

# PREACHING AND TEACHING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

by C.H. Dodd

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*Dodd's scholarly study distinguishing between kerygma (proclamation) and didache (teaching) in the apostolic church, examining the content and methods of early Christian preaching and instruction.*

1 Chapters

# Table of Contents

1. Preaching and Teaching in the Early Church

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Among the religions of the world there are, I suppose, few which have no ethical content at all. Religions which we regard as primitive sometimes surprise us by the comparative elevation of the moral ideas which they contain. At the same time, there are religions, and some of them among the "higher" religions, which so emphasize the mystical, or it may be the ritual: aspect of religion (to use the imprecise but serviceable terms) that social ethics seem hardly to count. On the other hand, there are systems of ethics, and some of them very fine and idealistic systems, which either repudiate religion, or, like Confucianism, treat it with a distant and somewhat ironical respect. The Christian religion, like Judaism (to take another example), is an ethical religion in the specific sense that it recognizes no ultimate separation between the service of God and social behavior. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy. God"; "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The two basic commandments stand together. But to say this is not to have resolved the tension which appears always to be latent between religion and ethics. In various contemporary ways of presenting Christianity there are marked divergences upon this point, as indeed there have been at most periods of its history. In some-quarters the strongest emphasis is laid upon the specifically religious. elements, by which I mean such things as faith, worship, sacraments, communion with God, the way of salvation, and the hope of eternal life. In other quarters it is the specifically ethical aspect which commands almost exclusive attention — conduct, moral judgments, philanthropy, the Christian social order, and the like, The advocates of the respective views are often severe with one another. Words harmless enough in themselves, such as "mysticism" and "moralism," are hurled about as if they were terms of opprobrium.

It is easy enough to say that both aspects are essential to Christianity and that both are important; even, perhaps, that both are of equal importance and that all that is required is a sound balance. That is true: but it does not go to the root of the matter. It is impossible to understand either the ethical content of Christianity or its religious content unless we can in some measure hold the two together and understand them in their true, organic relations within a whole, This calls for deeper soundings. In the course of its development through the centuries and its extension to various peoples and cultures, Christianity has acquired an immensely complicated history and a bewildering variety of forms; but it possesses a body of classical documents, the New Testament, which, fortunately, are acknowledged as such by the consent of all branches of the Christian Church; and these documents put us in a position to see what Christianity was like In its beginnings and what were the thoughts and principles by which it was shaped.

We must therefore undertake some examination of the data provided by the New Testament upon the problem before us. We shall approach these in a spirit of historical investigation, seeking in the

first place to recover a picture of the thought and activity of the Christian community in its earliest days, and then proceeding to interpret that picture.

We may begin our survey of early Christian literature with the Pauline Epistles, which, taken as a whole, are the earliest group of documents. Some of these have the character of occasional letters, spontaneous and without any plan or design; but some of them show a definite pattern. They are divided into two main parts. The first part deals with specifically religious themes – deals with them, in the main, in the reflective manner which constitutes theology and the second part consists mainly of ethical precepts and admonitions. Thus, the twofold character of Christianity as ethical religion is reflected in the very structure of these documents. The second or ethical part is linked organically with the first part, and this link we shall have to examine more closely later on; but the division between the two parts, though it is not absolute, is pretty well marked. The pattern is clear in the Epistles to the Romans, Galatians, Colossians, and Ephesians, and when it has been recognized in these clear examples, it can be traced by analogy in other epistles, where it is not so obvious at first sight; not only in epistles written by Paul but in those written by other authors as well. This is hardly accidental. We recognize here a set pattern of composition followed by early Christian writers, corresponding to the structure of their thought. They are presenting Christianity as an ethical religion in which ethics are directly related to a certain set of convictions about God, man, and the world, a set of convictions religious in their subject matter and theological in their expression.

