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## THE NATURE AND INTERPRETATION OF THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC

By PHIL. W. PETTY, B.A.

### SYNOPSIS.

The conviction that there must be some "law" which is binding upon all men is widespread, but all attempts to discover and state it have ended in failure.

God, as Creator, must be behind both the law which comes to our reason from without and that which comes through desire and feeling from within. Therefore attempts to define goodness without reference to God must be self-defeating. Further, the failure to recognise the reality of sin has resulted in finality being attributed to conclusions which have only a temporary and relative validity.

Christian Ethics must recognise that "there is none righteous, save One. . . ." Clearer understanding of ethical principles will, it is suggested, come as we endeavour to treat others as persons, doing to them as we would have done to ourselves. Personal relations cannot be fully defined in other than personal terms. While we must, because of the distorting effect of sin, accept the guidance given by principles, we must not treat persons as raw material on which to practise principles. To do so breaks the truly personal relationship and closes a door to fuller knowledge of the good.

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THE confusion existing to-day in the realm of rational ethics is so great that it is not only impossible to construct an ethical system in which the evident truths enunciated by the great masters of thought can be synthesised, but it is hard to see how such a system can ever be constructed, at least from the standpoint of rational ethics.<sup>1</sup> Since this state of affairs

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<sup>1</sup> It is sometimes suggested that one theory is strong where another is weak, e.g., Kant gives force to the idea of "ought" while eudæmonistic theories can never really do this. This is rather like building three houses, one with good floors, another with sound walls and a third with a watertight roof and then trying to imagine that between the three one has a satisfactory dwelling. The trouble is that it is precisely the strong point of the one theory which is unacceptable to the other.

cannot be satisfying philosophically, and since it cannot be final for anyone who believes in God as the source of all goodness, the time has plainly come to examine afresh the premisses which have guided moral philosophers since the Renaissance, during the era of the development of the rational ethic, away from its undoubted origin in religion. Emil Brunner has attempted this task in a monumental work which it will take many years to appraise fully.<sup>1</sup> The modest purpose of this paper is to examine some of the radically new ideas which are advanced in "The Divine Imperative", and to show how they may be related to the realisation of the ultimate nature of personal relations of which Martin Buber and others have made us so acutely aware, and also to the New Testament, which, as ever, proves on examination to have everything which appears new to us buried not far below its surface.

Since the day when Descartes emerged from the room in which he had locked himself for four days, philosophy and ethics have been betrayed over and over again by their anthropocentric view of truth. We shall see something of this error as we consider the drift of thought since that day, but we dare not delude ourselves with the idea that we have seen it all, for it is not open to us to detach ourselves completely from the stream of events in which we ourselves move, though by rational reflection we can in part do so. For the same reason, though the temptation is powerful to shut the books and start again from the profound words of the New Testament, we dare not yield to it; firstly because to do so would be to delude ourselves as to the absolute objectivity of our standpoint; and secondly because we should be forsaking a rich heritage, since no school of ethics, not even ethical hedonism, has been uninfluenced by the message of Christ, with whom the idea of goodness is for ever associated. Kant strove to produce a purely rational ethic which owed nothing to the transcendental idea, but it is doubtful if even he thought he had succeeded,<sup>2</sup> and quite evident to-day that he failed, despite the massiveness of his thought. On the other hand, Kant would have rejected root and branch the basic premiss of the utilitarians, but C. S. Lewis is undoubtedly nearer the mark when he makes<sup>3</sup> Screwtape complain to Wormwood that the enemy "is a hedonist at heart.

<sup>1</sup> *The Divine Imperative*, Engl. trn., 1937. Lutterworth Press.

<sup>2</sup> *Critique of Pure Practical Reason*, Pt. 1, Bk. II, Ch. 2.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, Ch. 22.

All these fasts and vigils and stakes are only a façade. Or like foam on the seashore. Out at sea, in His sea, there is pleasure and more pleasure. He makes no secret of it; at His right hand are pleasures for evermore."

On the other hand it is necessary to consider the other side of the picture and face the fact that the New Testament opposes the Kantian maxim<sup>1</sup> with the devastating statement that<sup>2</sup> "None is good save one, that is God," and condemns the great Perfectionist systems together with every form of hedonism in one word "He that saveth his life shall lose it." How does it come about that, while we recognise so much in Kant and Hegel, even in Bentham and Mill, which accords with our idea of right, the New Testament and Christian experience join in pronouncing them essentially wrong? Let us be quite clear about this—it is not simply the student's rational understanding of New Testament truth which results in this sentence on the great post-Renaissance systems of ethical thought, but also the experience of ordinary unreflecting Christian goodness.

