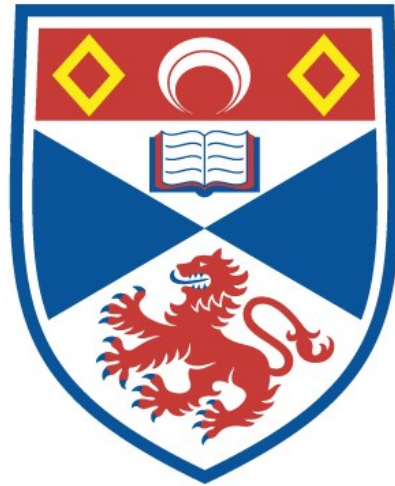


# University of St Andrews



Full metadata for this thesis is available in  
St Andrews Research Repository  
at:

<http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>

This thesis is protected by original copyright

## ABSTRACT

The period under discussion begins in 1915 during Reinhold Niebuhr's last year of postgraduate work and ends with his emergence into the public eye. Niebuhr at the beginning was the child of nineteenth century liberalism and gradually came under the pervading influence of Marxism by the middle nineteenth-thirties. The transition that took place during this twenty year period was to have a profound effect upon Niebuhr's work during the transition and his later work. The transitional period can be understood more clearly if one identifies and investigates the philosophers Niebuhr encountered during this twenty year period and studies these factors in conjunction with the relevant theological and historical factors of the period.

Niebuhr did not at any time during his many encounters with a variety of thinkers ever abandon his own principles completely for another man's set of principles. Niebuhr attempted throughout his early work to understand reality in terms of the immediate struggle of man.

Niebuhr's liberal period roughly corresponded to the twelve years he spent as the pastor of a Detroit church. Niebuhr's first interest, one that began in University, was centered around metaphysical speculation, which brought him into contact with William James. Jamesian thought was to have a continuing impact upon Niebuhr's developing thought. After the Great War Niebuhr came into contact with the ideals of pacifism and the social Gospel. Niebuhr was struggling to understand the post-War liberal world; he consequently turned to several philosophers. Niebuhr turned to Max Weber

for guidance when investigating the economic presuppositions of capitalism. Niebuhr found Oswald Spengler helpful when he became interested in the degeneration of liberal culture. Niebuhr also utilized A.N. Whitehead's insights when he examined liberal religion.

Niebuhr left his Detroit parish in 1928 when he was offered a place at Union Theological Seminary in New York. This was not the only change taking place in the later half of the nineteen-twenties. Niebuhr had become deeply concerned about the plight of the worker particularly the workers of H. Ford. The years leading up to the Stock Market crash of 1929 and the years following the crash found Niebuhr struggling with the implications of the Marxist assumptions, which he had previously encountered in Weber's work and elsewhere. Niebuhr became increasingly interested in the plight of the urban proletariat. By 1931 Niebuhr's involvement with Marxism had reached a new intensity. Niebuhr began to make use of certain basic Marxist assumptions.

The outcome of the 1928 to 1932 transitional phase was a reversal in Niebuhr's approach to revolutionary Marxism and the abandonment of certain liberal thinkers. However, Niebuhr had again turned to thinkers for guidance when investigating liberal society. The end of this transitional period in 1932 was marked by the publication of the book Moral Man and Immoral Society, which was not only the first major work produced while under the influence of Marxism, but also the beginning of Niebuhr's public recognition.

The three year period from 1933 to 1935 contained Niebuhr's

most intense phase of Marxist involvement. Niebuhr seemed to be casting off the last remnant of liberalism when he abandoned pacifism. In 1934 Niebuhr wrote Reflections on the End of an Era the most powerful product of his Marxist encounter. However, by 1935 the intensity of Niebuhr's Marxist involvement was on the wane. The year 1935 marks the beginning of Niebuhr's search for a new theological and ethical framework.

Niebuhr throughout his early works plunged into one set of ideas only to draw back and examine them more closely. Niebuhr retained certain ideas from each encounter and discarded the rest; he seemed to gain something from every encounter from W. James and K. Marx and the insights gained were to have a lasting effect.

UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS

A STUDY OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES  
ON THE EARLY WORK OF REINHOLD NIEBUHR WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO KARL MARX

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of  
Divinity in partial fulfilment of the regu-  
lations of the Degree of

BACHELOR OF PHILOSOPHY

John Nichols Adams

ST. ANDREWS

January 1976



Th 8824

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER ONE	
<u>The Liberal Period</u>	1
Biographical Sketch	1
Introduction	8
The Early Years	10
The Beginning of the Search.	14.
The Final Years in Detroit	38
A Brief Summary	64
CHAPTER TWO	
<u>The Years of Flux</u>	67
Introduction	67
The Beginning of the Transition	70
The Crash	93
The Last Days of Liberalism	97
The Transition	112
The Dominance of Marx	125
CHAPTER THREE	
<u>Marxist Involvement</u>	165
Introduction	165
In Fear of the Coming Catastrophe	168
A Continuing Radicalism	178
Nascent Doubts	220
BIBLIOGRAPHY	263

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the following thesis is based on the results of research carried out by myself that it is my own composition and that it has not previously been presented for a Higher Degree. The research was carried out at the University of St. Andrews under the supervision of Professor N.H.G. Robinson.



## CERTIFICATE

I certify that John Nichols Adams has fulfilled the conditions of the resolution of the University Court No. 1, and that he is qualified to submit this thesis in application for the Degree of Bachelor of Philosophy.

## ABSTRACT

The period under discussion begins in 1915 during Reinhold Niebuhr's last year of postgraduate work and ends with his emergence into the public eye. Niebuhr at the beginning was the child of nineteenth century liberalism and gradually came under the pervading influence of Marxism by the middle nineteenth-thirties. The transition that took place during this twenty year period was to have a profound effect upon Niebuhr's work during the transition and his later work. The transitional period can be understood more clearly if one identifies and investigates the philosophers Niebuhr encountered during this twenty year period and studies these factors in conjunction with the relevant theological and historical factors of the period.

Niebuhr did not at any time during his many encounters with a variety of thinkers ever abandon his own principles completely for another man's set of principles. Niebuhr attempted throughout his early work to understand reality in terms of the immediate struggle of man.

Niebuhr's liberal period roughly corresponded to the twelve years he spent as the pastor of a Detroit church. Niebuhr's first interest, one that began in University, was centered around metaphysical speculation, which brought him into contact with William James. Jamesian thought was to have a continuing impact upon Niebuhr's developing thought. After the Great War Niebuhr came into contact with the ideals of pacifism and the social Gospel. Niebuhr was struggling to understand the post-War liberal world; he consequently turned to several philosophers. Niebuhr turned to Max Weber

for guidance when investigating the economic presuppositions of capitalism. Niebuhr found Oswald Spengler helpful when he became interested in the degeneration of liberal culture. Niebuhr also utilized A.N. Whitehead's insights when he examined liberal religion.

Niebuhr left his Detroit parish in 1928 when he was offered a place at Union Theological Seminary in New York. This was not the only change taking place in the later half of the nineteen-twenties. Niebuhr had become deeply concerned about the plight of the worker particularly the workers of H. Ford. The years leading up to the Stock Market crash of 1929 and the years following the crash found Niebuhr struggling with the implications of the Marxist assumptions, which he had previously encountered in Weber's work and elsewhere. Niebuhr became increasingly interested in the plight of the urban proletariat. By 1931 Niebuhr's involvement with Marxism had reached a new intensity. Niebuhr began to make use of certain basic Marxist assumptions.

The outcome of the 1928 to 1932 transitional phase was a reversal in Niebuhr's approach to revolutionary Marxism and the abandonment of certain liberal thinkers. However, Niebuhr had again turned to thinkers for guidance when investigating liberal society. The end of this transitional period in 1932 was marked by the publication of the book Moral Man and Immoral Society, which was not only the first major work produced while under the influence of Marxism, but also the beginning of Niebuhr's public recognition.

The three year period from 1933 to 1935 contained Niebuhr's

most intense phase of Marxist involvement. Niebuhr seemed to be casting off the last remnant of liberalism when he abandoned pacifism. In 1934 Niebuhr wrote Reflections on the End of an Era the most powerful product of his Marxist encounter. However, by 1935 the intensity of Niebuhr's Marxist involvement was on the wane. The year 1935 marks the beginning of Niebuhr's search for a new theological and ethical framework.

Niebuhr throughout his early works plunged into one set of ideas only to draw back and examine them more closely. Niebuhr retained certain ideas from each encounter and discarded the rest; he seemed to gain something from every encounter from W. James and K. Marx and the insights gained were to have a lasting effect.

An Alphabetical List of the Abbreviations Used in the Footnotes

- ACW "After Capitalism-What?" The World Tomorrow  
 BAA "Barth-Apostle of the Absolute" The Christian Century  
 CC Courage to Change June Bingham  
 CCS "Can Christianity Survive?" Atlantic Monthly  
 CMST Capitalism and Modern Social Theory Anthony Giddens  
 CRSW The Contribution of Religion to Social Work  
 CSC "Catastrophe or Social Control: The Alternatives for America"  
Harper's  
 CSSR "Can Schweitzer Save Us From Russell?" The Christian Century  
 CTR "The Confessions of a Tired Radical" The Christian Century  
 DCNR Does Civilization Need Religion?  
 DW The Decline of the West Oswald Spengler  
 EB The Encyclopedia Britannica  
 EFM Essays on Faith and Morals William James  
 EJ "The Ethic of Jesus and the Social Problem" Religion and  
Life  
 ERP "Europe's Religious Pessimism" The Christian Century  
 EW Early Writings Karl Marx  
 GPWC "Germany-A Prophecy of Western Civilization" The Christian  
Century  
 IA "Intellectual Autobiography" K&B  
 ICE Interpretation of Christian Ethics  
 IP "Is Protestantism Self-Deceived" The Christian Century  
 ISE "Is Stewardship Ethical" The Christian Century  
 K&B Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social and Political  
Thought ed. by Charles W. Kegley and R. W. Bretall  
 LE "The Land of Extremes" The Christian Century  
 LLC "Let Liberal Churches Stop Fooling Themselves" The Christian  
Century  
 LNTC Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic  
 MK Reinhold Niebuhr: The Decisive Years (1916-1941) Paul  
 Charles Merkley  
 MMIS Moral Man and Immoral Society  
 M&P "Moralists and Politics" The Christian Century  
 MW Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait Reinhard Bendix  
 MWDN "Must We Do Nothing?" The Christian Century  
 NSS "A New Strategy for Socialists" The World Tomorrow  
 OSS "Our Secularised Society" The Christian Century  
 PA "Perils of American Power" Atlantic Monthly  
 PE The Protestant Ethic Max Weber  
 PIC The Prospects of Industrial Civilization Bertrand Russell  
 PNN Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking William  
 James  
 PP "Puritanism and Prosperity" Atlantic Monthly  
 PSPR The Protestant Search for Political Realism Donald B.  
 Meyer  
 PUF "Pacifism and the Use of Force" The World Tomorrow  
 RC The Religion of Communism Atlantic Monthly  
 REE Reflections of the End of an Era  
 RM Religion in the Making Alfred North Whitehead  
 RMM "Russia Makes the Machine Its God" The Christian Century  
 RPT "Reinhold Niebuhr's Role in Political Thought" K&B Arthur  
 Schlesinger  
 RR The Life of Reason: Reason in Religion George Santayana  
 (chapter one)

Footnote Abbreviations-Continued

RR	<u>Rousseau and Romanticism</u>	Irving Babbitt (chapters 2&3)
RRC	<u>Religion and the Rise of Capitalism:An Historical Study</u>	R.H. Tawney
RWK	"Religion and Class War in Kentucky"	<u>The Christian Century</u>
S&C	"Socialism and Christianity"	<u>The Christian Century</u>
SE	"The Stakes in the Election"	<u>The Christian Century</u>
SMW	<u>Science and the Modern World</u>	Alfred North Whitehead
SWOV	<u>Selected Works in One Volume</u>	Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels
SWP	"Shall We Proclaim the Truth or Search for It?"	<u>The Christian Century</u>
USQ	"The Contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr"	<u>Union Seminary Quarterly</u> John C. Bennett
VRE	<u>The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature</u>	William James
WBD	"We Are Being Driven"	<u>The Christian Century</u>
WGSC	"Why German Socialism Crashed"	<u>The Christian Century</u>
WN	"Whitehead and Niebuhr on God, Man and the World"	<u>The Journal of Religion</u> David Griffin
WWDMM	"What the War Did to My Mind"	<u>The Christian Century</u>
WVNNEO	"Why We Need a New Economic Order"	<u>The World Tomorrow</u>

Chapter 1

The Liberal Period

## Biographical Sketch

Reinhold Niebuhr was born in Wright City, Missouri on June 21, 1892; the son of Gustav and Lydia Niebuhr, who had emigrated from Germany to the United States at an early age. Gustav Niebuhr was a minister of the Evangelical Synod of North America.<sup>1</sup> Niebuhr went to Elmhurst a small denominational college,<sup>2</sup> from which he graduated in 1910,<sup>3</sup> which was followed by three years spent at Eden Theological Seminary.<sup>4</sup> In 1913 Niebuhr's father fell ill and shortly thereafter died,<sup>5</sup> and by 1915 Niebuhr had completed his theological education at Yale first receiving a Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1914 and completing his Master of Arts degree in 1915.<sup>6</sup> Niebuhr in his "Intellectual Autobiography" related the reasons for abandoning his graduate training at Yale, and becoming ordained by the Evangelical Synod in 1915:

Family needs (my father died just before my entrance into Yale) and my boredom with epistemology prompted me to fore swear graduate study and the academic career to which it pointed and to accept a parish of my denomination in Detroit. According to the rules of our denomination, a young ordinand was at the disposal of the Home Mission Board for two years after ordination. The Board picked a

---

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica 15th ed. under "Niebuhr, Reinhold" V. 13, p. 74, hereafter cited as EB.

2. June Bingham, Courage to Change an Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (New York 1961) p. 62, hereafter cited as CC.

3. EB p. 74.

4. EB p. 74.

5. CC p. 79.

6. EB p. 74.



newly organized parish for me in Detroit.<sup>7</sup>

During the thirteen year period that Niebuhr served as the pastor of the Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit, i.e. from 1915 to 1928, the city of Detroit grew threefold; while Bethel Evangelical Church during the same period increased tenfold, the congregation increased from a total of 65 to 656.<sup>8</sup> In 1923 Niebuhr joined one of Sherwood Eddy's travelling seminars which was indicative of his involvement with the pacifist movement that was present in the early twenties.<sup>9</sup>

During these early years in Detroit Niebuhr was exposed to American industrialism; he was specifically exposed to the automobile industry before the laborer was protected by unions and social legislation.<sup>10</sup> Niebuhr when recalling this period remarked that:

My first interest was not so much to challenge the reigning laissez-faire philosophy of the community as to "debunk" the moral pretensions of Henry Ford, whose five-dollar-a-day wage gave him a world-wide reputation for generosity. I happened to know that some of his workers had an inadequate annual wage, whatever the pretensions of the daily wage may have been. Many of them lost their homes in the enforced vacations, which became longer and longer until the popular demand for the old Model T suddenly subsided, and, forced a layoff of almost a year for 'retooling'.<sup>11</sup>

In 1927 Niebuhr published his first book Does Civilization Need Religion? which is an excellent indication of Niebuhr's

7. Reinhold Niebuhr "Intellectual Autobiography" in Reinhold Niebuhr His Religious, Social and Political Thought ed. by Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (Hereafter cited as K&B) (New York, 1956) p. 4 hereafter cited as IA.

8. CC pp. 101-102.

9. CC pp. 107-111.

10. EB p. 74.

11. IA p. 5.

growing intellectual interest and the only full length work that Niebuhr produced as a working pastor. In the following year Niebuhr was offered a teaching post at Union Theological Seminary in New York City by Henry Sloane Coffin president of the Seminary, which he accepted.<sup>12</sup> Niebuhr's recollection of these events as found in his "Intellectual Autobiography" was that:

I became a member of the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in 1928, largely at the instigation of my friend Sherwood Eddy, who persuaded the Seminary faculty to call me to a Chair of Christian Ethics. This was a hazardous venture, since my reading in the parish had been rather undisciplined and I had no scholarly competence in my field, not to speak of the total field of Christian theology. My practical interest and the devoting of every weekend to college preaching prevented any rapid acquisition of competence in my ostensible speciality. It was therefore a full decade before I could stand before a class and answer the searching questions of the students at the end of a lecture without the sense of being a fraud who pretended to a larger and more comprehensive knowledge than I possessed.<sup>13</sup>

In 1929 Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic was published which was a selection of entries from Niebuhr's diary written while he was still a working pastor in Detroit.<sup>14</sup>

1930 found Niebuhr involved in the foundation of the Fellowship of Socialist Christians as well as giving the Forbes Lectures which were published in 1932 and was entitled The Contribution of Religion to Social Work. Also in 1932 Niebuhr wrote and had published a book entitled Moral Man and Immoral Society.<sup>15</sup> John S. Bennett writes about the work Moral Man and Immoral Society:

This book was a landmark. It was the first major attack from within the ranks of liberal Christianity upon the optimistic idealism of the liberalism of that period and upon the dominant faith among intellectuals, especially among social scientists in a coming rational control of history.<sup>16</sup>

12. CC pp. 138-139.

13. IA pp. 8-9.

14. EB p. 74.

15. CC pp. 157-160.

In 1932 as well as in 1936 Niebuhr actively supported the Socialist party.<sup>17</sup> The years of Niebuhr's socialist convictions, i.e. the 1930's found Niebuhr not surprisingly involved with the theories of Marxism.<sup>18</sup> In 1934 Niebuhr published Reflections on the End of an Era a work in which he contemplated a world which for him existed under the shadow of Marxist catastrophism. In the middle 1930's Niebuhr was instrumental in the formation of the Fellowship of Southern Christians and the journal Radical Religion.<sup>19</sup>

As the 1930's came to a close, controversial events occurred such as the trial in 1937 of Radek, Platakov and other leading Communists for treason, which was followed by their public grovelling and inevitable execution. Niebuhr had begun to recognize the need of keeping democratic forms in any change involving socialism. The Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact, which jarred the world in 1939, was followed by Hitler's march on Poland. The subsequent invasion of Russia by Hitler two years later caused the Communist party in the United States to "flip-flop" from one extreme to another in a relatively short time. This series of events contributed to Niebuhr's strong criticism of the Communist party.<sup>20</sup> During the same period i.e. the later part of the thirties one finds Niebuhr beginning to attack the isolationism of America,

16. John C. Bennett "The Contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr" Union Seminary Quarterly Review Fall, 1968, v. 24, p. 6, hereafter cited as USQ.

17. CC p. 163.

18. EB p. 74.

19. CC pp. 206-210.

20. CC pp. 214-216.

although he was in a state of collapse from exhaustion and deep depression. The last years of the 1930's was a period in which Niebuhr worked for the idea of intervention by the United States.<sup>21</sup>

In 1939 Niebuhr was invited to lecture at the University of Edinburgh. Niebuhr remarked that:

When I was invited to give the Gifford Lectures in 1939 at the University of Edinburgh, I chose the only subject which I could have chosen, because the other fields of Christian thought were beyond my competence. I lectured on "The Nature and Destiny of Man", comparing Biblical with classical and modern conceptions of human nature and destiny.<sup>22</sup>

These lectures were revised and expanded, and they appeared several years later in two volumes the first in 1941 and the second in 1943 which made up the two volume work The Nature and Destiny of Man.<sup>23</sup>

This work is considered by many to be Niebuhr's salient theological work and his greatest book.<sup>24</sup><sup>25</sup>

John C. Bennett commenting about the thirties and forties observed that:

So critical was Niebuhr of the American economic system in the thirties that he rejected Roosevelt's New Deal because he saw it as an attempt to prop up capitalism. He reversed himself on this issue in the 1940's. He gradually moved away from a dogmatic socialism to become one of the most powerful critics of Communism, in spite of his early Marxist tendencies..... Late in the thirties, he began to shift his interest from domestic economic issues to international affairs and especially to the threat of Hitlerism to human freedom.<sup>26</sup>

In 1937 Niebuhr assailed Roosevelt's naval program as "sinister"

21. CC pp. 247-248.

22. IA p. 9.

23. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. "Reinhold Niebuhr's Role in Political Thought" K&B p. 145, hereafter cited as RPT.