Turn now from the epistles to the gospels. The Gospel according to Matthew, the first in canonical order, contains a large amount of ethical teaching with a certain general similarity to that which we have observed in the epistles, though with some marked differences, to which we shall have to give attention later. This teaching occurs for the most part in fairly large, continuous blocks. The most important and typical of these is the so-called Sermon on the Mount, which occupies three long chapters in succession (chaps. 5-7). It is not, of course, a sermon at all. It is a highly articulated and systematic presentation of the main features of the Christian ethical system. These solid blocks of ethical teaching correspond in some sort to the ethical sections of the epistles. They are inserted into a framework which takes the form of a narrative of events. When this structure has been recognized in the first gospel, it can be traced also in the second and third. Here, indeed, it is less formal, and story and teaching alternate more freely; yet even so each of these works provides examples of sequences of ethical precepts, more or less complete in themselves, and comparable with those which we found in the epistles; and these are related to passages of narrative which serve to introduce them.

There is therefore in the gospels a duality of structure corresponding to that which we recognized in the epistles. The ethical materials in gospels and epistles alike have a general similarity of form and content, but in the epistles they are related to theological doctrine, while in the gospels they are related to a narrative of events. The difference, however, is not by any means so great as it seems at first sight. The narrative and the theology belong together.

Careful inspection shows that the theological dissertations of the epistles often have imbedded in them fragments of narrative. When, for example, Paul sets out to discuss such abstruse doctrines of theology as those of predestination, election, and justification by faith, in the middle chapters of the Epistle to the Romans (chaps. 9-11). he relates his discussion throughout to a kind of skeleton

outline of the history of Israel. When he embarks upon the difficult problem of life after death in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, he expressly groups what he has to say upon certain historical facts about Jesus Christ which he says "were communicated to him by persons who were in a position to know."

Let us take a different author. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the author is attempting to define or characterize the profoundly religious ideas of priesthood and sacrifice and to show in what sense the work of Christ can be understood in terms of those ideas, he introduces a strangely vivid and moving reference to the narrative of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, which is familiar to us from the gospels (Hebrews 5:7-10).

Perhaps these examples will suffice to justify the conclusion that the theological sections of the epistles are not without a certain basis in the narrative of events. On the other hand, the narrative of the gospels, as all recent criticism agrees, is coloured throughout by a religious, if not a theological, valuation of the events which it records and of the central Figure in them. The gospels record actual occurrences, but they record them in a way which betrays their authors' sense of a pervading significance going beyond the mere occurrence. They relate it all through to ideas which are specifically religious and necessarily call for a theological interpretation; such ideas as the kingdom of God and the salvation of mankind.

It turns out, then, that the theology of the epistles and the narrative of the gospels have a motive in common. The writers of the gospels believed that the facts of the career of Jesus Christ were worth recording because they had decisive religious significance which challenged theological interpretation; and the writers of the epistles, presupposing a knowledge of the facts, undertook to explain their significance, and so created Christian theology. It is this inseparable interconnection of religion and theology with historical fact that justifies the description of Christianity as a historical religion; and this is a part of its distinctive genius. To sum up, the ethical teaching of the New Testament is embedded in a context which consists of a report of historical facts and an explanation of their religious significance, and this fact gives to Christian Ethics a peculiar character, which I shall presently attempt to describe. But before going on to a consideration of the ethical teaching itself, it is necessary to say something about this context in which it is embedded and which has both a historical and a religious aspect in indivisible unity.

According to the evidence of the New Testament, the earliest exponents of the Christian religion worked out a distinctive way of presenting the fundamental convictions of their faith, in a formula which they called "the proclamation. The Greek word here is kerygma. Our translators of the Bible commonly render it "preaching" but in its current implications at the present day the word is misleading. Kerygma properly means a public announcement or declaration, whether by a town crier, or by an auctioneer commending his goods to the public, or by the herald of a sovereign state dispatched on a solemn mission, to present an ultimatum, it may be, or to announce terms of peace. The Christian "preacher" thought of himself as an announcer of very important news. He called it quite simply "the good news," or in our traditional translation, "the gospel. " It was this "good news" that was embedded in the "proclamation", the kerygma. It was essentially a public announcement of events of public importance. The form and content of the proclamation, the kerygma, can be recovered from the New Testament with reasonable accuracy. It recounted in brief the life, and work of Jesus Christ, His conflicts, sufferings, and death, and His resurrection

from the dead; and it went on to declare that in these events the divinely guided history of Israel through long centuries had reached its climax. God Himself, had acted decisively in this way to inaugurate His kingdom upon earth. This was the core of all early Christian preaching, however it might be elaborated, illustrated, and explained. The preacher's aim was to convince his hearers that they were, indeed confronted by the eternal God in His kingdom, power, and glory; that they, like all men, stood under His judgment upon what they had done and upon what they were, and that this judgment was now immediate and inescapable; further, that those who would put themselves under God's judgment would, through His mercy, find an opportunity open to them to enter upon a new life; that actually, as a result of these facts which they proclaimed, a new era in the relations between God and man had begun.