Let us see first if there are any basic assumptions which the New Testament makes and which rational ethics have been either unable or else unwilling to include in their systems. It may be that in the course of this investigation we shall find something which, though unrecognised, accounts for the truth in these systems, and may yet point the way towards a synthesis of all that is true in them.

One basic assumption of the New Testament is that of a God who is both good and righteous and whose will is therefore good and right.<sup>3</sup> Before passing to the consideration of these two terms, with their strangely interlaced meanings, we must emphasise that we have here terms relating to two basic human experiences. In any system something must be known intuitively. For the Kantian, it may be one of the great maxims, for the utilitarian the goodness of pleasure, but there must be a starting point somewhere in direct experience. The good

<sup>1</sup> "There is nothing in the world, or even out of it that can be called good without qualification, except a good will." *Metaphysic of Moral*, Sect. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xviii, 19.

<sup>3</sup> It is characteristic of the New Testament approach and in conformity with the idea advanced in this paper that "good" and "right" are ultimate experiences, that this position is never argued and rarely stated. It is those things which are taken for granted that have the strongest hold on thought—cf. the contemporary idea that *all* increasing complexity is really progress, an idea which would be most difficult to defend really adequately, but which has almost completely mastered popular thought.

and the right can be described, and the conceptions denoted by the words modified, but they can neither be defined nor reached by any process of reasoning. "If we are to retain ethics as a normative science, a theory of ethics must involve the intuitive knowledge of certain truths. Even a theory opposed to most forms of intuition, like hedonism, must begin with an intuition that pleasure ought to be pursued, or that only actions which cause pleasure can be right."<sup>1</sup> Reason and experience may modify the conception of what is in fact good or right, but they can neither establish nor eliminate the basic conceptions of goodness and rightness. From the standpoint of the New Testament, this is what would be expected if, behind human ideas of goodness and rightness, there is God whose will is supremely the good and the right. It is at this point that rational ethics commonly departs from a Christian standpoint, e.g.,<sup>2</sup> "When we say that 'good' means 'commanded by God,' we are not defining 'good,' for most people feel that a good action would still be a good action even if it were not commanded by God." From the standpoint of the New Testament it is clear that the bare idea of God *not* commanding a good action is intolerable and it is also clear that this very feeling that the action is good is itself part of the Divine command. The fatal misconception of the individual as standing alone and in his own right has led thought astray at the critical point. Whence come man's ethical feelings? In the Biblical conception the good and the right, as the will of God, are embodied not merely in commands but in the very texture of the Universe.<sup>3</sup> "We still have to discover why good actions are good, and therefore worthy of being commanded by God," but whence comes this idea of goodness? We have said that it is a basic human experience, and indeed it is; but if this is true, there is no point in arguing in a circle, while if it is not true there appears to be no point in arguing at all.

We must now consider the conflict between what is felt to be the right and what appears to be the good. The drunkard, knowing well enough that the public house is no place for him, finds himself craving for a drink, that is to say alcohol appears to him for the present to be a good. Men do in fact seek what

<sup>1</sup> W. Lillie, *Intro. to Ethics*, Ch. 7, 6.

<sup>2</sup> W. Lillie, *op. cit.*, Ch. 9, 2., etc.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. vi, 7-8, Rom. i, 18-21.

appear to be "good" things;<sup>1</sup> even the bad man is not bad for the sake of being bad but for the sake of achieving something which appears to him, it may be for a transitory moment, as good. It may be the pleasure arising from hatred cherished and translated to action that man seeks, or it may be the highest good of another sought at great cost to self, but whatever it is, it appears, at the time, to be good. Yet, with the idea of the good, interpreted in this way, the idea of the right is so often in conflict. If both have their origin from One who wills the good that is always right, how can this be?