24. EB p. 74.

25. USQ p. 8.

26. USQ p. 12.

and in 1938 as "mad military expansion" something worse than Nazi rearmament. By 1940 Niebuhr was prepared to admit that he had been gravely mistaken and praised Roosevelt for having anticipated the coming peril.<sup>27</sup> The years of the war saw Niebuhr identifying himself with the resistance to Hitler and during the later stages of the Second World War opposing the idea of a vindictive peace.<sup>28</sup>

In 1944 Niebuhr in the West Foundation lectures at Standford was still wrestling with his previous commitment to Marxism. The lectures were later published and entitled The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness. Following the Second World War Niebuhr came into contact with the United States' State Department and had some influence with the policy planners in the State Department. Niebuhr was sent by the United States' State Department to Paris as one of the delegates to the UNESCO conference in 1949. Niebuhr strongly supported the Cold War resistance to Russian expansion in Europe during its initial stages.<sup>30</sup> This period was marked by Niebuhr's continuous work and his inability to relax because of his many commitments.<sup>31</sup> Niebuhr was able to accomplish a great deal during this period. Niebuhr wrote:

.... I incorporated studies undertaken for the Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale, the Warrack Lectures at the Scottish Universities, and a lectureship at the University of Uppsala in Sweden, in a volume entitled Faith and History.<sup>32</sup>

27. RPT p. 144.

28. EB p. 74.

29. RPT p. 144.

30. EB p. 74.

31. CC pp. 287-291.

32. IA p. 9.

During this hectic period Niebuhr helped establish such new organizations as The Committee for Cultural Freedom. Niebuhr spent a large amount of time travelling to and fro from Europe.<sup>33</sup> Niebuhr in 1947 became a leading figure in the organization Americans for Democratic Action, which became his primary political outlet. By 1949 he was willing to accept the logic of the pragmatic attitude and the pragmatic approach.<sup>34</sup> This general position can be detected in the work The Irony of American History which was published in 1952.

The year 1952 saw a radical change brought about in the hectic pace of Niebuhr's life. Niebuhr in 1952 suffered several small attacks which caused partial paralysis and an inability to speak. The Self and Dramas of History was a product of Niebuhr's illness and the lengthy convalescence that followed. Niebuhr's stroke caused him to curtail his public activities<sup>35</sup> and he again concentrated on teaching and writing.<sup>36</sup>

During the McCarthy era in the U.S., Niebuhr was accused of being a communist, however this was easily disproved. Niebuhr contributed to the fight against the House Un-American Activities Committee,<sup>37</sup> but was not heavily involved probably because of his illness.

In 1958 Niebuhr was invited to spend a year at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton. The result of this sojourn to Princeton was The Structure of Nations and Empires.<sup>38</sup> The 1960's

33. CC p. 292.

34. RPT p. 147.

35. CC pp. 317-320.

36. EB p. 74.

37. CC p. 373.

38. CC p. 377.

found Niebuhr opposing the war in Vietnam<sup>39</sup> and calling for the recognition of mainland China.<sup>40</sup> In 1960 Niebuhr partially retired from Union Theological Seminary and shortly thereafter a Chair of Ethics<sup>41</sup> was established in his honor.

Niebuhr during his life was an editor of The World Tomorrow a religious, pacifist and Socialist journal. Niebuhr also edited the biweekly Christianity and Crisis as well as the discontinued Christianity and Society which was formerly entitled Radical Religion.

Niebuhr's last work was Man's Nature and His Communities which disclosed a milder Niebuhr who saw man as having despite the dangers of pride a need for a healthy self-regard. "It was to be the final major revision of his endlessly changing dialectic with the world, though his topical essays continued to the end."<sup>42</sup> Niebuhr was married to Ursula M. Keppel-Compton in 1931 with whom he worked closely for many years. Niebuhr died on June 1, 1971<sup>43</sup> at Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

### Introduction

The area to be investigated will cover Niebuhr's early work from 1915 to 1935, i.e. the period covering his time in Detroit and ending at the height of his involvement with Marxism. The objective

---

39. USQ p. 15.

40. EB p. 75.

41. Ralph Eugene Wise, Irrational Man and the Modern Dilemma (Unpublished thesis, 1963) p. 121 hereafter cited as Wise.

42. "Reinhold Niebuhr, 1892-1971, Newsweek June 14, 1971 p. 61.

43. EB p. 75.

of this work will be to attempt to identify and trace the important philosophical influences in Niebuhr's developing thought. The aim will be to trace the sources of Niebuhr's concepts and ideas that stemmed from his contact with the thought of various philosophers.

The identification of the differing philosophical sources is difficult for a variety of reasons. The differing sources may originate for instance in many diverse and different areas. It must be noted that it is an impossible task to accurately trace the varying sources of ideas that Niebuhr made use of throughout the early stages of his career. For example the ideas that may have sprung from casual conversations and other such obscure sources and the effect of these casual events are of course impossible to trace. June Bingham recognized the difficulties of tracing the sources of Niebuhr's ideas:

Nor is Niebuhr today one bit more interested than he ever was in tracing the ideas he uses back to their source. His mind is not a sorting-machine but a great meat grinder into which chunks of fact and idea are constantly being fed, and the result is his own inimitable mixture. One of his friends jokingly says he would not dream of divulging an original idea to Niebuhr lest it appear, elaborated and improved, in Niebuhr's next article, with its author totally oblivious of having appropriated it.<sup>44</sup>

With these difficulties in mind the purpose of this paper will be to determine the philosophical sources and philosophical origins of some of Niebuhr's ideas that had an effect upon his work and to determine the use made of these ideas during his formative years.

The writings of Niebuhr that originated during the later half of the second decade of the twentieth century contained very few definite indications of Niebuhr's particular philosophical sources.

---

44. CC p. 282.



Niebuhr's basic philosophical and theological assumptions were rooted in the main currents of nineteenth century liberalism. The liberalism of the young Niebuhr contained the temper or spirit of nineteenth century liberalism more than the actual creed. Niebuhr did not present himself as a disciple of John Fiske or Herbert Spencer. Niebuhr's very early writings not unexpectedly embraced the spirit and outlook of the time, but gave few clues to the sources from which these ideas originated. <sup>45</sup>

### The Early Years (1915-1919)

The earliest evidence of Niebuhr's involvement with a philosopher that was to be of importance later in his life is found in a letter to one of his teachers at Yale Divinity School Professor Press, which was written in 1913. Among the books that the young Niebuhr was reading were James' works The Varieties of Religious Experience and The Will to Believe. <sup>46</sup>

An early indication of the philosophical origins of some of Niebuhr's ideas is discovered when one investigates Niebuhr's 1915 Master of Arts thesis entitled "The Contribution of Christianity to the Doctrine of Immortality". This thesis shows to what degree the young Niebuhr was involved with early twentieth century liberal theological thinking. The purpose of the thesis was to put forth the idea that the concept of immortality could be maintained even though the Christian claims about the physical resurrection of Jesus were to be abandoned. Niebuhr considered

45. E.A. Gaede, Reinhold Niebuhr and the Relationship of Politics and Ethics (unpublished thesis, 1968) pp. 19-20.

46. CC pp. 84-85.

the Christian claim of physical resurrection to be a product of historical development, which was not credible to modern man. Niebuhr's debt to liberalism is apparent in his conclusions about immortality.

A source that can be identified as a philosophical one is revealed when Niebuhr justifies the doctrine of immortality by applying William James' assumptions about "the will to believe"<sup>47</sup> as well as insisting upon the rights of personality. The only definite philosophical source that can be pinpointed in this the earliest of Niebuhr's writings is William James who was to be a continual source of inspiration for Niebuhr. Niebuhr in his thesis also followed William James' lead when he reasoned that it was not improper to believe that a strong demand such as the immortality of the soul could be considered to be true if there was no contradictory evidence.<sup>48</sup> In 1898 James had argued for the legitimacy of the belief in human immortality in Human Immortality.<sup>49</sup>

Niebuhr's thesis "The Contribution of Christianity to the Doctrine of Immortality" is of importance for several reasons. The thesis aids in giving a clearer understanding of Niebuhr acceptance of the historical-critical method and underlines the fact that Niebuhr did not follow necessarily the more conservative Biblical critics. The thesis illustrates that Niebuhr as a young man undoubtedly shared the liberal temper that was prevalent during this period and rejected traditional Christian

47. Ronald Henry Stone, Reinhold Niebuhr's Perspective in U.S. Foreign Policy (unpublished thesis, 1968) p, 9 hereafter cited as Stone.

48. Stone, p. 9.

49. Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James (London, 1937) v. II p. 355.

claims on the basis of their increditability to the sophisticated mind of his day. It revealed Niebuhr's positive evaluation of religious optimism.<sup>50</sup> Niebuhr, moreover, freely partook of the ideas and concepts that were a part of liberalism.

The early works of Niebuhr contained very few identifiable sources, but tended to incorporate within them the ideas that were to be found in the liberal thinking of the time. In 1916<sup>51</sup> Niebuhr published his first article in the Atlantic Monthly. The article was entitled "The Failure of German-Americanism" and was a rejection of "the idea of the hyphen", but the rejection came not from a fear of anti-German feeling, but from Niebuhr's idealism. Niebuhr's involvement with idealism and perfectionism is clearly illustrated in the article. Niebuhr in his first article stated that: "The prohibition movement has come to express the most enlightened conscience of the American people."<sup>52</sup> An observation that illustrates Niebuhr's early involvement with the social and religious perfectionism that was prevalent in this period. The second article which was published in 1916 centered on the theme of individual interest as opposed to community interest. The article was entitled "The Nation's Crime Against the Individual" which was also published in the Atlantic Monthly and it pinpoints several specific areas in which Niebuhr was thinking. In this article one already discovers Niebuhr setting forth the dichotomy of the man of individual conscience as opposed to society, in this case the nation at war. This article

---

50. Stone, p. 10.

51. CC p. 114.

52. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Failure of German-Americanism" Atlantic Monthly July, 1916, p. 17.

is not only of interest because of its anticipation of a famous theme, i.e. moral man and immoral society,<sup>53</sup> but also because it reveals Niebuhr's nascent interest and awareness of the fact that "economic issues underlie practically all national animosities."<sup>54</sup>

In 1917 America entered the war and in Detroit Ford began to organize the gigantic production of materials for the American and Allied armies. The war years saw the beginning of great power for the Protestant clergy; a period of cooperation between the American community and organized Protestantism.<sup>55</sup> In his diary in an entry for 1917 one finds that Niebuhr was still being strongly effected by the actions of fellow liberals and not unexpectedly he was a liberal war supporter as were a great many others.<sup>56</sup>

In an 1918 entry in his diary Leaves From the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic Niebuhr described a trip through a war training camp which throws light upon Niebuhr's liberalism. Niebuhr wrote that: "If we must have war I'll certainly feel better on the side of Wilson than on the side of the Kaiser."<sup>57</sup>

The year 1919 saw the triumph of the Prohibition movement which could be construed as a triumph for organized Protestantism over those elements in the American community that had

53. Donald B. Meyer The Protestant Search for Political Realism 1919-1941 (Los Angeles, 1960) pp. 218-219 hereafter cited as PSPR.

54. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Nation's Crime Against the Individual" Atlantic Monthly (Nov. 1916).

55. Paul Charles Merkley Reinhold Niebuhr: The Decisive Years (1916-1941) (unpublished thesis, 1966) p. 74 hereafter cited as MK.

56. PSPR p. 219.

57. Reinhold Niebuhr Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic (Chicago, 1929) pp. 14-15 hereafter cited as LNFC.

not believed as they believed. However, while Protestantism was celebrating its short lived victory Niebuhr was watching the idealism of Wilson being frustrated by Lloyd George and Clemenceau.<sup>58</sup> In a 1919 entry in his diary Neibuhr remarked with characteristic idealism that the picture of Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau, who were settling the fate of the world, was a dreary one and that "Wilson is evidently losing the battle."<sup>59</sup> Niebuhr again revealed his idealistic leanings when he wrote that "Realities are always defeating ideals, but ideals have a way of taking vengeance upon the facts which momentarily imprison them."<sup>60</sup> Another example of Niebuhr's continuing involvement with liberalism in 1919 is his decision to join the Fellowship of Recconciliation. Niebuhr like other liberals had already begun to drift away from the position that he had held during the war.<sup>61</sup>

#### The Beginning of the Search (1920-1925)

1920 was a significant year both from the organized church's standpoint and from the standpoint of international relations. The spring of 1920 was dominated by two stories, the Versailles Treaty and how Wilson and his "irreconcables did it in together,"<sup>62</sup> and the end of the "Interchurch World Movement", which was the

58. Stone, p. 13.

59. LNTC p. 22.

60. LNTC p. 23.

61. Robert Crocker Good, The Contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr to The Theory of International Relations (unpublished thesis, 1956) hereafter cited as Good.

62. MK p. 74.

first sign of the coming decline of the power of organized Protestantism. Niebuhr had during the last half of the second decade and the first half of the third decade of the twentieth century been a thoroughgoing democrat; however his allegiance to democratic forms was held within the larger faith of the liberal culture. The liberal faith contained two primary postulates which were a confidence in human and historical progress and a belief in the efficiency of the appeal to reason and conscience. The whole affair for Niebuhr was set in the context of a vigorous pacifism which came after the horrendous experience of the Great War, which shaped both the strategy and philosophy of many liberals. For Niebuhr pacifism was to linger on long after the very basis of his liberal faith had been abandoned.<sup>63</sup> The democratic and liberal orientation of Niebuhr was in evidence as well as his application of some of the classical themes of the "social Gospel".

In a 1920 entry in Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic Niebuhr commented that when he was criticised for speaking on political matters he had remarked that "every religious problem had ethical implications and every ethical problem had some political and economic aspects."<sup>64</sup> The best example of Niebuhr's early thinking about the political role of the Protestant church can be found in an article that was published in 1920 entitled "The Church and the Industrial Crisis". This article was addressed to the so-called progressive or "social Gospel" clergy,<sup>65</sup> who read the Biblical World in which it appeared. The theme of

63. Good p. 32.

64. LNTC p. 29.

65. W.E. David Comparative Study of the Social Ethics of Walter Raushenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr (unpublished thesis, 1958) cited in MK p. 69.

the article is the preservation of democracy against the selfish designs of the class holding power, which is a typical "social Gospel" description of industrial society. Since the Protestant clergy felt that they commanded the attention of the possessing classes in 1920 the task for the clergy was to "sensitize" the middle-class conscience.<sup>66</sup> The alternative to the conversion of the middle-class was even in 1920 considered to be class warfare by Niebuhr.<sup>67</sup>

Niebuhr as early as the year 1920 had already begun to wrestle with the ideas of Marx, and had begun to examine Marx's approach, although Marx can not be considered to be influential during this period. Niebuhr commented that the "class hatred of the proletarian movement which the church justly regards as incompatible with the Gospel is predicated upon a cynical contempt for the power of altruism in human nature..." Niebuhr commenting on this theme added that "one cannot deny that there is much in history to justify the cynicism."<sup>68</sup> Marxism in Niebuhr's opinion was very selective about its cynicism, i.e. about the middle-class but not about the worker. Niebuhr criticised the worker for being materialistic, and as selfish as the worst banker. Niebuhr, however, in his criticism did not take into account that the selfishness of the worker was for the Marxist a virtue, i.e. the proletariat possessed pure force which is utter, material interest. Niebuhr in 1920 rejected the Marxist pattern of contempt as nothing more than "cynicism".<sup>69</sup>

66. MK pp. 22-24.

67. MK p. 42.

68. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Church and the Industrial Crisis" The Biblical World (Nov. 1920) p. 590.

69. MK pp. 45-46.

Protestant leaders in the early twenties were beginning to rapidly lose their hold over the thoughts and actions of their congregations.<sup>70</sup> Niebuhr continued to ponder the "cynicism" of the proletariat and became more and more convinced that the Gospel was the force to be used in transforming the oppressor; after this period one is able to recognize that Niebuhr's belief in perfectionism was waning. Niebuhr in the article "The Church and the Middle Class" which was published just before Christmas, 1922 expressed the belief, which was rather cynical, that it was difficult for ministers to be effective champions of social justice when the victims of this injustice were not members of their congregations which paid the churches' bills.<sup>71</sup> Niebuhr's growing cynicism was illustrated quite starkly by his observations about the difference in feeling between the congregation's beliefs and the "social Gospel" beliefs of the clergy: "The leaders of the Protestant church are moving steadily in the direction of an intelligent application of Gospel principles..."<sup>72</sup> Niebuhr also cynically remarked after his statement about the Protestant clergy: "But the rank and file of the church is not in step with its leaders and frequently betrays its middle-class prejudices when it assays the task of industrial pacification..."<sup>73</sup>

Niebuhr's growing doubts about idealism is vividly depicted

---

70. MK p. 86.

71. CC p. 137.

72. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Church and the Middle-Class" The Christian Century (Dec. i, 1922) cited in MK p. 56.

73. Ibid. p. 56.



in a letter that he sent to the New Republic in 1922. Niebuhr when writing about the editorial "War and Christian Ethics" clearly demonstrated his growing dissatisfaction with liberalism. Niebuhr wrote that: "The Wilsonian liberalism, the New Republic brand of idealism, and the principles of that not inconsiderable body of Christian opinion which did not take its guidance from official propaganda or popular hysteria, were of no avail when the fruits of war were to be garnered." Niebuhr revealed his emerging distrust of the liberal stance and his nascent search for the causes of this distrust when he stated: "And most of us are beginning to feel that our failure was due to more fundamental causes than the personal weaknesses of our representatives (the singular would be better here) at Paris."<sup>74</sup>

In 1923 the perfectionist and the cynical observer were struggling within Niebuhr. Niebuhr turned his investigation to the social teachings of the church in 1923,<sup>75</sup> thus setting the scene for the withering away of the "indefinite source", i.e. liberalism and the consequent emergents of certain definite sources of ideas. In 1923 there was a period of involvement with pacifism that reached its peak when Niebuhr joined Sherwood Eddy's travelling seminar which included Kirby Page. Pacifism which was to be the longest lasting ideal that came from Niebuhr's involvement with liberalism was at its peak in the early part of the twenties. Sherwood Eddy was the moving spirit behind the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order and the secretary of the international Y.M.C.A.; Kirby Page was another moving spirit of the F.C.S.O. as well as being a pacifist pamphleteer and "social

74. Reinhold Niebuhr "Letter in reply to editorial 'War and Christian Ethics'" New Republic (Feb. 27, 1922).

75. Stone p. 14.

Gospel" adherent. Niebuhr along with the rest of the seminar visited the Ruhr and Essen for several weeks during the period that the French had sealed off the Ruhr as a form of retribution.<sup>76</sup> This trip was an excellent source of material for Niebuhr and as a result Niebuhr wrote several articles as well as writing several interesting entries in his diary that later appeared in Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic.<sup>77</sup> The effect of the trip on Niebuhr's thinking was threefold. The first was to strengthen his pacifism which was not directly attributable to the members of the seminar but to Niebuhr's own observations of the French treatment of the defenseless Germans in the Ruhr. The second effect of the trip to Europe on Niebuhr's thinking was to heighten his awareness of certain unpleasant facts that were part of the political and social scene. The European trip was the beginning of Niebuhr's long voyage toward social realism. This trip brought Niebuhr face to face for the first time with the facts and stark reality of class hatred as a dynamic political factor. The third effect of this sojourn on Niebuhr came from Niebuhr's stop in Britain where he observed that the people in Britain possessed a greater degree of social responsibility than elsewhere. Niebuhr foresaw within Britain the possibility of a Christian approach to politics. Niebuhr believed that in Britain's Labor Party he had found a true approach to Christian politics.<sup>78</sup> Niebuhr was more aware of social injustice because of the events of this journey. The issue of pacifism which just a few short years before seemed to have been forgotten was again

---

76. CC pp. 107-108.

77. MK p. 110.

78. MK pp. 110-115.

brought to the fore.<sup>79</sup> The trip to Europe was a turning point in the thinking of the young pastor from Detroit.

