

7. THE CLASSICAL OPTIONS GRAPHICALLY PORTRAYED

EVER SINCE CHRISTIANITY CEASED to be the faith of a persecuted minority and there were found within the churches persons carrying responsibility for the state, Christian thinkers have been haunted by the intellectual problem of relating the needs of statesmanship to the standards of the gospel. As a result of numerous attempts to discuss what has been variously referred to as "the problem of compromise" or "the problem of responsibility," it seems clear that the discussion is so strongly dominated by a variety of historical ways of thinking about these problems that one can hardly make a new start without dealing directly with some of the major historical options. Whether right or wrong, they have determined the vocabulary and the understanding of the nature of the problem which continue to dominate the discussion. The graphic demonstration of some of these classical solutions which is here offered does not claim to be more than a caricature. The purpose is not to represent with accurate detail the positions of certain individuals or churches so much as to see in them types, each of which illustrates a general approach even if it is not historically true to the complexity of the positions taken by the persons or movements named. There is nothing particularly original about this typological approach, nor about the particular observations being made; the reason for surveying this history is to relate the solution being proposed here to the other traditional approaches.

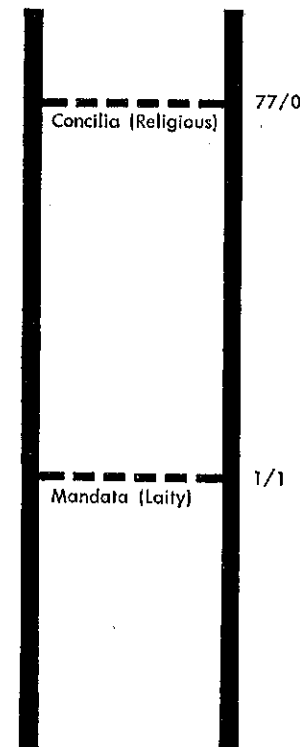
A. The Medieval View

The understanding typologically attributed to classical Roman Catholic thought is that of the double standard. This approach can well be portrayed by the identification of two separate levels of moral demand. Whereas in Catholicism these two levels would apply in every significant realm of ethics, we are concerned especially with the problems of evil, retribution, and forgiveness, and can therefore represent these positions on a scale of differing degrees of retribution or forgiveness. In the center of the scale is the level of justice, where retribution and offense are exactly proportionate ("eye for eye, tooth for tooth"). Considerably below this would be the incommensurate vengeance exercised by a Lamech (Genesis 4:24). Above the level of equal retribution are rising degrees of willingness to forgive, the extreme being Jesus' instructions to forgive seventy times seven, i.e., to forgo retribution completely regardless of the measure of the offense. The lines marked on this graph stand for ethical norms. The graph does not show whether these

standards are attainable or not; it is assumed that they are not intrinsically impossible of fulfillment.

For the major body of society, classical Roman Catholic moral theology thinks of certain basic precepts or commands which, if not identical with the level of exact retribution, remain quite close to that level, because of society's need for justice. What just behavior

MEDIEVAL



means on this level is knowable by reason to anyone, even a pagan, and Christian thought on the subject draws extensively from such men as Aristotle and Cicero.

Far above this is the ethical level of the evangelical councils, which are known only by special revelation and are really the norm only for very special Christians.

The difference between the two levels is a difference of vocation. Mankind is divided into two kinds of persons, the variations between them consisting precisely in the level of moral obligation on which they stand. Those who are truly saints belong with all of their life on the upper level; those who are responsible for the economic

and political function of the world may with no pangs of conscience remain on the other level, or rise above it only slightly; but for them to attempt to be saints would not only be unrealistic; it would be undesirable.

Let us look more in detail at the significance of the fact that the norm of justice is a definite quantity (i.e., a fixed point on the graph). Epistemologically, this presupposes that it is possible outside of the revelation of the incarnate Christ to know what justice is. It is further presupposed that we have standards to calculate what it means for the retribution to fit the offense (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; but how do we measure equivalence when the offense leaves the realm of anatomy?).