The New Testament interprets the contradiction as sin. Sin has distorted both the idea of the good<sup>2</sup> and also the idea of the right and thus made conflict between them inevitable. Here arises the great obstacle in the path of the man who would construct a Christian ethic, and there is no by-passing it. It means as the Master said that "None is good save one. . . ." Not even in his ideas can man be wholly right while still in the thralldom of sin. Revelation may be given him, pure as crystal spring, but he muddies it all too soon in the eddies of his thought. Here is seen man's extremity that can only be met by the Divine forgiveness. Here is explained the failure of every purely rationalistic system which, with man as the sole point of reference, can find no room for the conception of a God whose will is itself the good and the right, nor yet for radical evil, the strange perversion whereby man, for no reason outside himself, chooses the evil under the delusion that it is the good.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Green, Bk. II, Ch. I, 154. "Self-satisfaction is the form of every object willed, but the filling of the form, the character of that in which self-satisfaction is sought, ranges from sensual pleasures to the fulfilment of a vocation conceived as given by God, and makes the object what it really is." "In all willing a self-conscious subject seeks to satisfy itself," Bk. III, Ch. 1, 156. This differs from the contention of this paper, in this—that where the good is sought also as the right, attention is diverted from the desires of the doer to the object or action done, and therefore self-satisfaction cannot be said to be the motive of the doer, inasmuch as it is not his conscious motive, and it is doubtful if the idea which some would advance of an unconscious motive has any meaning at all. Whatever truth may underlie the idea of unconscious *craving* should not be allowed to spill over into words which lose their meaning unless allied to conscious thought and will. If the object is sought as the good, though known not to be the right, then attention is usually centred in the desire of the doer. Ethics touches psychology here, and the subject is too big for adequate discussion in a paper like this.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xi, 34, etc.

<sup>3</sup> All moral systems recognise evil, but not its tragic nature or its depth. "Thou oughtest, therefore thou canst," is the implicit assumption of all forms of rational ethic. It will not and cannot recognise the truth of the predicament outlined in Rom. vii.

This leads us to another basic difference between the natural ethic and the New Testament ethic.<sup>1</sup> "The natural ethic says though I may sometimes fail in my external behaviour, my inmost will is good. The Gospel says though outwardly you may even do some good, yet your inmost heart is sinful. . . . It is not merely acts which are sinful, but the person, the doer. It is characteristic of natural morality and ethics that it seeks exclusively to answer the question, 'What ought I to do?' It deals only with conduct, not with the person who acts." It is obvious that it is here that the answer is to be sought to the radical defect in the Kantian ethic—its conflict with the general feeling that a man who *wants* to do good and does it is really a better man than the one who acts under some compulsion.<sup>2</sup> Realising the good and doing the right, therefore, can only mean that man has been restored to his rightful relationship with God, that he is again moving within the sphere of the Divine will. Sin cannot be understood, for it is in its very essence irrational. It can only be interpreted as "the severance of freedom from the will of God." Redemption means restoration not to a self-righteous independence of God where man *has* something that is *his*, but towards his rightful place within the will of God which he recognises as right for himself and good for others, as well as himself. The Christian ethic, therefore, is concerned not with acts themselves, but rather with the person who acts. This person, however, has still to apprehend the good and the right, which ideas still relate to objective choices, which must be made. We therefore have still to answer the question "How is the will of God known? How is man to know the good and the right? What principles are to guide him when the two appear to conflict?"

We can consider this question of the interpretation of the will of God under the headings of law, conscience, reason and tradition before passing to the consideration of that conception of personality which has dawned on the world with new, yet familiar, light.

Consider first the idea of law as normative for conduct—and we do not say Christian conduct, for God is God of all and His will is the good and the right for all. An ethic, if it is to have any validity whatever, must have universal validity.

<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner, *op. cit.*, Ch. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Hence the sting of Schiller's jibe, "We do good, but unfortunately by inclination."



“We are against this course of action, not as Christians, but as sensible men,” wrote a man with an honours philosophy medal to his name recently. Such ideas are not uncommon, but they can never be admitted without abandoning all hope of finding any ethical direction.

It is evident that any kind of law, embodying a set of principles, can be only a rough and ready guide. The Ten Commandments are commonly taken as normative, yet they are not normative, invariably, in this world. The man faced with the choice of telling a lie to save the life of a friend or telling the truth which he knows will end in his death is, provided that the right be on the side of his friend, in a dilemma. In a perfectly good world, such a state of affairs could not arise doubtless, but that does not help to guide conduct here. Further, the conception of an external law can never take motive into account. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ transforms the purely external command concerned with action into a command which takes account of motive, but in doing so the command ceases to be universal and external, and this is nowhere more clearly seen than in the controversies over the Sabbath day. Christ considers the keeping of the Sabbath in a fresh light, but in doing so, moves to new ground. The command is no longer one that can be universalized in terms of direct command or prohibition. It may be that it is right to heal on the Sabbath day but it does not follow, necessarily, that all dispensaries should be open on Sundays. For this reason we must reject the ever-present temptation to reduce the Christian ethic to a set of rules formulated by ourselves. Goodness does not consist in compliance with any law that can be stated as a series of universal principles or commands, and the law of love is no exception to this, for it is not such a law.