Although Niebuhr was becoming more aware of social realism in 1923 Niebuhr still rejected the tenets of Marxism. In the article entitled "Protestantism in Germany" Niebuhr analyzed German Protestantism and examined the reasons for the manual laborer's rejection of the church. This was an early example of Niebuhr's ever growing concern with the fate of the manual laborer a concern that was to bring him into ever increasing contact with Marx. Niebuhr harshly made the judgement in 1923 that the manual worker had renounced his Christian principles to "espouse Marxian socialism and displayed the same bitterness toward the church as toward the capitalist state."<sup>80</sup> Niebuhr understood the cynicism of the worker and his materialistic philosophy and even sympathised with these attitudes of the worker, but he warned against their rebellious mood. Niebuhr agreed that the worker had cause for complaint;<sup>81</sup> the beginning of Niebuhr's involvement with Marx can be traced to this article. The seeds of another philosopher's thought can also be found beside that of Marx. One finds the earliest hint of Max Weber's thought in the article "Protestantism in Germany". An underlying assumption of Weber is met within the statement of Niebuhr that "Calvinism is now frequently accused of having blessed modern capitalism."<sup>82</sup>

In 1924 Niebuhr participated in what might be called his political apprenticeship in Detroit. Niebuhr was persuaded by

79. LNTC p. 47.

80. Reinhold Niebuhr "Protestantism in Germany" The Christian Century (October 4, 1923) p. 1258.

81. Ibid. p. 1258.

Jane Addams to serve as the Detroit chairman of the La Follette campaign. This was Niebuhr's first experience with politics at the National level something that he was never to withdraw from thereafter.<sup>83</sup> The motivation for this action can be found in the article "Christianity and Contemporary Politics" that was published in the Christian Century.<sup>84</sup> The article demonstrates that Niebuhr still embraced the spirit and general ideas of liberalism. Niebuhr was still convinced that the Protestant clergy could command the attention of the middle-class. Niebuhr considered the hope of reform to lie in the fact that the middle-class may be enlisted through its ideas once they have seen the need for a thoroughgoing political and economic reconstruction. The basic assumption Niebuhr made was that there was a possibility of educating the middle-class, and thereby bringing about social progress.<sup>85</sup> Niebuhr at this juncture is vaguely under the spell of what might be labeled the liberal stance, i.e. the John Dewey-"social Gospel" amalgam, that he will shortly and violently reject. It is not surprising that Niebuhr would support the aims of the La Follette Campaign which sought to bring about social justice in a more or less liberal way.<sup>86</sup>

Even though Niebuhr was still under the influence of the so-called Dewey-"social Gospel" amalgam, one can detect that Niebuhr was already becoming cynical about liberalism. Niebuhr

82. Ibid. p. 1258.

83. CC p. 113.

84. MK p. 26.

85. MK pp. 26-27.

86. PSPR p. 180.

commented in a 1924 entry in his diary that he "poked fun at them (a group of liberal people) a little for enjoying their theological liberalism so much in this part of the country, while they were afraid of even the mildest economic and political heresy."<sup>87</sup> Niebuhr in the same entry bemoaned the separation of theological and economic thinking.<sup>88</sup> Niebuhr was beginning to recognize the need for change in the industry of Detroit.<sup>89</sup> Niebuhr had begun to wrestle with the question of idealism and its accompanying illusions.<sup>90</sup>

In the article "Is Protestantism Self-Deceived?" Niebuhr revealed his ever growing dissatisfaction with the ideals of liberalism. Niebuhr carefully examined the bigotry of the liberal Protestants as opposed to the Orthodox Catholics and found little difference in the two forms of bigotry. Niebuhr criticised the liberals since: "they were probably carrying as many fagots for the flames of religious bigotry as their more orthodox brethren, for the tolerance which they preached was rooted in spiritual pride and nurtured the arrogance which is the cause of our present animosities."<sup>91</sup> Niebuhr continued with his criticism of liberalism by pointing out that "The Protestant insistence on liberty has had some equally interesting and sometimes fatal consequences

87. LNTC p. 62.

88. LNTC p. 62.

89. LNTC pp. 72-73.

90. LNTC p. 70.

91. Reinhold Niebuhr "Is Protestantism Self-Deceived?" The Century (Dec. 25, 1924) p. 1661 hereafter cited as IP.

in the realm of economics."<sup>92</sup> The realm of economics was to spearhead the major criticism of liberalism by Niebuhr. Niebuhr had deduced that the middle-class with its belief in liberty had not realised that the industrial civilization that they had built in the last century "was throwing men closer and closer together so that the problem of modern life is not how free men can be, but how equitably their powers and privileges may be coordinated and distributed."<sup>93</sup> Niebuhr continued with his criticism of liberal Protestantism by comparing the social and economic records of Catholicism and Protestantism. "Both the Catholic and Anglican churches have better records for courage on social and economic issues than congregationally organized communions in which the individual prophet is frequently at the mercy of a congregation which may contain many men who do not want religion to 'interfere with the business'...".<sup>94</sup> Niebuhr clearly has begun his search for methods of understanding and correcting the false postulates of liberalism and will begin to turn to various philosophical thinkers to criticise the methods and assumptions of liberalism.

As had been mentioned there are traces of Weberian thinking that are suggested by certain ideas expressed by Niebuhr. Max Weber was a German social philosopher who proposed that the origins of the ideas of capitalism which he had labeled the "spirit of capitalism" could be found in the religious ideas of the Reformation. This concept's possible validity was recognized by and commented upon by Buckle, Keats and others who had ack-

92. 1P p. 1661.

93. 1P p. 1661.

94. 1P p. 1662.

nowledged the affinity between Protestantism and the development of certain commercial ideas. Weber had realised that the Protestant aptitude for commerce and industry had become in certain instances a part of secular policy. Weber had investigated these ideas in the volume entitled The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and he had concluded that these ideas were paradoxical i.e. intense religiosity and intense economic activity involved for him mutually incompatible tendencies. Weber had discovered that the explanation for this phenomena lay in an analysis of the theological doctrines of the Reformation. Weber set out to show that the secular, ethical concepts of the Reformation period were related to theological doctrines from the same period and hence verified that the new orientation which was now operating in the world, i.e. capitalism, was related to the ideas of the Reformation.<sup>95</sup>

There are some statements in "Is Protestantism Self-Deceived?" that suggest that Niebuhr's thinking was drifting towards the ideas that had been expressed by Weber. Niebuhr in this article wrote that "Modern industry and commerce simply became too complex for ancient laws which were meant to hold their greedy impulses in check... before the advent of the Reformation."<sup>96</sup> Niebuhr following this line of Weberian reasoning extends his argument by noting that: "Protestantism did give moral sanction to the idea of an economic life without moral sanction. The result is everywhere the religion of the commercial classes..."<sup>97</sup>

---

95. Reinhard Bendix Max Weber an Intellectual Portrait (London 1959) pp. 55-58.

96. IP p. 1661.

97. IP p. 1662.

Niebuhr further revealed the Weberian drift in his thinking when in "European Reform and American Reform How They Differ" an article in the Christian Century he opined that the "critics who suggest that Calvinism is the basis of our present capitalist order of society have something to say for themselves."<sup>98</sup>

Niebuhr had obviously concluded that there was a connection between the ideas of the Reformation and the ideas of capitalism. Niebuhr had by this time recognised the validity of Weber's basic idea, but had not mentioned Weber as being the source of these ideas.

In 1924 one still finds Niebuhr joining battle with the ideas of Marx. In the article "Christianity and Contemporary Politics" there is a fairly comprehensive denunciation of Marxism. This article illustrates the quality of Niebuhr's socialism at the time, which was pro-Fabian but anti-Marxist. Niebuhr had concluded that Marxism was a source of distrust, one of the many sources of the tendency for men to distrust one another, and to turn only to force. Niebuhr condemned Marxism since "distrust inevitably breeds hatred, and when hatred has conceived, it brings forth war."<sup>99</sup> It is ironical and at the same time revealing that Niebuhr rejected Marxism because of his pacifism and later he was to reject pacifism because of his Marxist convictions. Although Niebuhr was interested in the ideas of the socialist he was convinced that Marxism only strove to bring about race

98. Reinhold Niebuhr "European Reform and American Reform: How They Differ" The Christian Century (Aug. 28, 1924) p. 1110.

99. Reinhold Niebuhr "Christianity and Contemporary Politics" The Christian Century (April 17, 1924) p. 498.



friction and class hatred.<sup>100</sup> Niebuhr on the other hand praised the outlook and work of the British Labor Party and approved of the parties belief "in a thoroughgoing and fundamental change in our social and political order, in order that competitive strife may be discouraged, unequal economic and social privilege divided and unjust economic authority destroyed."<sup>101</sup> Niebuhr continued in his praise of the Labor Party of Britain by commenting that "It knows very well that the crux of the problem of civilization is economic rather than political, but it also knows that every economic problem has profound moral implications."<sup>102</sup> Niebuhr alined himself with the ideas of the more moderate socialist and in his criticism of the class struggle as outlined by Marx noted that "even among moderate socialists the Marxist dogma of the class struggle has built up walls of mutual distrust between the classes which is making orderly parliamentary government almost impossible."<sup>103</sup> Niebuhr distrusted the ideas of Marx even though they were being applied to a certain extent by the moderate socialist of which he approved. Niebuhr's approval of the Fabians is starkly revealed and his opposition to the Marxist is also revealed in his comment that "the Fabians have contributed to the development of a 'sane radicalism'. The Fabians have revealed the economic unsoundness of unalloyed Marxism and thus prevented its spread from the continent."<sup>104</sup>

---

100. Ibid. p. 498.

101. Ibid. p. 499.

102. Ibid. p. 499.

103. Ibid. p. 499.

104. Ibid. p. 500.

1924 found Niebuhr drifting away from the use of liberalism as a source and turning to other sources for his economic and social assumptions. Niebuhr had become more involved with economic issues in 1924 and the ideas of Weber and Marx. Both of these men's ideas were to have a profound effect on Niebuhr's thinking as the depression came closer and closer.

In 1925 Niebuhr spoke to a group of students in Evanston, Illinois warning them that the church had as an institution knuckled under to nationalism. Niebuhr in 1925 became more and more convinced that the church had been entirely won over to the middle-class from which it drew the majority of its members, and the Gospel of the church was only a variation on middle-class morality. In 1925 it is easily ascertainable that Niebuhr had begun to deride the liberal church about its failure to contribute to moral reform.<sup>105</sup>

In 1925 an increasing amount of evidence pointed to Niebuhr's increasing debt to Weberian thinking. The drift to Weberian assumptions was detected in 1924, but the first direct confirmation of this involvement appears in 1925. The essay Der Protestantische und der Geist des Kapitalismus by Weber first appeared as an article and was reprinted in 1920 in the first volume of the work entitled Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie. Weber's main thesis as put forth in these works was that Calvinism played a preponderant part in the creation of the moral and political conditions that were favorable to the growth of capitalism.<sup>106</sup> Niebuhr and his brother H. Richard Niebuhr were

105. MK p. 28.

106. R.H. Tawney Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (London, 1926) pp. 319-320.

probably among the first Americans to refer to Weber's ideas and make use of the concepts Weber introduced.<sup>107</sup>

In the article "Capitalism: A Protestant Offspring" one finds Weberian thinking. Niebuhr was aware that the "thesis that the rise of commercialism is intimately associated with the individualism which may be regarded as a fruit of the Protestant Reformation is not a new thought."<sup>108</sup> The importance of Weber's thinking to Niebuhr was demonstrated when he argued that it had remained for Max Weber "to prove Protestantism and capitalism in an intimate and organic relationship far beyond individualism which was the spiritual fruit of the one and the moral basis of the other."<sup>109</sup> Niebuhr believed that Weber's work would be of use in any analysis of the United States since "Weber finds in our American life every final argument for the validity of his thesis that Protestantism and capitalism are organically united."<sup>110</sup> The high regard that Niebuhr had for Weber's methods and ideas is evident in Niebuhr's summation of Weber's work: "His generalizations are boldly and imaginatively conceived but he essays the difficult task of validating them with a pedantic patience which heaps evidence upon evidence and explores every field however remote, if it promises to throw light upon his problem."<sup>111</sup>

107. *MA* p. 30.

108. Reinhold Niebuhr "Capitalism: A Protestant Offspring" The Christian Century (May 7, 1925).

109. *Ibid.* p. 600.

110. *Ibid.* p. 600.

111. *Ibid.* p. 600.

Niebuhr briefly summarised Weber's thesis as being "that Protestantism is the root of the 'capitalistic spirit' as distinguished from the 'traditional spirit' of classical antiquity and the middle ages."<sup>112</sup> Niebuhr wrote that what "Weber means by the capitalistic spirit is the distinctive attitude of the modern man toward profit making and profit seeking."<sup>113</sup> Niebuhr recognised the importance of Weber's conception that the motivation of modern man, i.e. the need for material possessions and the satisfaction he obtains from acquiring them, was based on the assumption that the 'sanctity of all work' was valid. "Thus Protestantism sanctified secular activity and manual toil in a way totally unknown to the middle ages."<sup>114</sup> Niebuhr agreed with the Weberian thesis that Calvinism was more inspirational for capitalism than Lutheranism.<sup>115</sup>

Niebuhr recognised Weber's contributions to the analysis of America. Weber regarded the tremendous material prosperity of America as only partially due to the resources of the American continent. "To a great extent he believed it to be due to the fact that of all nations of the world the sects of Puritanism grew most powerful upon our shores."<sup>116</sup> Weber contributed the enthusiasm of the American people in grappling with the problems of industry to the prevailing Puritanism and Calvinism of America.

112. Ibid. p. 600.

113. Ibid. p. 600.

114. Ibid. p. 600.

115. Ibid. p. 601.

116. Ibid. p. 601.

Niebuhr credited Weber with the insight that "the very nature of Calvinism" is "to find moral satisfaction in virtues which enable the individual with a high survival value to be comparatively indifferent to the social virtues which help him to live on some unselfish basis with his fellows..."<sup>117</sup>

Niebuhr summarized the thesis of Weber thus: "Protestantism is presented as a frustrated and perverted idealism."<sup>118</sup> There is little question after reading Niebuhr's review of Weber's thesis of the high regard in which Niebuhr held Weber. Weber's influence on Niebuhr's thinking was to last for several years and to be of importance.

Yet another source of philosophical ideas can be identified from Niebuhr's writings in 1925. In the article "Can Christianity Survive?" Niebuhr confronted Bertrand Russell and to a certain extent made use of the analysis of Russell. In this article Niebuhr challenged the liberal's faith in man's benevolence and reasonableness which Niebuhr felt was belied by the facts of experience and the data gathered by the social sciences."<sup>119</sup> In his analysis of religion's future in the modern world Niebuhr turned to Russell. Russell in the work Prospects of Industrial Civilization was of the opinion that the future of civilization contained no place for religion which for Russell was becoming extinct, a desirable and inevitable end in his opinion. Russell had predicted that the industrial worker would become increasingly naturalistic and regard the Christian ethic as a fraud and

117. Ibid. p. 601.

118. Ibid. p. 601.

119. Good, p. 38.

religious faith as an illusion.<sup>120</sup> Russell based his prophecy of the decline of religion upon the fact that the industrial worker unlike the peasant was no longer in contact with nature, and not "dependent upon the weather or the seasons except in a very minor degree;" the causes "which make his prosperity or misfortune seem to him, in the main, to be purely human and easily ascertainable."<sup>121</sup> Niebuhr disagreed with this analysis and reasoned that Russell failed:

to take into account that religion is as much the product of man's conflict with himself as of his battle with nature; nor does he consider that even an urban civilization in which no man is divorced from the soil and freed from the caprice of the elements cannot finally eliminate the grim hostility of the natural world to everything which man holds dearest and which will try inevitably to save from nature's last and implacable servant-Death.<sup>122</sup>

Niebuhr enlisted the aid of Russell's analysis and admitted that "in the main, much may be said for Mr. Russell's analysis and prophecy..."<sup>123</sup> Niebuhr was willing to concede that religion was not a vital factor in civilization 'at present'. In fact Niebuhr saw in the American situation a confirmation of Mr. Russell's arguments. Russell foresaw a continuation of religion among the capitalists, but among the poor it would last only for a short time.<sup>124</sup> Niebuhr agreed with Russell that "religion may long continue in the life of those classes which benefit, or at

120. Reinhold Niebuhr "Can Christianity Survive?" Atlantic Monthly (Jan., 1925) p. 84 hereafte cited as CCS.

121. Bertrand Russell The Prospects of Industrial Civilization (London, 1923) pp. 46-48 cited as PIC.

122. CCS pp. 84-85.

123. CCS p, 85.

124. PIC p. 46.

least do not suffer, from the limitations of our industrial civilization."<sup>125</sup> Niebuhr also considered this process to be true in America and foresaw as did Russell the poor and humble folks of the world becoming more and more hostile to religion. Niebuhr employed Russell's predictions about the future role of religion in civilization in his disagreement with the optimism of Christian liberalism. Niebuhr concluded that liberalism "deludes itself in the belief that the monstrous sins which lurk in our economic and political traditions may be overcome by a few well-meaning church resolutions..."<sup>126</sup> Russell had reasoned that science was the underlying reason for the decay of religion. Russell wrote that: "The lessened vitality of religion which has made it unable to survive new conditions is in the main attributable to science."<sup>127</sup> Niebuhr appreciated that Russell's argument was a valuable insight and stated that religion "must be able to deal with the problems of economic and political life in the spirit of scientific realism and offer their solution to the dynamic of faith that is incurably romantic."<sup>128</sup>

The use of Russell's thought is an excellent example of the way Niebuhr employed the reflections of philosophers. Niebuhr was not in agreement with Russell and had fundamental differences with Russell. Nevertheless, Niebuhr applied certain ideas of Russell with which he agreed and incorporated these concepts into his arguments against liberalism. Niebuhr was able to utilize

125. CCS p. 85.

126. CCS p. 88.

127. PIC p. 48.

128. CCS p. 88.

the concepts of philosophers that were hostile to Christianity as well as philosophers that were sympathetic to Christianity, using both to understand and to correct some of the faults that were to be found in liberal religion, by selecting only certain concepts from each thinker and discarding the rest.

An excellent example of Niebuhr's harsh rejection and disagreement with some of Russell's ideas is starkly revealed in the article entitled "Can Schweitzer Save Us from Russell?". This article finds Niebuhr making use of Russell's ideas in a negative way. In the article Niebuhr compared the ideas of Russell that are in his work What I Believe and the ideas of Schweitzer which are in his work Civilization and Ethics. Niebuhr condemned the concepts of Russell and used the invalidity of these ideas as a spring board to underline the strengths of Schweitzer's ideas. Niebuhr remarked that Russell is "sure that the universe reveals no purpose and encourages none of the hope with which men have been wont to beguile their life."<sup>129</sup> Niebuhr's total condemnation of Russell's ideas as presented in What I Believe as well as his condemnation of Russell's methodology is revealed when Niebuhr avered that "It would not be difficult to find fault in Mr. Russell's relentless logic for absolute consistency is always betrayed into absurdity and the consistent mechanistic philosophy of Bertrand Russell is absurd at more than one point."<sup>130</sup> However, Niebuhr did not consider the detection of these flaws to be of any consequence when confronted by the chilling influence of Russell's opinions. Niebuhr recognised the pessimism of Russell

129. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Can Schweitzer Save Us From Russell?" The Christian Century p. 1093 hereafter cited as CSSR.

130. CSSR. p. 1093.



to be a reaction against the easy optimism in which religion as a whole had moved into ever since Greek philosophy was absorbed by Christianity, and concluded that such philosophers as Hegel and Royce had created the pessimism that was harvested in the form of Russell's thought. Using Russell's ideas as a spring board and an illustration of some of the dangers of religion Niebuhr turned to Schweitzer's idea that "the universe is not as sympathetic to the human spirit as traditional religion has assumed and when ethics is rooted in this assumption it must finally suffer shipwreck."<sup>131</sup> Schweitzer had rejected the use of metaphysical systems since they were prompted by the problems of epistemology and not by the problems of ethics and religion. Niebuhr called for a return to naive dualism as had Schweitzer. This dualism was made up of the conflict between the divine and human personality with that of nature. Niebuhr using Russell's negative approach highlighted Schweitzer's assessment, which Niebuhr agreed with and thought to be a practical approach to the problems of religion.

