

VALUE SYSTEM:

... as avowed

... as practiced

"Conventions are customs which are more practiced than preached; morals are customs which are more preached than practiced," wrote Will Durant in *The Mansions of Philosophy*. Judging from the proliferation of problems — unemployment, relief, high taxes, spending, graft, inflation, poverty, delinquency, neglect of children, broken homes, crime, anarchy, decline of morality, war — among a people generally considered to be citizens of a religious nation, we might conclude that the value system in this country include principles that are more PREACHED than PRACTICED.

Not alone in the twentieth century, however, has mankind shown a propensity for professing one thing and doing another. Some explanation seems in order for the wide disparity between what

mankind professes to value and what his practiced values produce.

In order to make a comparison between our avowed personal value systems and our practiced value patterns, some evidence must at least be reviewed which would indicate that they are not in harmony. This evidence is both general and specific.

We subscribe to the adage that "Honesty is the best policy." At the same time, we have created a national disgrace with cheating in classrooms, getting by with undercover deals in business, and causing insurance rates to sky-rocket because of our dishonest practices in reporting losses. We have complicated and distorted that balance of trust by which men and civilizations have been pleased to advance themselves economically, socially, politically, and morally; we

have aggravated the task of the shopkeeper with our shoplifting; we have denied the private businessman his right to legitimate profit by taking, in addition to the wages he pays us, whatever we can conceal in our pockets or our vehicles, or embezzle through clever book-keeping system. We have abdicated responsibility for indebtedness through the widespread subterfuge of bankruptcy. As if that were not enough, we have "nicted" (looked the other way) while bribery, graft, wholesale thievery, grand larceny even, have become accepted behavior by appointed and elected officials.

We profess to value human life, but even the most obvious instinct in mankind, self-preservation, becomes a mockery in practice. On the one hand, we spend millions of dollars, quantities of energy, and talent in pursuit of cures for everything from the common cold to cancer. On the other hand, with what would be comedy if it were not such tragic irony, we abuse, debase, even destroy ourselves physically. The records of highway slaughter

are commonplace; they no longer shock us. The gluttony and excessive indulgences to which we subject our bodies are not so dramatic, but equally destructive.

A most individual matter serves as a striking example of the ridiculous manner in which we irrationally practice what we do *not* rationally preach. Almost no one, regardless, of his habits, will deny that cigarette smoking is a dirty, time-consuming, expensive, senseless habit. Within the last ten years, a mountain of evidence, universally disseminated, has attested to its injurious, if not fatal, consequences to physical well-being. But cigarette smoking is on the increase, not decrease.

The sinister forces that threaten and take our lives prematurely have their roots in our self-deception, professing to value one thing while practicing an opposing value pattern.

Probably no area of our lives, save one, is more fraught with meaning in this matter than is the political arena. Moral standards are preached; political **expe-**

diency is practiced. The science or art of politics, that by which we govern ourselves, ought to be the least suspect because of its tremendous influence upon the lives and fortunes of so many; yet from the local alderman or councilman to the men who aspire to the Presidency, we need a Diogenes to search out "an honest man." Political expediency has become a way of life; the effects are monumental and worldwide in scope.

The candidate presents himself as a man of intelligence and honesty, assured that he has something of value to contribute to the effectiveness and orderliness of our democratic process. Then, so often, he begins the devious journey which will preclude his contribution, telling himself that in order to be elected, he must sacrifice some of his honor, some of his principles, in the interest of the greater good, that of service. He really thinks he will reinstate those compromised principles of morals and ethics once in office. What a sorry plight our communities, cities, the nation, and the entire world

are in through this kind of gap between professed values and practiced behaviors.

We criticize those elements in our society whose demands for higher wages, shorter working hours, more fringe benefits are wrecking such havoc on the value of the dollar. Under a slightly different guise, however, we add our own irresponsibility to the spiraling inflation that threatens our very existence as a free nation. We express regret, even indignation, over the plight of starving millions in far-off places and find a hundred excuses for not contributing to the United Fund in our own communities.

We pass laws and immediately begin the skillful evasion, or downright violation, of them. We say that we honor virtue, but we do not practice it; we avow our love of freedom and for more than thirty years have bartered it piecemeal for a false security.