What of the claims of conscience? We need spend little time over this. It is paradoxically true that if we do not obey our conscience then we do wrong, but if we do obey it we do not necessarily do right, and the history of mankind is too thickly strewn with the wreckage caused by men who were sure they were right to permit us to accord to conscience the position of sole arbiter of man's actions. Conscience is too deeply involved in sin.

Reason, as already observed, cannot provide a basis for ethical action. It can only modify one already there. We have suggested that the ideas of the good and the right are intuitive,

but distorted by sin, and therefore twisted, often unrecognisable reflections of the true Good and Right.<sup>1</sup> Reason shares in the distorting influence of sin, but, because of the power it gives man in a measure to step aside and view himself from without, it is capable, in alliance with conscience and experience, of bringing about a clearer understanding of the will of God. It can never lead to a universal ethic, however, because of its inseparable relation with the man who reasons. It is all the time dealing with shifting sand and has no hope of constructing from it solid rock.

Tradition differs from law in that it is not conceived as divinely given but rather as resulting from accumulated human experience, though the Divine command is, in part, worked out by human society and embodied in human tradition. The British conception of fair play, for example, has surely something of universal value in it and this can only arise from the Divine Will.<sup>2</sup> Yet tradition either takes no account of motive or else fails to give precise instructions at the critical point of time. Furthermore it, too, is involved in sin and therefore in part invalidated by it.

No absolute interpretation of the will of God can be found here. Normally, perhaps, all four will point in one direction, and then there is reasonable certainty; but what happens when two or more are in conflict? Further, it will not have escaped notice that we are here considering acts rather than persons, and there-

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<sup>1</sup> Theistic thinkers, and even Christian thinkers have not, of course, been at one in regarding the will of God as the ground of the Good. In Greek thought and in religions of the type of Zarathustra, there is present the idea that God became Lord by choosing the good, or that God is God because He always chooses the good. This idea came over into Christian thought with Aquinas. "God's holiness consists in the fact that essentially His will can will only the good and the right. Thus it presupposes an eternal standard of all willing which is not subject to the free choice of God, a standard with which the Divine will agrees not freely but of necessity so that God's holiness consists precisely in this necessary agreement." The idea has found its way into Protestant thought. Cf. Dale, *The Atonement*, Lect. 10. "God is the Moral Ruler of the Universe. . . . Does it imply that the will of God is . . . the ultimate ground of moral obligation, that goodness is good only because God commands it? This hypothesis is intolerable." "There is an eternal Law of Righteousness. . . ." Once again, it is impossible to discuss this within the compass of a paper. The idea of an Eternal Law of Righteousness existing as it were alongside God is here rejected.

<sup>2</sup> The idea that God is not at work unless He is felt to be at work, that an idea of right does not derive from God if the man who thinks it holds that it does not so derive is a common one. It will be clear that this view is no part of the present thesis.

fore are standing rather on the ground of rational ethics than on that of the New Testament.

Thus at last we come to the distinctive standpoint of the New Testament ethic which differs alike from all forms of rational ethic and also from the bulk, but not all, of the Old Testament ethical ideas. It is based on the conviction that the good and the right for myself and the good and the right for my neighbour must be basically the same, since my neighbour and I have both been created by God. From this conviction arises the command to seek the good of my neighbour equally with my own. That good which is his, is also mine. It is also right. Where my neighbour's good appears to conflict with mine, or with what seems to be right, then the reason for the conflict is sin. We shall have to consider the implications of this later. In the meantime, let it be emphasized that here we have a conception of good which is not based on any ultimate principle but rather on an ultimate relationship, that which exists between two men. The term for this relationship in the New Testament is love, but it might be more adequately rendered in 20th century idiom as friendship. The fact that the I/Thou<sup>1</sup> relationship is something fundamentally different from the I-it relationship has escaped notice—as it was well-nigh bound to do—during the years of individualism. From the humanistic, egocentric point of view, alike of Kantian, Utilitarian, Stoic and Epicurean it cannot really be perceived. Other people are never really persons to any scheme of rational ethics but rather means whereby the individual realises himself or abstract values for himself. In the Kantian system the whole of mankind is more or less a means for the realisation of an abstract principle. This I-Thou relationship, which ought to be friendship, or love, and is so, apart from sin, is itself an ultimate experience. We can describe the phenomena which accompany it, but it is not itself capable of definition, any more than truth, beauty, or goodness are capable of definition.