Niebuhr called for a practical solution to the problems that confronted religion by calling for the use of a middle path between the extremes of absolute pessimism and absolute optimism into which many metaphysicians had fallen. James would have approved of Niebuhr's abhorance of the extremes of pessimism and optimism. James had rejected both pessimism and optimism and chosen the middle path as well.<sup>132</sup>

Another philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, that will later

131. CSSR p. 1093.

132. CSSR pp. 1094-1095.

be of great importance can be detected in the article "Can Schweitzer Save Us From Russell?", or, at least areas of agreement detected. In this article Niebuhr's reconciliation of the fact of evil with the goodness of God is reminiscent of Whitehead. Both men argued that if God is totally responsible for the universe, his perfect goodness is denied.<sup>133</sup> Whitehead had stated that "the temporal world is to be construed in terms of additional formative elements which are not definable in the terms which are applicable to God."<sup>134</sup> Niebuhr in the same vein wrote when confronting the same problem of God's goodness that "The universe is simply too blind to the needs of men and too ruthless with personal and spiritual values to warrant the theory that a good God is in essential control of all forces."<sup>135</sup> One has no direct evidence at this stage of Niebuhr's development that he was involved with or even familiar with the work of Whitehead, but the stage has been set and the possibility of Niebuhr turning to Whitehead for support and ideas has become feasible.

During 1925 one meets with Niebuhr attempting to find an alternative to both liberalism and orthodoxy. Niebuhr's dissatisfaction with both alternatives is apparent from his statement that one must steer a course "between fundamentalism and modernism, avoiding arbitrary dogmatism on the one hand and connivance with nationalism on the other."<sup>136</sup> Niebuhr was concerned

133. David Griffin "Whitehead and Niebuhr on God, Man and the World" The Journal of Religion (April, 1973) p. 170 hereafter cited as WN.

134. Alfred North Whitehead Religion in the Making (Cambridge, 1930) p. 80 hereafter cited as RM.

135. CSSR p. 1094.

136. Reinhold Niebuhr "Shall We Proclaim the Truth or Search for It?" The Christian Century (March 12, 1925) p. 345 hereafter cited as SWP.

with finding an alternative to the ideas of liberalism and the dogmatism of orthodoxy. Niebuhr's main preoccupation was with a critical analysis of liberalism. Niebuhr rejected the "efforts of liberalism to preserve peace between warring classes and nations by pitting self-interest against self-interest.." which in his opinion was "bound to fail".<sup>137</sup> Niebuhr's apparent disillusionment with liberalism also appeared when he invoked the concept of realism although its shape remained far from clear. Niebuhr's use of Weber in his growing criticism of liberalism appeared in the article "Can Christianity Survive?" when Niebuhr wrote that: "The complete secularization of society is a fairly recent historical development. The Protestant Reformation contributed to it immensely when it centered the moral dynamic of religion upon the drama of the inner life and removed every spiritual restraint upon social groups."<sup>138</sup> Niebuhr utilized Weberian assumptions to pinpoint the causes behind the failure of liberalism.

The other area in which Niebuhr was involved to a great extent during this period was an overriding concern with the concept of personality in religious thought. James had written that: "religious thought is carried on in terms of personality, this being, in the world of religion, the one fundamental fact."<sup>139</sup> One can hear the echo of this thinking when Niebuhr in "Shall We Proclaim the Truth or Search for It?" advocated the worth of the idea of per-

137. CCS p. 87.

138. CCS p. 86.

139. William James The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York, 1902) p. 491.

sonality in religion. "Religion is the advocate of personality in a seemingly impersonal universe."<sup>140</sup>

Already in 1925 Niebuhr's philosophical sources are playing an important part in his developing thought. Niebuhr makes use of philosophical sources in his criticism of liberalism and one finds him beginning to rely upon these sources in his growing criticism of liberalism. Niebuhr was heavily involved with James's idea of the fundamental part played by personality in religion, which illustrates Niebuhr's continuing reversion to the thought of James.

An interesting development that was later to bear fruit was Niebuhr's concern with the industrial worker. The influence of Niebuhr's environment and in particular that of Henry Ford was to later play a part in Niebuhr's turn to Marxism.

In 1925 Niebuhr visited an automobile factory and observed that the life within was artificial and consequently became cognizant of the harsh realities within. Niebuhr commented about the toll that the industry exacted in order to produce cars in his diary that: "we are all responsible. We all want the things which the factory produced and none of us is sensitive enough to care how much human values the efficiency of the modern factory costs."<sup>141</sup> Niebuhr realised that the church had failed and remarked that "The church is undoubtedly cultivating graces and preserving spiritual amenities in the more protected areas of society. But it isn't changing the essential facts of modern industrial civilization by a hair's breadth."<sup>142</sup>

140. SWP p. 345.

141. LNFC p. 78-79.

142. LNFC p. 79.

D.R. Davis considered the influence of Henry Ford to be significant in the "making of a Christian revolutionary out of Niebuhr."<sup>143</sup> Davis adhered to the view that Niebuhr's Christian revolutionary stance was a "by-product" of Ford's motor manufacturing. Davis goes so far as to state that Niebuhr "through his contact with the Ford workers, both inside and outside",<sup>144</sup> changed his attitude to social problems. Davis saw Niebuhr learning about the suffering of the Ford workers through his contact with them and also learning about "the penetration of idealism by the corrupting elements of self-interest; the inevitability of self-deception in the best intentions; the underlying cruelty and brutality in every class culture."<sup>145</sup> D.R. Davis is fairly extreme in his estimation of Ford's affect on the outlook and thinking of Niebuhr in comparison with other commentators,<sup>146</sup> but one must recognise that Ford had an influence on the thinking of Niebuhr. Ford may have been instrumental in Niebuhr's subsequent turn to Marxist convictions. This period certainly contains clues to Niebuhr's later Marxist involvement.

#### The Final Years in Detroit (1926-27)

Early in the summer of 1926 James Myers of the Federal Council of Churches submitted a list of labor speakers to the executive secretary of the Detroit Council of Churches in preparation for the October convention of the American Federation of Labor. Rein-

143. D.R. Davis Reinhold Niebuhr: Prophet from America (London) p. 22.

144. Davis, p. 24.

145. Davis, p. 24.

146. CC p. 111.

hold Niebuhr was chairman of the Industrial Relations Commission of the Detroit Council and reported that there was general interest in having labor speakers. However, only two churches in the council actually had speakers; one of which was Niebuhr's church.<sup>147</sup> There are indications in Niebuhr's diary that the affair caused him to lower his estimation of all concerned. He was displeased with the capitalist who threw their weight around; the clergy who allowed them to do so; and the would be leaders of labor who did not make good use of the few pulpits that were opened to them because of their inability to let go of the primitive ideals of the "village banker".<sup>148</sup> Niebuhr's criticism of Ford and the cult that surrounded Ford was deepening. Niebuhr began to ask why there was so much adulation, which was uncritical, of Ford and in fact indulgence.<sup>149</sup>

Niebuhr's heightened concern with economics and politics can be met with when studying his conflict with Henry Ford which is clearly and expressively illustrated by the article "How Philanthropic is Henry Ford?". Within the article "How Philanthropic is Henry Ford?" Niebuhr attacked Ford's policies in several different ways. The first weakness in Ford's policies according to Niebuhr was Ford's belief that high wages obviated the need for philanthropy. Niebuhr wrote: "The trouble is that the facts do not bear out Mr. Ford's contention that his wage obviates the necessity for philanthropy."<sup>150</sup> Niebuhr was of the

147. PSPR p. 83.

148. LNFC pp. 111-113.

149. MK pp. 36-38.

150. Reinhold Niebuhr "How Philanthropic is Henry Ford?" The Christian Century (Dec. 9, 1926) p. 1516.

opinion that the worker received a good deal less than the amount advertised by Ford except in the case of the highly skilled worker. Niebuhr considered the so-called high wages to be non-existent and further reduced by the implementation of the five-day week. Niebuhr called into question Ford's policy of removing boys off the streets (those between 16 and 20 years of age) to stop them from causing mischief. Niebuhr asserted that the policy was being implemented when the majority of full time men were being laid off and in fact many were being discharged. Niebuhr charged that "the net result is that Ford is substituting young men for old men."<sup>151</sup> Niebuhr was concerned and disturbed not only by the myth that surrounded Ford but also about the worker. Niebuhr understood Ford to be a symbol of an America whose faults were inherent in its economic system. Niebuhr summarised by writing that: "If Ford is the symbol of an America with its combination of sentimentality and shrewdness, he is also the symbol of an America which has risen almost in a generation from an agrarian to an industrial economic order and now applies the social intelligence of a country village to the most complex industrial life the world has known."<sup>152</sup>

1926 finds Niebuhr extending his attack upon the assumptions of modernism with the weapons given to him by an expanding number of thinkers. An interesting article that illustrates Niebuhr's use of new philosophical sources is "Our Secularised Society" which throws light upon Niebuhr's deteriorating liberal-

151. Ibid. p. 1517.

152. Ibid. p. 1517.

ism.<sup>153</sup> In this article Niebuhr attacked the assumptions of modernism and incorporated within this attack the ideas of other thinkers; a tactic that he repeatedly has used throughout his early works. In the article "Our Secularised Society" Niebuhr turned to two new philosophical sources. The two new sources were George Santayana and Alfred North Whitehead; the latter having already been detected but not confirmed in Niebuhr's writings before 1926.

Professor Santayana was a Spanish-American philosopher that Niebuhr would continue to make use of in a slight way for the next few years. Niebuhr in criticising the pantheistic tendency in modernism turned to Santayana for support since he had drawn a distinction between the two instincts within religion. The two instincts as defined by Santayana were the instinct of piety and the instinct of spirituality, "the one seeking to hallow the necessary limitations of life and the other seeking to overcome them."<sup>154</sup> In speaking of modernism's tendency to take refuge in pantheism Niebuhr utilised this distinction of Santayana: "Pantheism inevitably strengthens those forces in religion which tend to sanctify the real rather than to inspire the ideal."<sup>155</sup>

The other new source of ideas is of far greater importance than Santayana. The other philosopher that Niebuhr turned to, Alfred North Whitehead, in his critical evaluation of modernism in "Our Secularised Society" was to have a continual influence on

153. William Allen Greenlaw Reinhold Niebuhr as Theologian: A New Interpretation (unpublished thesis) p. 32 hereafter cited as Greenlaw.

154. Reinhold Niebuhr "Our Secularised Society" The Christian Century (April 22, 1926) p. 509 hereafter cited as OSS.

155. OSS p. 509.



Niebuhr's developing thought. After criticising the liberal Protestants for their atheistic tendencies Niebuhr turned to the other extreme i.e. the traditional Protestants which exhibited for Niebuhr the quality of quietism which for Niebuhr did not meet the moral problems presented by a socially complex age. Niebuhr referred to Professor Whitehead's work Science and the Modern World when he criticises the errors that were to be found within quietism. Whitehead called for the Regeneration of Religions old power so that it could face change and continued by observing that "its principles may be eternal, but the expression of those principles requires continual development."<sup>156</sup> Whitehead had concluded that the soul cried out for change and that this change should be found in art as well as science and that this lack of change is preserved in religion. Whitehead was of the opinion that all thought "concerned with social organization expressed itself in terms of material things and capital. Ultimate values were excluded. They were politely bowed to, and then handed over to the clergy to be kept for Sunday." Whitehead maintained that "a creed of competitive business morality was evolved, in some respects curiously high; but devoid of consideration for the value of human life."<sup>157</sup> Niebuhr appreciated the wisdom of these stinging remarks and applied them: "Protestantism... has no understanding of the social factors which impinge on and condition human personality." Niebuhr as did Whitehead before him criticised religion for not helping men to discover the sins

---

156. Alfred North Whitehead Science and the Modern World (Cambridge 1926) p. 270, hereafter cited as SMW.

157. SMW pp. 291-292.

lurking in their social systems and moral traditions.<sup>158</sup> Niebuhr as did Whitehead considered the interplay between the soul and the environment to be of importance. Whitehead has asserted that the soul became claustrophobic because of the static facts of existence.<sup>159</sup> Niebuhr wrote: "Protestantism believed that righteousness can be produced in a vacuum. It produces no sense of tension between the soul and its environment."<sup>160</sup> Whitehead foresaw religion in Europe becoming more and more decadent and more and more powerless.<sup>161</sup> Niebuhr concurred with Whitehead's belief and stated that "No religion is more ineffective than Protestantism against the major social sins of our day, economic greed and race hatred."<sup>162</sup> Niebuhr's agreement with Whitehead is extensive. Niebuhr obviously found Whitehead an agreeable source as well as an excellent support for his ideas.

Niebuhr had become dissatisfied with the two extremes, i.e. the liberal and the traditional approach to religion. Niebuhr had become more conscious of the over all problem that confronted religion as a whole. The general questions that Niebuhr faced and the critical conclusions that he had drawn cause him to turn to thinkers who also had confronted the general problems of religion. Niebuhr's use of Whitehead and Santayana was an indication of this trend. The most important indication of Niebuhr's turn to the general problems of religion is Niebuhr's heavy

---

158. OSS p. 509.

159. SMW p. 290.

160. OSS p. 509.

161. SMW pp. 269-270.

162. OSS p. 509.

reliance upon Whitehead. Niebuhr in the article "Does Religion Quiet or Disquiet?" confirmed his respect for Whitehead's general opinions about religion. Niebuhr agreed with Professor Whitehead's idea that religion was not transcendently good but transcendently important. Another example of the agreement of Niebuhr with the opinions of Whitehead on a general question is found in Niebuhr's belief that the influence of religion could either be good or evil, but like Whitehead he realised that religion no matter whether it was good or evil always had an appreciable influence.<sup>163</sup>

Niebuhr in 1926 also turned to Weber and continued his dialogue with the ideas presented by Weber which were later to be repeated and underlined by Tawney. In Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic Niebuhr commented that "You can't rush into a congregation which has been fed from its infancy on the individualistic ethic of Protestantism and which is part of the civilization where ethical individualism runs riot, and expect them to develop a social conscience in two weeks."<sup>164</sup> Niebuhr easily incorporated the ideas of Weber in this cynical and pessimistic statement which illustrates to what degree he had become involved with the assumptions of Weber and particularly with the assumptions having to do with the development of the Protestant idea of individualism.

In the article "Puritanism and Prosperity" Niebuhr revealed to what degree he had become immersed in the ideas of Weber. Niebuhr avered that many economic determinist had insisted that all

163. Reinhold Niebuhr "Does Religion Quiet or Disquiet?" The World Tomorrow (Nov., 1926) p. 220.

164. LNTC p. 107.

cultural and religious life could be explained in terms of economic circumstances without a thorough study being made of religious life as a possible source of economic phenomena. Niebuhr held that Weber was the "only one" that had made such a detailed study of the religious sources of economic phenomena. Niebuhr as did Weber concluded that "Protestantism is the main root of the modern capitalistic spirit..."<sup>165</sup> Niebuhr agreed with Weber's analysis of puritanism with its rejection of all sensuous and emotional elements in culture which produced pessimistically inclined individuals,<sup>166</sup> which Niebuhr considered to be the fruits of puritanism in America.<sup>167</sup> Niebuhr referred to the Weberian observation that the Huguenots were a source of superiority "of the French and Dutch economic culture from which these communities sprang..."<sup>168</sup> Niebuhr also noted the large part that the Huguenots had played in trade. One should also note the fact that Niebuhr was already immersed in the assumption that there is a connection between individualism and capitalism which was introduced by Weber long before he started to make use of Tawney's analysis of individualism. Weberian concepts figured prominently in Niebuhr's examination of America:

America is the only nation of the Western world that developed the new attitude toward business totally unhampered by religious and moral traditions which date back to mediaeval and classical antiquity. Completely

165. Reinhold Niebuhr "Puritanism and Prosperity" Atlantic Monthly (June, 1926) p. 722 hereafter cited as PP.

166. Max Weber "The Protestant Ethic" (London, 1930) p. 105 hereafter cited as PE.

167. PP p. 722.

168. PE p. 43.

emancipated from these ancient scruples against business enterprise, we have been able to give ourselves to commercial and industrial tasks with a passion unknown to Europe. That is the real secret to our phenomenal success. <sup>169</sup>

The year of 1927 was a momentous one for Niebuhr in many ways, in that it was his last full year in the parish and the year in which he published his first book, which was entitled Does Civilization Need Religion? There were signs that the intellectual interest of the young pastor was beginning to expand beyond the confines of a single parish.<sup>170</sup> It was during this period that Sherwood Eddy a continuing source of help and guidance for Niebuhr persuaded him and the congregation of Bethel to retain an assistant minister to carry the bulk of parish duties; for which Eddy paid for from his own pocket.<sup>171</sup>

Does Civilization Need Religion? gives the student an opportunity to study in detail the trend of Niebuhr's thinking as well as the philosophical sources that he utilized. It is clear that Niebuhr has not completely gotten away from the "social Gospel" - John Dewey amalgam. The emphasis that dominated this first book was that modern industry was destructive to human values. Niebuhr in true "social Gospel" fashion attacked the Ford factory not because of the hypocrisies of wages and hours as he had previously done, but because he considered the Ford factory to be a place unfit for human life.<sup>172</sup>

In 1927 there was the advent of Ford's retooling period which was the period when Ford discontinued the Model T and closed the factories in preparation for the coming of the Model A. This cause sixty thousand men to loose their jobs and when finally

169. PP p. 724.

170. CC p. 138.

171. MA pp. 49-50.

rehired to be treated as new employees. The effect of these events were reflected in Niebuhr's writings.

There was a lack of focus in Niebuhr's political outlook that oscillated between a moderate confidence in preaching the word and a pessimistic foreboding that preaching was for naught. Niebuhr felt that the proof of the incompetence of the American mind and conscience when facing industrial civilization was in the celebration of Ford as an exponent and perpetuator of humane industrial ideals. Niebuhr at the same time reasoned that there was a reserve of idealism in the American culture and he believed that this reservoir of idealism could be tapped for the purposes of social action,<sup>173</sup> another indication of the influence of the "social Gospel". However, one must also recognize that the book Does Civilization Need Religion? was an attack upon liberalism; one of the many works of Niebuhr to be critical of liberalism.

The diary of Niebuhr Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic contains entries that are informative as well as revealing, and gives us an insight into Niebuhr's thinking in this last year of his Detroit ministry. There are repeated references to the problems of the capitalistic system and one can identify a growing sense of discontentment within Niebuhr with the whole of the capitalistic system. Niebuhr pessimistically observed that:

Perhaps there is no better illustration of the official impotence of the modern church than its failure to deal with the evils and the ethical problems of stock manipulation, millions in property values are created by pure legerdemain. Stock dividends, watered stock and excessive rise in stock values, due to the productivity of the modern machine, are accepted by the church without a murmur

172. CC p. 131.

173. PSPR pp. 24-25.

if only a slight return is made by the beneficiaries through church philanthropies.<sup>174</sup>

The dissatisfaction that Niebuhr felt when viewing the effect of the capitalistic system was evident in his dissatisfaction with the policies of Henry Ford. Niebuhr was upset by the loss of wages caused by the closing of the Ford factory and the suffering that was caused, which drove him to observe in his diary:

What a civilization this is! Naive gentlemen with a genius for mechanics suddenly become the arbiters over the lives and fortunes of hundreds of thousands. Their moral pretensions are credulously accepted at full value. No one bothers to ask whether an industry which can maintain a cash reserve of a quarter of a billion ought not make some provision for its unemployed.<sup>175</sup>

Niebuhr's diary also gives the first indication of Niebuhr's interest in the ideas of Oswald Spengler. Niebuhr had been attracted before to the idea of world decay and particularly the decay of civilization which was presented by Russell. Niebuhr was again attracted to the idea of the destruction of civilization as presented by Oswald Spengler:

I am profoundly impressed by the Spenglerian thesis that culture is destroyed by the spirit of sophistication and I am beginning to suspect that I belong to the forces of decadence in which this sophistication is at work. I have my eye too much upon the limitations of contemporary religious life and institutions; I always see the absurdities and irrationalities in which narrow types of religion issue. That wouldn't be so bad if I did not use the instruments of intellectualism rather than those of a higher spirituality for the critical task.<sup>176</sup>

The thesis of Spengler about the destructive power of sophistication.

174. LNTC p. 128.

175. LNTC pp. 154-155.

176. LNTC p. 133.

had a rather large impact upon Niebuhr and caused him to question some of his own ideas. This is an excellent indication of what has happened in the past. One would expect to find Niebuhr making use of Spengler in later works, and not surprisingly he does so.

