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This War and Christian Ethics

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THE 'GOOD' AND THE 'RIGHT'

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It is not necessary to listen long to the contemporary debate amongst Christians on the ethics of war to realize that there underlies much of it the old problem of the relation between the 'good' and the 'right'. Those who discuss are not as a rule aware that there is such a problem, still less that their difficulties illustrate it, but this only makes it the more necessary to bring it into the open and consider it in the context of the specifically Christian message, and calling, and interpretation of life. This article is an attempt to make some contribution to this end.¹

Since the time of Kant there have been two main tendencies in ethical thought: (1) the tendency to what may be called value-ethics, in which the 'good' is made the dominant category; (2) the tendency to what may be called duty-ethics, in which the 'right' is made the dominant category.

According to the former view there are certain ends which the moral judgment declares to be intrinsically good and valuable, such as justice, freedom, happiness, etc. The decision as to what one ought to do in any given situation is, or should be, reached by estimating the probable consequences of such lines of action as are open under the circumstances, and choosing that which on balance seems likely to produce the greatest amount of good, or the least amount of evil. That action which, so far as we can judge, will produce the greatest good, or

¹ The problem of the 'right' and the 'good' has been much discussed in recent years by writers on ethics, notably by Sir W. D. Ross in *The Right and the Good* (1930), *Foundations of Ethics* (1939), and W. G. de Burgh, *From Morality to Religion* (1938). The relation of the problem to the specifically Christian viewpoint has not been so thoroughly explored, still less its relation to the Christian judgment upon war.

least evil, is morally obligatory upon us, is the *right* action for us. The 'right' thus becomes a category subordinate to, and derivative from, the category of the 'good'. This logically involves the doctrine that the end justifies the means. *Any* means becomes right directly it is judged to be necessary to produce an overplus of good consequences, provided, of course, that the latter be estimated in terms of moral value.

The second view is almost the exact inverse of this. According to this view the moral judgment declares certain acts or relationships, or types of act or relationship, to be intrinsically right and binding, or wrong and prohibited, regardless of what the consequences may appear likely to be. No doubt there is an implicit belief that the consequences of right action can never be finally evil, but such a belief is a matter of faith and does not enter as a determinant into the choice between the alternatives of action in the given situation. It is not the good consequences which make the action right, as in the first view, but rather the rightness of the action which ensures that the consequences will be good, in spite of all appearances to the contrary.

When we examine our moral decisions in actual life, we find that, in any but the simplest situations, they are taken as the result of a mental process in which both the lines of thought just indicated play a part. This is not surprising, for ethical theory is very largely the reflective analysis and refinement of what is first given in the moral consciousness of ordinary folk prior to and independently of such theorizing, and any theory which was not attached at some point to the 'given' of everyday experience would have no plausibility at all, if indeed it were intelligible. In a complex situation the awareness of certain 'goods' to be pursued by appropriate means and the awareness of certain lines of conduct being in any case required or forbidden are as a rule in confused interplay with one another, so that when the decision is finally made it is often impossible to justify it very persuasively

in terms of one or other type of consideration alone.¹ This cannot be better illustrated than from the contemporary discussion of the ethics of war.

Those who support the use of war in the present situation, despite a full admission of its appalling evil, rest their case mainly on the judgment that not to use it would entail greater evil still. That is to say, it is justified as right, because in the circumstances it is a necessary means to a good end. Yet there enter also as a rule considerations of the other sort. Thus it is said that this country was under moral obligation to fulfil its promise to Poland; it was its duty so to do, having given its bond, and it would have been utterly wrong for it not so to do. Whether this judgment includes the thought that Britain's duty was to fight, independently of any rational estimate of the prospects of victory, is perhaps not clear. Probably most people, on reflection, would agree with what would undoubtedly be the view of statesmen, that no country can be expected to run a high risk of disaster even to fulfil its bond, i.e., they would return under stress to the first of the two lines of thought and derive 'rightness' from the 'goodness' of consequence. Yet they would feel far from easy about this; there would be left a powerful feeling of moral indignation and shame that every risk was not accepted, even the risk of going down in defeat, especially when Poland had gone to war on the strength of our promise and had perished in consequence.² Another indication of the intrusion of an ethic