If this is true, then it means that the law of love can never be translated into a series of principles which can be appreciated when abstracted from the human situation. I cannot act towards my small son who evinces a desire to play with my razor as I act towards a friend who is staying with me and who has left his at home, if, in each case, I want to act

<sup>1</sup> See Daniel Lamont, *Christ and The World of Thought*.

rightly. That is because the "good" is not the same for both of them. This does not violate the conviction that my neighbour's good is basically the same as my own because, in estimating that good, I take into account what I see to have been my good when in the circumstances in which I find my respective neighbours.

Does this not, however, lead us into an unbridled individualism in which every man attributes to his own convictions an absoluteness which he denies to his neighbours by invoking the idea of sin? Quite obviously this is a very real danger, but it must not be over-estimated. Mary in breaking the pot of ointment over the Master, was acting in accordance with the dictates of friendship, while Judas in condemning her action did so on the grounds of an abstract principle. The Master did not deny the validity of Judas' statement but He approved Mary's action because of its relationship with a person. Was He not right? Is it not better that deeds should be done for the sake of others than that they should be done in accordance with some principle? Or consider the case of the woman taken in adultery. The Master does not defend her action, but He does say to her "Go and sin no more," that is to say, He considers the good of the person and acts towards her as a friend. On the other hand, the woman at Samaria's well He treated differently, uncovering her sin. It was this very attitude which scandalised the Pharisees, whose attitude was dictated by a belief in the priority of principles over persons. It is because of this that the Christian frequently appears to the rigorist to be a hedonist, while at the same time the hedonist considers him a rigorist. The Master, however, had, we suppose, that absolute knowledge of goodness which is denied to us who are sinners. Yet even if this be granted, it remains true that an honest consideration of the good of the other person, in the light of what we believe to be our own good, is likely to lead us to do those acts which accompany goodness—that is to say, that approximation to goodness of which we alone are capable.

Having established the priority of persons over principles, however, we must acknowledge that we are, in fact, guided by principles. The difference is that the Christian ethic conceives the principle as guiding action which is rightly related to a person, whereas rational ethics always conceives the person as raw material upon which the good is practised. Emil Brunner has several extraordinarily suggestive chapters in this con-

nection. The goal of human life cannot be sought in the individual himself and to seek it there involves the denial of the New Testament principle of love. "There is only one self-end in the sphere of possible experience, and it is this: personal life, or community between persons." This differs from the traditional humanism in that it is rooted in God who wills community, and not in the individual as autonomous. This Christian Humanism is concerned with "my neighbour," not with "humanity," with the concrete individual who confronts me, not with an abstraction which I myself shape. Similarly, values are only values because "through divine appointment certain things are due to, necessary or useful for life: such things are values, but nothing else at all. All values, by the will of the Creator, are subject to persons." I may be a great artist but if consideration of my helpless parent means that I must take a more remunerative job, then the realisation of beauty must be subordinate to the claims of the person who needs me.

As already indicated, there are many principles laid down in the New Testament and elsewhere which aid us in the interpretation of this basic "law" that we must relate ourselves rightly to others, even our enemies, in friendship, but none of them can be regarded as absolute, without qualification. One thing alone is absolute and that is the will of God and the will of God is supremely that relationship between men which is love. The New Testament is not afraid to leave ethical conduct to the guidance of this principle. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. . . ."<sup>1</sup> but at the same time it does not neglect to interpret this command in specific concrete instances because man, being a sinner, is always misinterpreting it in his own wrongly conceived interest, or even in the wrongly conceived interest of his neighbour. Yet, when those rules of conduct, which man has found do normally accord with the law of love, have been enunciated, it remains for the individual, in the light of them and from the standpoint of his own consciousness, to do that thing to his neighbour which he would wish done to himself. The Christian ethic is based squarely on this personal, I-Thou relationship and on the conviction that its ethical meaning derives from the God who made all.

