

Morality Essential for Civilization

EVERY few days you might run across a declaration by someone who argues that "you can't legislate morality!"

It might be true that enacting a law won't instantly change an individual's moral standards, but if you pursue the matter you may find that such arguments often come from those who simply do not want their particular brands of immorality outlawed.

Just a few days ago, legal counsel reportedly advised the Oklahoma City Planning Commission that "morals should not cloud" its discussions of regulating indecent adult amusements businesses.

The advice was to dodge legislating morality while legalizing immorality! Have we all come down with a case of total moral amnesia?

Most of the morality (including honesty, integrity and decency) that exists in the world today has been legislated or otherwise converted into rules of conduct. A great deal of morality is according to law and without such laws, our morality might be even lower than it is.

Codes of moral conduct include religious commandments, manners, patriotism, sex laws and customs, integrity, lawfulness, professional ethics, loyalty, cooperation, house rules for organizations, honesty and sportsmanship. Every society from primitive to civilized has some legislated morality.

In a recent editorial in U.S. News & World Report, Marvin Stone wrote: "Ethics may sound purely moralistic, but fundamentally it just means the kind of behavior that enables people to live together in a free society. Without it, a country risks descent into chaos or dictatorship."

That has happened. In 1920 Lenin repudiated all morality for Russia except that which fit his communist concepts of human progress.

Recently, President Reagan said of Soviet leaders that "the only morality they recognize is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat."

"The biggest failing in higher education today is that we fall short in

exposing students to values," said Steven Muller, president of Johns Hopkins University. "We don't really provide a value framework to young people who more and more are searching for it."

Many educators argue that teaching moral values is not a proper function of schools and colleges. Yet, it is admitted that up to 60 percent of students will cheat in order to make better grades. Cheating students make crooked businessmen.

In his "Country Boy" column in The Oklahoma Cowman magazine, Roy P. Stewart recently deplored the passing of the day "when a man's word was his bond." He cited frequent repudiation of sports contracts as examples and commended the cattle industry tradition of trading by a nod or a handshake. It involved little paperwork and lots of moral integrity.

There can be no such thing as moral neutrality. Morality is more than just a religious or legal question. Integrity is essential to civilization. Amoral people can hardly be called fully civilized.