Those who responded to this appeal and placed themselves under the judgment and mercy of God as declared in Jesus Christ, became members of the community, the Church, within which the new life could be lived. These members were then instructed in the ethical principles and obligations of the Christian life. This course of instruction in morals, as distinct from the proclamation of the gospel, is covered by the term "teaching," which in Greek is *didaché*. This order of approach, first the proclamation, then the beginning of instruction in morals, first *kerygma*, then *didaché*, seems to have been thoroughly characteristic of the Christian mission; it is precisely this order, first *kerygma*, then *didaché*, which we have seen to be general in the New Testament writings. This way of approach to ethics was sharply distinguished from that of contemporary Greek moralists, who from the time of Aristotle had set out to provide a self-contained and self-justifying system of ethics. For Christianity, ethics are not self-contained or self-justifying; they arise out of a response to the Gospel. On the other hand, while the Christian way of approach contrasts with that of Greek moralists, it has a real analogy with the Jewish tradition out of which Christianity arose. The classical formulation of the moral law in the Old Testament begins, "I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me." Then it goes on to lay down such concrete moral precepts as "Thou shalt not kill"; "Thou shalt not commit adultery"; "Thou shalt not steal." That is to say, it begins with a declaration of historical facts religiously understood. The facts were that Israel had escaped out of bondage in the land of Egypt and become a free nation. These facts were understood religiously as meaning that God Himself had intervened to liberate His people. The "commandments" are a corollary to the facts.

Again, if instead of the Decalogue, which is the shortest possible summary of the moral law in the Old Testament, we examine the grand structure of the Torah or Law of Moses (contained in the Pentateuch, or Five Books of Moses), we discern the same character. The extremely concrete and detailed system of regulations is embedded in a narrative of events, which are presented in the guise of "mighty acts of the Lord"; that is to say, they are historical events understood as religiously significant. It is this background, the mighty acts of God, that gives cogency to the commandments of the Torah, for these acts of God established what is described as the "covenant," by which is meant a special relation between this particular people and the God who had delivered them.

Later Judaism distinguished between *haggada*, the declaration or exposition of religious truth, often in the form of a story, and *halakha*, regulations for conduct. This distinction is analogous to the primitive Christian distinction between *kerygma* and *didaché*, the proclamation of the

fundamental facts of the Gospel in their religious significance, and moral instruction grounded upon them. In Christianity, as in Judaism, the kerygma announces the mighty acts in which God established His new covenant with His people, and the moral obligations set forth in the didaché arise within that covenant.

It appears, then, that the problem that we have set ourselves, the problem of the way in which ethics and religion are related in the ethical religion which is Christianity, may be attacked by way of examining the literary records of kerygma and didaché, the proclamation and the ethical instruction" respectively, and trying to trace the relation between them.

We shall start at the ethical end, by investigating the form and content of ethical instruction in the early church, on the basis of the ethical portions of the epistles. In doing so we shall bear in mind that such instruction, both in the literature and in the established practice of the primitive church, was made to depend upon the affirmations of the kerygma.

It appears that the earliest extant Christian writing is Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians. As it happens, it provides a useful starting point for our present study. This letter was written by the apostle in the year 50 A.D. to a congregation of newly converted Christians in the city now called Salonica, in Macedonia. While preaching there he had fallen into trouble with the police and was banished from the city and forbidden to return. He felt some natural anxiety that these new Christians, many of whom had been brought out of paganism only a few weeks before and had had little teaching, should appreciate the moral demands of their new faith. Accordingly, he writes to them as follows (I abridge slightly what he says, but only slightly):