¹ Cf. W. G. de Burgh, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

² Thus showing that the idea of 'right' in the impact it makes upon, and the response it evokes from, the ordinary mind does not *mean* merely 'capacity to produce good consequence', as Sir W. D. Ross has shown. We have observed that many people feel the same strong moral indignation at what they regard as the 'letting down' of Czecho-Slovakia, and no amount of argument that Britain perhaps was not in a position at that point to fight a major war allays the feeling. In *The Times* of April 2, appeared a letter from Lord Elton urging that the Allies should have intervened early on behalf of Finland and containing these words: 'This was perhaps one of those moments of history when a certain inspired recklessness is called for, as of men knowing at once and by instinct that, whatever its dangers, a certain course is their duty, so that they can no other.'

or right and duty into a position based mainly, at least in discussion, on the other view, is the fact that those who support the war commonly feel, and not infrequently express, a species of moral indignation with those who hold the pacifist position. Yet, plainly, if moral duty is determined solely by an estimate of the effects of various lines of conduct, then such indignation is out of place (on the assumption of sincerity in all concerned), for the estimation of probable consequences is not a moral judgment at all, but a purely intellectual process. The pacifist might, therefore, on that basis, be accused of stupidity, but hardly of moral obtuseness or delinquency. The fact that he is often treated as though he were guilty of the latter, shows that judgments of 'right' are also at work, as, for example, the judgment that it is right to fight in the defence of one's native land. Still another indication of the same thing is the fact that many who support the war none the less insist that there are some things which this country must not under any circumstances do in order to win it. They repudiate the doctrine that 'all's fair in war', even when winning the war is judged to be necessary in order to achieve certain good ends. The Archbishop of Canterbury, for example, in a broadcast at the beginning of the year said that, though doubtless there must be reprisals, there are some which Great Britain must never use. He meant, presumably, 'whatever the consequences', for he added, 'what shall it profit a nation if it gain the whole world and lose its own soul?' This view is commonly held, especially among Christians.

Turning to the pacifist view, we find there also not infrequently the same interplay of the two lines of thought. The pacifist tends on the whole to rest his judgment on a direct sense of the utter wrongness and therefore 'forbiddenness' of modern warfare to any committed to the Christian way of life. It is for him so unrelievedly evil that he cannot, despite all contrary appearances, entertain the proposition that it could be productive of a balance of good. For him it is an example, almost shocking in its

clarity, of seeking to justify grossly immoral investments on the ground of the moral dividends it is hoped they will pay, of expecting a corrupt tree to bring forth good fruit. The ends, however honourable, cannot justify *this* means. On the other hand, in his total reflection on the matter, and sometimes in his public presentation of the case, considerations of the other sort enter in. Unless he is prepared to repudiate all use of force,¹ he is bound to justify his readiness to use some kinds of force while refusing to use the particular kind which war involves. This he may do either by seeking to analyse different usages of force in such wise that the intuition of the essential wrongness of some as over against the relative wrongness of others is facilitated and justified, or by reference to the actual results of the war method as these are to be observed in past history or in contemporary events. The latter is obviously an appeal to a calculus of good and evil consequences.²

We have used divergent views on war to illustrate the general truth that in the moral consciousness of men both types of approach tend to be present. A theoretical ethic, therefore, which attempts to comprehend the moral life in terms of the one to the exclusion of the other is *prima facie* an oversimplification. The tendency of recent thought is, indeed, to recognize this and to endeavour to

¹ A position so seldom advocated that it can be ignored, though opponents of pacifism, even at this time of day, still sometimes argue as though the repudiation of all use of force were essentially the pacifist position, and that such a ridiculous assertion is the only one they have to dispose of.

² Prof. Reinhold Niebuhr seems to regard the introduction of such considerations into the pacifist case as indicative of confusion of mind. It is an illegitimate mixing of 'pragmatic with perfectionist scruples'—*An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (1936), p. 196. Yet, as already indicated, the non-pacifist position, as exemplified in the statement of the Archbishop of Canterbury, also mixes them. Of course, both positions may be confused in so doing, though one may hope that Prof. Niebuhr is himself not without 'perfectionist scruples' in relation to certain types of action that might be mentioned. Anyhow, if it be confusion of mind, it is one which is deeply rooted in the moral consciousness of men, and it should be carefully examined and not too easily dismissed as a trick of unconscious class-prejudice.

