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The One Foundation of Christian Ethics

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ONE of the perennial problems confronting Christianity is the relation of ethics to faith. Thirty years ago the late Dean Inge wrote, "The storm-centre of religious controversy in post-war Europe and America is, it seems to me, the relation of the Gospel of Christ to problems of conduct. If the authority of Christ were rejected in this field, what would be left of Christianity would not be worth quarrelling over."¹ The gloomy Dean could scarcely have foreseen the conditions of the present day which give his words prophetic urgency. In the face of ethical problems, the solution to which is literally a matter of life-and-death, it is particularly important that we understand the relation of the Gospel of Christ to those problems. It is the lack of such understanding which accounts for the tragic fact that the voices raised in the name of Christian ethics are frequently confusing and even in conflict with one another. The crux of the difficulty, I believe, is a failure to acknowledge the truth, for Christian ethics, that "no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11). The one foundation of Christian ethics is the Christian faith. The following examination of three different schemes of ethics will point out that the fallacy in each is the assumption that some other foundation is necessary in order to make the Christian faith relevant to the ethical problems of human life.

I

The theology of Thomas Aquinas is generally regarded as the great medieval synthesis in which Greek, and particularly Aristotelian, philosophy provided the framework for the interpretation of the Christian faith. But Thomism involves not only synthesis but syncretism, that is, Christianity undergoes a serious modification through its union with Greek philosophy for the sake of mutual consistency. The ethical system of St. Thomas is a two-storey structure which is largely Aristotelian on the first level and Biblical on the second. Accordingly, the cardinal virtues are separated from the theological, and moral precepts distinguished from evangelical counsels. And although the Greek virtues and precepts are "baptized," that is, they are "infused together with charity,"² the whole scheme is a highly organized system of prudential ethics which bears little fundamental resemblance to the ethics of the New Testament. Scripture provides no warrant for a

1. W. R. Inge, *Christian Ethics and Modern Problems* (London, 1930), p. 4.

2. *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q. 62, art. ii. Also, "Theological virtues are specifically distinct from virtues moral and intellectual." Q. 65, art. iii.

distinction between the ordinary Christian and "the religious"; all men are bound by the radical requirements of *agape*-love which St. Thomas elaborates as "evangelical counsels." The idea of a "nicely calculated less and more" suggests a legalism which is foreign to the ethical demands of the Gospel. George Thomas calls attention to this primary defect in Thomism when he states: "Aquinas does not recognize that the 'precepts' of Jesus do not constitute a 'new law,' but are simply illustrations of what God's absolute will requires of members of his Kingdom. Consequently, he does not see the radicalism of the ethics of the New Testament."³

The Thomistic ethical system is rooted not in the Gospel but in natural or moral law, that is, in the affirmation of "common and indemonstrable principles" which are apprehended by man's natural reason.⁴ The crucial question here is well expressed by Paul Ramsey: "By what is Christian ethics to be distinguished from generally valid natural morality, if some theory of natural law becomes an authentic part and to any degree the *primary* foundation of Christian morality?"⁵ Many students of Protestant ethics acknowledge the validity of "natural law" within the context of general revelation; indeed, its relevance is a question of particular urgency today, when nations must either discover some basis of common international law and order or face annihilation. At present, however, there is little agreement as to the place of such a concept in any scheme of Christian ethics. In any case, it is evident that an ethic based upon natural law tends to become stultified and obsolete, as in its application to birth control or in the idea of a "just war." The cause of Christianity was strengthened in the thirteenth century through the remarkable syncretism of Thomas Aquinas. But the continuing acceptance of his ethics in a large area of Christian thought is regrettable, insofar as Thomism misinterprets the Christian ethic by assuming that it may be based on a foundation other than the Christian faith.

II

Classical Protestantism has generally been critical of Thomism for what it regards as an unwarranted optimism concerning the capability of human reason to apprehend the moral law. In this respect, one of the outspoken prophets of neo-protestantism is Reinhold Niebuhr. Dr. Niebuhr has rendered a service to Christian ethics by re-emphasizing the gravity of human sin, and by warning against an easy application of the love ethic of the New Testament to the problems of society. He has persistently called attention to "the problem of compromise, the problem of creating and maintaining tentative harmonies of life in the world in terms of the possibilities of the human situation."⁶ On the other hand, he has been critical of every scheme

3. *Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy* (New York, 1955), p. 114.