We beg you, we appeal to you, in the Lord Jesus, to be even more diligent than you are in following the tradition we passed on to you, about the Way to please God by your conduct. You know what orders we gave you, by the help of Jesus Christ: it is the will of God that you should be holy, that you should abstain from sexual immorality and learn, each of you, to keep his body in holiness and honor. . . not to overreach his fellow-Christian or to invade his rights. . . About family affection (within the Christian "family", the Church, he means) it is not necessary for me to write to you. You have God's own teaching, to love one another" (He is referring to the Old Testament commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, " as reaffirmed by Jesus Christ) and you are in fact practicing .this rule of love .towards all your fellow Christians in Macedonia" We appeal to you to make even greater efforts. We want you to strive hard to keep calm, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands, as we ordered, so that you may both make a good impression on outsiders and also find your own (economic) needs supplied. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-12)

There are several points here that should be observed before we pass on. First, there is the downright peremptory tone which Paul adopts. He neither argues nor offers tactful advice. He gives "orders"; the term which he employs is the term used for army orders. This may come as something of a shock to those who have been accustomed to think of Paul as the apostle of liberty, and even of what is nowadays called "Christian anarchism."

Secondly, the orders are severely practical and common-sense. The Christians of Thessalonika are to observe decent self-control in sexual relations, to respect the rights of others, to do their best to love their neighbors, and to be honest and industrious so as to maintain a reasonable

standard of living without having to keep appealing for charity (like some Christian communities which Paul knew too well). Paul's teaching, then, has its feet well on the ground.

Thirdly, we can hardly be wrong in identifying these "orders" to which the apostle refers, as belonging to the regular course of ethical instruction for converts. The technical term used for it was catechesis; hence our word "catechism." That it must have covered a great deal more than is mentioned here, goes without saying. Paul is recalling certain points in this catechesis which, he feels, in view of news received from Salonica, need emphasizing. But so far as it goes, this passage gives us trustworthy information of the contents of the Pauline catechesis. As it happens, we can supplement the information we have in this passage from a second letter which the apostle wrote to the same community. We have noticed that one item in the body of instructions was the rule that members of the church should be ready to work with their hands. This salutary rule seems to have been unpopular at Salonica. In the second letter the apostle writes: "When we were with you, we gave orders that if a man was unwilling to work he should not be given food, " and he then proceeds to elaborate the point, in view of flagrant refusal :to work on the part of some members (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

Fourthly, in both letters to the Thessalonians Paul speaks of the body of instructions he had given as "traditions." He uses the same term in writing upon matters of conduct to the Corinthians, where he prefaces a fresh piece of teaching with a tactful acknowledgment that the Corinthians have faithfully followed the orders which they had previously been given. "I commend you, " he writes, "because you remembered what I said and preserved the traditions which I passed on to you" (1 Corinthians 11:2). Of course, every tradition must be started by someone, and it is arguable that Paul was, in fact, the originator of the "tradition" of ethical teaching to which he refers. In that case, the passages we have noted would tell us about nothing more than Paul's own established practice. But it would be entirely unnatural to understand his words in that sense, especially as in the same letter to the Corinthians he also speaks of a "tradition" regarding the facts about Jesus and expressly says that he had received it from others and handed it on to his correspondents (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). We may take it, therefore, that there was already a traditional body of ethical teaching given to converts from paganism to Christianity. Paul could safely assume that such teaching was given in churches outside his own sphere of influence, as appears from a place in his letter to the Christians of Rome a city which he had not yet visited. He expresses thankfulness that the Roman Christians wholeheartedly obey what he calls "the pattern of teaching" which they had received, proving thereby, he says, that they had been liberated from sin and made into servants of what is right (Romans 6:17-18).

There seems to be evidence here both for the existence of a definite form of ethical instruction or catechesis in the earliest days of the Christian mission to the Roman Empire and for some part, at least, of its contents. Our knowledge of any further contents must be derived from the study of passages in the epistles which seem to recall, sometimes directly and sometimes allusively, the well-established pattern of catechetical training through which their readers had been put when they first became Christians. It is a delicate matter to decide in any given case whether we are in fact being referred to such an established pattern, or whether the writer is developing fresh teaching for the occasion.