Since the norm of justice is both fixed and attainable, this means that we can conceive of, and perhaps with good coordination even achieve, a state which would be all that we could ask a state to be. Such a state would completely fulfill the requirements of justice, while making no attempt to act according to love. It would, in fact, not be good for a state having reached the level of justice to rise higher on the scale. For the state to move closer to forgiving love—e.g., by relaxing the application of the death penalty—would, in fact, not be truly higher, since it would mean the state's abandoning its own assignment of justice.

It goes without saying that on this basis it is possible to build a coherent social ethic, as Roman Catholicism has done with great clarity and thoroughness. That the norms of justice are knowable and distinct from redemptive love tends to presuppose that they are founded in creation, in the nature of man or society. It is this nature which will give us our guidance in knowing how to define not only retributive justice (which we are discussing on these graphs) but also attributive and distributive justice.

The awareness that the norms of justice are supposed to be founded in creation raises one serious weakness of this view, for we are discussing how justice can deal with evil. If, however, there is evil, we are no longer on the level of creation, but that of the Fall. Can we then know the norms of creation and of man's true nature? If we do know them, is it appropriate that we should use them as standards for guiding society after the Fall?

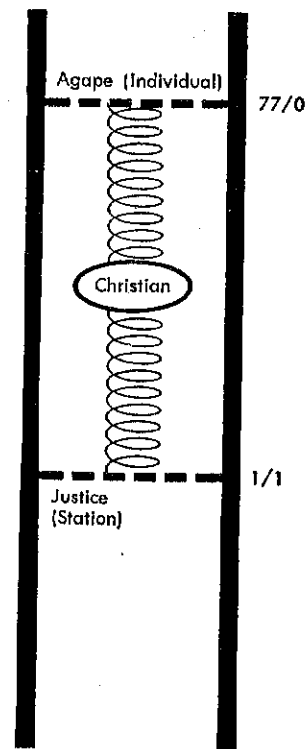
B. The Classical Lutheran View

It will be observed that this position is similar to the one analyzed above, in placing two distinct and definite lines on the graph. The standard of suffering, forgiving love, as revealed in Christ, is substantially the same; likewise the standard of justice. If anything, the distinctness and definiteness of the standards of justice are greater in Lutheranism than in Catholicism. For whereas Catholi-

cism founded its doctrine of natural law in philosophical realism, so that in order to know what a man's nature is one analyzes the *concept* of man, Lutheranism spoke rather of "order of creation," which, it was practically assumed, could be observed by looking empirically at society, by observing what a prince or a banker is.

Lutheranism differs distinctly, however, in its understanding of how individual Christians relate to both of these standards. Instead of dividing mankind into two categories, some saints living in perfect love and the mass of common men operating on the level of justice, Luther places every man on both levels. As an individual,

LUTHERAN



involved in face-to-face relations with his neighbor, every Christian is to be nonresistant, bearing patiently every kind of evil treatment. Likewise, every man, when he functions with a view to his assignment ("vocation" or "station") in society, operates on the lower level. Thus, instead of asking, What kind of person am I? as was the case in Catholicism, the Christian will ask from case to case and moment to moment, On what level am I now operating, in my station or as an individual? The graph symbolizes this condition by

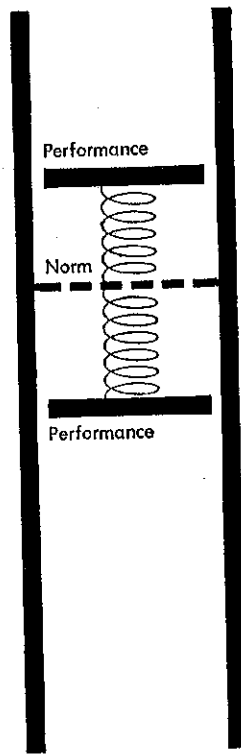
placing the Christian in a position of tension between the two levels.