do justice to both sides without merging them in one another. We do not, however, fully understand the moral consciousness of most people, and therefore the acuteness of the problem with which this interplay of the two categories is liable in serious situations to present them, unless we realize that the thought of what is right is apt to be much the more dominant one in psychological force; it seems to lie much closer to the springs of moral energy and enthusiasm in the soul. As Dr. de Burgh says, 'people are far more readily influenced by the plea to do what is right than by the plea to do what will promote good'.¹ The effect of this is that when a decision has been taken that something normally judged to be wrong must nevertheless be done in order to achieve certain good ends, there often remains throughout the subsequent activity a feeling of disquietude which nothing can allay except perhaps a wholly undesirable hardening of the mind through use. The judgment that this is right or wrong is not forgotten as one item in a set of arithmetical calculations might be forgotten by an engineer directly the conclusion on which he acts is reached. It persists, and in certain cases may bring with it a recurrent and distressing feeling of moral shame and degradation. That is the unspeakably tragic situation of many to-day in relation to war. Convinced that there is no other means available if certain 'values' are to be preserved in human life, they yet continue to suffer a sickening revulsion from it as something which they can only describe as 'devil's work'. Nor can they recover peace of mind merely by going over the calculus of consequences again, for at the heart of such moral revulsion there is the uncomfortable feeling that such evil cannot produce good, and that a calculus which says it can must be wrong somewhere. This last thought is often further reinforced by the contemplation of the history of Europe since the last war. The only way in which any alleviation of the tension is achieved is, significantly, by setting against one sense of

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 122.

right and wrong with its deep emotional reverberation in the soul another with an even deeper and stronger emotional force. The unspeakable brutalities wrought by the Nazis upon Jews, Czechs, Poles, are called before the mind, and instantly the judgment emerges, carried on a great wave of moral indignation, that it must be *right* to crush that sort of thing.¹

It is apparent from all this that the crux of the problem is in the sense of what is right. Three questions present themselves: (1) First, whether through the awareness of right or wrong there is ever presented to the will an absolute, which it is its duty to obey whatever the calculable consequences, either to the moral subject himself or to others, may appear likely to be. (2) Second, if so, how may the fact or possibility of such an absolute be conceived in terms of a general interpretation of morality, or, to put it differently, what sort of rational justification of it may be given to one who whilst feeling the pressure of such an absolute feels also the pressure of the need for a reasoned, and not merely impressionistic, direction of the moral life as a whole? (3) Third, what can be said about the profound moral disturbance which persists where an accent of 'rightness' or 'wrongness', strong yet falling short of absoluteness, rests on certain lines of conduct which for other reasons it is deemed proper not to pursue, or to pursue?

(1) First, is there ever presented to the will an absolute which it is its duty to obey whatever the calculable consequences may appear likely to be?

¹ I cannot help wondering whether Sir W. D. Ross's discussion of the 'right', illuminating as it is, plumbs the depth of the problem. Perhaps too much is made to rest in the discussion upon the relatively simple instances of breaking promises or telling white lies in certain personal relationships which are otherwise on a fairly high level of conscientiousness and decency. Thus Sir W. D. Ross says that when we feel ourselves justified in breaking a promise we feel 'not indeed shame and repentance, but certainly compunction'. (*The Right and the Good*, p. 28.) But 'compunction' is hardly a strong enough word for what many feel about war when they engage in it. It is precisely shame, and even a need for forgiveness, that they feel when they get into the actual business of bayonet and machine-gun fighting and the firing-squad.

There can be no doubt that the ordinary man's first answer to this question would be in the affirmative. By such an answer he would not mean that such an absolute right or wrong appears in every situation calling for moral decision. In most situations, he would readily admit, we have to weigh a variety of considerations, some concerned with ways and means to 'good' ends, some with what Sir W. D. Ross calls *prima facie* obligations—lines of conduct which in all circumstances *tend* to rightness without being absolutely binding—and make the best decision we can. But in some few situations at least, he would wish to maintain, an absolute appears, or may appear, sheering right through every calculation of good to be achieved or evil to be avoided. Asked for an example, he might, if he had read Hugo's *Les Misérables*, refer to the frightful decision which the author depicts as confronting Jean Valjean. Jean Valjean had been sent to the galleys for an act which most people would have deemed morally innocent. Thence he had escaped, and had succeeded in burying his past so that none knew of it. He had built up a new life of honour, industry and usefulness. Multitudes now depend upon him for their living. Suddenly he is faced with the fact that an old, half-witted tramp, on whom none depend and whom few would mourn, useless to society, indeed a charge upon it, with probably only a few years to live, has been identified as Jean Valjean the escaped convict and is about to be sent to the hell of the galleys. Instantly a frightful conflict arises in his soul. It is not merely that everything within him shrinks from going back to that living death of the galleys. That by itself, though making decision terrifically hard, scarcely affects the moral issue. The conflict is between the estimation of consequences taken over all their breadth and the utter and absolute wrongness of letting the old man go to the galleys in his place. The revealing of his real identity and returning to the galleys will mean the collapse of the industry he had built up and on which the town depends, considerable unemployment and want,