4. *Op. cit.*, II-II, Q. 91, art. iii.

5. *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York, 1950), p. 86.

6. *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York, 1935), p. 59.

of prudential ethics, and continues to insist upon the necessity of bringing tentative achievements "under the criticism of the ultimate ideal."⁷ But Niebuhr's severest criticism has been reserved for what he terms the "naive utopianism" of the Social Gospel and the "moralistic pietism" of American liberalism. The extent to which such phrases have become watchwords in contemporary social ethics is evidence of Niebuhr's widespread influence. For example, E. L. Long, Jr., re-echoes Niebuhr's criticism of the proponents of the Social Gospel in these words: "They took the ultimate norm of Christian love as equivalent to a practical program of action, . . . [trusting] that Christian love could be translated into social reality without a process of compromise."⁸ The validity of this criticism will be considered later. Niebuhr's own compromise, however, makes the norm of love altogether impracticable in the realm of social and political activity. Indeed, it is doubtful whether his positive suggestions for a social ethic are compatible with the Gospel at all.

The key to Niebuhr's interpretation of the relation of politics to justice is contained in his affirmation that "In the field of collective behaviour, the force of egoistic passion is so strong that the *only* harmonies possible are those which manage to neutralize this force through balances of power. . . ."⁹ This is a constant refrain in all Niebuhr's utterances concerning social, economic, political and international affairs, as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., points out. The latter quotes Niebuhr as saying, "An uneasy balance of power would seem to become the highest goal to which society could aspire." And Schlesinger comments, "On the level of strategy the balance of power in one form or another . . . remains still . . . Niebuhr's answer to the problem of achieving a tolerable society."¹⁰ Niebuhr admits the necessity of submitting every proposal to the judgment of Christian love, but denies that a realistic form of justice is attainable on the basis of such love. In this he fails to acknowledge fully the redemptive possibilities of the Gospel or its ethical application. In other words, Niebuhr recognizes Christ as Judge but not as Saviour of men in any collective, social sense. His "realism" prevents him from regarding the Christian hope in other than eschatological terms; the hope of achieving more than a tolerable society based on uneasy balances of power is apparently naive and utopian!

Niebuhr came to accept a "balance of power" strategy as a reaction against the "easy optimism" of American Christianity, which failed to combat the injustices arising from the domination of the economic life of society by industrial magnates and increasingly powerful corporations. Seeking a realistic approach to the problems of unemployment in a time of economic depression, he was deeply influenced by the dialectical philosophy of Marxism. John Bennett, commenting on Niebuhr's social ethics, states:

7. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

8. *Conscience and Compromise* (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 28.

9. *Op. cit.*, p. 140; emphasis mine.

10. C. W. Kegley & R. W. Bretall eds., *Reinhold Niebuhr, His Religious, Social and Political Thought* (New York, 1956), p. 137.

"He used Marxism to criticize the sentimentality of liberalism. He does not expect 'the conception of love, held by oligarchs of a civilization, to qualify or challenge the power which they hold.' This leads him to accept the class struggle as diagnosis and as strategy with few qualifications."¹¹ The other major influence upon Niebuhr's ethical thought was American pragmatism. Critical as he has often been of Dewey and his school, his own ethics have become increasingly prudential and pragmatic. So Schlesinger observes:

. . . Niebuhr came to intellectual maturity under the influence both of the Social Gospel and of pragmatism. But where Dewey and the social passion had agreed on the fundamentals of social strategy, Niebuhr . . . began to detect a difference between what he called the "prophet" and the "statesman"—the one committed to God, the other to the sinful world. The ethic of Jesus and the dictates of pragmatic wisdom, instead of coinciding, seemed almost at times—and necessarily so—to point in opposite directions.¹²

Although Niebuhr has forsaken his early socialism and has become a bitter critic of the pacifism he once espoused, he has consistently maintained his emphasis upon "checks and balances" of power and power groups as the key to social justice. He has frequently indicted Christianity for holding "political theories which are not able to cope with the problem of establishing a relative justice in society through the strategic use of coercion, conflict and balances of power."¹³ This is an astonishing criticism of Christianity. How Niebuhr can make such an observation can only be understood by recognizing his separation of the Christian life from its faith; and his emphatic denial that "the way of the Cross" is practicable from a social point of view. A recent statement makes this quite explicit:

It must be noted that the distinctively Christian theory of grace and redemption does not find place in a social ethic because it is a question whether nations, races and other groups have direct access to God and can repent and have newness of life in the sense that individuals do.¹⁴

From a theological point of view, the conditions Niebuhr imposes here upon the operation of divine grace and redemption are open to serious question. It appears evident that in his preoccupation with the judgmental side of the Gospel, he minimizes its redemptive nature. He denies as unrealistic the New Testament affirmation that *love is power* (Rom. 1:16; 12:21; I Cor. 1:23-24); but are not the Cross and Resurrection shorn of their ethical significance for men in such a denial?

