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LOVE YOUR ENEMIES? —

C. Mervyn Maxwell writes: "Religion . . . offers freedom from ill will toward one's neighbors," and proceeds to give a proof text, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and cites as the Bible reference Matthew 22:39.

Jesus—when he quoted this passage from Leviticus 19:18—surely knew that it was written many centuries before he was born. Am I to assume that Mr. Maxwell, of the Department of Church History, Andrews University, does not know it? If he does, why then, like so many others who should and do know better, does he persist in the pretense that this statement originated with Jesus?

In his next paragraph Mr. Maxwell quotes that curious anomaly, "Love your enemies." I would not have believed that any rational man in the twentieth century would still seriously urge this as a moral precept.

Do you, sir, or any of your readers know of any sane person of any religious denomination anywhere (now or ever) who loves (or loved) his enemies—who feels and behaves toward those who would destroy him the same way he does toward his mother, wife, or child? (Webster's Unabridged dictionary defines enemy as "one who hates, and desires or attempts the injury of, another.")

Where in the gospel does Jesus express any love toward, for instance, scribes or Pharisees? Not that these were his enemies but, apparently, the editors of the New Testament felt they were. In any event, they attribute to Jesus words of contempt, hatred, and vilification aimed at these finest intellects and noblest spirits among his people in his generation. (See Matthew 23, but also read Parks, Hereford, or Moore *inter alia* on the Pharisees.)

Does the Biblical admonition to "love" mean merely to "tolerate"? Rabbi Albert Goldstein takes issue with "Insight" Editor C. Mervyn Maxwell on the age-old question.

As most Bible scholars realize, the love-your-enemy passage must be explained away by some such means as the "interim ethic" theory in order to save Jesus' own reputation for common sense—if, indeed, we are to believe that he ever said it.

Or do you or your readers accept Mr. Maxwell's definition of "love" as a "freedom from ill will . . . hostility or suspicion"? Webster's Unabridged offers this: "Love: a feeling of strong personal attachment induced by that which delights or commands admiration . . . a strong liking; fondness; . . . tender and passionate affection." If none of this is meant by Christian love, then why not use a word that does express what you do mean, something that covers freedom from ill will, hostility, and suspicion, and say "tolerate" if that is all you really mean? But please do not depreciate the beauty of love into nothing more than the pallid insipidity of toleration. Sincerely,

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REPLY

As Rabbi Goldstein has intimated, part of our difficulty is semantic. What do we mean by the word "love"?

It is said that "the Greeks had a word for it." For love, as a matter of fact, they had four words, and this is important because Jesus' command to love our enemies has come to us in Greek.

The love of affection that parents and children feel for each other the Greeks called "storgē" (stor-gay). Sexual love they called "erōs," and love between friends, "philia." Within Christianity as it arose there came into use a rare fourth Greek word for love, "agapē" (ah-gah-pay).

"Agapē" love sometimes includes the other kinds of love but typically it had a special meaning of its own. It is the love defined, for example, in 1 Corinthians 13 that "envieth not; . . . seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked" and "never faileth." It is pre-eminently the love God feels for men even before they repent and turn to Him. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" (1 John 4:10). It is in so special a sense God's love that God Himself is said to be "agapē." "God is love" (1 John 4:16).

Here is the love of moral principle. It is not blind! Because it is so other-centered it resents every social injustice large or small. But while it vigorously hates sin it sincerely loves sinners. It sees in even the worst of men a child of God—and respects that child of God as a brother. It is the love that always takes us by surprise. Animals feel affection and "erōs." Even thieves can sometimes be close friends. But when an intelligent man, who knows that an enemy hates him and is seeking to harm him, nonetheless harbors in return no personal re-

NONSENSE!

sentment but even defends his enemy's rights as a person and patiently seeks opportunities to do him good—this always appears to go beyond the human. When early Christians saw it they exclaimed in surprise, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts" (Romans 5:5).

Has any intelligent person ever felt this way? According to Plato, Socrates died without any resentment toward those who poisoned him and sought to the last to persuade them to follow the same high morals he espoused. Ghandi may have been motivated by "agapē" when he substituted peaceful negotiations in British India for revolutionary violence.

In the Jewish Scripture perhaps David is the outstanding example of "agapē" love. Though King Saul hated him fanatically and tried for years to murder him, David twice refused to kill Saul in return when it would have been easy for him to do so, and when Saul died fighting Philistines he lamented, "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! . . . Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives" (1 Samuel 1:19-27).

The writer of Proverbs 25:21, 22 intimated "agapē" love when he said, "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you" (R.S.V.). This Old Testament passage was used by Paul to illustrate love in Romans 12 and—surprising as it may seem to you—it appears to have been the scriptural inspiration for Jesus' command, "Love your enemies"; for Jesus immediately followed "Love your enemies" with the words, "Do good to them which hate you" (Luke 6:27). Thus both of Jesus'

"In asking us to love our enemies Jesus asked us to love them as God loves, to see in them sons of God . . . and to treat them with active kindness as God treats us."

commands to love our neighbors and to love our enemies were based on the Jewish Scriptures.

In asking us to love our enemies Jesus used the word "agape." He did not expect us to feel affection for them like members of the family or to fall in love with them like sweethearts or even to like them as friends like each other. It seems unreasonable to you that God could expect us to have this kind of love for our enemies and you are right. Jesus did not require it either. He asked us instead to love them as God loves; He asked us to see in them sons of God in whom the image of God may yet be restored and to treat them with active kindness as God treats us. In may not be too much to say that it is an active acceptance of this principle that is the essence of being a Christian rather than merely "believing in Jesus." God loves sinners enough to die for them, Christianity says, and He wants us to do the same. This kind of loving is so demanding that it requires an ultimate change not only in what a man does and says but also in what he is.

But did Jesus Himself love His enemies? Did He not dub Phari-

sees "whited sepulchres" and "hypocrites"?

Why should you and I doubt His evaluation of the Pharisees? If the spiritual leaders of His day were fully noble and upright men, they were much better men than the Jewish leaders whom prophets knew—and much better too than many religious leaders of today. At least, I know I often catch myself doing good for very bad reasons, and the confessions of my colleagues in most Christian ministries reveal that they often do the same.

But what about the scourge Jesus held aloft in the Temple? He laid it on no one! He simply spoke as an individual. There was no violence and no mob to back Him up. What then drove the moneychangers out in panic? Evidently their sense of guilt in the presence of His unselfishness.

The tone of Christ's voice when He addressed the spiritual leaders as hypocrites is not recorded in Scripture. We have no reason to believe it was harsh. Personally I hear a sob in every sentence. Only the day before, when all the people had hailed Him as king—and it had been in His power to use them to attack the hierarchy had He so desired—as the procession came in sight of Jerusalem Jesus provoked no riot but burst into tears of sorrow at the city's impending fate.

A few days later, as soldiers drove nails into His hands at the behest of the priests, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them."

That Jesus, though utterly serious, was also warmly compassionate in His rebukes is attested by the fact that within weeks after His death a large number of the very leaders He had rebuked became His ardent followers. "A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).