suffering for women and children, the leaving of his own little orphan ward defenceless and uncared for amidst enemies. On any sane estimate of consequences, to lie low and say nothing would be productive of least evil. Yet the compulsive sense of the utter, absolute wrongness of the deed obstinately remains, and in the end Jean Valjean bows to it and the doddering half-wit is left to potter along the roads and hedges a little longer. The story is fictional, but most people feel that it throws into high relief the sort of thing which may happen at any moment in real life, namely, that an inescapable sense of right or wrong should cut through every consideration of consequence and absolutely bind the will.¹

Yet, on reflection, it is possible to raise a demurrer to such an affirmative answer to the question. It may well be suggested that the bindingness of the obligation tacitly presupposes that its field of reference is of a limited and stable kind. Because the field of reference is thus stable and we do not really envisage the possibility of its ever being otherwise, the obligation appears to be binding in its own right and in respect of any situation whatsoever. We unconsciously assume that there are no situations outside the field of reference, and that the latter will remain basically unaffected whatever we do. Thus, in the instance given, Jean Valjean's decision lay within, and tacitly assumed, the stability and 'ongoing-ness' of French society at the time. But supposing Jean Valjean had achieved the position of a general in the French army at a critical point in some defensive campaign against a

¹ It may be noted that in the instance given that the accent of absoluteness falls on the prohibition of something wrong rather than on the requirement of something right, I think this is usually, if not always, the case. Positively, things *tend* to be right; negatively, they may be absolutely and intrinsically wrong. Sir W. D. Ross notes the increased stringency of negative duties. The difference perhaps calls for more investigation than has been given to it. Does the stringency of the negative duty rest on an intuition of certain basic requirements in the world of personal relationships the infringement of which would make any moralization of life at all impossible? A house, within certain broad limits, may have many different shapes, but the foundation allows little scope for choice.

barbarian horde threatening to overrun the land, would it have been right for him to concern himself overmuch about the fate of a single half-wit? Was the latter to be put into the balance with the fate of France or, as we might say to-day, of western civilization? No doubt he would be wrong to brush the matter on one side as of *no* consequence; no doubt he would have to admit a very strong *prima facie* obligation to the old man. But that is beside the point. The point is, are there not abnormal circumstances, involving the very foundations of everyday existence, wherein what is normally felt to be absolutely binding (because the foundations are assumed and remain, as foundations usually do, out of sight) must submit to overriding considerations of good and bad consequence? Is it not sometimes expedient, as Caiaphas thought, that one man should die for the people?¹ And must I not be willing, if need be, to be the instrument of such injustice, even though my whole soul, owing in part to the habituation of a stable and ordered society, recoil from it? To put it in another way: are we really entitled to say, 'let justice be done *though the heavens fall*' except as a rhetorical and somewhat misleading way of intimating that we do not believe the heavens would or could fall, that we are sure that that wide framework of human existence will not be shaken anyhow? If I had reason to believe that the heavens would fall and annihilate human existence altogether, were this or that particular wrong not perpetrated, would I not be as pedantically foolish to refuse to perpetrate it as the man who keeps an engagement for the theatre at the risk of his wife's life, because 'promises should be kept'?

