

AlbertMohler.com

Values and Moral Truth are Not the Same

Friday, April 18, 2008



No discussion of our national ills is complete without some mention of slippery “values” in the public square. Indeed, though talk of moral absolutes is portrayed as outdated and simplistic, the debate concerning national values has never been more heated.

The late Allan Bloom, whose 1987 book *The Closing of the American Mind* became a runaway bestseller, wrote perceptively that the contemporary talk of “values” is what is left when society accepts the notion that there is no genuine right or wrong. Moral issues are reduced to matters of personal preference and conviction. My “values” may not match your “values,” but we all must respect each other’s convictions equally in matters of common concern.

The situation prompted one observer to comment that when he hears talk of “values,” he reaches for his nearest discount catalogue. It is about as useful as anything else if all moral absolutes are discarded.

The postmodern philosophers have undermined the very concept of morality, arguing that all moral systems are merely relics of the repressive past, put in place by oppressive forces. Since all truth—including moral claims—is socially constructed, postmodern humans are free to “deconstruct” these moral codes and find “values” within.

The loss of the nation’s moral center has been long in coming. The late Fredrick Moore Vinson, a former Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, declared before 1950 that “Nothing is more certain in modern society than the principle that there are no absolutes.” Coming from one who was then America’s foremost jurist, the statement was a dark prophecy of things to come.

No thinking person can ignore the massive and seemingly insoluble moral debates that plague our society and frame national debate. When the most basic issues of life, sexuality, family, marriage, and moral responsibility are up for grabs, the nation has reached a testing point of unprecedented proportions. Given the confusion, only the most radical relativist can celebrate our current state of moral affairs.

The shift from morals to values in the church is a sign of the Christian abdication of moral leadership. When the church joins in the affirmation that all moral issues are matters of purely individual concern, the salt has lost its savor. The reduction of morality to values was a hallmark of the 1980s, when progressivist educators pushed this agenda in the public schools. Throughout the educational world, “values clarification” exercises became the order of the day, with children and teenagers encouraged to invent their own individualistic systems of morality and to “develop” their own values. Since these are individually determined, no one can be right and no one can be wrong.

That generation of young people is now well into adulthood, and we can see the moral damage inflicted by those who instructed students to look only within themselves for a system of values, and to doubt or defy traditional morality. Values reflect only a subjective dimension with no objective moral truth. A generation raised in the incubator of moral relativism is groping for enduring truth in the moral wilderness.

Content Copyright © 2002-2010, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.