We extol the value of stable family life as the most basic foundation upon which to regenerate a free society, composed of individuals committed to honor, decency, courage, and respect for fel-

low-beings. All the while we participate in practices that are diametrically opposed to the preservation of family life. With childlike simplicity we expect to have it both ways. Now we are reaping a whirlwind of violence, bloodshed, and anarchy through our violation of the most primal law of life, that of love for our neighbor as for ourselves.

In attempts to secure greater freedom, we enslave ourselves through personal habits or strictures imposed in the guise of security and the delusion that prosperity is synonymous with deflated dollars in wide circulation and civilization with the products of technology. We manifest our universal folly in selecting the commodity we desire but refuse to pay the price to obtain it. We are no more willing to harmonize our ways and means than we are to harmonize our professed values with our practiced values. While it may be a dubious alibi to suggest that we are foolish rather than hypocritical, the fact remains that not all of the discrepancies between professed values and prac-

ticed value patterns can be accounted for by planned hypocrisy.

The school of philosophy generally attributed to Freud views man essentially as an animal, as a pawn, as a mere victim of his surroundings. The Judaic-Christian Ethic, upon which our value system has been traditionally based, however, sees man as having not only the capacity but also the responsibility for directing himself along constructive, positive ways rather than merely following the path of least resistance. While we may give lip service to this principle that man must bear responsibility for his behavior, we often deliberately and with efficiency remove the individual from the consequences of his misbehavior.

Hoodlums roam the streets wantonly destroying property and human life, but they are not considered responsible. Society, whatever that animal is, has failed them. Gangs of idle malingerers vandalize schools, churches, and private homes. Who can blame them? The community does not provide wholesome recreation. If students do not

learn in school, the cause is not their indolence, inattention, or disinterest, but the failure of the teacher to motivate them. We have carried this mythical scapegoat business to such proportions that the effect is disastrous to the general well-being of the national character.

Man is an agent unto himself; he cannot escape the inevitable consequences of his personal value systems in profession and practice. Yet, we have made guilty of our *own* behavior society, our parents, the government, teachers, preachers, friends, as well as the "divine thrusting on" and "planetary influence." Meanwhile, the net result does not go away; it sits and stares at us, growing more and more formidable. While it is easy to blame society, or something else, it is difficult to admit "I was wrong" or "I was in error."

Man is not born with a value system. He must learn it. Plato, in *Laws*, said that the little human animal will not at first have the right responses. It must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those

things which really are pleasant, likable, disgusting, and hateful.

In the *Republic*, the well-nurtured youth is one

. . . who would see most clearly whatever was amiss in ill-made works of man or ill-grown works of nature, and with a just distate would blame and hate the ugly even from his earliest years and would give delighted praise to beauty, receiving it into his soul and being nourished by it, so that he becomes a man of gentle heart. All this before he is of an age to Reason; so that when Reason at length comes to him, then, bred as he has been he will hold out his hands in welcome and recognize her because of the affinity he bears to her.

Aristotle had something similar to say on the subject. He thought that unless a child had been trained in "ordinate affections or just sentiments," it would be useless to appeal to his ethical sense when he became an adult because he would have no basis for such an approach. Though too obvious

to require saying, the home, the church, and the school, in that order perhaps, have abdicated some responsibility in inculcating moral and ethical principles, underlying

a value system, early in the child's development. — *By Mabel M. Mitchell in The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, Spring 1968.*

COSTLY PRINTING ERRORS

HELP-WANTED ad in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*: "Drivers, school bus. Add to income or supplement retirement tension."

FROM a Kiwanis Club bulletin: "Sorry to hear about Edith feeling poorly. We hope you're feeling your usual porky self soon, Edith."

FROM a restaurant's business card: "Indian, Pakistani, Chinese foods . . . Die in an authentic Eastern atmosphere."

FROM an article on a drum and bugle corps in the Marion, Ohio, *Star*: "Mr. Seaton, who retires from the corps this year, will join the staff as bulging instructor."

FROM the Charlottesville, Va., *Progress*: "Appointments may be made beforehand by calling the hospital and asking for the blood bank. This will avoid needles waiting."

NOTICE in the Belton, S.C., *News*: "I want to say thank you to all the friends who have continued to remember me with prayers, cards, letters and gifts. I am still under the doctor's care. Please continue to pray for me."

FROM the Memphis *Press-Scimitar*: "A total of \$40 million in tax revenge was collected by the state."