 exceeded those in 1944 by 12.4%, the largest increase in fifteen years. On July 6th, J. Edgar Hoover, head of the F.B.I., reported the nation facing a potential army of 6,000,000 criminals, ten times the number of students in our colleges and universities.

Particularly distressing is the steady rise in juvenile delinquency. Since 1939 the arrests of girls under 18 years of age rose 198%. The figures for boys under 18 show an increase of 48% for homicide; 70% for sex offenses; 72% for assault; 101% for drunkenness and drunken driving. There is, of course, no

record for such matters as filthy language, gang terrorism, degeneracy and abortions. In the war years, juvenile delinquency rose more than 100% and is still rising.

Meanwhile the figures for venereal diseases are equally bad. In some parts of the country they were almost epidemic.

In 1940, the last year for which figures are available for the United States, there were 264,000 divorces, more than double the rate per thousand of population in 1913, with each year's figures showing a steady increase. This rise has continued. In 1945 new highs were reached in all the large cities for which figures are available. Reno had 8,590; New York 8,301; Philadelphia 5,286; Boston 2,265.

Alcoholism is also increasing steadily. Two experts writing in the Journal of the American Medical Association in October declared that there are 600,000 alcoholic addicts in the United States, 2,000,000 heavy drinkers, and 38,000,000 so-called social drinkers. They considered it a serious national health problem. In 1945 Americans spent \$7,800,000,000 for alcoholic liquors, a rise of 9% over 1944, and an

average of \$56 for every man, woman and child in the country.

I have not the time here to go into such matters as commercialized vice, abortion mills, and the various other rackets and forms of degeneracy. Figures are not available for them; but it is a fact known to those familiar with each that they are flourishing as they never flourished before, and that little is being done about them. Perhaps we have dropped so low morally that we are below the point of shock in such matters.

All of us are familiar with the operations of the black markets, for we helped to make them. But how many of us have stopped to consider the moral implications. The structure of rationing and price control was set up by the Government to assure fair distribution at fair prices of goods in short supply, so that our own poorer people might not suffer and to ease the tragedy of the starving millions of Europe and Asia. Yet most of us set our own selfish greed above those noble purposes—our greed for dirty money and our greed for goods that we could do without and which would save our dying brothers abroad.

We showed respect neither for our own laws nor for the laws of God. We wanted what we want-

ed when we wanted it; and we did not consider the consequences. We thought only of ourselves. The black marketeer thought only of his extra, illegal profit, and the rest of only that extra pound of butter or that pair of nylons.

Evidence of moral decline is manifest in most aspects of business and government. The average American views most things from what is in it for him. If he can get away with it, that is all that matters. He does not think of moral standards. Tax evasion is a good example of this. Few of us observe the traffic laws on our highways and streets when we can get away with it. And so it goes. The lack of respect for our own government and for law enforcement is more general than ever before.

Finally, take a look at the moral standards of our stage, our motion pictures, our literature. No one could call these standards high. Many a Broadway producer uses the spice of vice and indecency to assure the financial success of his play, knowing full well that that is what most of his potential customers want and not clean, wholesome entertainment. It takes the Legion of Decency to hold Hollywood in check; and at that it goes as far in salacious-

ness as it dares without risking retribution at the box-office. The same is true of many of our leading authors of books. Efforts by civic authorities to halt the sale of a novel for indecency assures a rush to buy it while it is available and stimulates sales elsewhere. Too often the makers of plays, motion pictures and books consider only the cash in their pockets and not the moral consequences. How many of them stop to consider the boys and girls they might corrupt or the decent men and women they might disgust?

From all this it seems clear that a great many Americans are more intent on cultivating the seven deadly sins than in practicing the four cardinal virtues. It is easy to blame this condition on the war. But is it right? It seems to me that two world wars in our generation are proof of our moral decline and not the cause of it. True these two wars did bring great disruptions in our national and home life. True the boys and the girls in the services saw terrible things and had soul-searing experiences. True the people at home also had drastic changes in their life and work and plenty of worry. True millions of women left the home to work in factories, with the resulting neglect

of the home and the children. Yet this moral decline has been with us for a long time. It goes back before the turn of the century. Many of us, for instance, cannot recall the prohibition era without a shock to our consciences. The figures for divorce, crime, vice, intemperance and all kinds of indecency were bad before the war and growing steadily worse. They merely were accelerated by World War II. We must go elsewhere for the causes.

Let us take a look at the three institutions that should teach good morals to our youth—the home, the school and the church—for if the child gets a good moral foundation it should stay with him through life.

Let me hasten to say that I do not think that the fault is with the churches. All churches, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish, are striving to correct the conditions of which we are complaining. Thousands of religious men and women of all creeds, who have devoted their lives to God, are doing all they can. They give their time and energy and prayers. They are more numerous than ever before; they have more knowledge of the human soul; and better physical equipment in churches and recreation halls; but they are simply

swamped. Their task is like trying to sweep back the waters of the sea.

This takes us to the home. We all know that the average American home is not what it used to be—a haven of rest and peace from the stress and turmoil of the world, where a loving mother taught the Christian virtues and a dignified father maintained Christian discipline. Too often it is a few dirty and noisy rooms in the slums. Too often it is a suite in a hotel or an apartment house. Too often there is no provision, or little provision, for children. Too often they are not wanted at all. Too often those that come are treated as nuisances. Selfishness takes the place of love; and the will of God is thwarted. The men and women who should be the instruments of God in the creation of other men and women are instead irritable, greedy, money-grabbers with dubious morals and shriveled souls, forever seeking pleasures that forever elude them or turn to poison in their hands.