We noted above that for Catholicism the fact that moral performance is demanded indicates that it is attainable. For Lutheranism this has changed completely, as far as the norm for perfect love is concerned. Man is always a sinner, even though justified. His inability ever to attain perfect love is not only a result of the fact that he has social obligations which call him to do justice, but is also an outworking of his corrupt will. With reference, however, to the maintenance of justice, the insight into human sinfulness does not lead to any doubts about whether the standards of justice defined for the statesman in his station can be attained; Lutheranism traditionally places considerable confidence in rulers.

C. Calvinist Theocracy

When we move to the position represented first of all by Ulrich Zwingli and finally incorporated in the reformed societies of Geneva

CALVINIST/PURITAN



or the Netherlands, we find a series of very significant changes. First of all, the Reformed tradition is original in its rejection of any kind of dualism. No realm of life is removed from Divine

Sovereignty or from the moral norms imposed by revelation. Reason or nature cannot be the source of a different set of standards from those revealed in God's word. Insofar as reason and nature have any usefulness as concepts, they agree with the norms of revelation; they can never differ therefrom, as in the Catholic and Lutheran schemes. On the graph we therefore have only one norm line.

This line is not the level of pure justice, eye for eye retribution. The kings of the Old Testament are praised for their mercy and their care for widows and orphans. A puritan society in the Calvinist tradition is Christianized in a far-reaching way, with certain elements of New Testament ethics, such as the rejection of usury, built into the larger society. Thus the norm is above the level of pure justice. But neither is the line set on the level of *agape* love. The norm must be drawn from the whole Bible, including the Old Testament. It must serve as a standard for entire peoples, which are not yet in a position to take seriously a call to true self-sacrifice.

It would therefore be wrong even for individuals to attempt to function in a higher or more loving way, for they would then be unfaithful to their common responsibility for the civil order. For example, if a government is unjust, Christians are not to bear it as disciples of Christ, but to rebel; every individual is always responsible for the norms of order and it is never really loving for him to disobey them.

Although all men as individuals are sinners, an ideal theocracy is a possibility even in this world. It is, in fact, possible for a state to be too good—e.g., by laxity in the use of the death penalty or by disarming. The performance line (P) can fall either above or below the will of God for the state.

D. Liberal Pacifism

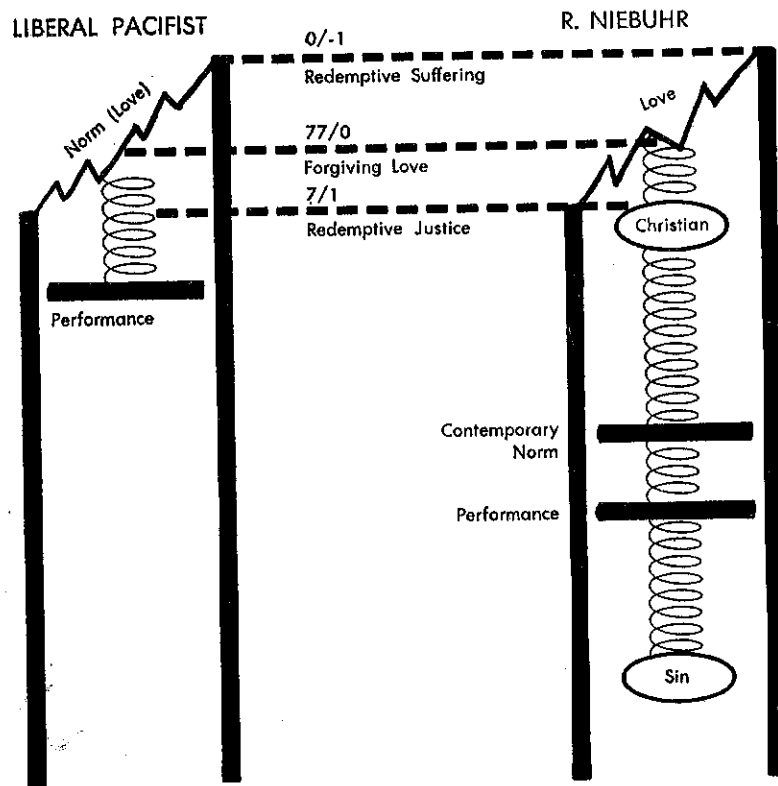
Standing in the Puritan-Nonconformist tradition, the liberal pacifist position tolerates no duality. There is only one norm, both for individuals and for societies; neither the Lutheran distinction between individual and social office nor the Catholic distinction between different kinds of people can be tolerated.