So put, the demurrer seems powerful. It amounts, of course, to a statement of the Lutheran doctrine of the orders of creation in relation to moral decision, the doctrine that where it is a question of preserving certain wide frameworks of human existence we may be under obligation to do things which within that framework, as the

¹ John xviii, 14.

abiding normal setting of our life, it would be our duty not to do come what may. Yet it is very doubtful if it altogether disposes of the affirmative position. It is precarious to generalize about the judgments of 'morally sensitive people' (one is so apt to regard as morally insensitive judgments which differ from one's own!), yet I venture to think that most morally sensitive people would feel that there are certain acts or types of act from which not even the motive of avoiding the most disastrous consequences over the widest conceivable areas of human life would suffice to lift the prohibition which they feel rests upon it. Most people would feel thus concerning the torturing of a little child, or the sexual forcing of a woman, or the re-introduction of the slave market. These are no doubt remote possibilities, but the sort of situation they illustrate is not so very remote when once a nation has plunged into that *ne plus ultra* of violence which is modern war. As we have seen, there is high authority for the view that it would be better for the British Empire to go down in defeat than use certain types of reprisal. Yet the British Empire, even if we do not identify it, as some apparently do, with civilization itself, may be considered to be an exceedingly wide framework of life, the collapse of which before Germany would be unimaginably disastrous. Even if we widen the field of reference to its utmost limit, many would still feel the same. If, *per impossibile*, it were known that the heavens *would* fall if a few little children were not tortured to death, many people would prefer to let them fall and to call upon the human race to go down into ruin and annihilation in dignified defiance of such a monstrous world.

I take it, therefore, to be a fact that for many, if not most, ethically sensitive and reflective people an absolute, at least of 'wrongness', may appear in the midst of a complex situation, even though the likelihood of its doing so may be considered to be remote. The position, therefore, of the pacifist in regard to modern warfare is not intrinsically absurd or odd; the oddity, if it be an

oddity, is in his supposing that what others envisage as a remote, and perhaps merely theoretical, possibility has become actual. For him the methods of modern war have taken on the same quality as torture or rape, which not even the best intentions in the world to produce good or avoid evil can justify.

(2) This brings us to our next question, which we expressed in these terms: if the fact or possibility of an absolute for the will be admitted, how may this be conceived in terms of a general interpretation of morality, or, what sort of rational justification of it may be given to, or by, one who whilst feeling the pressure of such an absolute feels also the pressure of the need for a reasoned, and not merely impressionistic, direction of the moral life as a whole? The necessity to ask these questions arises from the fact that whilst no doubt the judgment that an act is absolutely wrong and forbidden is a sufficient reason for not doing it, in spite of all consequences, the "compelling" quality of the judgment is not by itself a sufficient reason for accepting it as true and trustworthy without examination and reflection. A man would disobey it, so long as it continued to hold him, at great peril to his moral integrity and growth, but to obey it *instanter* and without reflection would expose him to an only lesser peril. As is well known, there are other sorts of compulsion on the mind besides the compulsion of truth.

It might be thought at first that in the nature of the case there can be no test or justification of an intuition of absolute wrongness attaching to an act or relationship, any more than there can be a test or justification of the sensation of scarlet which one has when one looks at a geranium. It is surely, it may be said, a case of simple inspection. Either one sees it or one does not. But the analogy with sense-impressions is misleading, even though it be true that all moral reflection must end in a direct intuition which one either has or has not. The moral judgment is not a simple, relatively detachable experience

like an impression of scarlet. It is a function of the whole rational personality; it is part of a life-history which can be reviewed; it is embedded in a series, or rather a complex organism, of moral judgments and decisions and acts; it rests on, and implies, even if unconsciously, a general view of the nature of man and his world. What might be called a metaphysical perspective or vista is always liable to unveil itself within it. Moreover, there is at the heart of it the deep need of the self for internal unity and consistency. The need for unity and consistency in the moral life is far more than a merely theoretical interest which some people with a bent that way may feel, in much the same as some people have a bent for higher mathematics. Unity of principles in the domain of theory, as Hartmann insists,¹ is merely a supreme postulate of abstract thought, whereas unity of moral end and moral decision is a postulate of life and conduct. A man must therefore be continually submitting his moral judgments to re-examination and endeavouring to see them as part of a general view of life's meaning and tasks to which he has committed himself, or is prepared on reflection to commit himself, over the whole breadth of his living.

If the awareness of an absolute obligation to be followed in defiance of the calculable consequences is to be thus satisfactory to what Kant called the 'practical reason', it must, we may suggest, be part of a general interpretation of life which includes at least the following:

(a) A belief in a divine Will of righteousness which is dynamically participant in human history and is the active guarantor that the ultimate consequences of men's adherence to righteousness will be good.