Many children, the majority in fact, show little or no respect for their parents and their elders; and in truth these elders do not always deserve respect. The unloved and undisciplined children are in turn selfish and wil-

ful. They are hard to control in the home and in the school, and sometimes revolt against life itself. And when they respect not their homes and their parents, their school and their teachers, their church and its pastors, they can scarcely be expected to respect the law of the land and the law of God. Moreover they have an evil influence on the children of the truly Christian home when they come in contact with them in the school and at play in the streets and the parks.

Now let us visit the American school. The first thing we note is the splendid buildings and equipment, and next the well-trained teachers. We have not spared money or effort to make our schools good. We are proud of them, and we have stressed education as probably no other people has. We have concentrated on knowledge however, and we have neglected character building, and knowledge without character can be dangerous to the individual and to the community.

And in some of our schools of higher learning, God has been excluded and with Him His moral code. True God and the moral law are still stressed in the Church schools; but these schools are only a part of American education.

The breakdown of the American home and the failure of the American school have imposed a task on the church alone which should be shared by all three, and the Church alone cannot do it.

However, I do not think this is the full answer to the problem. I feel that the causes are largely inherent in the kind of civilization we have built for ourselves in the United States.

Ours is basically an industrial civilization. We stress the physical and not the spiritual. We measure success in dollars. We are the makers of machines, beautiful and efficient machines; but they have no soul. We live with machines; we work with machines; we fight with machines; but we have not dared to deal realistically with the impact of machines on human beings. We have seen filthy slums spread in our cities, as thousands crowded into them to work in our machine shops. We have seen our men and women stupefied by the monotony of their work in factories or cast aside as useless in the prime of life because they could not keep pace with the assembly line or match the precision of some mechanical monster. We have seen hunger and disease and crime enter

the American home because it is now dependent on the steady flow of cash wages and must weather long periods of cruel industrial and business depressions. In thousands of cases the machine which was to be the slave of man has become his master; and we have a class of economic slaves; and hunger in the midst of plenty.

The change within the American home has been as great as the change in our work. The modern home is also full of wires and gadgets. As it shrinks into fewer and fewer rooms the machines multiply. We do the housework with machines. We get the news over the radio machine; and we listen to program after program. The noise is incessant and nerve-wracking. We leave the home only to go to the movies and have another machine entertain us, and seldom is the entertainment elevating. Then we go dashing through the streets in noisy subways and street cars and about the countryside in other machines; and we maim and kill hundreds of thousands of our neighbors yearly in our mad passion for speed. We fly through the skies and over continents and oceans in other machines. We pride ourselves on our conquest of time and space; and yet we have less

time for leisure and contemplation than had our ancestors.

The tempo and the rhythm of our lives are terrific as we strive to keep pace with our machines. We build hospitals for the resulting nervous wrecks, but we cannot build them fast enough. Our insane asylums have more tenants than ever before despite the progress made in the care and cure of mental diseases. More men and women die of heart diseases than ever before. Medical science battles successfully to prolong life; and then we lead the life that kills. It does not make sense.

We have the most successful mechanized civilization in all history and we love to emphasize the good things it brings us. It does produce a flood of machine-made goods, for we have mastered mass production and to a less degree mass distribution; but as we have gained in material things we have lost in spiritual values. We have worldly wealth and low moral standards. This is our tragedy.

Less and less, Americans take time for meditation on anything outside the routine of their particular business. Less and less, they take time for contemplation of the eternal verities. In the rush of life and the making of money little time is given to God.

At first after abandoning God and his moral code, Americans turned to the Golden rule, but more and more that also is being forgotten. Our national philosophy now is a debased pragmatism. "What is in it for me?" has replaced the old American motto "In God We Trust." "Can I get away with it?" is the new code of national honor. Is it any wonder that our moral standards are dropping lower and lower?

At the same time there is a world-wide campaign by the enemies of God to discredit the Churches, to supplant His moral code by material expediency, and to extricate love of Him from the hearts of men. This campaign takes advantage of the chaos and uncertainties of our times. The enemies of God are on the offensive. They scoff at all religion. They try to turn one good against another. They belittle and ridicule the faithful and exalt the godless. They make material success the ultimate principle of life. And they have a large measure of success, here in the United States as elsewhere.

What is the remedy? Obviously it is a return to God, a return to His moral code as expressed in the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. These are the principles

on which the United States was founded and which helped to make us a great people and a great nation. We undermine our greatness when we abandon them. Historians record the fact that all great nations have been built on high moral standards—in other words a hardy people living a life of simple virtue—and that nations fall when the people forsake these standards for soft-living and vice. This was true in the case of Rome. It will be true with us, for it never fails.

The American home is the place to seek the redemption of

America. The family is still the basic unit of our State as it is of our civilization. We should safeguard it. It needs tranquility and security just as the State needs peace and order. And God should be welcomed into it. His precepts should be taught and enforced by our mothers and fathers and accepted by the children. The family that reads the Bible or says the Rosary will not stray far from the paths of virtue. That is the kind of family that America needs and must have if she is to fulfill her responsibilities in the confused world of today.