

What can Morality & Law do for Me? Fr Varghese Paul, SJ

I believe that morality is rooted in the human conscience. In the conscience a person is alone with God. But men and women are at the root of law and rules. Law is based on the decision of people. Usually after much discussions among themselves men and women give themselves laws and rules.

The basic awareness of morality and ethics springs from a person's conscience. It is the responsibility of every person to develop this basic awareness. Thus a person shapes his/her socially and religiously acceptable rational mind and adopts specific thought patterns. This conscience of a person is a very personal. Awareness is one's own. On the other hand rules and laws are not internal but external to a person. Rules and laws guide a person in his/her dealing other people and the circumstance. The social behavior of a person is determined by external factors.

If a person desires, he/she can get away from the rules and laws governing a human society; but he/she cannot get away from his/her conscience. As long as a person lives his/her conscience is with him/her; so a person has to listen to the inner voice of his/her conscience.

If a person goes alone and lives in some caves of the Himalayas on his/her own, then that person is free from any rule and law of the world. But such a person cannot escape from his/her conscience. His/her conscience will be with him/her wherever the person lives.

A concrete example for modern man is that of Henry David Thoreau (1817-62). He went away from his family and society. He lived all alone on the side Walden Pond in a cabin. He was free from all rules and laws of the society as they did not matter to him any more in his lonely life in the jungle. Walden or Life the Woods is the result of his experiences of living all alone inside the jungle.

There is a famous saying of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. "Power have been abolished, morality of ordinary man has found success". That is to say, when there is no power, when there is no authority, who points to rules and laws, then a person has to live on his own morality. Morality touches the character of a person. For, morality deals with the thoughts and doings of a person. Based on moral behaviors we say, "that person is good" or "that person is bad."

The rules and laws made by men and women after much discussion and deliberation are very different from the morality and ethics of inner conscience. Basic ethics and morality is in the conscience of every person. As a believer in God I hold that God has implanted the basic ethics and morality in every person. while rules and laws are made by people in authority. The authority who makes laws and rules may be the head of a family, the king of a country or some elected members of a society or a nation. Usually the authorities make rules and laws for the good of those people under their care and concern.

The person who lives according to his/her conscience is happy. Such person experiences inner

peace. The values and ideals of such persons are in accordance with his/her conscience or inner voice. Such persons are happy interiorly even if they have to suffer persecutions and harassments.

The inner joy in following the promptings of the conscience is such they are able to endure sufferings and bodily pain by external forces. For, walking on the path of Jesus and Buddha they are able to overcome anger with peace, evil with goodness and enmity with love; and they even bless those who persecute them.

On the other hand, those persons who try to cheat their conscience and their inner voice are never able to experience the inner peace and joy of the mind as they try to please others to escape suffering and persecution and end up by betraying themselves. Perhaps a person may benefit externally by cheating others and betraying one's conscience. But his/her conscience will constantly prick him/her like a small pebble in one's shoe.

An inner sadness will envelop him/her thoughts like "I have done evil", "I have betrayed." It will constantly prick his/her conscience and harass in life. The persons who betray their conscience can never sleep in peace. But the person who follows his/her conscience is able to enjoy happiness and inner joy even in most trying circumstances.

Finally, I believe that all laws and rules formed by men/women should be in tune with genuine human morality and ethics. The rules and laws which uphold ethics and morality will gift us genuine happiness and peace.

Last Changed: 01-08-2016
Next Change: 16-08-2016
Copyright Fr. Varghese Paul SJ, 2016