It might be thought that this insistence on God as active *Will* is unnecessary, that so far as guaranteeing the good consequence of obedience to the absolute imperative is concerned, it is sufficient to believe that righteousness, or values, or the good, whatever term may be preferred, is constitutive of the universe and can no

¹ N. Hartmann, *Ethics* (English translation, 1932), Vol. I, p. 79.

more be set on one side than say the law of gravity in the physical sphere. From the standpoint of logic this may be so, but from the standpoint of the practical reason I do not think it is so at all. Adhesion to a course of action in defiance of all rational estimate of consequences is such a surrender of one of the prime uses of reason, and that too at a point of crisis where the whole person focalizes and unifies itself in the will, that rational balance can only be recovered by interpreting the act as obedience to, and faith in, a rational will of a higher order—though the word ‘interpretation’ is not wholly satisfactory suggesting, as it does, a subsequent theoretical construction, whereas what is meant is rather a bringing forth into full consciousness of what is already implicitly there. This I take to be the fundamental meaning of Kant’s insistence that the categorical imperative as a manifestation of the practical reason *postulates* belief in God. The exact meaning of postulation in Kant’s thought has, of course, been much discussed, but the use of the word instead of a logical category such as ‘presupposes’ or ‘implies’ indicates perhaps that what Kant had in mind was a profound adjustment of the person whereby the tension between the inescapable imperative upon the will and the apparent facts of nature and history as presented to the calculating reason is resolved by the thought of God.¹

(b) A belief that the divine Will, active in history, may make itself known through demands upon the wills of individual men and women, which transcend the insight of the majority of their contemporaries.

The readiness to defy all consequences in principle includes the readiness, if necessary, to defy the common judgment of one’s community and to be an *Athanasius contra mundum*. ‘Here stand I. I can do no other.’ But thus

¹ It is significant in this connection that N. Hartmann (*op. cit.* xx), who repudiates theism, and seeks to support the moral consciousness by a doctrine of values as eternal and self-subsistent essences, is compelled to speak of them in such wise as to suggest that they have a quasi personal interest in and activity towards their own realization.

to isolate oneself from one’s fellows, even from the highest ends and values by which the common life is sustained, must always be as morally suspect as it is spiritually dangerous. To anyone seeking to be a ‘reasonable person’ in the sense of seeking to live in the universalities of reason and not to be at the mercy of purely individual, often unconscious ‘anti-herd’ compulsions, such a position is, indeed, a very unhappy one, and can only be rested in on the basis of the faith that a minority of a few, or even of one, is sometimes the chosen agent of the divine will which assuredly intends, and seeks thus, to serve the good of all. This does not, or at least need not and should not, involve an unpleasant spiritual pride, for it does not in the least necessarily involve the view that God in His manifold wisdom does not use other people, including those who do not share the insight, or feel the call, in question. An absolute ethic of right or wrong must therefore, I suggest, be somewhat suspect if it is not part of what may be called a philosophy of vocation. Thus there would appear to be a right instinct behind the policy of tribunals, which have been given the impossible task of adjudging the genuineness of conscientious objection to military service, of proposing as one test the question whether the applicant’s objection is part of a religious belief and outlook, and whether there is any evidence to show that such religious belief and outlook govern the whole life.

(c) The belief that the divine Will values the individual person, and whilst immanent, and calling for man’s obedience, within history, transcends history in its ultimate fulfilment and consummation.

The belief given under (a) above could be construed to mean that God guarantees the triumph of good at some distant date *in this world only*. Yet it is very doubtful whether an absolutist ethic of the type under consideration could rest satisfactorily on such an interpretation. For if the individual is called upon to sacrifice himself and others to some distant, purely this-worldly con-

summation, then of necessity he and they lose all value and significance in and for themselves, for a this-worldly consummation certainly cannot include *them*. They become merely phases or items in progress, merely means to ends in which they have no share. Whether an absolute ethic of right or wrong could survive for long such a devaluation of the individual is certainly open to doubt. If God thus uses men merely as means to a this-worldly end, it is difficult to see why we should not do so also, making the best calculation we can of proximate results in a measurable future. If it be said that our calculations are of necessity so untrustworthy that we must leave that side of the matter to God and simply obey, the difficulty still remains of supposing that what is permitted to God, namely to use men as means, is not permitted to us, not because it is wrong, but merely because we are ignorant. The postulate of a divine Will actively participant in history must therefore be supplemented by the postulate that that Will values the individual as part of a trans-historical end. Thus again we come by a different route to something like Kant's position, when he derived from the categorical imperative the immortality of the soul and the maxim that a man must never be regarded as a mere means but always as an end in himself.