It is, however, not precisely definable just where the one line lies. Sometimes it is on the level of unretaliating forgiveness which we have called *agape*. Sometimes, however, it falls somewhat short of this, assuming that a certain residual necessary amount of justice can be maintained with a very redemptive approach. At still other times it goes even beyond *agape* in believing that suffering in itself may have a redemptive value. There is no clear distinction in the thought of liberal pacifism between these three upper levels, a fact which we have indicated by the slanting irregular line.

Since the norms for society and those for the individual coincide and are fixed on the high level of love, it is clear that justice and love are identical, as are reason and revelation. There are no problems that cannot be solved if we try hard and sin has not basically changed the original pattern of creation. Performance may actually fall somewhat short of the standards we hold before the state, but there is no reason that it needs to.

E. Reinhold Niebuhr

The contemporary thinker who has given the most careful attention to the subject we are dealing with is without doubt Reinhold Niebuhr. He begins by accepting major elements from all



of the views we have been looking at. Like Lutheranism, he understands the individual Christian to be in a continuing tension between the ethical demands of two different levels. In face-to-face relations it is imperative and to some extent possible to follow the precepts of Christ; in social responsibility this is not only impossible but actually wrong because in the social dimension love expresses it-

self in the norms of responsibility, i.e., justice. Like Luther, he believes the decision in a specific situation will have to be made by the Christian on the basis of whether he finds himself in a purely personal relationship or in a context of responsibility; the choice between face-to-face and eye-for-eye depends on the presence or absence of the dimension of responsibility.

With the Catholic tradition, Niebuhr argues that there are certain ethical values in the Greco-Roman tradition, expressed most clearly in the pagan moralists of the classical age, which we need to add to Christianity in order to guide a responsible witness to the state or to a society at large. Thus the difference between uniquely Christian standards and those we apply to the state is not only that between pure idealism and compromise, but also between different sources of norms.

It is perhaps less broadly realized to what extent Reinhold Niebuhr is indebted for his analysis of this problem to continuing agreement with liberal pacifism. Like the liberal pacifist he used to be earlier, Niebuhr has only one real ideal, and that is the one at the top. There is no built-in justification for anything less than love. As with liberal pacifism, Niebuhr is not quite sure just where the ideal line runs. Sometimes, when arguing the inadequacy of *agape*, he seems to be equating it practically with absolute self-negation (the redemptive suffering beyond *agape*—symbolized on the graph by 0/-1); at other times he thinks of pacifists as people who are trying to organize a redemptive but still somehow just and effective society (7/1).

The originality of Niebuhr's position, which enables him to synthesize these otherwise irreconcilable views, is indicated on the graph by the fact that the "norm" line is not a fixed point. Although the demands of justice are distinct from those of love, they are not definite. We cannot find in natural law or elsewhere a clear definition of what the just state would be. In his own thinking probably Niebuhr's reason for this innovation is simply his experience in a study of the history of Christian thought and of social history. He has seen that justice is a relative and instrumental concept and not a fixed and clearly definable norm. Yet beyond this pragmatic discovery he has actually solved some of the problems raised by the other views. When justice was thought of as representing a fixed point on the scale, we had to ask how this point can be known and with what revelatory authority it is communicated to us. Niebuhr avoids these problems since the concept of justice which he will use at any given point is not a fixed quantity. This means that the justice line is double. Whereas in the earlier views the level of performance did not need to be indicated on the graph, since the norms by which we judge the state were not

thought of as dependent upon what the state was doing, the actual performance level has to be indicated for Niebuhr because there is no other point of orientation. Thus we have an interplay of tensions such that the norm by which we speak to the state is always higher than present performance, but never so much higher as to be irrelevant.