Thus, in Galatians 5:13 Paul is clearly making a transition from the rather controversial theology of the earlier chapters to ethical instruction. He begins by reminding his correspondents that the whole law can be summed up in the commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This is certainly traditional. In the verses that follow, down to the end of chapter v, the case is not so clear. There is a list of vices to be avoided, which recalls similar lists of vices to be found in pagan moralists and their Jewish imitators, and may well have found its way into Christian tradition; with a balancing list of virtues which may already have been traditional in Christian circles, but is, perhaps, more likely to have been compiled by Paul himself. The way in which the whole passage is tied up with the distinctively Pauline doctrine of the Spirit expounded in the earlier chapters suggests that we have here an ad hoc development of traditional material, rather than anything like an extract from it. With 6:1 we perhaps return to something more directly taken from tradition: "If a man is detected in any misbehavior, you who are spiritual must put him right, very gently, and with great care lest you should be tempted yourselves. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ." The language of the passage is thoroughly Pauline, and we should, perhaps, not have suspected that the matter of it was traditional, but that it clearly alludes to regulations for the treatment of offenders in the church which are to be found in Matthew 18:15-17. It is significant that Paul expressly refers these injunctions to "the law of Christ." But the soundest method of determining, with the highest degree of probability, which the nature of the case admits, the contents of the early Christian "pattern of teaching," as Paul calls it, is to examine the ethical portions of a number of epistles, and see whether the material common to them all betrays any signs of originating at a stage antedating the particular writing. The enterprise is limited by the fact that most of the relevant documents are either by Paul or else were written directly under his influence, so that it is arguable that whatever is common to them attests only Paul's masterful mind. But, in the first place, it is now almost certain that the Epistle to the Hebrews and the First Epistle of Peter contain much more that is independent and original than earlier criticism admitted; and in the second place, even in the Pauline epistles themselves there are some recurrent features of language and style in the ethical sections which seem to set them apart, as if the apostle were not writing entirely freely, in his own natural manner, but following a partly stereotyped pattern.

Anyone who will read the epistles with attention, and pay regard to style and form as well as to content, cannot fail to recognize, even in translation, a common style in certain passages, different from the normal style of the writers concerned. Take as examples the following three short passages, as they stand in the Revised Standard Version.

(I) We exhort you, brethren, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

(II) Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body.

(III) Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called,

that you may obtain a blessing.

It would, I think, puzzle even a person well read in the New Testament to say, on grounds of style alone, to what authors these extracts are to be assigned. They are so much alike. They are all marked by a concise, staccato style. They use the fewest words possible. They have a kind of sing-song rhythm, which helps the memory. As a matter of fact, the first is by Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:14-18), the second from the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 13:1-3), and the third from the First Epistle of Peter (1 Peter 3:8-9): The author to the Hebrews has a strongly individual style, deeply influenced by Greek rhetoric and entirely different from Paul's, which again is unmistakably individual. The style of the First Epistle of Peter is less individual, yet it is sufficiently distinctive to bring out the difference between such passages as that which I have quoted and the bulk of the epistle.

I do not think it plausible to suggest that all this is accidental; nor would it be any more plausible to suggest that the authors of Hebrews and 1 Peter said to themselves, "Since Paul changes his style when he comes to ethical teaching, we will do the same." It is surely more likely that each of these writers was unconsciously influenced by the ring and run of familiar forms of ethical instruction in the church. I do not suppose that in such passages we have anything like a direct reproduction of an existing document, or even verbal quotation of an established form transmitted by word of mouth. But it does seem probable on general grounds that we are here indirectly in touch with a common tradition. Different writers develop and elaborate the common pattern at different points and in characteristically different ways, but tend to return to it where they are not concerned to emphasize any particular point.

It appears, then, that the ethical portions of the epistles are based upon an accepted pattern of teaching which goes back to a very early period indeed, and whose general form and content can be determined with considerable probability.

It seems to have run somewhat as follows: The convert is first enjoined to lay aside certain discreditable kinds of conduct, especially some which were common and easily condoned in pagan society. Sometimes lists of such vices are inserted, lists which can be shown to have been drawn from popular ethical teaching of the period, quite outside Christianity. The convert is enjoined to abandon these vices and to be prepared for a total reorientation of moral standards in a Christian sense. This is sometimes expressed in the terms "to put off the old man and to put on the new."

Next, some of the typical virtues of the new way of life are set forth, with especial emphasis upon such virtues as purity and sobriety, gentleness and humility, generosity and a hospitable temper, patience under injuries, and readiness to forgive.