Our position then is that an ethic which is constrained to acknowledge the possibility of absolute obligations gains considerably in consistency and force from the context of a theistic faith of the type contained in the three propositions just set forth. But even more does such an ethic gain these from the context of a specifically Christian faith. For that faith has at its heart the conviction that God has acted, and is still acting, with unique and critical decisiveness through Jesus Christ, and through the minority who are called to the distinctive Christian vocation through Him. Furthermore, bound up with belief in this supreme revelatory act of the divine love is the intensest possible valuation of the individual and, supporting that, the conviction that the divine

kingdom, in which the significance of both the individual and of universal history will be realized and conserved, lies beyond this world altogether. Thus the whole Christian movement in history is seen as an activity of God detaching men and women from their fellows through a vocation, and through intimations of His will, which the majority of men do not, and cannot, share or fully understand. Yet such detachment is in another sense not detachment at all. Those who are so called in Christ are the bearers of, as they are themselves borne by, the mystery of God's saving purpose towards the whole of mankind.

This, no doubt, is a high view of the calling of the Christian, but it is the New Testament view and something like it has surely lain very near the heart of Christian piety and witness through the ages. Given it, the possibility that at certain points amidst the confusion of the historical process, which God alone has in His grasp, Christians, or groups of Christians, may be called upon to stand fast to certain positions, come what may, without being able to justify what they do in terms of the usual prudential considerations and calculations which rightly govern much of human existence, is a very real one. One would indeed expect it to happen. A Christian, or group of Christians, or for that matter a majority of Christians, may, no doubt, sometimes mistake their own prejudices for the will of God, but that does not affect the point.

Turning now to the question of war, it will be apparent, if there is any truth in these remarks, that the pacifist position,¹ in so far as it rests on the judgment of the absolute wrongness of the methods of modern war, if it is to have consistency and force, must be part of a general interpretation and attitude to life of the kind indicated. And Christian pacifism, we may add, in

¹ The remarks which follow apply just as much to those non-pacifists who, though willing to participate in war, would yet assert that within the war method itself certain absolute prohibitions may appear, which must be obeyed at any cost. That, however, has not for the moment become a live issue.

accordance with what has been said, will have perhaps the greatest consistency and force. Moreover, and this must be said with emphasis, the force of the pacifist position cannot possibly be grasped, except it be seen as part of such an interpretation and attitude. A great deal of the discussion of this issue seems to me to miss the mark, not only because the reality and acuteness of the problem of the right and the good is not grasped, but also because the general interpretation of life (in the case of Christian pacifism the whole understanding of the Christian revelation) which lies behind and sustains the pacifist position is not grasped. By isolating the view from its supporting belief and faith it is not difficult to make it look self-contradictory and absurd.

Thus Christian pacifism is sometimes dismissed as an overhang from a shallow, optimistic liberalism, which does not take sin seriously and believes that men will respond instantly to a few eloquent sermons about love. This may be true in some instances, but the position may just as well rest, and usually, I think, does rest, on a profound sense of the power of evil and of the exceedingly great cost of God's redeeming activity in relation to it, involving nothing less than the Cross of the Incarnate Lord—an activity which the Christian believer is himself called upon by virtue of his special vocation costingly to share.

Again, it is sometimes said that the pacifist witness has been the cause of this present war, inasmuch as it weakened the military will and preparedness of the democracies and encouraged the German dictator to pursue his evil purposes. This is obviously an absurd and partisan oversimplification, but it illustrates a problem which is always liable to confront an absolute ethic of right or wrong, namely that it may apparently hinder the achievement of ends otherwise accounted good. Should not one sacrifice one's own conscience and co-operate with those who, according to such light as they have, must be judged to be seeking at least relatively higher ends than

others? The answer to this might be that to speak of sacrificing an *absolute* is something of a contradiction in terms, and that all the consequences of one's obedience to it must be accepted; but even so the apparent anomaly of hindering good for righteousness sake would remain. The anomaly disappears, however, when set in the context of the Christian's faith that amidst all the confused interplay of forces which constitute history God fulfils Himself in divers ways, one way being the laying of His hand on certain individuals and groups and calling them to an uncompromising witness. This is not to say He uses them alone. He uses also the best insights and highest service of others as well. It does not appear to me, therefore, to be a necessarily inconsistent position, though it is often represented to be such, for a pacifist to take up, that if either side wins this war it would be better, so far as he can judge, for the Allies to do so, and yet he himself is under call not to co-operate in the enterprise. His contribution to the whole tragic situation must, in terms of his own unique vocation, be made along other lines.