Whereas in the earlier dualist systems the lower level was fixed by revelation, in Niebuhr's the only thing that holds down the set of tensions and norms is the weight of sin at the bottom. Sin is not an additional norm but a brute fact in the life of society. There is no philosophical reason for the state not to be loving; the only reason is factual.

Since the two justice lines are not fixed, it is an idle question to ask whether they are above or below the level of exact eye-for-eye equivalence. In fact this level of exact equivalence cannot and need not be known with real certainty. It may be spoken of hypothetically, as can other pagan ideas of justice, order, etc.; it is never a real norm either in value or in knowability. It is also an idle question to ask whether justice is attainable. At any given point, by the very nature of the situation shown graphically, the justice which it asks of the state is more than it is presently performing; yet in each case that which is asked is not impossible.

"Sectarian" Views

All of the positions analyzed thus far, conservative or liberal, old or new, pacifist or not, have one thing in common. They speak of the moral problem of an entire society without considering faith as a decisive dimension. They may distinguish between two kinds of Christians, or between the individual and the collective, but there is no difference between belief and unbelief, or between believing and unbelieving societies. They deal with the fact that the Christian, although justified, continues to commit sin, and with the further fact that the Christian who bears social responsibility seems to be obligated to do things which Christian love would not call for; they do not in any seriousness take account of the fact that a major proportion of society is made up of people who have not the slightest intention of even attempting Christian idealism, and who feel that it is quite in order that they should use society and even the state as the tools of their selfishness.

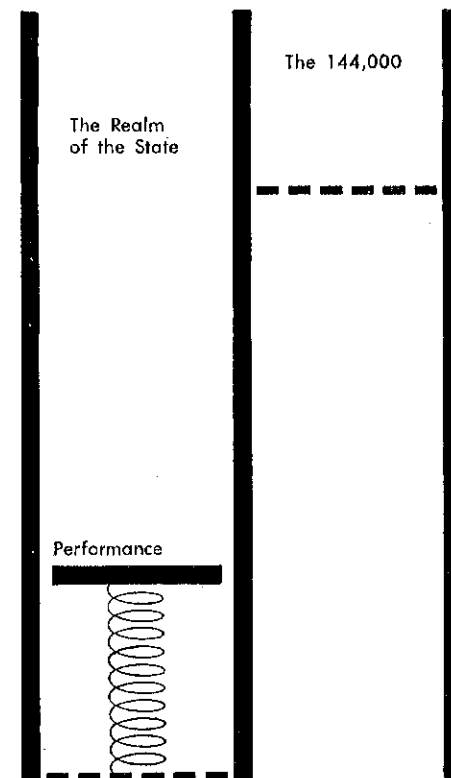
The views to which we now turn are distinguished by the fact that they do give consideration to the issue of faith. (The term *sectarian* used to designate this originality is a qualifying epithet which, although it initially had a pejorative sense, is now sometimes used descriptively, as we mean to do here.) This means that we can no longer adequately represent our problem on a single graph, as

everyone from the Middle Ages to Reinhold Niebuhr has been trying to do. We must rather have two graphs, one for the ethical realm where faith is a conditioning factor; another for the realm where it is not. It should not be thought that this distinction is a sociological one between two different kinds of groups, as though the assumption were being made that the organized church is the realm of faith and the rest of society the realm of unbelief. The middle line on the graph divides not societies but problem areas.