It is therefore equally wrong to speak of either an autonomous

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xiii, 10.

morality, which must lead, as it led the Greeks and Aquinas, to a moral law which is either alongside of or else above God, or of an autonomous religion, for there is no service of God which is not at the same time service of man, and therefore ethical conduct towards man, nor any true service of man which is not, in some sense, service of God. "He that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. . . ." It is only when man realises that he exists not to do good to his neighbour that he may establish his own righteousness but, on the contrary, that he may obey the will of God that there is the possibility of true service of his neighbour. It is no true service by one person to another if that person does good things for his own sake, even though they result in good for the other, because selfish conduct fails to establish the truly personal relationship. "To love a human being means to accept his existence as it is given to me by God and thus to love him as he is. For only if I love him thus, that is, as this particular sinful person, do I love *him*. Otherwise I love an idea, and in the last resort this means that I am merely loving myself."

#### WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS.

MR. A. CONSTANCE wrote : I feel deeply indebted to the author of this paper for a penetrating analysis of what is surely the basic problem of Christian faith. I wish, however, that he had made some reference to Kierkegaard's position in this field of Christian thought, for the Danish theologian, with his emphasis on "the individual," has much to say that is vital and relevant—particularly in his books *Training in Christianity* and *The Works of Love*. (O.U.P.)

I fully agree with Mr. Petty's premises, but feel that he prejudices his own case as he comes to the core of the matter, in his very unfortunate choice of a key example : "I may be a great artist, but if consideration of my helpless parent means that I must take a more remunerative job, then the realisation of beauty must be subordinate to the claims of the person who needs me."

This is, it is true, a choice between a principle and a person—but it is no choice between a *spiritual* principle and a person, the choice which is implied in the earlier part of the paper. Mr. Petty should have emphasised the varying qualities of conflicting princi-

ples. Here he instances a mere æsthetic one. Compare this with the conscientious objection conflict of the First World War, as postulated by Tribunals: "What would you do if a German attacked your mother?" There you have the true conflict between principle and person. How would Mr. Petty answer such a question—apart altogether from its non-resistant or pacifist implications? I feel that Mr. Petty's example is one which implies *his advocacy of a principle*, this principle being that one should always choose the person, if principle and person are in conflict. In thus advocating a *principle* himself—an ethic for all circumstances—Mr. Petty is inconsistent. I conceive no Christian ethic of universal application to be practical. Guidance is given by God to each believer as an individual, and may vary widely, ethically and qualitatively, according to the peculiar circumstances of individuals.

A communication was also received from Miss L. Bush.

#### AUTHOR'S REPLY.

Mr. Constance's conclusion appears to me to be the negation of ethics, and indeed of the idea of the righteousness of God. If there is any consistency in God, then it is hard to see how God can will conflicting ends for His creatures, and that would seem to me to be involved in the idea of "guidance varying widely, ethically." My conviction is that guidance may *appear* to vary widely, ethically, but that is because ethics and guidance are wrongly conceived. The will of God, I hold, is always in harmony with a true ethic, being the ground of that ethic, or, in other words, God is righteous and wills righteousness. No one has a perfect knowledge of God's will, or a perfect understanding of the Christian ethic (least of all myself!), and the purpose of my paper is not to enunciate as final any set of ideas, but to indicate the direction in which, it seems to me, we should travel. In that I use the plural "we," it is clear that I cannot accept Mr. Constance's position, and must therefore defend my own.

If the second great commandment is a principle, then I certainly hold it as **THE** principle of the Christian ethic. It does not appear to me, however, to conform to the usual character of a principle, because its unchanging aspect is not in the "rational" realm, but

in the personal one, and therefore it cannot be stated as an universal principle in logical terms. Mr. Constance's comment seems to recognise this, for what exactly does "one should always choose the person" mean?

(In the particular instance which he quotes, my reply would be that the convictions of mother and son, and consequently their wishes for each other, would be a factor in deciding the issue, which is, of course, not as simple as it seems, since it involves one in apparently conflicting duties to two people. This situation results from sin, and in the meantime we are so deep in sin that it appears to involve us in evil whatever we do. I should say myself that my aim would be to defend the attacked without killing the attacker. Probably both of us would be killed in that case. . . .! Yet I think it might be worth trying.)

I agree that a better example than that which I chose could have been given. I wish also to repeat that I am not opposed to principles. *Right* principles will agree with the command of love, but they will never be universal. My real contention is that a fuller understanding of that command is not to be sought so much in the study of principles and in adherence to them, but rather in yielding to the urge of Christian love in our attitude to others.