Niebuhr's theory of "power politics" is also open to criticism from a sociological point of view. Although power is an instrument for the preserva-

11. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 132. See also Eduard Heimann, "Niebuhr's Pragmatic Conservatism" in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. XI, No. 4.

13. *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

14. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Problem of a Protestant Social Ethic" in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. XV, No. 1.

tion of order in a state, the basis of order is not compulsion but consent.¹⁵ Moreover, there is little sociological support for the idea that international order can be maintained for long by the balancing of sovereign powers.¹⁶ On the other hand, there is a good deal of evidence that a "tolerable society" has been achieved through strategies other than the manipulation of power, that the power of God to redeem men and their societies has been exercised through devoted men and the *koinonia*, rather than through the kind of power structures which Niebuhr considers indispensable.¹⁷ In his discussion of Christian social strategy, Niebuhr seems to overlook the creative possibilities of Christian leadership, personal and corporate witness, or organized social action in behalf of justice, economic assistance or international reconciliation. As this paper is a discussion of the foundation rather than the methods of Christian ethics, extensive evidence of the way in which divine grace and redemptive activity have apparently been operative in society would be out of place. By way of example, however, the political leadership and activity of William Wilberforce and his associates in the abolition of the slave trade might be cited, or the influence of the Wesleys upon the English industrial revolution.

Deserved tribute has been paid to Reinhold Niebuhr for his contribution to contemporary Christian ethics. His warnings have had a salutary effect upon many forms of complacency and self-satisfaction, and have exposed the inadequacy of a too optimistic view of man or society. But those who believe in the wholeness of the Christian faith and its relevance to all the affairs of men must raise serious questions about Niebuhr's social ethics. Looking for realistic strategies with which to meet the social and political problems of his day, Niebuhr found his answer in Marxism and pragmatism rather than in the Christian faith. In the name of pragmatic realism he advocates a foreign policy which, supported by coercive power of great magnitude, could well prove disastrous. The sheer "unrealism" of such a policy is made evident by the certain knowledge that the exercise of ultimate power available today would exterminate most of the human race. Yet if the historical evidence is valid, the prospect of thwarting the use of power by a show or balancing of power is very dim indeed. One can only marvel at the dialectical skill of a man who can persuade himself and others that such "power politics" and its terrible possibilities are even remotely related to the one foundation of Christian ethics, which is Christ a loving Saviour.

III

A third scheme of ethics which exemplifies another attempt to express

15. E.g., "Essential as are the services of socialized force they have also very decided limits, and even within these limits force is normally effective because it is conjoined with profounder expressions of the human will."—R. M. MacIver, *Society* (New York, 1941), p. 343.

16. "... countless historical evidences that in international relations preparation for war has begotten war."—*Ibid.*, p. 344.

17. Cf. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Abridgement of Volumes I–VI by D. C. Somervell (New York, 1946), Chapter XX.

the Christian faith in relevant terms is Moral Re-Armament, formerly known as the Oxford Group Movement. This movement is a vital form of that "individualistic pietism" against which Reinhold Niebuhr often inveighs. It is preoccupied with the same ethical problems that concern Niebuhr, labour-management relations, international affairs, etc. But its strategy is individualistic rather than social; it seeks to change men, and especially *key* men. Niebuhr's ethic, we suggested, is largely divorced from the Christian faith, so far as it concerns itself with social problems. Yet Niebuhr is prepared not only to admit but to insist upon the fundamental importance of doctrine for Christian ethics. Moral Re-Armament, on the other hand, stresses the primacy of personal morality to the neglect of faith and doctrine. Niebuhr contends that Christian absolutes are "always a little absurd," but this absurdity is the core of the Moral Re-Armament program, with its four "absolutes," honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love.

