

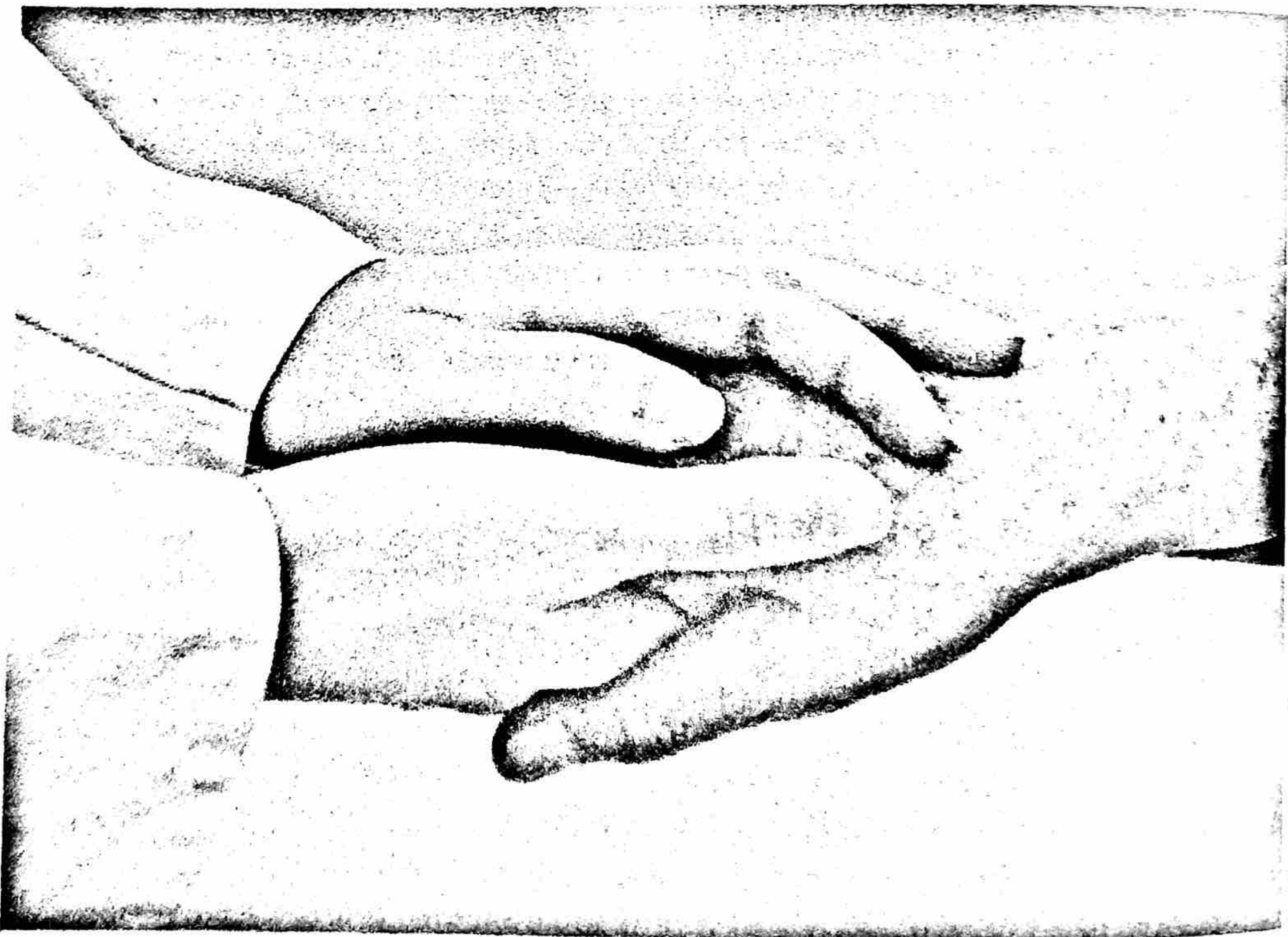
Love is the Supreme Law

Joseph F. Fletcher (1905-1991) is considered a founder of the field of biomedical ethics. He was an ordained Episcopal priest who taught Christian ethics at Episcopal Divinity School and Harvard Divinity School, both in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Later, at the University of Virginia, he taught medical ethics.

In his 1954 book, *Morals and Medicine*, Fletcher argued in favor of euthanasia and for telling the truth to dying patients. In his most famous book, *Situation Ethics* (1968), Fletcher asserted that in complex moral situations, the law of love must take precedence over more general moral laws. In the late 1960s, Fletcher became an atheist and humanist.

Social activism was an important part of Fletcher's life. He actively supported labor unions, and helped found the Planned Parenthood Federation and the Society for the Right to Die.

—Lora Hobbs & Austra Reinis



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Excerpts from *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*, Joseph F. Fletcher
Chapter 1: pp. 17-18, 22-23, 26, 31, 33

There are at bottom only three alternative routes or approaches to follow in making moral decisions. They are: (1) the legalistic; (2) the antinomian, the opposite extreme—i.e., a lawless or unprincipled approach; and (3) the situational. All three have played their part in the history of Western morals, legalism being by far the most common and persistent. Just as legalism triumphed among the Jews after the exile, so, in spite of Jesus' and Paul's revolt against it, it has managed to dominate Christianity constantly from very early days. . . .