Then various social relationships are reviewed, in particular those which constitute the family as the primary form of community; the relations of husband and wife, parents and children, master and servants – for, in the social structure of the time, a servant, even if he were a slave, was a member of the familia. The proper Christian attitude in all such relations is briefly indicated: husbands are to love their wives, children to obey their parents, masters to treat their servants with consideration, and so forth.

Then the wider "family" of the Christian community itself comes into view. The new member is enjoined to respect the leaders or elders of the society and is taught that each member has his own special function in the body, for which he is responsible.

Looking farther afield, he is given some counsel about behavior to his pagan neighbors in the delicate situation in which the members of an unpopular sect were likely to find themselves. He must be prudent, nonprovocative, seeking peace, never flouting the social or moral standards of those among whom he lives, while using any opportunity of doing a kindness to them even if they had not been friendly to him.

Like other subjects of the Empire, he is told, he owes obedience to the constituted authorities and should make it a matter of conscience to keep the law and pay his taxes. But there are limits beyond which a higher allegiance claims him: he must be loyal at all cost to his faith, and prepared to endure persecution with inflexible determination and fortitude.

Finally he is reminded of the extremely critical time in which he lives, which calls for constant watchfulness and lays upon him the most solemn responsibilities.

Such is the general scheme which, with large variations of detail, reappears so often in these writings that we cannot but conclude that it was part of the common and primitive tradition of the church.

It is filled in and elaborated variously in different writings. We shall later have to take account of this elaboration, because it is there that we may detect some of the ways in which the fundamental convictions of the Gospel make their impact upon ethics; but for the present we recognize in the ethical teaching which is represented by the epistles, a practical scheme for the guidance of organized groups in the Roman Empire faced with the common problems of social behavior, in a situation which in some ways made such problems more difficult for them than for other people. In the Greco-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. It won many proselytes, and its influence spread far beyond the limits of membership of the synagogue. Hellenistic Jewish missionaries had learned much as regards method from the preachers of popular philosophy, who went from city to city and often found ready audiences. These wandering philosophers mostly put forward some version of the fine, austere moral code of the Stoics, adapted for popular appeal.

We have a fair amount of evidence of the way in which these precursors of the Christian mission, both Jewish and a pagan, went about their task. It seems clear that the early Christians were influenced by their example. For instance, known Jewish forms for receiving proselytes show parallels to elements in the Christian catechesis, such as the insistence upon a radical reorientation of moral standards, and upon membership in a society carrying solemn obligations; such, again, as the recital of typical commandments which the convert will be expected to observe, and the warning of the danger of persecution" with demands for constancy.

Again, there is the method of setting forth moral obligations under the head of typical social relations: duties of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, duties to the commonwealth and the government. The passages of the epistles which deal with this theme are

similar in style and manner to the popular teaching both of Hellenistic Judaism and of Stoicism. Not infrequently parallels to the actual precepts can be found, and have been set out at length by scholars. In broad outline, therefore, it appears that the ethical teaching given by the early church was pretty closely related to the general movement in Greco-Roman society towards the improvement of public morals as it was undertaken in the first century by various agencies. Christian teachers took for granted the existing structure of society, with its known moral problems and dangers. Up to a point, they were able to adopt a good deal of the basic criticism and counsel which serious moralists of other schools were urging on their contemporaries,

They were certainly wise in thus linking up the teaching they gave with the accepted standards of the society in which their converts moved. There is always a certain danger about a movement which aims at making its members superior to the commonly recognized standards. With unstable characters there is always the risk that, once emancipated from the accepted conventions, they will fall, below them instead of rising above them, and lapse into eccentricity or worse. It shows therefore, much wisdom in these early Christian teachers that they kept their converts' feet firmly on the ground, by reminding them continually of the accepted fundamental obligations of society. It was extremely healthy (for example) for the Thessalonians to be told, "It is the will of God that you should be honest and industrious"; and for the Romans to be told, "It is the will of God that you should obey the law and pay your taxes"; whatever other and higher demands Christianity might make upon them. When we have recognized the fact that in general structure the catechesis of early Christianity followed the lines of other ethical teaching of the time, we shall be better prepared to recognize the points at which specifically Christian motives and sanctions are introduced. We shall discover within the framework of a workaday code of behavior the impact of ideas which go far to transform the whole moral situation; and this will lead us to appreciate the deeper connections between Christian ethics and the religious springs from which they took their rise.

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