This "ideology," as it calls itself, is essentially so simple and uncomplicated that it requires little elaboration. Its contrast with the "realism" of Niebuhr may be illustrated by a newspaper article commenting on two conferences held simultaneously in May, 1954, in Switzerland, the Big Power Conference at Geneva and the World Assembly for Moral Re-Armament at Caux. "At best, all that can come out of Geneva is a compromise which can moderate deadly passions for a time without curing the fundamental differences. In Caux, hatred is not appeased but actually overcome."¹⁸ This face-to-face overcoming of differences is one of the major strategies of Moral Re-Armament.

The devotees of Moral Re-Armament make much of the fact that it is essentially an ideology in which all men can come together. The Right Reverend George West, former Bishop of Rangoon, writes: "The first thing that struck me about the World Assembly at Mackinac was the people who came. These included Catholics, pagans and Protestants, men of every faith and men of no faith." And he adds, "I saw that Christianity lived out fully is an ideology."¹⁹ The precise meaning given to "ideology" is not clear; but it appears that some kind of levelling takes place if Catholics, pagans and Protestants are all united in a common ideology. Perfect morality is taken to be the expression or embodiment of perfect faith, but this, apparently, does not mean the Christian faith. The lowest common denominator, or as the devotee regards it, the highest common factor, which unites believer and infidel is personal acceptance of the four "absolutes." Absence of doctrine does not mean, however, that there are no religious elements in the ideology. But the religious ideas are expressed in a non-Christian form, which adherents of other religions may accept without difficulty: life-changing through sharing (confession to another), surrender to God, restitution to all who have been wronged, and guidance.²⁰ This, with the four "abso-

18. R. C. Mowat ed., *Report on Moral Re-Armament* (London, 1955), p. 146.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

20. The Layman with a Notebook, *What is the Oxford Group?* (London, 1933), pp. 8-9.

lutes," comprises the essential formulation of the ideology—a much more satisfactory ethical scheme, from the stand-point of simplicity, than Niebuhr's, with its ambiguities, complexities and ironies!

There are certain techniques peculiar to Moral Re-Armament which distinguish it from traditional forms of pietism. Methods of modern salesmanship and propaganda of various kinds are employed.²¹ The presentation of the ideology in dramatic form has been widely successful; indeed, the "success" psychology of advertising is used with considerable finesse. "Testimonials" are impressive, particularly from the "top men," with whom the Moral Re-Armament effort begins and upon whom it concentrates. The theory behind this effort is that if you win the top or key men, it is easier to impress and change the others—a technique which has proved remarkably successful in current professional fund-raising programs. It is also claimed, with justification, that the affairs of men are most vitally influenced and affected by those in places of importance. In this age of depersonalization and "the organization man," recognition of the value of persons is most desirable. At the same time, we do well to recall that Jesus' disciples could hardly have been called "top" men in terms of position or prestige. Criticism has also been directed against the "slickness" of some of the Moral Re-Armament propaganda.²²

Our interest in Moral Re-Armament, however, is to weigh its importance as an ethical system, focusing particular attention upon its relation to the Christian faith. It has already been suggested that reconciliation between different points of view is achieved by some "common denominator" principle, which men of any faith or of no faith can all accept. That principle may be expressed in the assumption that everyone can be changed, guided and good! Moral Re-Armament's insistence upon the primacy of personal reformation undoubtedly has its roots in the Christian doctrine of regeneration. But according to the Christian faith, regeneration is a response to divine revelation and grace proffered to the individual through the incarnate and living Christ. Without disputing the claim that "men of every faith and men of no faith" are "changed," we must raise a question as to the nature and results of such changes, if the redeeming work of the Saviour Christ is minimized. Likewise, the Church as the body of Christ and the fellowship of Christian believers plays a very minor role in the ethical strategy of Moral Re-Armament.

A question related to the doctrines of Christ and the Church must also be raised in connection with Moral Re-Armament's naive idea of guidance.

21. Recently, the propaganda of Moral Re-Armament has concentrated on an anti-communist crusade which parallels the efforts of "Spiritual Mobilization," and in milder form, the now waning "McCarthyism"; they all see sinister influences behind any attempts at rapprochement with Communism—recognition of Red China, increased trade, exchange of visitors, etc. Cf. *Ideology and Co-existence*, circulated very widely on this continent.