As the diary of Niebuhr has shown Niebuhr was dissatisfied with the ideas and practices of Ford which was vividly illustrated by his article "Ford's Five-Day Week Shrinks". This article underlined Niebuhr's growing sympathy with the plight of the worker. There is a feeling of condemnation when Niebuhr reviews the practices within Ford's factories. In the first place Niebuhr condemned Ford's reasons for bringing about a five-day week as hypocritical. "It is now quite apparent that the five-day week was largely a device for concealing or for effecting the lower production which the decreased demand for Ford cars necessitated."<sup>177</sup> Niebuhr condemned as well Ford's idea that an "adequate wage would give the worker the security both against unemployment and against old age which workers so greatly covet."<sup>178</sup> Niebuhr had come to realise that unemployed Ford workers were the heaviest burden that the Detroit Charities had to bear. Niebuhr began to foresee the possibility of discontent among the workers in the Ford factories and also began to sympathize with the grievances that the workers had toward the policies of Ford. Niebuhr condemned Ford because the workers found "it impossible to reach any one with real authority," and because the "dismissals of the old men are

---

177. Reinhold Niebuhr "Ford's Five-Day Week Shrinks" The Christian Century (June 9, 1927) p. 713.

178. Ibid. p. 713.



multiplying."<sup>179</sup>

Although there is no conclusive proof or even direct evidence that the situation as created by Ford was the underlying cause of Niebuhr's later turn to Marxism, one can deduce that Ford's activities did cause Niebuhr to recognise that there was some validity in the approach favored by the Marxist. "It is rather significant that the rising tide of resentment among the Ford workers has no avenue of expression except through the communistic weekly sheet, The Ford Worker".<sup>180</sup> Niebuhr went on further and noted that "The paper is crude enough in its temper but fills its pages with specific instances of injustice rather than with the usual communistic propaganda."<sup>181</sup> Niebuhr had obviously set forth upon the path that was to lead to his involvement with Marxist principles. Niebuhr had come to realise that although he was suspicious of Communism that it was to be counted as more valuable than the regular agencies of organised labor, who had despaired of organising the Ford workers. Niebuhr's anguish about the condition of the worker. The effect that industry was having upon the condition of the worker and the effect that industry was having upon the worker is apparent when he wrote: "The fact that an industry which develops distressing social consequences should nevertheless still be heralded as a model of humane industrial strategy speaks volumes for the incompetence of the social conscience of our age."<sup>182</sup>

---

179. Ibid. p. 714.

180. Ibid. p. 714.

181. Ibid. p. 714.

182. Ibid. p, 714.

At the close of 1927 there appeared the article "Why I am Not a Christian" in which Niebuhr summed up his pacifistic position. He revealed later that when he wrote this article he had come to regard himself as a Marxist.<sup>183</sup> After Niebuhr had stated that he was a pacifist he asked a question that he was only able to answer later. "But how can you maintain physical standards of living except by physical force?" Niebuhr even further reveals his doubt about his pacifistic position when he asks the question: "Would I be a good pacifist if I belonged to an unsatisfied nation rather than to a satisfied one?"<sup>184</sup> There is a suggestion of cynicism and a faint echo of Marx in some of these questions. As one investigates the involvement of Niebuhr with Marxism one comes to realise that an excellent indication of his commitment to Marxism is signalled by an increase in doubt about the validity of the pacifistic position, particularly when Niebuhr begins to analyze pacifism with the tools given to him by Marx. One should also recognise the fact that the growing doubt about pacifism not only was an indication of Niebuhr's increasing involvement with Marxism, but also represented the termination of Niebuhr's reliance upon this the last remnant of liberalism. One should note that in 1927 Niebuhr's doubts are in their nascent stages. One finds these doubts being expressed in the article "A Critique of Pacifism". Niebuhr finds pacifism still a servicable vehicle for his cynicism and notes that it is necessary to maintain an army to "preserve a higher standard of living than the rest of the world..."<sup>185</sup> However, in the article "A Critique of Pacifism"

183. Good p. 53.

184. Reinhold Niebuhr "Why I am Not a Christian" The Christian Century (Dec. 15, 1927) p. 1483.

Niebuhr has already begun to question certain specific peace proposals.

The volume Does Civilization Need Religion? was the product of a working clergyman who was encountering the experiences of people in the church and trying to come to terms with these experiences. This caused Niebuhr to press throughout the work the question: is religion relevant to the world's needs? Niebuhr directed this question both towards ideal religion as well as towards religion as practised by the people of the time. The work is an excellent opportunity to examine to what degree Niebuhr as a pastor had already become influenced by certain philosophers.

The work Does Civilization Need Religion? reveals that Niebuhr utilised and drew support from the same philosophical sources that he had turned to in his earlier works. Does Civilization Need Religion? illustrates the consistency of Niebuhr's philosophical sources both those to which he turned for inspiration and those to which he turned to for specific ideas. In Does Civilization Need Religion? Niebuhr as before turned to various thinkers for support and weapons in his continuing struggle with the false assumptions of liberalism and an alternative to these assumptions. Not only was he acting as a prophet in that he was trying to predict the eventual outcome of the liberal approach to religion, but also trying to predict the fate of liberal civilization.

Niebuhr in his examination of liberal religion turned to certain philosophers for specific ideas with which to combat the eroding affect of liberalism. As has been previously noted Nie-

---

185. Reinhold Niebuhr "A Critique of Pacifism" Atlantic Monthly (May, 1927) p. 641.

buhr was interested in certain of Bertrand Russell's ideas although he was in violent disagreement with a great many of Russell's conclusions. Niebuhr had become aware of the validity of some of Russell's criticisms concerning the church. Niebuhr again makes use of certain of Russell's criticisms about the church in particular the fact that the church got in the way of social reform. Niebuhr gave credence to and quoted Russell's statement that: "emancipation from the churches is still as essential condition of improvement, particularly in American where churches have more influence than in Europe..."<sup>186</sup> One should be aware of the fact that Niebuhr turned to Russell only for specific ideas but was in the main wary of Russell.

Niebuhr utilized the ideas of other philosophers in his investigation of religion particularly liberal religion. In Does Civilization Need Religion? Niebuhr refers to Whitehead as he has in the past when confronting general questions about religion. In his earlier references to Whitehead Niebuhr made use of Whitehead's work Science and the Modern World which he continued to use in Does Civilization Need Religion?, however, Niebuhr also relies upon another of Whitehead's works Religion in the Making. Niebuhr had obviously become more deeply involved with the thought of Alfred North Whitehead. Niebuhr refers to Whitehead not only when commenting upon general subjects but also when commenting upon specific issues. An excellent example of Niebuhr's familiarity with Whitehead's thought and his use of Whitehead in confronting general questions is when he commented about the bulk of knowledge having in the past destroyed the

authority of any unifying perspective, that was presented by philosophy, which was particularly true of absolute determinism. Niebuhr refers to Whitehead in order to support this contention and consequently points out that Whitehead believed that an anti-mechanistic trend of philosophical thought would achieve mastery over modern science.<sup>187</sup> However, Niebuhr also turned to Whitehead on the specific issue of the over-simplification of morals that was present in certain denominations specifically the Methodists and Baptists. Niebuhr accused these denominations of over-simplification in the field of morals which was a term favored by Whitehead, and one that Niebuhr employed throughout subsequent works. This term simply implies a tendency to judge men, in spite of the intricacies of their life and the complexities of their social relations, as being good or bad.<sup>188</sup>

Another area in which Niebuhr referred to Whitehead was when discussing dualism and its presence in religious symbolism.<sup>189</sup> Niebuhr referred to Whitehead's definition of God as that "reality which is not concrete but the principle of every concrete actuality."<sup>190</sup> Whitehead had stated that "An epochal occasion is a concretion. It is a mode in which diverse elements come together into a real unity."<sup>191</sup> Whitehead had believed that apart from concretion that these elements stood in actual isolation, and that an actual entity is the outcome of a creative synthesis. White-

187. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Does Civilization Need Religion?" (New York, 1929) p. 11 hereafter cited as DCNR.

188. DCNR pp. 108-109.

189. DCNR p. 210.

190. DCNR p. 212.

191. RM p. 80.

head concluded that "The various elements which are thus brought into unity are the other creatures and the ideal forms and God."<sup>192</sup> Whitehead in the light of these assumptions defined God as that "nontemporal actuality which has to be taken into account of in every phase."<sup>193</sup> Niebuhr is aware that the world is not totally consistent or coherent, however he does not reject the world's coherence in an ultimate sense since for Niebuhr the world has a basic coherence in an ultimate sense. Niebuhr realised that the temporal world was not totally consistent with its ground, which is the eternal character and purpose of God, since if one confirmed this consistency in this sense the world would be totally good or evil and would be attributable to God. However, Niebuhr cites Whitehead's affirmation of God's "unchangeableness" and transcendence<sup>194</sup> in the sense that God's nature remains self-consistent in relation to all change which did not justify the deterministic conclusion that there was "complete self-consistency of the temporal world." Thus "the reality of God and the reality of evil as a positive force are thus both accepted."<sup>195</sup> Whitehead and Niebuhr had noted that the temporal world was essentially incomplete. Whitehead had asserted in his discussion of the nature of God that "He is exempt from transition into something else, must mean that his nature remains self-consistent in relation to all change."<sup>196</sup> Niebuhr and Whitehead favored this dualistic approach in order to make the reality of

---

192. RM p. 80.

193. RM p. 81.

194. WN p. 171.

195. DCNR pp. 212-213.

196. RM p. 86.

God and the reality of evil both acceptable. Whitehead in Religion in the Making stated this:

The temporal world exhibits two sides of itself. On one side it exhibits an order in matter of fact, and a self-contrast with ideals, which show that its creative passage is subject to the immance of an unchanging actual entity. On the other side its incompleteness, and its evil, show that the temporal world is to be construed in terms of additional formative elements which are not definable in the terms which are applicable to God.<sup>197</sup>

Niebuhr in reconciling the fact of evil with the goodness of God turns to Whitehead for support.

Niebuhr further on in his discussion of dualism again referred to Whitehead to support his oft repeated preference for empirical adequacy as opposed to rational self-consistency. Niebuhr makes use of Whitehead's distinction between Oriental monism and practical dualism. Professor Whitehead succinctly stated that "Christianity has always been a religion seeking a metaphysics in contrast to Buddhism which is a metaphysics generating a religion..." The defect of a metaphysical system is the very fact that it is a neat little system which thereby oversimplifies its expression of the world."<sup>198</sup> Whitehead's support is apparent when he concluded that "in respect to its treatment of evil, Christianity is therefore less clear in its metaphysical idea but more inclusive of the facts."<sup>199</sup> Niebuhr depended upon Whitehead at this juncture of his work when dealing with the problem of dualism and draws support from Whitehead's understanding and solutions to

197. RM p. 86.

198. DCRK p. 198.

199. DCRK p. 198.

the problems of dualism.

In Niebuhr's discussion of dualism one also discovers Niebuhr referring to James' work on pluralism. Niebuhr commented that "the pluralism of William James, which has been criticised as scientifically inaccurate and metaphysically inconsistent, seems both to have scientific and metaphysical virtues."<sup>200</sup> James like Whitehead considered monism to be inferior and James criticised monism for insisting that "when you come down to reality as such, to the reality of realities everything is present of everything else in one vast instantaneous complicated completeness..." James considered pluralism to be superior since it only needed to admit "that the constitution of reality is what we ourselves find empirically realised in every minimum of finite life."<sup>201</sup> Niebuhr approved of James' simple approach and believed dualism to be simpler than monism. Niebuhr concluded that "there is good reason to accept at least a qualified dualism not only because it is morally more potent than traditional monism, but because it is metaphysically acceptable."<sup>202</sup>

Niebuhr regarded Christianity's tendencies towards dualism to be more inclusive of the facts of existence than the monistic approach to existence. In the volume Does Civilization Need Religion? Niebuhr entered into an exhaustive metaphysical analysis of dualism and he identified himself to a certain extent with William James' pluralistic approach and Whitehead's thesis of dualism as well as his doctrine of continuity and the concept that concretion was a justification for religious belief.

200. DCNR p. 213.

201. William James A Pluralistic Universe (New York, 1909) pp. 321-322.

202. DCNR p. 213.



Niebuhr felt an affinity with the robust God of theism and was suspicious of the all knowing absolute of monistic philosophy that were for him an attempt to solve the epistemological problems and not to represent the actuality. For Niebuhr God was active in the structure of the world and suffered at the hands of the world; a viewpoint with which Whitehead would have had sympathy. Niebuhr had come to regard dualism as metaphysically sound as well as something close to the naive religious faith in the Bible, i.e. close to what Schweitzer stood for. Niebuhr as did James regarded the absolute as destructive of any practical effort to reform the world.<sup>203</sup> In dealing with the problem of monism as opposed to dualism Niebuhr again used familiar philosophers to support his contentions.

Another familiar source is called forth to give specific support to Niebuhr's contentions about another general religious problem that of pantheism. Niebuhr refers to George Santayana when discussing the evils of pantheism which had crept into the thinking of the early church when it had to make intellectual concessions to Hellenistic philosophers. Niebuhr turned to Santayana's work the Life of Reason for critical ideas about pantheism. Santayana condemned pantheism for turning the "natural world, man's stamping ground and system of opportunities, into a self-justifying and sacred life; it endows the blameless giant with an inhuman soul and then worships the monstrous divinity it has fabricated."<sup>204</sup> Santayana as did Niebuhr after him

203. Stone, pp. 20-21.

204. George Santayana The Life of Reason : Reason in Religion (London, 1905) p. 176 hereafter cited as RR.

realised that St. Augustine's combination of the dialectic achievements of the Greek philosophers with the simplifications of the Gospel was the basis for the elaborate theological structure in which God had become "at the same time the guarantee of the reality of the ideal and the actual cause of every concrete reality."<sup>205</sup> Santayana had considered this to be the source of pantheism within Christianity. Santayana noted as did Niebuhr that both Luther and Calvin followed in the foot steps of St. Augustine and emphasised the fanatical side of St. Augustine which was the "very predistination and absolutist doctrine which he had prevailed on himself to accept."<sup>206</sup> Santayana had traced the pantheistic ideas to the idealists in Germany and remarked that an "absolutism which thus encourages and sanctions the natural will is stoical and pantheistic,... pantheism subordinates morally what it finds to be dependent in existence,..."<sup>207</sup> The echo of this concept is heard when Niebuhr stated that "a rigorous determinism as well as an unqualified pantheism destroyed moral vigor because it either makes the attainment of the ideal too certain or idealises the real beyond all evidence."<sup>208</sup>

Niebuhr not only turned to philosophical sources when confronted by general religious questions he also turned to philosophical sources when discussing the fate of society and civilization in general. Niebuhr had sympathy with the notion that civilization was on the path of destruction a notion which was not

205. DCNR p. 202.

206. RR p. 171.

207. RR p. 173.

208. DCNR p. 203.

only favored by Russell but also by Oswald Spengler. Niebuhr had sympathy with the inference that the foundation of an ethical life could be found within a continuing attitude of despair, however, Niebuhr considered Russell's own bitterness to be an example of how corrupting this type of belief could become when applied to moral idealism. In investigating the phenomenon of an ethical idealism unsupported by religion Niebuhr referred to certain of Oswald Spengler's conclusions which were presented in his work The Decline of the West. Niebuhr became involved with Spengler in the same year that he wrote Does Civilization Need Religion? which has already been noted when reviewing the 1927 entries in his diary. One can easily recognise the attraction of Spengler since Niebuhr was already interested in the idea of the coming destruction of civilization and in particular liberal civilization. Spengler would have also disagreed with Russell since he like Niebuhr considered that a moral idealism that had sacrificed its hopes with its illusions would become enervated. Niebuhr found support in Spengler's observation that "religion without God" was "the unvarying symptom of a dying civilization."<sup>209</sup> Niebuhr apparently had discovered in Spengler's approach, e.g. his "morphology of civilization", some points for agreement. The main reason for Niebuhr turning to Spengler was to criticise liberalism in this case one aspect, liberal society, since in Niebuhr's opinion as well as Spengler's opinion it was dying. Niebuhr had been attracted to Russell's ideas about the destruction of civilization in his earlier works and he was again attracted by Spengler's pessimistic ideas in 1927. Niebuhr, however, was

---

209. DCNR p. 56.

more in sympathy with the Spengelerian approach and was to return again and again to Spengler's concepts.

Another philosopher Niebuhr had encountered in the past and had used to examine liberal society was Max Weber. The ideation of Weber had been of interest to Niebuhr for a long time by 1927, but there is no indication that Niebuhr's interest was flagging and in fact there seems to be an increase in Niebuhr's use of certain Weberian concepts. Niebuhr not only referred to Weber but also to Tawney who was a disciple in some ways of Weber and certainly agreed with Weber's basic ideas. Niebuhr through his increased involvement with the Weberian thesis not only revealed the continuity of his thought, but also the desire to thoroughly investigate the ramifications of Weber's thesis when applied to liberalism. It has been evident that in the past Niebuhr had faith in the theory of Weber that the origin of the ideas of capitalism could be traced to the Reformation. Niebuhr not only showed familiarity with this concept in Does Civilization Need Religion?, but also with other concepts that were presented in the work Die Protestantische Ethik unter Geist des Kapitalismus. Early in Does Civilization Need Religion? Niebuhr referred to the fact that: "It might be better to say therefore that the commercial middle-class appropriated as much as they prompted the revision of Protestant theology and religion."<sup>210</sup> Another important thesis of Weber was that the "most consistent basis for the idea of calling as well as Protestant asceticism was to be found in Calvinism."<sup>211</sup> Although Niebuhr disagreed with the assumption

---

210. DCNR p. 30.

211. PE pp. 155-156.

that Calvinism was the basis of Protestant asceticism, he was in agreement with the Weberian thesis that Protestantism contained an element of asceticism which was an important factor in the birth of capitalism. Niebuhr also recognised the validity of the Weberian thesis that there was a relation between puritanism and capitalism. Niebuhr referred the reader to Weber's work which illustrated his deep respect for the work of Max Weber. Niebuhr like Weber was aware that there was a great deal of impetus given to capitalism by the ideas of Protestantism. Niebuhr noted that "the religious sanction of material gain was a new thing in history and undoubtedly helped to fashion the moral temper of modern society in which diligence is the great virtue of and greed the besetting vice."<sup>212</sup> Niebuhr's references to Weber's work reveals that his interest in Weber was deepening since Niebuhr also refers to the larger work in his analysis of the commercial and industrial superiority of Protestant nations that appeared in the work Gesammelt Aufsätze Zur Religions-Sociologie.

Another thinker that Niebuhr turned to was R.H. Tawney who followed the general thesis of Weber and underlined the effect of the idea of individualism which according to Weber and Tawney originated in the Reformation and subsequently was brought into the capitalistic system. Tawney's major work is entitled Religion and the Rise of Capitalism. In 1927 Niebuhr not only referred to the work of Weber but also to the work of Tawney in his investigations of the origins of capitalism. Tawney puts forth the idea that the "growing complexity of commercial transactions

---

212. DCNR p. 103.

invalidated the old canonical laws designed to enforce ethical standards in business and thus made the secularization of economics inevitable even before the Reformation."<sup>213</sup> Niebuhr using Tawney for support presents the idea that the Reformation was not the only reason for the rise of capitalism, but Tawney as well as Niebuhr underlined the fact that Protestantism was a major factor in the birth of capitalism. Niebuhr as he had with Weber utilised Tawney's support when discussing the idea of the importance of the idea of a "calling" in Protestantism and capitalism.

Niebuhr considered the work of both Weber and Tawney particularly their investigation of the phenomenon of the rise of capitalism to be of great value and he made extensive use of the central thesis that the Reformation was instrumental in the birth of capitalism. Niebuhr, however, had stated that "The emancipation of economic relations from all ethical restraints was more or less in concomitant with the Reformation movements, but it is a question of how much it was casually and how much coincidentally related."<sup>214</sup> Niebuhr, even though he was in agreement with Weber and Tawney and greatly admired their work, was still not completely committed to the thesis that the origin of capitalism was to be found in the Reformation, which Tawney and Weber themselves had realised could be questioned.