Again, it is sometimes urged against the pacifist position that it is a quite arbitrary refusal to compromise with evil at one particular point when one is compromising with it at countless other points through the mere fact of living in a society at all. It is picturesquely suggested that the only way in which the pacifist can achieve consistency is by leaving the community and living on a desert island. It might be replied that it is not necessarily inconsistent to compromise at ninety-nine points and refuse to compromise at the hundredth, for evil is always a matter of degree and quality, and a change of degree and quality may occur at the hundredth point of such a kind as to call for a particularly emphatic protest, especially from those who are committed to a certain style of life and to a certain type of witness to mankind.¹ Yet

¹ Of course, one is under obligation to try to grasp in terms of one's general interpretation of life why the hundredth case is so different, otherwise one may be at the mercy of merely sentimental impressionism.

when apparently the whole life of a community is at stake, the point cannot perhaps be so easily dismissed. The only way in which it can be met is for the position to rest on and be part of the kind of faith already indicated, the faith, that is, that God, who is above all communities and their needs, is Himself at work in history and may call through the illumination of His spirit to those who are already under a special vocation in Christ for a special type of protesting witness. From this angle it hardly seems just to dismiss the pacifist position as an inconsistent endeavour to introduce a perfectionist attitude into those corrupt relativities of this sinful world which one has to accept in order to be alive at all. The pacifist does not commit himself to a perfectionist position any more than does the non-pacifist who would rather see Great Britain go down in defeat than engage in certain types of reprisal. Like everybody else he is up to the neck in evil. What he does implicitly commit himself to is a belief in God's activity in the world, an activity which may at any moment call for a special type of service and witness, especially perhaps at certain crisis points in the working out of His purpose.

(3) The third question we asked was, what can be said about the profound moral disturbance which persists where an accent of 'rightness' or 'wrongness', strong yet falling short of absoluteness, rests on certain lines of conduct which for other reasons it is deemed proper not to pursue, or to pursue?

I do not propose to offer any thoughts on this question, partly because there is no room in the space allotted to me, but still more because I have none of any consequence to offer. I wish only to emphasize a problem connected with our whole sense of right, and with its power to

For the pacifist this means discriminating between different usages of force as judged in the light of his Christian vocation. I have attempted to work this out in greater detail in an article contributed to Vol. IV of the Church, Community and State Series, published in connection with the Oxford Conference. The article is entitled 'The Revelation in Christ and the Christian's Vocation'.

touch the deeper sources of feeling and energy in the soul, the reality and acuteness of which, especially in relation to war, are not, I think, always fully realized. I do not myself see that there is any adequate dealing with the problem except on the basis of the Christian faith, particularly the Christian faith in the forgiveness of sins. For those who have no such faith, there is perhaps nothing to be done save to disregard their scruples and hope that habituation will reduce the tension sufficiently to make it no bar to efficiency. Yet I doubt sometimes whether even a most deep-going doctrine of forgiveness, still less the making of distinctions between the 'antecedent' and 'consequent' will of God, really meets the case. So many young soldiers, who have something of Christian sensitivity, feel the whole thing to be so utterly beastly and degrading that to ask God's forgiveness in the very act of putting the maximum of their own efficacy into it strikes them as being on the verge of blasphemy. Like Studdert Kennedy they feel that if it is really God's will, even His consequent will, that they should do this, if He has made a world where, even as corrupted by sin, there is no option, in order to secure good, save to mow men down with molten lead or blow them to pieces with high explosive, then they are not merely anti-war, but also anti-God. What the answer to this problem is, and how a Christian doctrine of forgiveness can be stated in order really to meet it, I do not know. One thing of which I am sure is that far worse than not having an answer is not to realize how acute it is for many and hence to suppose that one has met it when one has not. And worst of all is it to brush it on one side as the result of an amiable sentimentalism which use in time will overcome; but I do not imagine that any Christian would wish at this time of day, to take that view, though some unfortunately speak as though they do.