22. Dr. Buchman says, for example, that "pray" means Powerful Radiograms Always Yours, and "Jesus" means Just Exactly Suits Us Sinners. Cited by Horton Davies, *Christian Deviations* (London, 1954), p. 102.

If the guidance of God were as direct and dependable as the adherents of this ideology apparently assume, why should the Incarnation be necessary at all? A Muslim's "guidance" as to what constitutes absolute purity in marriage, for example, will likely be quite different from that which a Christian ordinarily considers purity. Do men know with assurance what absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness or love require? Or knowing, can they hope to fulfil such requirements? The basic doctrinal weakness of Moral Re-Armament is its failure to acknowledge the Second Person of the Trinity as well as the Third.

Moral Re-Armament, like Thomism, errs in making the Christian ethic into a set of rules. As Alexander Miller points out, the absolute of Christianity, is "an absolute loyalty and not an absolute principle" or set of principles.²³ The absolute love of which the Christian speaks is not a rule of life nor a law of ethical behaviour; rather, it is God himself making available his grace, in response to which men learn to love one another. Christian ethical requirements arise from the demand of divine love apprehended by faith. Faith and love precede obedience; or rather, love is the expression of obedience. "In us, as in God, Love must proceed from the Word."²⁴ In so far as the Christian ethic is thus derivative, it is not essentially a system of morality at all, and the assertion that there is no such thing as Christian ethics is correct in this respect. We must make a distinction, however, between the fundamental basis of Christian ethics and its particular application to a given problem or situation. The difficult but crucial issue is not whether, but how, the Christian gospel becomes relevant to the urgent social problems which any ethic must consider.

IV

Through the critical examination of three very different ethical schemes, we have tried to point out the weaknesses and inadequacies of Christian ethics which are not rooted in the Christian faith. The cornerstone of all Christian morality must be neither less nor other than the saving activity of God revealed in Jesus Christ. In other words, the norm of Christian ethics is *agape*-love, which in its vertical dimension describes the sacrificial, redeeming love of God, and horizontally, the response of men to that divine love in *all* their human relationships. Such a norm does not rule out, but supersedes, an ethic based on natural law. It affirms the saving activity of a living Christ, the operation of the Spirit of grace and truth, not only in individuals, but in groups and in the larger associations of men. Dr. Niebuhr's denial that the Christian doctrine of grace and redemption has any place in social ethics means, in effect, that Christianity is reduced to the individualistic pietism he so pointedly deploras! Moreover, a prudential ethic—a reduction of social strategy to "the art of the possible"—sets

23. *The Renewal of Man* (New York, 1955), p. 94.

24. Jacques and Raissa Maritain, *Prayer and Intelligence*, quoted by Erik Routley, *The Church and Music* (London, 1950), p. 217.

human limitations upon the boundless possibilities of God's saving activity, which is present as well as past, if the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is to be taken seriously. A living Christ is much more than mere example; he is the life, as well as the way and the truth,—life which is not bounded by the limitations of individual persons.

It is necessary, however, to suggest how the redemptive ethic based on the Gospel becomes realistic, relevant and responsible, if we reject the "compromises" examined above. It has been suggested, in effect, that strategies cannot be divorced from the norm, that works cannot be separated from faith, that means cannot ignore ends. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the Christian ethic, ultimately expressed and determined by Christian love, becomes responsible to the extent that it is considerate of possible consequences. It is in this particular respect that the Christian's openness to new truth and new insights based upon the experiences of men becomes important. This does not mean that Christian social ethics must become a calculating or prudential morality, as Dr. Niebuhr, in his quest for a responsible ethic, concludes. A profound understanding of Christ's crucifixion will not allow us to require assurance that the love ethic will "work" before we are willing to apply it; although we cannot dismiss lightly the truth in Paul's injunction: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). To deny the creative possibilities of grace, operating through social as well as personal expressions of love, is a serious distortion of Christian truth.

Nevertheless Dr. Niebuhr has reminded us that to act responsibly the Christian must be "as wise as a serpent"; a foolish scorn of consequences cannot be regarded as an intelligent or fully devoted expression of *agape*-love. That is why love must go beyond its source in the Christian faith in order to be true to itself. The widest possible examination of relevant human insight and experience is necessary to test the wisdom of an intended expression of love. Love is still love if some possible consequences are overlooked; it is not love if possible adverse consequences are negligently or wilfully overlooked.