F. Jehovah's Witnesses

In the realm of faith the ethical standard to be applied is not the *agape* of Christ but the law of Old and New Testaments. In

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES



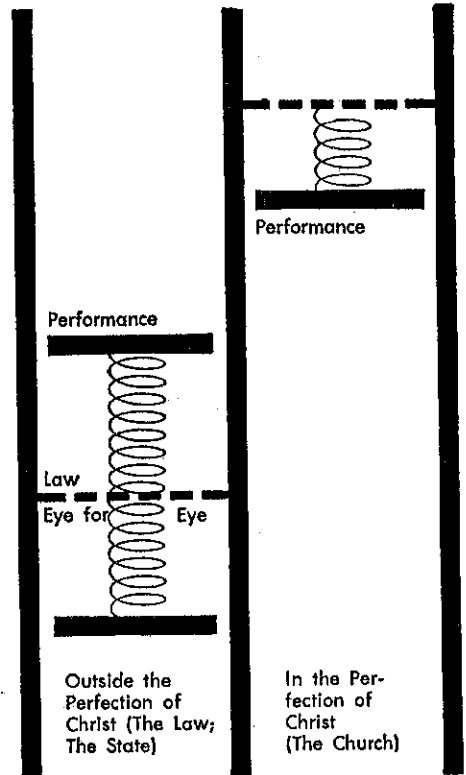
this respect the Jehovah's Witnesses are parallel to the Puritans. This side of the line is not, however, our major concern; we are interested in the norms that can be drawn for the unbelieving society. Since, however, the state in the understanding of the Jehovah's Witnesses is diabolical, there are actually no norms at

all to hold up before it. Jehovah's Witnesses do go to court frequently to claim their rightful liberties, but in doing this they are driven by considerations of publicity and not by a concern for the duties of the state. If a state does not persecute the faithful it is, in fact, better than its diabolical nature would lead one to expect; it is possible for the performance of the state to exceed in lovingness the essential pattern of the state. In this situation, it would be pointless to speak regarding any specific duty of the statesman or the institution; the only message is the call to individuals to come and join the multitude of 144,000.

G. Traditional Amish-Mennonite

The view of the Jehovah's Witnesses was mentioned first in order to distinguish it from other views which also find a difference

AMISH TRADITION



between church and world. Like the Jehovah's Witnesses, traditional Mennonitism distinguishes between the realm of belief and that of unbelief. Unlike them, this distinction is not drawn on the

narrow basis of denominational affiliation, not claiming that all of the church is in Mennonitism and that all of the world is outside. Unlike the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonites and Amish do have standards which they apply to a state to call it to do its duty better. The obvious traditional example is their contesting the legality of religious persecution. At the same time they have recognized the necessity for the state to work on a lower level than that of *agape*. Some have accepted the death penalty as legitimate, and modern conservative Mennonites have made a similar point in their argument against liberal pacifism. This view is thus similar to the Catholic and Lutheran views in that a *distinct* and *definite* level of normative sub-Christian justice is presumed to exist. For him who has made the commitment of faith, nothing stands ultimately in the way of his fully following Christ; similarly, he who would bring about earthly justice could, presumably attain it, since its requirements are fixed and known.

There are very obvious differences from the earlier views in defining the standards for Christian behavior. The full New Testament vision of binding (and possible) discipleship norms is maintained for the believer; there is no unrealistic "pacifist" expectation of discipleship performance from the state. Yet as far as what is said about the world is concerned this position is open to the same criticisms as the Roman Catholic and Lutheran views discussed earlier; it posits an independent standard of justice, which is thought to be known somehow apart from Christ. The more conservative representatives of this position would here speak of the Mosaic legislation; contemporary interpreters would sometimes speak of Greco-Roman concepts of fair retribution or of the state's pragmatic obligation to defend its own existence. This independent standard, which can be both known and attained apart from Christ, is challengeable not only because it raises a claim to be revelation outside of Christ but also because it doubts the biblical affirmation that God in Christ is "Lord" over the world.

It was said above that the vertical line dividing the two columns is to be interpreted as signifying only belief as versus unbelief, and not as the institutional distinction between those who are and are not church members or are or are not in the world. If, however, the diversity of standards between the two realms is strongly emphasized, the temptation becomes very strong to "stiffen" the line between the two realms, thinking of the ins and the outs sociologically or even geographically, weakening both the missionary imperative and the relevance of a witness to the state.

