

## ETHICS IN A PERMISSIVE SOCIETY

William Barclay has been Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism in Glasgow University since 1963, although he has been on the staff of the university since 1947. His main job is to teach the New Testament. Before that he was Minister of Trinity Church of Scotland, Renfrew. Although he has lived in the academic world for so long he has always made it his aim to communicate the Gospel to ordinary men and women with no technical qualifications. His series of volumes on the New Testament in the *Daily Study Bible* have sold over a million copies; and his books on prayer in the Fontana Series have sold by the hundred thousand. For many years he has been a regular contributor both to the *British Weekly* and to the *Expository Times* and he has done much work as a broadcaster both on radio and television. He has made it his life work to try to bridge the gap between the academic and the lay world.

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ETHICS IN  
A PERMISSIVE  
SOCIETY

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WILLIAM BARCLAY

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For Jane B and Jane C  
who are the modern generation

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## Foreword

My first word must be a word of very sincere thanks to the Baird Trustees for entrusting me with the task of delivering these lectures. The Baird lecturers have been a distinguished succession, and it is a very great honour and privilege for me to walk in that company.

My second word must be a word of explanation. Until now the Baird Lectures have been an academic occasion, and they have been delivered to a comparatively limited audience within a college or university. But on this occasion the Baird Trustees and the BBC decided to make an experiment by putting the Baird Lectures on to the television screen. This necessarily altered their presentation. They had to be designed to reach a far larger audience and an audience of a different kind. What had formerly been an academic occasion became an experiment in communication; what had formerly been intended for a limited number had now to be aimed at the general public.

The original title of the television series was *Jesus Today: the Christian Ethic in the Twentieth Century*, and the circumstances in which they were given explain both the form and the subject of the lectures. I am quite sure that at the present time there is nothing more important than the presentation of the Christian ethic. What I have tried to do is to present the Christian ethic in its relevance for today, not in a form for the classroom or even for the pulpit, but in a form which would be relevant and intelligible for people with Christian concern, but with no specialist knowledge. It has been no small problem to do justice to the academic nature of this lectureship

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and at the same time to meet the need for the wider communication which its presentation on television necessitated. It has been given to me to begin this kind of experiment; I am sure that in the time to come others will do it far better than I have done.

Since the lectures were given on television they were shorter than they would otherwise have been. I have therefore added some material to this book in addition to the actual lectures, and have in some places expanded the lectures. The chapters on the ethics of the Old Testament, the ethics of Jesus, situation ethics, work, community ethics and person to person ethics are the substance of the six lectures which were actually delivered. The chapters on the ethics of Paul, on pleasure, and on money are additional material. This is not a handbook on Christian ethics. Very often subjects which need far more detailed treatment have had to be dealt with in a paragraph. But Christian ethics form a subject on which no book could ever be complete. I have tried to deal with the aspects which I believe to be most relevant for today, and often I have tried rather to open avenues for further thought than to offer any solutions. The fact that these chapters began life as television talks explains too why there is a certain amount of repetition. It could not be assumed that every listener would listen to every talk, and therefore each talk had to be complete in itself, and some things have had to be said twice.

For the Baird Lectures to be put on television was a departure. And this seemed to me to carry with it the necessity of a departure from custom in publishing them also. In former times the Baird Lectures would have been a stately and fairly expensive volume. But it seemed to me—and the Trustees agreed—that the corollary of presentation on television was publication in paperback form.

I have many people to thank for their help and sympathy. Colonel Baird and Rev R. H. G. Budge of the Baird Trust gave me constant encouragement. And I owe a greater debt than I can express to Rev Dr R. S. Falconer of the BBC and

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to the whole BBC team which produced these lectures on television. He and they combined kindness and efficiency to give me every support.

It is my hope and prayer that these lectures may do something to show that the Christian ethic is as relevant today as ever it was.

*Glasgow University,  
January 1971*

William Barclay