The Bible is particularly important for Christian ethics, not only because it provides a unique record of "the Word" from which love must proceed, but also as the supreme account of the experiences of men who responded to that Word. The Bible is not a handbook of Christian ethics, as many have supposed. Neither the Decalogue, nor the prophetic affirmations of righteousness, nor the moral injunctions of Paul—not even the precepts of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount—can be regarded as the absolute norms or fundamental consideration of Christian ethics. What *is* basic is that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), and that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5); that is, in Christ men are given both the norm and the power to attain it. Christ's life, his teachings, his death and resurrection, taken together, provide the meaning of love, divine and

human. This is not to regard the Sermon on the Mount or any other Biblical teaching as irrelevant. Far from it. These must be taken seriously but not literally as evidence of what love requires, rather than as specific rules of behaviour which would constitute the basis of a new legalism. They help to provide content or to suggest the manner in which the Christian expresses his faith ethically, but they are not, in themselves, of the essence. For the Christian, being is more fundamental than doing; and for the "new being" in Christ, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Dispensing with rules does not relieve the Christian of moral obligation, nor free him from responsibility for the ethical problems of organized society. The application of the love ethic to society does not result in utopian anarchism, as Leo Tolstoy supposed.²⁵ The claims of love, springing from the perfect love of God, are absolute. But the expression of love is particular; what love requires is never known in detail or absolutely in advance of any situation. Consequently, the Christian must seek to discover the most adequate expressions of the Christian life which may be possible in his society at any given time. This means that the Christian ethic must be "teachable," to use Paul Ramsey's term,²⁶ so far as its particular content is concerned. The Bible is the "primary teacher" in this respect. Likewise, the Christian Church, as guardian of the faith and community of the faithful, must play a unique role in teaching the ethical requirements of the divine Word. But Christian ethics, if it is truly "teachable," must also be willing to examine non-Christian ideas of morality; the experiences of men recorded in history, the insights of moral philosophy, and the ethics of other religions may all offer valid suggestions as to what love may require.²⁷

Christians are obliged to listen, for example, to both the Christian Albert Schweitzer and the atheist Bertrand Russell, with regard to the problems of nuclear weapons and the "cold war." The proposals of either or both of these men may be "more Christian" than the moralism of Moral-Rearmament, the realism of Reinhold Niebuhr, or the legalism of Thomas Aquinas. In the light of possible consequences, love may demand a suspension of the testing of nuclear weapons and unilateral disarmament, rather than the stockpiling of weapons to maintain an uneasy balance of power. It may even be necessary to renounce all war, even "just war," although the advocate of such a radical proposal must be prepared to consider whether submission to tyranny is preferable to violence in the present instance. Responsible Christian concern must take all such possibilities into account. But the love by which every consideration is judged is also redemptive; new possibilities and creative alternatives to old solutions must constantly be sought and expressed.

25. Tolstoy would have ruled out the punishment of criminals by courts of law, or the use of force in any form by the state. Cf. *A Confession and What I Believe*, Chapters II & VI.

26. *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

27. Contrast Emil Brunner: "Does the Christian faith give the answer, the only answer, and the whole answer to the ethical question?" His reply is a decisive "Yes!"—*The Divine Imperative* (London, 1937), p. 51.

The application of the love ethic to social and political problems has often been rejected on the basis of the aphorism: "Politics is the art of the possible." Those who, like Thomas Aquinas and Reinhold Niebuhr, come to that conclusion, do so because of a mistaken understanding of the Christian ethic as an expression of the Christian faith. On the other hand, moralistic pietism, as exemplified by Moral Re-Armament, also fails to recognize the social relevance of that ethic by interpreting its strategy too narrowly in terms of individual activity. At the same time, Christian love would be no more than a utopian ideal if it proposed strategies which took no heed of "the possible." But an ethic founded upon the Christian faith will place on "the possible" no limits which are suggested by human experience alone. Jesus expressed the only limit when he told his disciples: "You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). And he stated the basic nature and ground of obligation in human relationships in similar, unlimited terms: "Love your enemies . . . *so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 5:44-45). This is both the foundation and the ultimate consideration of Christian ethics, not simply because it is Jesus' teaching, but because it is the supreme ethical expression of the faith in life, which Christ himself embodied. That they may be sons of their heavenly Father, men have been given a Redeemer; but they must also learn to love even as he loved, who in his own Person is the one foundation of Christian ethics. "No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."