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1: Morality and young people: a schoolmaster's view

What follows in this short article must be clearly understood to be based largely upon impressions, both personal and of other experienced colleagues, and also upon keeping in touch with some of the relevant literature over the past decade.

In general terms teachers have in the last four or five years become increasingly alarmed at the rising tide of disruptive behaviour in schools rather than with fears concerning the sexual morality of their pupils.

The disruption is manifest in behaviour which reveals thought-patterns, standards and values which are at variance with the norms of most (but not all) adults in School Communities. It is found in schools of all kinds, not just in the widely publicised large urban Comprehensive schools—although the problems may show up in their most acute form in such establishments.

It may be seen in a range of behavioural procedures, from rudeness and truculence, through to disobedience and sheer defiance. On the other hand there is evidence to suggest, for instance, that drugs do not have the same aura of attractiveness for teenage rebellion and escapism as previously. However, a greater incidence of smoking and drinking amongst both boys and girls is apparent.

So too is the phenomenon of the use of bad, and even obscene language. Amongst Primary children this is generally restricted to the playground, where four-letter words may increasingly be heard. Among Secondary pupils it is all too common in the classroom itself. When checked or disciplined such youngsters (including 'respectable' girls from middle class backgrounds) make it clear that it is part of the normally accepted speech pattern between members of the peer group and often within the family itself. Much of it would seem to stem from widespread use throughout the mass media and current literature. There is evidence too to indicate that increasingly teachers are being addressed in this way, even to the extent of being verbally assaulted.

Schools have always had their share of petty pilfering cases, often going in waves over succeeding years. Some reported cases later turn out in fact to be matters of loss through sheer carelessness, although parental wrath may often be assuaged by pointing the finger in the opposite direction! Likewise, some of the noise heard

about juvenile shoplifting may sometimes be attributable to cover-up moves by dishonest sales staff. Having said that it remains true that there has been an increase in indictable offences amongst juveniles and this is a very serious and worrying feature of the moral state of a growing number of young people.

Commander Peter Marshall, head of Scotland Yard's Community Relations branch, has referred¹ to juvenile crime as "the growth industry in Britain's cities and particularly in London". "It has risen by a staggering 40 per cent in the past five years and threatens to rise in London by at least a further 25 per cent in this year alone. In 1969 juveniles between 10 and 16 committed more than a quarter of all crimes. Last year (1973) this was up to almost a third".² Petty theft, burglary, car stealing, robbery, wounding and assault were among the most frequent offences. He also drew attention to something well known to experienced teachers for a very long time now, namely the close correlation between juvenile crime of all forms and the incidence of truancy, which in some areas has reached almost epidemic proportions.

However, perhaps the saddest, and most serious way in which standards have declined, is not so much in the areas already indicated, or even in the realm of sexual morality, but rather in the way in which violence and vandalism have developed. One must hasten to add that it would be totally wrong to suggest that all our schools are 'Blackboard Jungles'—far from it. However, both the Press and the Teachers Association have drawn attention to the situation. The Association even claims a 60-fold increase in the number of reported attacks against its members in the past ten years although this may only be a reflection upon the efficiency of information-gathering in the earlier years.³

The causes are many and complex. They include personal factors of a psychological and emotional kind, besides contributory factors arising from inadequate to downright appalling family and social backgrounds. The number of divorces, separations and marriages under stress seems to be on the increase, some teachers reporting as many as a third of their class members as coming from such a milieu.

Some of the problems facing schools today are due to the inadequacies of the Children and Young Persons Act (1969) where insufficient qualified social services staff and resources have led to added burdens being laid upon hard-pressed schools, themselves facing a crisis in staffing and facilities.

Sometimes, it must be stated quite frankly the problems are of the school's own making. Especially is this so where strongly academic teachers are unprepared to change their attitudes, curricula

or methods to cope with the pupils of average or low ability from a different strata of society. Here particularly the Christian caring teacher should have much to contribute, especially in a situation where Secondary Schools are reorganised along Comprehensive lines.