The last thinker to be investigated will be Karl Marx. It has been one of the main purposes of this paper to investigate Niebuhr's changing relationship with Marx. It is still evident

213. DCNR p. 93.

214. DCNR pp. 92-93.

at this stage of Niebuhr's development that he rejected the ideas of Marx although he was already becoming familiar with some of the central theses of Marx. Niebuhr remarked that "The Marxian idea of the unification of the world upon the basis of the common interests of the proletarian class must be relegated to the category of millennial dreams."<sup>215</sup> The unification of the world on the basis of the interests of the proletariat was to later be considered to be valid by Niebuhr. Although Niebuhr still was unconvinced by the approach of the Marxist he was aware that the ideas of Marx had force. Niebuhr, nevertheless, stated in Does Civilization Need Religion? "The real history of Western society is being written by Nietzschean and Marxian cynics who have subdued every scruple which might qualify their contest for power."<sup>216</sup>

In Does Civilization Need Religion? one new thinker emerges; this was R.H. Tawney a not unexpected source. Niebuhr as he had in the past turned to certain philosophers for help in his analysis of civilization such as Spengler and Weber and to others to examine the general questions of religion such as Whitehead. Niebuhr seemed to be deeply involved with two of these philosophers one being Whitehead and his approach to general religious questions and the other being Weber with his approach to the question of the origin of capitalism.

#### A Brief Summary

Niebuhr commented later in life that while at University he was concerned not with moral usefulness but with the metaphysical

---

validity of religious convictions. However, Niebuhr admitted that his interest shifted from the field of philosophy when confronted by the effects of the Great War.<sup>217</sup> Niebuhr's interest in William James is rooted in the period before the Great War and is the first identifiable source of philosophical ideas to appear in Niebuhr's writing. Niebuhr during the period before the Great War and the period immediately following the War seemed to have been under the influence of the spirit of nineteenth century liberalism, but without being under the influence of any specific source. Niebuhr during the early part of his pastorate showed signs of being effected by the ideas of perfectionism and idealism which included pacifism the longest lasting ideal of this period.

In 1920 and the following few years Niebuhr became involved with the "social Gospel-John Dewey" amalgam and consequently involved with the accompanying idea that the correct method of transforming the oppressing class was to make correct use of the Gospel. By 1923 Niebuhr had reached the peak of his involvement with the pacifistic idea. 1923 also marked the beginning of Niebuhr's pro-Fabian phase, which indicated the beginning of Niebuhr's long journey toward Marxism. 1924 finds Niebuhr turning to his second identifiable philosophical source that of Max Weber.

By 1925 Niebuhr had become heavily involved with Weber, not only with his thesis about the origin of capitalism, but also with his ideas about individualism and Calvinism. In 1926 there is an ever increasing interest on the part of Niebuhr in the fate

---

217. Reinhold Niebuhr "A Religion Worth Fighting For" Survey (Aug. 1, 1927) p. 444.



of the worker yet another step on the path to Marxism. The year 1926 was important for another reason and that is Niebuhr's introduction of Whitehead into his writings as a source of support and ideas for his investigations of liberal religious ideas.

In 1927 Niebuhr was involved with the idea of destruction particularly the destruction of civilization, which included the ideas of Spengler. The year 1927 was a momentous one for Niebuhr since it also saw the advent of the publication of his first book Does Civilization Need Religion?, which included the ideas and concepts that Niebuhr had reaped from his ever increasing circle of philosophical sources. The three philosophical sources that seem to have had the greatest impact by 1927 were Weber, Whitehead and James the latter being the longest lasting source.

In 1927 and the years leading up to 1927 Niebuhr, although wrestling with the ideas of Marx, never accepted them and in fact warned against them. This first chapter covers the first of three stages of development that Niebuhr underwent in the period before 1935. The first stage could be labeled the "pre-Marxist" phase of Niebuhr's development which included for the most part Niebuhr's involvement with liberalism. Niebuhr was aware of the problems of social injustice in the middle 1920's and even earlier, but was basically dependent upon the tenets of liberalism although he was aware of the doctrines of Marxism.<sup>218</sup>

---

218. Charles C. West Communism and the Theologian : A Study of an Encounter (London, 1958) p. 122.

Chapter 2

The Years of Flux

## Introduction

In the late twenties and early thirties Niebuhr's appetite for social realism was fed by his growing disenchantment with the ideals set forth by liberalism, which were instrumental in the seeds of Marxism being sown. During this period the defects of liberalism seem to be the strengths of Marxism. Liberalism had failed to relate the individual organically to society while Marxism made society the beginning and the end. Liberalism held to the belief that the individual through maximizing self-interest would serve in some miraculous way the interest of all; Marxism labeled this approach middle-class ideology. Liberalism concealed the conflict of interest in society while Marxism laid the conflict bare, i.e. the underlying struggle between diverse social and economic classes. Liberalism insisted that justice could be attained through the automatic processes of a free economic system while the Marxist proclaimed that injustice was inevitable as long as economic inequality existed.<sup>1</sup> This meant that Niebuhr by 1932 was writing that the Marxist even though he had made mistakes in choosing "the means of accomplishing his ends.." had "made no mistake either in stating the rational goal toward which society must move, the goal of equal justice or in understanding the economic foundations of justice."<sup>2</sup>

One can also detect the seeds of Marxism being propagated by certain philosophers who were to be later supplanted to a large extent by Marxist ideals and analysis. For example, Spengler,

---

1. Kenneth Thompson "The Political Philosophy of Reinhold Niebuhr" in Reinhold Niebuhr His Religious, Social, and Political Thought edited by Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York, 1956) p. 158, hereafter cited as R&B.

2. Reinhold Niebuhr Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics (London, 1963) p. 165, hereafter cited as MMIS.

who had definite reservations about socialism, commented in The Decline of the West that "We are all Socialists, wittingly or unwittingly, willingly or unwillingly."<sup>3</sup> Spengler goes so far as to opine that socialism is in the "highest sense" the "crown" of Western Culture.<sup>4</sup>

In the methods utilized by Weber one can detect certain tendencies that could have been instrumental in Niebuhr's turn to Marxism. Much of Weber's work is a skillful application of Marx's historical method. However, Weber considered Marx's view of world history to be an untenable monocausal theory which reduced the multiplicity of causal factors to a single factor. Weber did not squarely oppose historical materialism, but he did take exception to the claim of Marx that there was a single and universal cause. The Weberian approach to political structures closely parallels the Marxist approach to economic structures. Weber's own work may be seen as an attempt to round out the economic materialism of Marx by a political and military materialism. With Marx, Weber shared an attempt to bring "ideological phenomena into some correlation with the material interest of the economic and political orders."<sup>5</sup> Weber saw the concept of rational bureaucracy in a capitalistic society to be of central importance in "economic materialism". Weber did not deny the existence of the class struggle, but he did refute the idea that the class struggle is the central dynamic. Weber in some ways

3. Oswald Spengler The Decline of the West (London, 1922) VI p. 361, hereafter cited as DW.

4. Ibid. p. 363.

5. Max Weber Essays in Sociology trans. and introduced by H.R. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London, 1957) p. 47.

tried to revitalize the work of Marx by placing it in a more generalized context and showing that Marx's conclusions rested upon observations drawn from a dramatized special case. Nevertheless, one must always keep in mind that Weber was a rather nostalgic liberal.<sup>6</sup>

There was obviously a sharp change in focus in Niebuhr's use of certain philosophers during the period between 1928 and 1932 as well as a change from a liberal orientation to a basically Marxist stance. One can trace the changes in Niebuhr's thinking through the changes in his philosophical sources and the way in which he used these philosophical sources. The change of stance and emphasis was not an unreasonable one when viewed purely as a transition from one set of ideas to another set of ideas. The transition in the late twenties and early thirties can be more clearly understood by a close examination of Niebuhr's philosophical sources.

In 1923 in Detroit Niebuhr spoke before the Student Volunteer Convention in Detroit at the instigation of Sherwood Eddy. In the audience of the Convention was Henry Sloane Coffin, later president of Union Seminary, who sent a note to Niebuhr asking to see him. They became acquainted, and in time Coffin offered to Niebuhr a teaching post at Union Seminary.<sup>7</sup> Niebuhr commented that "I became a member of the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in 1928, largely at the instigation of my friend Sherwood Eddy, who persuaded the seminary faculty to call me to a Chair of

6. Ibid. pp. 46-50.

7. June Bingham Courage to Change an Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (New York, 1961) p. 138, hereafter cited as C.C.

Christian Ethics."<sup>8</sup> Niebuhr saw this as a major change and a somewhat hazardous venture. He quite freely admitted in his diary that he had qualms about leaving the pastorate: "At any rate now that the time has come to sever my connections with the church I find it almost impossible to take the step."<sup>9</sup> In his "Intellectual Autobiography" written for the Living Library of Theology series Niebuhr wrote in reference to this new phase of his life that "This was a hazardous venture, since my reading in the parish had been rather undisciplined and I had no scholarly competence in my field, not to speak of the total field of Christian theology."<sup>10</sup> Niebuhr not unexpectedly was affected by this change in his environment which obviously would have a definite effect upon his thinking. Niebuhr himself points out that "the pressure of academic discipline and my companionship with the distinguished members of the Union faculty did serve to introduce me to the main outlines of Biblical faith and to the classical texts of Christian theology."<sup>11</sup>

#### The Beginning of the Transition (1928)

The year of 1928 was the year that Niebuhr started on the road to realism<sup>12</sup> and away from the ideas of perfectionism. This period brought about an ever increasing, ever developing critique

8. Reinhold Niebuhr "Intellectual Autobiography" K&B p. 8.

9. Reinhold Niebuhr Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic (New York, 1929) p. 195, hereafter cited as LNFC.

10. Reinhold Niebuhr "Intellectual Autobiography" K&B p. 8.

11. Ibid. p. 9.

12. Robert Crocker Good The Contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr to the Theory of International Relations (Unpublished thesis, 1956) p. 60.

of pacifism which was a sign of Niebuhr's change in stance and his involvement with the pragmatic ethic which was to be consummated in Moral Man and Immoral Society.<sup>13</sup> This was also the year that Niebuhr wrote his first article on Karl Barth although he had been in touch with the Christian pessimism of Continental Orthodoxy for some time.<sup>14</sup> At the close of 1927, Niebuhr sounded a discordant note concerning his pacifism in his article "Why I Am Not a Christian". Niebuhr asked "Would I be as good a pacifist if I belonged to an unsatisfied nation rather than to a satisfied nation?"<sup>15</sup> Niebuhr in 1927 was already beginning to realize that perfectionism was in some ways an irresponsible position. R.C. Good comments that "for the first time in 1928" there is the inception of a realistic approach to the problems of social strategy.<sup>16</sup> M.F. Doyle points out that "with his (Niebuhr) return to academic life in 1928 his interest shifted from a primary focus upon religion to the social and political forces which were influencing society."<sup>17</sup> R.H. Stone also comments that: "Between 1927 and 1932 Niebuhr experienced a deeper sense of the difficulty confronting all programs of social reform and Marxist thought helped him explain these difficulties."<sup>18</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. pointed out that for Niebuhr: "now

13. Ibid. p. 61.

14. Ibid. p. 62.

15. Reinhold Niebuhr "Why I Am Not a Christian" The Christian Century (Dec. 15, 1927) p. 1482.

16. Good op. cit. pp. 70-71.

17. Mathias Francis Doyle Theology and Politics in the Works of Reinhold Niebuhr (unpublished thesis, 1968) p. 8.

18. Ronald Henry Stone Reinhold Niebuhr's Perspective on U.S. Foreign Policy (unpublished thesis, 1968) p. 40.

translated from the Detroit parish to Union Theological Seminary in New York, the economic collapse came as a conclusive refutation of liberal hopes."<sup>19</sup> June Bingham also recognised that the dramatic occurrence of this era had a lasting effect upon Niebuhr.<sup>20</sup> Niebuhr began in 1928 to wrestle with the problem of social strategy and reform, which sparked his eventual turn to the ideas of Marx in order to come to terms with the issues of the day. In 1928 Niebuhr undertook a full length analysis of society's ills in "Why We Need a New Economic Order".<sup>21</sup>

Niebuhr had criticised in 1927 the evils of the Stock Market in his diary Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic:

Perhaps there is no better illustration of the ethical impotence of the modern church than its failure to deal with the evils and the ethical problems of stock manipulation. Millions in property values are created by pure legerdemain.<sup>22</sup>

But Niebuhr like so many others did not foresee the extent and duration of the depression that came after the crash of the Stock Market in September, 1929. The early thirties were a time that saw the advent of terrible poverty, that was made even worse since it was in such stark contrast with the things that people had had in the recent past. The tragedy of this period was portrayed by John Dos Passis in U.S.A. and in John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath. It was a time when overfed adults were just a few blocks away from children who were crying for food. The

19. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. "Reinhold Niebuhr's Role in Political Thought" K&B p. 134.

20. C&C p. 154.

21. Paul Charles Merkley Reinhold Niebuhr the Decisive Years (1916-1941) (unpublished thesis, 1968) p. 40.

22. LNFC p. 128.



situation was made even more tragic by unusually cold winters and summers which were bedeviled by drought.<sup>23</sup> It is not surprising that Niebuhr felt the need for a new approach and turned to new thinkers when he attempted to solve the many problems of America in the early nineteen thirties.

During the early part of Niebuhr's teaching career there were many arguments within the political and academic groups of which he was a part.<sup>24</sup> This was the period when the Socialist Party was at its lowest ebb, i.e. immediately after the election of 1928 which was when Norman Thomas, John Dewey and W.E.B. DuBois began to develop a third party movement. It was also during this year that the League for Independent Political Action was born.<sup>25</sup> Niebuhr considered the alternative of a third party as constructive<sup>26</sup> and from the beginning became a member of the L.I.P.A.<sup>27</sup>

Another sign of Niebuhr's increasing involvement in 1928 with the left was his editorship of the socialist-pacifist monthly The World Tomorrow.<sup>28</sup> This monthly was a mirror of the left wing clerical mind of the 1920's which was started in 1919 under the direction of Norman Thomas and was the official organ of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The emphasis of the monthly was as much socialist as it was pacifist; its editors saw the two as being inseparable. The masthead of the monthly described

23. CC p. 155.

24. CC p. 156.

25. Merkley op. cit. p. 108.

26. J.M. Danielson The Evolution of the Political Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (Unpublished thesis, 1965) p. 5.

27. Merkley op. cit. p. 108.

28. Good op. cit. p. 63.

itself as a "Journal Looking Forward to a Social Order Based on the Principles of Jesus."<sup>29</sup>

In 1928 Niebuhr had not declared in print that he was a socialist but it is quite evident that the community of people with which he communicated gave him an opportunity to participate in a dialogue about politics, economics and social problems with socialist. The furthest that Niebuhr had gone was to declare support for Norman Thomas in the 1928 election, who was the Socialist Party candidate. The effect of these associations was to influence both his decision to join the Socialist Party and his favorable assessment of the socialist cause and methods.<sup>30</sup>

The most interesting work of 1928 is the article "Why We Need a New Economic Order" which appeared in the World Tomorrow in October of that year. Within this article are definite Weberian overtones as well as a hint of R.H. Tawney's work.<sup>31</sup> This is a significant publication because of its overall approach and its clear and accurate portrayal of some of the reasons for the coming Stock Market crash and the fundamental flaw in the American economy that brought about the crash.<sup>32</sup> Niebuhr pointed out in this article that the worker could not absorb the increased production of industry without an increase in his buying power. However, industry instead of increasing the wages of the worker only aggravated the problem of overproduction by lowering wages, which restricted the buying power of the worker. Niebuhr still

29. Merkley op. cit. p. 109.

30. Ibid. pp. 109-110.

31. Ibid. p. 99.

32. Ibid. p. 100.

basically relied upon the same philosophical sources that he had discovered and utilised in the 1920's and the later part of the 1910's.

There are a number of places in "Why We Need a New Economic Order" that underline the influence of Max Weber. The first indication is Niebuhr's apparent high regard for the pioneers of capitalism, which was a major feature of Weberian thought. Niebuhr remarked that: "Modern industry was created by pioneering individuals who were forced to resist social and political restraints which survived the attachment of the political state to the feudal economic order." Niebuhr in a similar vein continued "at first the owner was invariably the executive whose administrative ability seemed to account for the success of the enterprise."<sup>33</sup>

Weber as a child was able to observe an entrepreneur in his own family, and consequently was able to observe the founder of an enterprise at first hand.<sup>34</sup> Weber described the entrepreneur as an unusually "strong character" and felt that the entrepreneur needed "along with the clarity of vision and ability to act... the virtue of very definite and highly developed ethical qualities" which could "command the absolutely indispensable confidence of customer and workman." Weber revealed his interest in the pioneers of capitalism by outlining what the true founder of an enterprise must be. "They were men who had grown up in the hard school life, calculating and daring at the same time, above all temperate and reliable, shrewd and completely devoted to their business

---

33. Reinhold Niebuhr "Why We Need a New Economic Order" The World Tomorrow (October, 1928) pp. 395-398, cited in Paul Merkley pp. 405-418, hereafter cited as WWNNEO.

34. Reinhard Bendix, Max Weber an Intellectual Portrait (London, 1930) p. 50, hereafter cited as MW.

with strictly bourgeois opinions and principles."<sup>35</sup> Weber as well as Niebuhr had a high opinion of the "pioneers", nevertheless, both men realised that the entrepreneurs were not able to set up a new economic order by themselves.<sup>36</sup> Weber asserted that: "In order that a manner of life so well adapted to the peculiarities of capitalism could be selected at all, i.e. should come to dominate others..... It had to originate somewhere and not in isolated individuals alone but as a way of life common to the whole group of men."<sup>37</sup>

Niebuhr mirrored Weber's opinion that the community was important to the capitalistic system and was needed by the entrepreneur to counteract the drawbacks of what Weber called economic traditionalism, i.e. avarice and the completely unscrupulous acquisitive drive, and the accompanying desire of the worker for more pay and less work and the unwillingness of the worker to adapt himself to new methods.<sup>38</sup> Niebuhr stated that: "Since the pioneer stage of industry is passed and industrial processes have become an integral part of the community's life and the initiative of individual owners is decreasing, the cooperation of the community as an increasing factor in industrial efficiency."<sup>39</sup> Niebuhr and Weber both recognised the ethical side of the economic order as being of extreme value. Niebuhr asserted that "An economic system which is based upon the assumption that greed is the most effective spring of human action has the tendency of creating individuals who seem to substantiate that assumption."<sup>40</sup>

35. Max Weber The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism trans. Talcott Parsons (London, 1930) p. 69.

36. MW p. 55.

37. PE p. 55.

38. MW p. 54.

39. WWNNEO pp. 405-418.

40. Ibid. pp. 405-418.

Weber was troubled as well by the presence of greed: "At all periods of history, where ever it was possible, there has been ruthless acquisition, bound to no ethical norms whatever."<sup>41</sup>

Both men considered greed and unlimited acquisition to be harmful but a continuing reality in an economic system such as capitalism. Weber writing about unlimited acquisition stated that: "with the break of tradition and the more or less complete extension of free enterprise, even to within the social group, the new thing was not generally ethically justified and encouraged, but only tolerated as fact."<sup>42</sup> Niebuhr also speaking about the greed found in modern enterprise avered that greed was "one of the ethical byproducts of an economic order which may condemn it in the eyes of the thoughtful even if society maintains it for its supposed material benefits."<sup>43</sup> Niebuhr, however, departed from Weber in one particular area. Niebuhr believed that greed was fixed in the structure of the present economic system while for Weber greed came from the traditionalistic elements that still retained a certain degree of influence in the present economic system. Niebuhr, however, agreed with Weber's opinion that hard work and frugal living should have its rewards in the economic system, but Niebuhr sees this being prevented by the modern economic set up and Weber by traditionalism.