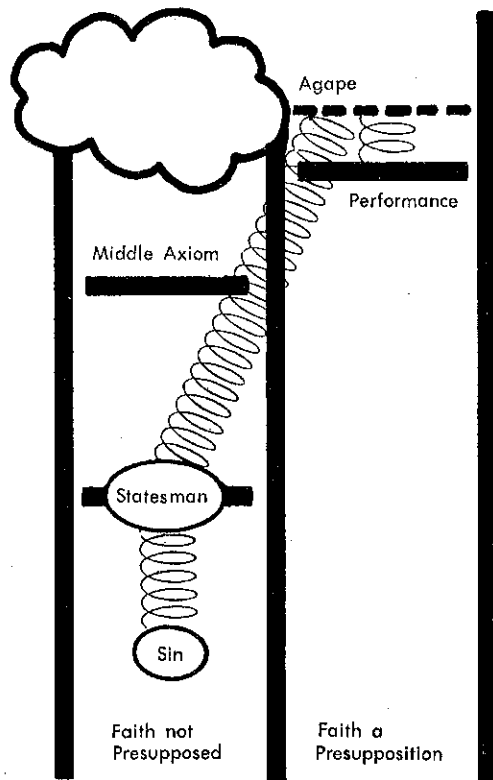
H. Proposed New Formulation

The diagram here suggested agrees with the traditional sectarian view in its maintaining the norm of love as the only standard in the

church, in maintaining the distinction between the presuppositions of faith and of unfaith, in realistically expecting the standards and the achievement of the world to be less than love, and in considering love to be a relevant historical possibility distinct from self-immolation and from puritan benevolence.

It differs from the traditional sectarian view just as it differs from the medieval positions in challenging the existence or the knowability of a fixed standard of justice in the realm of unbelief. (The theological advantages of this difference have been discussed above in connection with Reinhold Niebuhr.) We therefore avoid affirming that there is any norm willed by God other than love

PROPOSED



itself. What holds down the performance and the standards that apply in the world is the weight of sin, not a divinely revealed lower order for secular society. God's only ultimate will is what He has revealed in Christ.

The individual citizen or statesman in the world of unbelief cannot see through the wall that separates him from the world of

faith. Therefore the point at which the norm of *agape* is understandable and relevant to him is not the top of the scale on his side of the barrier of unbelief. Looking directly up he can see only a cloud, within which he fears there might lie an ideal demand for self-sacrifice, which he understands as suicide, i.e., not a meaningful alternative. The point at which *agape* becomes meaningful for him is rather the point at which the "spring" representing the relevance of love operating from within the realm of faith goes out of his sight through the wall. At this level the norm is formulated for him in pagan terms (liberty, equality, fraternity, education, democracy, human rights). This we have represented by the line *N* for norm, which is not a fixed point but a projection representing the next highest conceivable level of standards to which one can appeal in the world of unbelief.

The point where the "spring" impinges on the line of justice is the individual. He can be appealed to make a leap of faith. This might be a small leap, as far upward as he can see in the direction of the standards that have been held before him; even this clearly requires faith. Or it could be the true leap of faith, taking him beyond the barrier of unbelief to the commitment of discipleship. It will be observed that these norms—or, to use the earlier term, middle axioms—are expressed with no embarrassment in pagan terms, even though it is insisted that the ultimate ground for their validity is the love of Christ; in fact, that they do not even exist except as a reflection or projection of the relevance of that love.

It is therefore possible to explain, or at least to represent graphically, how the Christian can speak to the statesman, without failing to take account of their differing presuppositions, using pagan or secular terminology to clothe his social critique without ascribing to those secular concepts any metaphysical value outside of Christ.

We thus also avoid the confusing possibility that was visible on the other diagrams where the "justice" line was fixed, of having a state actually doing better than it should, such as a state which would be reprimanded by the church for failing to be sufficiently rigorous in the repression of crime or in military preparedness.