If the picture painted so far seems to be rather black, let me add that there is considerable evidence to indicate that there are very many young people who are honest, open and caring in their dealings with others. They can be extremely warm and generous, especially when given a lead, in their relationships with younger children, the handicapped and the aged.

Many schools today have developed strong community links, give generously of time, talent and money to worthwhile charities, and have established a healthy social services outreach. (Incidentally, it is sad sometimes to note the "pi" School Christian Fellowship staying aloof from this activity).

Turning now from general matters of morality as they affect young people and their schools, what of the much vexed question of sexual morality amongst our youth? With the lowering of the age of the onset of physical maturity, the raising of the school leaving age, the free availability of advice on contraception, the increasing use of the Pill⁴ and the legalisation of abortion, are our young people going on a sexual rampage? Is there evidence to indicate a decline of moral standards in this area too?

To help answer this question I would like to summarise the evidence produced by Michael Schofield and his team of researchers published in 1965.⁵ A fine point scale of sexual behaviour was developed running as follows:

STAGE I—Little or no contact with the opposite sex

STAGE II—Limited experience e.g. kissing

STAGE III—Sexual intimacies, falling short of intercourse

STAGE IV—Sexual intercourse with only one partner

STAGE V—Sexual intercourse with more than one partner⁶

His survey was based upon a sample of approximately 900 boys and 900 girls between 15 and 19 years of age from seven different areas and covering differing types of secondary education.

By 19 most of the boys had moved from stage I to Stage III or beyond, whilst for girls there tended to be a barrier at Stage III. More teenage boys than girls had had experience of sexual intercourse—about 11% of the younger boys compared with 6% of the younger girls, with 30% of the older boys against 16% of the older girls. "Intercourse before fourteen was found to be rare and by sixteen 14% of the boys and 5% of the girls had started."⁷

Usually the first experience was unpremeditated, took place with someone older (in the case of girls quite often an adult), and

more often than not took place in the parental home of the beginner or the partner. Although fewer girls had intercourse, those who had experienced it did it more often. The boys tended to be more promiscuous, indulging in a search for sexual adventure, whereas the girls were more often searching for love and security.

"Our results", says Schofield, "have made it clear that premarital sexual relations are a long way from being universal among teenagers as over two-thirds of the boys and three-quarters of the girls in our sample have not engaged in sexual intercourse. On the other hand it is equally apparent that teenage pre-marital intercourse is not a minority problem confined to a few deviates. It is an activity common enough to be seen as one manifestation of teenage conformity."⁸

Since the date of publication of this survey, increasing concern has been felt with regard to the number of girls under sixteen who become pregnant. According to the Lane Committee⁹ between 1965 and 1971 the number went up from 1,227 to 4,060. In 1971 nearly 2,500 abortions were performed on girls under sixteen compared with less than 600 in 1968. Sixty per cent of girls under sixteen who became pregnant in 1971 had abortions—a 5% increase on the year before. By 1973, 3,478 young teenagers had abortions, or about 10 a day for every day of the year.¹⁰ From 1968 to 1972 the V.D. cases also rose sharply for 11-15 year old girls from 233 to 427 (From a population of all 11-15 year olds of 1.8m).

However, these figures need care in interpretation. The increase in reported V.D. cases may not necessarily indicate increased sexual activity. It may just mean that more cases are being detected, or that there is an increasing resistance to antibiotics. Similarly, the rise in the abortion rate in recent years must be viewed against the passing of the Abortion Act in 1967.

Pressures upon teenagers to indulge in sexual experimentation however are strong indeed, although one G.P. in the same T.E.S. article is quoted as saying that the pressures of the permissive society were, if anything, less strong than they had been in the late 1960's. Fourteen year olds who came to his surgery were, he thought, "less concerned than their elder sisters had been with keeping up sexually with the Joneses."¹¹

Further evidence in the article indicated that whilst young teenagers are more exposed to open discussion and advice on sexual matters (through their peer groups and through the mass media and especially magazines like 'Cosmopolitan', 'Honey', '19', 'Over 21' and 'Petticoat'—and even explicit journals like 'Forum') it is not at all certain that their actual behaviour is influenced to any great extent.