Niebuhr as before extensively used Weber's idea that the spirit of capitalism had its origins in Protestantism. In the article "Would Jesus Be a Churchman Today?" Niebuhr stated that

41. PE p. 57.

42. PE p. 58.

43. WWINNEO pp. 405-418.

"The most serious weakness of current Protestantism is that it is enmeshed with the peculiar prejudices not only of the Nordic peoples but of their commerical class."<sup>44</sup>

R.H. Tawney a disciple of Weber made a definite impression on Niebuhr's thinking and in particular his classical delineation of the connection between the origins of capitalism and individualism.<sup>45</sup> The presence of this undercurrent is detected in the statement that: "pioneer individuals were forced to resist social and political restraints which survived the attachment of the political state to the feudal economic order. Inevitably they rationalised their conflict by idealising the values of freedom and individualism."<sup>46</sup> This particular passage from "Why We Need a New Economic Order" reminds one vividly of R.H. Tawney's delineation of the connection between capitalism and the ideology of individualism.<sup>47</sup> R.H. Tawney quoted in Religion and the Rise of Capitalism the merchants of Antwerp who wrote protesting to Philip II about having been interfered with since for them:

"the cause of the prosperity of this city is the freedom granted to those who trade there." Swept to wealth on the crest of a wave of swiftly expanding enterprise, which a century before would have seemed the wildest of fantasies the liberal bourgeoisie of Antwerp pursued, in the teeth of all precedents, a policy of practical individualism, which would have been met in any other city by rebellion...<sup>48</sup>

Tawney continued with the observation that:

---

44. Reinhold Niebuhr "Would Jesus Be a Churchman Today?" The World Tomorrow (December, 1928) pp. 492-493.

45. Merkle op. cit. p. 99.

46. WVNNEO pp. 405-418.

47. Merkle op. cit. p. 99.

48. R.H. Tawney Religion and the Rise of Capitalism An Historical Study (London, 1926) p. 74, hereafter cited as RRC.

The law of nature had been invoked by mediaeval writers as a moral restraint upon economic self-interest. By the seventeenth century, a significant revolution had taken place. "Nature" had come to connote, not divine ordinance, but human appetites and natural rights were invoked by the individualism of the age as a reason why self-interest should be given freelay.<sup>49</sup>

Niebuhr recognised this process and remarked that: "inevitably they rationalised their conflict by idealising the values of freedom and individualism."<sup>50</sup> Niebuhr like Tawney recognised that there was a definite connection between the individualism of the early capitalist and the individualism of the present capitalistic system. Niebuhr understood as did Tawney that practical individualism became an ideology of individualism as capitalism began to prosper. Tawney and Weber both sketched the spirit of individual enterprise as having been produced by the Protestant spirit. Tawney acknowledged his indebtedness to Weber's work, but criticises Weber on one point. "Weber ignores or at least touches too lightly on, intellectual movements, which were favorable to the growth of business enterprise and to an individualistic attitude toward economic relations, but which had little to do with religion."<sup>51</sup> Tawney disagreed with the degree of emphasis Weber had placed upon religion as a source of the capitalistic spirit. Niebuhr as has already been observed, tended towards the Weberian approach and consequently ignored as did Weber the other intellectual movements e.g. the political thought of the Renaissance, which Tawney considered to be of importance.

There does not seem to be any real evidence for assuming

49. RRC p. 180.

50. WNNNEO pp. 405-418.

51. RRC p. 320.

any real Marxist commitment by Niebuhr at this early stage of his academic career. Niebuhr, however, did point out the dangers of overproduction and the fact that: "industry only aggravates the problem by lowering wages and cutting wages, thus further restricting the buying power of the public."<sup>52</sup> Niebuhr's doubts about Marx's system of analysis and Marx's conclusions at the time that "Why We Need a New Economic Order" was written is illustrated by Niebuhr's disquiet at the possibility of revolutionary change.

The question is whether society can gain sufficient social intelligence to modify the present system step by step as the need arises and as traditional methods become unworkable or whether through the stubbornness and blindness of the holders of power and privilege and through the ignorance of the masses the system will be permitted to disintegrate until change can come only through revolution.<sup>53</sup>

Although Niebuhr understood that there was a possibility of revolution he undoubtedly favored the gradual modification of the economic system over the possibility of revolution; an opinion that he will re-examine in the coming years. Niebuhr stated that "A society which is able to modify its processes and relationships to fit new situations may gradually evolve new systems out of old ones."<sup>54</sup> Niebuhr's "step by step" modification is reminiscent of Fabian socialism or "gas-and-water" socialism, a type of socialism present in America among certain intellectuals in the 1920's. This concept of a modification of the system instead of an abrupt change is a conviction that was also held by the "social-Gospelers". In 1928 Niebuhr did not consider revolution to be inevitable. Niebuhr avered that "The more complex an

---

52. WNNNEO pp. 405-418.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.



an economic and social relationship becomes, the less forceful is the logic of revolutionaries."<sup>56</sup> Niebuhr in 1928 although involved with socialism and Marxist doctrines was still only beginning to turn to Marx.

There are other philosophical overtones that appear in 1928 from another familiar source that of William James. In 1928 Barth's Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie appeared in translation making Barth's work available for the first time in English. Niebuhr was given this work to review for the Christian Century.<sup>57</sup> The book review led to a series of articles which was initiated by the article "Barth - Apostle of the Absolute".<sup>58</sup> This article is significant not only because it was the first article by Niebuhr on the work of Barth, but also because one finds Niebuhr confronting Barth at the beginning of his teaching career, and doing so while standing within the tradition of William James:<sup>59</sup> confirming what Niebuhr was to later write to a friend "I am in the William James' tradition. He was both an empiricist and a religious man, and his faith was both the consequence and the presupposition of his pragmatism."<sup>60</sup>

56. WVNNEO pp. 405-418.

57. Merkley op. cit. p. 137.

58. "Barth - Apostle of the Absolute" Christian Century (Dec. 1928) pp. 523-24; "Church Currents in Germany" Christian Century (Aug. 1930) pp. 959-960; "Barthianism and the Kingdom" Christian Century (July 1931) pp. 924-25; "Barthianism and the Political Reaction" Christian Century (June, 1934) pp. 757-59; "Marx, Barth, and the Israel's Prophets" Christian Century (Jan. 1935) pp. 138-140; "Karl Barth and Democracy" Radical Religion (Winter, 1938); "Karl Barth on Politics" Radical Religion (Spring, 1939).

59. Merkley op. cit. p. 139.

60. CC p. 224.

Although the first article on Barth by Niebuhr is curiously  
 ambiguous,<sup>61</sup> the sway of the tradition of William James is clear.  
 Both Niebuhr and James were empirically oriented. James and  
 Niebuhr both looked upon the world as being essentially incom-  
 plete, contingent and continually productive of the new and  
 novel;<sup>62</sup> what James called the "pluralistic universe"; Niebuhr  
 called a dynamic universe.<sup>63</sup> Both James and Niebuhr realised  
 that the unpredictable universe could not be contained within  
 a closed philosophical system. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. points  
 out that James thought that monism as well as absolutism were  
 the end and the miserable culmination of what he called "tender  
 mindness". For Niebuhr absolutism and monism were both incorrect  
 in their ways of picturing the universe. James considered the  
 incompleteness of preception and the crudity of experience as the  
 essence of reality. Whereas, Niebuhr who was committed to the  
 ultimate explanation, developed the category of paradox to deal  
 with the antinomies which formed the substance of James' "radical  
 empiricism".<sup>64</sup> James used pragmatism as a method of settling  
 metaphysical disputes; whereas Niebuhr used this method to break  
 through the pretensions that are to be found in all ideas.<sup>65</sup>

Niebuhr in the article "Barth - Apostle of the Absolute"  
 asserted that "... ultimately there is no more peace in dogmatism

61. Merkley op. cit. p. 137.

62. Robert Hill Hartman The Use of Theology in Reinhold Niebuhr's Interpretation of History (unpublished thesis, 1969) p. 153.

63. Schlesinger op. cit. p. 131.

64. Ibid. p. 131-2.

65. Hartman op. cit. p. 153.

than in magic."<sup>66</sup> James rejected the dogmatism of supernaturalism as well as the mysticism of the Monist and called for pluralism and an experiential supernaturalism. James felt uneasy about the presence of dogma and mysticism; rejecting them both as being representative of any final answer. Niebuhr as well felt uneasy about dogmatism and magic and saw no hope of a solution by retreating to either of these extremes although he realised that there were worthwhile elements in both of these approaches as did James.<sup>67</sup>

Niebuhr in "Barth - Apostle of the Absolute" also made another comment reminiscent of James:

We can escape relativity and uncertainty only by piling experience upon experience, checking hypothesis against hypothesis, correcting errors by considering new perspectives, and finally by letting the experience of the race qualify the individual's experience of God.<sup>68</sup>

Niebuhr wished to make use of the experiences of a person both the mental and physical experiences and to combine all the experiences of men in order to escape relativity. One can hear the echo of this thinking in the words of William James in The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature. James wished to redeem religion from what he called "unwholesome privacy" and to give "public status" to its deliverances. James called for the comparison of experience when he averred that:

We are thinking beings, and we cannot exclude the intellect from participating in any of our functions. Even in soliloquizing with ourselves, we construe our feelings intellectually. Both our personal ideas and our religious and mystical experiences must be interpre-

66. Reinhold Niebuhr "Barth - Apostle of the Absolute" Christian Century (Dec. 13, 1928) p. 1524, hereafter cited as BAA.

67. Ralph Barton Perry The Thought and Character of William James (London, 1937) v. II p. 334.

68. BAA p. 1524.

ted congruously with the kind of scenery which our thinking mind inhabits... more over, we must exchange our feelings with one another, and in doing so we have to speak, and to use general and abstract verbal formulas. Conceptions and constructions are thus a necessary part of religion, and as moderator amid the clash of hypotheses, and mediator among the criticisms of one man's by another, philosophy will always have much to do.<sup>69</sup>

James assumed that "Good", "Bad", and "obligation" were objects of feeling and desire, which had no foothold or anchorage in Being, apart from the existence of actually living minds.<sup>70</sup> Niebuhr did not entirely agree since he considered morals in terms of good and evil as being bound up with the concept of God and not just a subjective idea. Niebuhr stated that "'God be merciful to me a sinner' should result in creative social activity as well as in a religious assurance of pardon."<sup>71</sup> Niebuhr had revealed, however, the basic pragmatic tone of his thinking in the statement: "But if the realization of the tragedy of sin merely bruises the sensitive soul with efforts to find theological, metaphysical, and mystical solutions for the problems of our morality, the poor devils who bear in their bodies the agony of social injustice may be pardoned if they regard religion with indifference and contempt."<sup>72</sup>

Niebuhr agreed with James' moralist principles when he expressed his fear of the soul taking flight "into the absolute which can neither be established upon historical grounds nor

69. William James The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (London, 1902) p. 432, hereafter cited as VRE.

70. William James Essays on Faith and Morals (London, 1949) p. 197, hereafter cited as EFM.

71. BAA p. 1524.

72. BAA p. 1524.

justified by a strictly rational process, but can only be assumed and dogmatically asserted because it seems morally necessary."<sup>73</sup> James also feared this flight of the soul into absolutism because it stiffens itself in the notion "that certain things absolutely should be, and rejects the truth that at the bottom it makes no difference what is,..." and will find itself "thwarted and perplexed and bemuddled by the facts of the world,...".<sup>74</sup> However, James opined that the subjectivist is correct when he is willing "to seek harmony by toning down the sensitiveness of the feelings."<sup>75</sup> While Niebuhr believed that "It is the business of religion to create a sensitive conscience."<sup>76</sup> There is little question that James still had an effect in 1928 upon Niebuhr in his approach to a multitude of problems, but Niebuhr did not always agree with James.

Niebuhr and James both were in favor of comparing religion to the experiences of mankind. Both take the approach that the life of the believer is the important point from which one should judge the worth of certain ideas. James and Niebuhr were both in favor of approaching the judgement of an issue from the standpoint of what will best conform to the facts of life. Both men took the stand that human need and the concrete life of a human being is the point at which to determine whether or not a truth is of "value", i.e. is of use. Niebuhr like James appreciated the value of comparing religion to all experiences and all hypotheses.

---

73. BAA p. 1524.

74. EFM p. 107.

75. EFM p. 104.

76. BAA p. 1524.

Another article of importance from the standpoint of philosophical influence was written in 1928 and appeared in The Christian Century. In the article "The Confessions of a Tired Radical" one can detect the part that Spengler played in Niebuhr's thinking. In this article there is a suggestion of Spengler in Niebuhr's general approach to the idea of "peoples" or "groups". Spengler in The Decline of the West started the chapter entitled "Cities and Peoples, Races, Rongues" by disagreeing with the romantic:

idea of the "people" in the moral-enthusiastic sense of the word. If, here and there, in earlier time a new religion, a new ornamentation, a new architecture, or a new script appeared the question that it raised, presented itself to the investigator thus - what was the name of the people who produced the phenomenon? ... The purpose of this chapter is to demolish this romantic conception. What has inhabited the earth since the Ice Age is man not "peoples".<sup>77</sup>

Niebuhr had the same general attitude as Spengler about the misuse of the idea "peoples" and he went on and asserted that "the fact seems to be that all groups, religious and racial, tend to preserve their self-respect by adopting contemptuous attitudes toward other groups and to express their appreciation of their own characteristic culture by depreciating that of others."<sup>78</sup>

Spengler underlined the presence of race hatred in cultures. In speaking of race Spengler is of the opinion that "the feeling of 'being' different is the more potent on both sides, the more breed the individual possesses." Spengler felt that many intellectuals have overlooked the concept of race and consequently the deep hatred, "which is the beat-difference of two currents of

77. DW II p. 113. .

78. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Confessions of a Tired Radical" The Christian Century (Aug. 30, 1928) p. 1046, hereafter cited as CTR.

being manifested as an unbearable dissonance a hatred that may become tragic for both,..."<sup>79</sup> Spengler was aware of the presence of race-hatred and also of the dangers of not recognising the consequences of this phenomenon. Niebuhr like Spengler recognised the total feeling of race-hatred or group hatred, and stated that ".... the majority seems to be the most bigoted simply because it is in a position where it can indulge its arrogance more freely."<sup>80</sup> Niebuhr in recognition of the total feeling of race-hatred pointed out that the minority develops "an animus against the majority which makes it quite impossible to deal scientifically with the whole problem of group animosities."<sup>81</sup> Niebuhr undoubtedly as did Spengler deduced the general feeling of group distrust as being at the root of race-hatred. Spengler, however, unlike Niebuhr was not campaigning for the extinction of this particular human fault, although he did recognise the ramifications of the problem, whereas Niebuhr was searching for ways to defeat this particular problem of society.

There was little doubt that Spengler considered group alignment or "peoples" as necessary. Spengler stated that: "For me the people is a unit of the soul". Spengler arrived at the conclusion that this was the one and only connotation of the word "people", and pointed out that "neither unity of speech nor physical descent is decisive. That which distinguishes the people from the population, raises it up out of the population, and will one day let it find its level again in the population is always the lived experience of 'we'". A note of approval for this concept

---

79. DW II p. 319. .

80. CTR p. 1046.

81. CTR p. 1046.

of alignment by Niebuhr is found in the statement: "Among races and classes which are still fighting for their place in the sun, group loyalty seems a necessary virtue."<sup>83</sup> However, Niebuhr unlike Spengler calls for the removal of these groups:

... yet on the whole it would seem that in a world in which groups have been thrown into such intimate contact with each other, our educational and religious emphasis ought to be on loyalty to standards, values, truths and ideals rather than to any group which is supposed to incorporate them.<sup>84</sup>

Spengler's general approach to the concept of race can be heard faintly ringing in the thought of Niebuhr. Niebuhr, however did not follow slavishly the approach of Spengler; on the contrary, there is rather a marked difference in conclusions, once the central premise that groups and peoples are an outmoded concept has been passed. Both Spengler and Niebuhr are of the opinion that peoples and groups as unities have certain general characteristics and patterns of behavior for all men both east and west. There is a strong and definite overtone of the Spenglerian approach when Niebuhr sets up the problem as a general problem of mankind, i.e. gathering together in groups is a universal feeling. Nevertheless, both Spengler and Niebuhr realised that the concept of a group or "people" contained certain false presuppositions.

Any method of following Niebuhr's change from his perfectionist stance of the early twenties to the Christian Marxism of the thirties is aided by a close study of his changing attitude toward pacifism. There is little doubt that Niebuhr's pacifism collapsed under the Marxist inspired critique of liber-

83. CTR p. 1047.

84. CTR p. 1047.



alism of which pacifism was the last lingering representative. Niebuhr finally broke with the tradition of Christian social radicalism, which contained a mild form of socialism while disavowing the use of violence.<sup>85</sup> This break is vividly illustrated by Niebuhr's abandonment of the Fellowship of Reconciliation which was a pacifistic organization founded by Henry T. Hodgkin, with which Niebuhr had at one time been deeply involved to the extent of becoming the National Chairman.<sup>86</sup>

Not only is the study of pacifism useful in discerning the signs of Niebuhr's growing commitment to Christian Marxism but it is also an excellent indicate of Niebuhr's use of pragmatism. As has been noted Niebuhr was drawn to the idea of pragmatism and this can be clearly seen in Niebuhr's nascent modification of the absolute pacifistic position in the article "Pacifism and the Use of Force".<sup>87</sup> Niebuhr in this article puzzled over the fact that the absolute was always being brought into question by the realities of life. In Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic Niebuhr acknowledged that: "Those of us who make adjustments between the absolute ideal of our devotion and the necessities of the immediate situation lack peace, because we can never be sure that we have our adjustment at the right place."<sup>88</sup> In the preface of Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic Niebuhr revealed his interest in the ramifications of pragmatism in particular when there was the collation of the realistic with the absolute or in

85. Stone op. cit. p. 58.

86. Donald B. Meyer The Protestant Search for Political Realism (1919-1941) (Berkeley, 1960) pp. 50-51, hereafter cited as PSPR.

87. Good op. cit. p. 71.

88. LNTPC p, 196,

Niebuhr's terms the prophet with the statesman. Niebuhr asserted that: "the moral achievements of statesmen must be judged in terms which take account of the limitations of human society which the statesman must, and the prophet need not, consider."<sup>89</sup>

In "Pacifism and the Use of Force" there are indications of a serious modification in the views of Niebuhr about pacifism. In this article one finds Niebuhr differentiating between violent coercion and non-violent coercion.<sup>90</sup> Niebuhr wrote that: "He (the writer) must begin, therefore, by stating two positions which represent the two poles of his thought." Niebuhr continued "one is that the use of physical violence in international life has impressed itself upon his mind as an unmitigated and unjustified evil." However, at this point Niebuhr varies with the absolute pacifist: "The other is that some form of social compulsion seems necessary and justified on occasion in all but the most ideal human societies."<sup>91</sup> Niebuhr went even further and recognised the fact that even though non-violent coercion is an evil it is a necessary evil, and it is not morally inferior to "non-resistance", which conotes the lack of coercion.<sup>92</sup> Niebuhr pragmatically observed that:

... it seems that the world in which we live is not so spiritual that it is always possible to prompt the wrongdoer to contrition merely by appealing to his conscience and to that of the society in which he lives. It may be necessary to deprive him of some concrete ad-

89. LNFC p. xii.

90. Good op. cit. p. 71.

91. Reinhold Niebuhr "Pacifism and the Use of Force" The World Tomorrow (May, 1928) p. 218, hereafter cited as PUF.

92. Good op. cit. p. 71.

vantage or inflict some obvious harm upon him to bring him to his senses. In other words, Gandhi's boycott in India and the Chinese boycott against the English in Hongkong and the strike of the industrial worker would seem to be necessary strategies in the kind of world in which we live. It is possible to justify the use of such force without condoning violence of any kind.<sup>93</sup>

Here again one sees Niebuhr partaking of the fruits of pragmatism when Niebuhr began to realise that moral exhortation may remain ineffective where disproportionate power tempts exploitation. This is the first step in Niebuhr's rejection of pacifism which resulted from taking a pragmatic approach to the problem. James stood against pacifism of the type put forth by the "socialistic peace advocates" because they were upholding a weak position. James avered that: "the duties, penalties and sanctions pictured in the utopias they (the pacifist) paint are all too weak and tame to touch the military-minded."<sup>94</sup> James saw the need for force although he advocated the military virtues unlike Niebuhr, but James also approved of the pacifism of Tolstoi for its consistent pessimism about the world's values which was pragmatic in James estimation. James was against the absolute values that the pacifist apply to the world, and took the stand that the military method was better because it was more realistic in its approach.<sup>95</sup> Niebuhr was beginning to stray from the path of pacifism spurred on by some of the same reasons and the realisation that pacifism's weapons were too ineffectual. Robert C. Good is of the opinion that with the rejection of pacifism there goes hand-in-hand a formulation of a pragmatic social ethic.<sup>96</sup>

93. PUF p. 219.

94. EFM p. 301.

95. Ibid. p. 301.

96. Good op. cit. p. 75.

The article "What the War Did to My Mind" was published in 1928 in which Niebuhr analyzed the twists and turns of his intellectual life, ten years after the Great War. In this article Niebuhr confessed to having already started the long road from liberalism to cynicism and realism before the beginning of the 1920's. Niebuhr speaking of the Great War avered that: "when it ended and the full tragedy of its fratricides had been revealed, I had become a realist trying to save myself from cynicism."<sup>97</sup> Niebuhr confirmed that he no longer completely believed in or held with the hope of the liberals. Niebuhr was no longer a believer in the unbroken line of progress in civilization, a fact confirmed by his turn to Spengler.<sup>98</sup> "Now I saw how civilization was enlarging the areas of conflict, increasing the units of battle and sharpening the tools of destruction." The cynical tone was reiterated when Niebuhr added that "Civilization was not a victory of the human spirit over nature. It was only partly that. It was also the arming of the brute in man."<sup>99</sup> The conclusion of this article illustrates the combination of realism, pessimism and liberalism that was characteristic of Niebuhr's writings during the later twenties. The liberal credo still comes through in Niebuhr's conclusions:

We can only start where other generations have left off and wean man of his hatreds, enlarge the areas of co-operation, reduce the misunderstanding by education, check greed by self-restraint in the individual and dispel fears by destroying the obsession of man with physical force.<sup>100</sup>

97. Reinhold Niebuhr "What the War Did to My Mind" Christian Century (Sept. 27, 1928) pp. 1161-1163, hereafter cited as WWDMM.