Personal observations and consultations with colleagues—including the new brand of trained teachers known as School Counsellors—together with the informed comments and surveys as reported in the educational press would lead the writer to conclude that whilst there are very real problems to be faced, the evidence so far as young people are concerned (and particularly the younger teenager—if not for their parents where the picture seems to be sadly different) indicates no relative decline in sexual moral standards, although with the peak population now going through our Secondary Schools¹² the situation in absolute terms may indeed look depressing.

In answer to the question then about whether the decline in sexual morals in schools is as bad as we are sometimes led to believe, I would answer “no”—albeit in somewhat guarded terms. Most colleagues in the profession would, I feel, express as much, and more, concern about such matters as declining courtesy and good manners, the wave of petty thieving and shoplifting and the pernicious effect of a minority of disturbed children given to violent and abusive behaviour.

In view of the foregoing, a further question to be faced is whether we as Christians should try and impose our moral standards on others? A full answer to this would lead us deeply into a consideration of both the philosophy of religion and of moral philosophy and of their interplay, if any.

If, as Christian educationalists, we hold to the essential rationality of man, even though this has been affected by the Fall, then we are bound to the establishment of morality upon a basis of the giving of reasons and of seeing their point. Could therefore the imposition of ‘our’ standards upon other rational beings be itself a moral act? Certainly for very young and immature persons, strong authoritative action may need to be taken for the benefit and safety, both of the individual concerned, and for others who may also be affected harmfully. However, for moral standards to become meaningful they must be shown, within an educative context, to be relevant on the basis of rational criteria acceptable to the individual concerned.

For some this may be Bentham’s principle of the greatest good to the greatest number of people involved. For others it may be the principle of “Be ye holy for I am holy!”, but whether for these or others the development of true morality cannot surely be based on mere ‘authoritarianism’. There is I would suggest much in the realm of moral education that both Christian and Humanist can learn from each other, and much that they can achieve together. This indeed is being shown by the work of such leading and yet diverse educationalists as John Wilson, Dr. R. Deardon, Prof. R. S. Peters, and Prof. Paul Hirst to mention but a very small sample.

By his example, by his caring, understanding and sympathetic attitude, as well as by his relevant teaching and practice of sound scriptural principles, the modern, informed Christian teacher will no doubt seek to show that there is a life which can be lived humbly, joyfully, and positively to the glory of God and to the blessing of his fellow man, by the aid of the indwelling spirit of truth and holiness.

The teaching of the necessity and relevance of sound moral standards, attitudes and values is one of the greatest tasks facing home and school alike today. It is a task which the responsible, Christian teacher knows full well cannot be fulfilled without the understanding and intelligent prayerful backing of a revived Christian Church.

References

- 1 *Times Educational Supplement* 27.9.74 p8
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 A report on *Violence in Schools* published by the National Association of Schoolmasters Dec. 1974
- 4 It is estimated that of the 2m women on the Pill in 1973, 160,000 were between the ages of 16 and 20.
- 5 *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People* M. Schofield. Longmans 1965
- 6 *ibid.* p. 41
- 7 *ibid.* p. 247
- 8 *ibid.* p. 248
- 9 Report of the Committee on the Working of the Abortion Act Vol. 1. Report HMSO £1.75
- 10 *Times Educational Supplement* 1.11.74 p. 23
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 The population in maintained Schools in England and Wales has risen from 7m in 1965 to 9m in 1974 according to a Department of Education and Science (DES) Report on Education (No. 80 Dec. 1974).

P. KIMBER

2: The communication of Christian standards

I was six years old when an urchin first told me the facts of life. Some time earlier I had approached my family on the subject.

'Do you have a chair that is empty one minute, and then the next minute there is a baby in it?' I asked.

'Something like that', I was told.

So when my mentor told me why there were structural differences between boys and girls, I disbelieved him, though he quoted impressive authority in his support.