98. William Allen Greenlaw Reinhold Niebuhr as Theologian: A New Interpretation (unpublished thesis, 1972) p. 40.

99. WWDMM p. 1162.

100. WWDMM p. 1163.

The Crash (1929)

In the awful last week of October, 1929 the Stock Market in the United States collapsed. In two insane months the market lost all the ground that it had gained in two manic years. It was not the wild decline of the Stock Market that damaged the faith of a generation firmly wedded to the conviction of never-ending prosperity. It was the high rate of unemployment. In Munice, Indiana, known as "Middle Town" every fourth factory worker was out of a job and in Chicago the majority of working girls were earning less than twenty-five cents an hour. In the nation as a whole the residential construction fell by ninety-five percent. Eighty-five thousand businesses failed. The national volume of salaries dwindled forty percent, wages sixty percent and dividends fifty-six percent. And the worst aspect of the Great Depression was that there seemed to be no end to it no turning point, no relief. In 1930, the national income fell precipitously from eighty-seven billion dollars to seventy-five billion dollars; in 1931 to fifty-nine billion dollars; in 1932 to forty-two billion dollars; and by 1933 the United States was virtually prostrate with the income of the country down to thirty-nine billion dollars, with fourteen million unemployed sitting on street corners haunting the land. The spirit of America seemed to be crushed.<sup>101</sup>

In 1929 Niebuhr's doubts were deepening about the basic tenets of liberalism. The "crash" of the Stock Market was an event that was to greatly effect Niebuhr. Donald B. Meyer inter-

---

101. Robert L. Heilbroner The Worldly Philosophers (New York, 1953) pp. 260-262.

prets this period as being similar to the period that Barth went through when the German Social Democrats voted for the war credits in 1914. This crisis was not as severe a crisis as the one that Barth faced since Barth expected a great deal from the Social Democrats whereas Niebuhr's expectations were already declining and he expected little from the unreconstructed capitalistic system.<sup>102</sup> This period brought about a change in Niebuhr's ways of assessing society and he began to become more and more convinced of the correctness of Spengler's pessimistic approach which held that decay was present in society and in particular in the middle-class.<sup>103</sup>

In 1929 Niebuhr's criticisms were not influenced to any great extent by Marxism. Niebuhr doubted that the new order would be any more just than the old and saw no guarantee that the new order would be more just. Niebuhr regarded the hopes of the Marxist for justice from the coming new order as merely a romantic illusion and any hopes of eliciting moral sensitivity from violence as illusory. Niebuhr's pacifism prevented him in 1929 from subscribing to the Marxist doctrine of revolution, however, a good many of Niebuhr's goals for society would have fitted into the socialist program. As the depression deepened so did Niebuhr's pessimism about the effectiveness of liberal attempts to reform the system.<sup>104</sup>

In late 1929 Niebuhr after reflecting upon the depression in the city of New York began to call for the abandonment of any

102. PSPR p. 249.

103. PSPR p. 228.

104. Stone op. cit. p. 35.

hope for significant reform through the two major political parties; he considered the Socialist Party to be the only effective organization for this purpose. Niebuhr hoped that the socialist would concentrate on winning congressional seats and through effective organization rise to a position of power. Niebuhr urged the Socialist Party to abandon its dependence upon the programs of the communist as well as the American Federation of Labor. By 1929 Niebuhr had completely rejected the laissez-faire approach to economic theory labeling it a boon to the privileged which hindered necessary progress.

Another factor that had a continuing effect upon Niebuhr was the signing of the Pact of Paris in July, 1919 which when declared effective already saw two of the signatories at war. The Pact of Paris was the high point of the idealistic approach to international affairs and the beginning of its rapid decline. The inadequacy of the liberal world view was measured by the growing chasm between the expectations of the early 1920's and the events of the late 1920's and early 1930's. Niebuhr was one of the earliest to attack the assumptions of the liberal world view.

There is present in the thought of Niebuhr a strong pessimistic undercurrent rooted in the concepts of Oswald Spengler. In the article "We are Being Driven" one can detect the echo of Spengler's words about the mechanical civilization of the West. "But for that very reason Faustian man has become the slave of his creation. His number and the arrangement of life as he lives it, have been driven by the machine on a path where there is no turning back."<sup>105</sup> Niebuhr agreed with this analysis of mechanical

---

105. DW v. II p. 504.

civilization. Niebuhr quoted C.F. Andrews who had recently visited the United States: "You are not driving the machine of civilization; you are being driven."<sup>106</sup> Niebuhr commented that "Those words have haunted my mind: You are being driven." Spengler believed "The machine"<sup>106</sup> had bred three great figures in the "economy of the machine-industry"; the three figures are the entrepreneur, the engineer, and the factory-worker. Spengler commented that the "machine-industry" forces the entrepreneur not less than the workman to obedience."<sup>107</sup> One finds the same tone in Niebuhr's statement concerning the executives: "no wonder they (the executives) feel no more secure in their jobs than the poor devils who are on the production lines. These high priced executives may be feathering their nests, while the gravy is good, but they are being driven."<sup>108</sup> There is also the hint of coming disaster that will become a dominant theme in Niebuhr's thinking. Niebuhr in the conclusion of this article stated: "But as long as we must keep this productive process going we cannot bother to avert the danger of an ultimate international catastrophe."<sup>109</sup>

In the article "Political Action and Social Change" Niebuhr still was searching for an overall view which was lacking in most of his articles that were published in 1929.

In the article "Political Action and Social Change" Niebuhr revealed his growing confusion that preceded the so-called "Marxist phase". In this article Niebuhr seemed to be of two

106. Reinhold Niebuhr "We Are Being Driven" The Christian Century (May 1, 1929) p. 578, hereafter cited as WBD.

107. DW v. II p. 504.

108. WBD p. 578.

109. WBD p. 579.



minds about the issue of social change. Niebuhr quite readily admitted that he supported the ideas of the Socialist: "There is nothing in the program of the Socialist platform of the 1928 election to which anyone who is aware of the trend of industrial and economic events could take exception." Niebuhr then pragmatically asked "whether the political traditions of our people might not make the formation of a new party, including farmers and workers from the day of its organization, wise political strategy?"<sup>110</sup> Niebuhr, however, completely condemned the idea of communism: "Communism is a philosophy which springs from either despair or romantic perfectionism."<sup>111</sup> Although Niebuhr supported the Socialist Party he still fell back upon certain liberal motifs. Niebuhr called for the education of the middle-class and the organization of "economic life so that it will secure the highest measure of justice for all classes..."<sup>112</sup> Niebuhr appealed to the whole of society to work for a solution to the problem. Niebuhr throughout condemned the use of violence by anyone to gain their ends. It is quite evident that Niebuhr still had liberal tendencies in his approach to reform, but with strong overtones of socialism which pointed to his coming transformation.

#### The Last Days of Liberalism (1930)

In 1930 one of the Socialist Party's candidates was Reinhold Niebuhr. Actually Niebuhr had been somewhat surprised to find

---

110. Reinhold Niebuhr "Political Action and Social Change" The World Tomorrow (Dec. 1929) p. 493.

111. Ibid. p. 493.

112. Ibid. p. 493.

himself a candidate of the Socialist Party in the 1930 election. Maurice J. Godboom then an active member of the Socialist Party tells us that Niebuhr did run in 1930, but he was an unwilling candidate in some ways. Apparently, while Niebuhr was in Europe the Socialist Party filed a designating petition for him and Niebuhr did not send in his declination until after the legal deadline. The climax of the story during the primaries was that a group at Union Theological Seminary organised the voters to vote for Niebuhr in the primaries, and Niebuhr was therefore nominated against his will. This was also counter to the wishes of the trustees of Union Theological Seminary.<sup>113</sup>

In 1930 Niebuhr made a trip to the Soviet Union which was an indication of his increasing involvement with Marxism. Niebuhr was one of a group of United States' churchmen who traveled to Russia to study the new society. Out of this trip came five articles for the Christian Century. Niebuhr was struck by the enthusiasm among the people of Russia about the accomplishments of the revolution. Niebuhr felt that the great pride of the people in their accomplishments would carry the revolution through the years during which the leaders must ask for the sacrifice of private consumption in the interest of the industrial advancement of the whole nation. The sense of national pride that Niebuhr found in Russia was an exciting experience since he was accustomed to the rampant individualism and the selfishness of the capitalistic world. Niebuhr concluded that the reasons for the sacrifices by the Russians was to be found in man's perennial need for religious faith. The Russian people were finding a pur-

---

pose in life in what can only be called a religious experience in their constructive experiment which constituted a positive religious gain as opposed to the religious nourishment that they had failed to receive from their churches. However, Niebuhr was not entirely optimistic about Russian society; he foresaw that the Russian people might become so swollen with pride over their accomplishments that they would not admit their dependence on the eternal. Niebuhr feared like Spengler that under the influence of years of hard discipline and autocratic authority the people would become like the machines that they worshipped. Niebuhr feared that the hearts of the Russian people would become hardened by their own self-sufficiency.<sup>114</sup>

Another indication of Niebuhr's growing involvement with the Socialist philosophy was his connection with the Fellowship of Socialist Christians. The F.S.C. was founded in late 1930 at which time Niebuhr became a member and in fact a dominant member. This group was devoted to the ideal of the socialist translation of Christian principles and had definite links with the Socialist Party. The appearance of the Fellowship marked the beginning of a Protestant social realism that was self-consciously opposed to liberalism. Donald B. Meyer submits that Niebuhr was a leading figure in the Fellowship with its two fronts - political and religious.<sup>115</sup>

The increasing interest in the evils of economic self-interest by Niebuhr is apparent in the article "The Preaching of Repentance". Niebuhr pointed out that there are "comparatively few

114. Merkley op. cit. pp. 195-199.

115. PSPR pp. 177-178.

laymen in the churches who have ever been led to understand to how large a degree their religious and political opinions are merely rationalizations of their economic interests."<sup>116</sup> In the area of economic interest Niebuhr spoke in somewhat the same way as had Weber and Marx. Weber recognised that ideas were affected by political and economic interests,<sup>117</sup> and connected economic interest with religious interest. In Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Weber stated that: "the actions or ideas which are religiously or 'magically' motivated are by no means to be separated from the round of everyday, purposeful activity, especially since the purposes of those actions and ideas are themselves predominantly economic."<sup>118</sup>

In another article Niebuhr again referred to several Weberian ideas that bore a close resemblance to the ideas of Marx. Niebuhr realised that there was a need for power when rebelling against arbitrary and unrestricted power. In "Is Stewardship Ethical?" Niebuhr stated that "The student of history is forced to draw his conclusions in terms which come perilously near to the assumptions of economic determinism. He will, if he is wise, escape the moral enervation of complete determinism as being inconsistent with the facts."<sup>119</sup> Niebuhr as had Marx recognised the importance of economic self-interest as an aid in understanding history, but as did Weber refused to admit that economic self-

116. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Preaching of Repentance" The Christian Century (June 18, 1930) p. 780.

117. Bendix op. cit. p. 46.

118. Ibid. p. 93.

119. Reinhold Niebuhr "Is Stewardship Ethical?" The Christian Century (April 30, 1930) p. 557, hereafter cited as ISE.

interest was the reason behind all historical events. Niebuhr wanted people to recognise that economic self-interest was a very important factor in ethical freedom. Niebuhr, however, when asked to choose between depending upon economic determinism and not depending upon economic determinism for ethical judgements preferred to err toward the use of economic determinism as a basis for his judgements.<sup>121</sup> Niebuhr like both Marx and Weber saw a connection between human behavior and economic interest, and the need for the use of economic force, which again is a step away from the absolute pacifistic position. A summary of Niebuhr's position at this juncture is that:

Without using economic force in the form of the strike or the threat, and political force through the creation of a political party which protects the interests of the less privileged members of an industrial community, there is no possibility of equalizing the privilege and destroying the arbitrary power.<sup>122</sup>

Niebuhr in his editorial "Europe's Religious Pessimism" dealt with the question of optimism as opposed to pessimism. Niebuhr came to the conclusion that "As between religious pessimism and religious optimism, I suppose pessimism is more dangerous."<sup>123</sup> Niebuhr like James recognised the dangers of both extremes. James rejected pessimism as well as optimism for the middle ground of "meliorism",<sup>124</sup> while Niebuhr had begun to appreciate the realism of the pessimistic position. Niebuhr

120. Anthony Giddens Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber (London 1971) p.195.

121. ISE p. 557.

122. ISE p. 556.

123. Reinhold Niebuhr "Europe's Religious Pessimism" The Christian Century (Aug. 27, 1930) p. 1033, hereafter cited as ERP.

124. William James Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking (New York 1946) p. 285, hereafter cited as PWN.

underlined this preference in his evaluation that "while pessimism is more dangerous than optimism it is also in many respects more realistic and more spiritual."<sup>125</sup>

Other writings that offer information as to Niebuhr's philosophical sources are the five editorials that Niebuhr wrote for the Christian Century during his visit to Russia. These articles are an exceedingly revealing source of information as to Niebuhr's crystallising theology and thought. They are also instructive both in pointing to Niebuhr's deepening commitment to Marxist thought and his continuing interest in the ideas of William James.

The first editorial of interest is entitled "The Church in Russia", in which we find James' idea of the "will-to-believe" reappearing:

Nothing not even a more adequate church, would save modern Russia from irreligion. The new Russia is bent upon industrialization and has thrown all of its spiritual resources with such abandon into this task that it cannot possibly be alive to those aspects of life which transcend every historic situation and even the most urgent immediate problems. Some time it will again realise that when man has solved his immediate problem he confronts the more ultimate problems of human life itself and its relation to the mysteries of the universe... That is why religion is the possession of the poor who are not interested in the problem of physical well being and of the well-to-do who have solved it. That is why religion is at once a precious and a perilous escape from the immediate to the ultimate.<sup>126</sup>

Niebuhr like James before him considered the will-to-believe to be an irreducible element in a man's makeup. James held that after the intellect had investigated all that it can of the world there still remains a brute and baffling fact to man's reason. If reason cannot be satisfied then at least it can be silenced by representing the world in a way that satisfies itself. James.

---

125. ENP p. 1033.

126. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Church in Russia" The Christian Century (Sept. 24, 1930) p. 1145.

considered belief to be necessary because with the abstinence from belief there is the loss of the chance of finding truth, or its equivalent, which is disbelief. Disbelief is not proved by sensible facts as is belief which is positive and fruitful. James understood that belief was dictated by the preferences of our practical nature.<sup>127</sup> Niebuhr also held that the will-to-believe to be a part of man's nature, and also understood belief to be aimed at the practical problems of the world which were more important because of the presence of poverty. Niebuhr as in the case of Russia and as James before him considered faith to be an integral part of society. James had stated:

A social organism of any sort whatever, large or small, is what it is because each member will simultaneously do theirs. Wherever a desired result is achieved by the cooperation of many independent persons, its existence as a fact is a pure consequence of the precursive faith in one another of those immediately concerned... There are then cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming.<sup>128</sup>

James and Niebuhr both recognised that the will-to-believe was an irreducible fact of man's nature and that this will-to-believe can be applied to the ultimate or to the world. Niebuhr differentiated slightly from James by making this an either/or statement while James considered both to exist, but James did not say that one or the other must exist.

Another interesting aspect of this editorial, which is an example of what will become more and more obvious as Niebuhr comes closer to Marxism, was his criticism of the liberal church using the weapons given to him by Marx. In the editorial "The

127. Perry op. cit. V. II pp. 209-211.

128. FFM pp. 55-56.

Church in Russia" there is an early example of this tendency. Niebuhr stated that "After all the liberal church of America is intimately related to economic reaction as was the Russian church to tsarist oppression." Niebuhr utilized the Marxist concept that the church was an instrument of economic repression.

In the article "Russia Makes the Machine a God" Niebuhr again underlined his belief that "the will to believe is an irreducible part of the human character." Niebuhr went even further and made the statement that "A nation needs a religion..." elaborating upon this theme he asserted that "Russia's new religion is industrialization." Niebuhr noted that the new religion of Russia was as vital and unquestioning as all new religions.<sup>129</sup> As one would expect Niebuhr turned to philosophical sources such as Weber and Marx both of whom had foreseen mature capitalism as being the situation in which religion will be replaced by social organisations in which technological rationality reigns supreme.<sup>130</sup> Another statement of interest that calls to mind yet another philosophical source is Niebuhr's fear of a machine oriented culture which resembles Spengler's fear of a machine oriented Faustian culture: "on the whole, I see little difference between the American and the Russian naive enthusiasm for the machine."<sup>131</sup> One can hear the lingering echo of Spengler's warning about the dangers of the machine, and the blindness of Western man toward the dangers of enslavement by the machine.<sup>132</sup>

---

129. Reinhold Niebuhr "Russia Makes the Machine Its God" The Christian Century (Sept. 10, 1930) p. 1081, hereafter cited as RMM.

130. Giddens op. cit. p. 215.

131. RMM p. 1081.

132. DW v. II pp. 504-505.



In the editorial "The Land of Extremes" Niebuhr noted the extremes that were present in the Russian character as had Spengler. Spengler commented on the extreme metaphysical speculation in Russia and asserted that the Russians saw all "things with an eye of faith even when the ostensible topic is franchise, chemistry or women's education...<sup>133</sup> Spengler as did Niebuhr commented on the resistance of Russia to industrialization in the last century. Niebuhr remarked that Russian:

mysticism is more other worldly and its irreligion more consistent, in former days its contrast between poverty and wealth was more vivid and its present insistence that the contrast be eliminated is more undeviating, its resistance to industrialism was more stubborn in the last century and its acceptance of it in this century is more unqualified than anything known in the western world.<sup>134</sup>

Niebuhr unlike Spengler classified Russia with the rest of the Faustian world, but essentially made the same observations about Russia as Spengler had made.

One sees the continuing Jamesian undercurrent in Niebuhr's thought when he, as had James, admitted that he feared extremism and critically observed that "Here a ruthless logic presses toward the destruction of all values which stands at the center of communist devotion."<sup>135</sup> This is not to say that Niebuhr disapproved of the Russian "experiment" and its sources Marxism and the Russian spirit. Niebuhr, however, revealed his mixed feelings about the Russian system in the concluding sentence: "Russia's all or nothing principle can be a principle from which great creative movements have sprung but the same principle is also a

133. DW v. II p. 194.

134. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Land of Extremes" The Christian Century (Oct. 15, 1930) p. 1241, hereafter cited as LE.

135. LE p. 1242.

source of every kind of fanaticism."<sup>136</sup>

In the article "Mechanical Man in a Mechanical Age" Niebuhr again profited from Spengler's idea of the coming decline of civilization which had always fascinated him. Niebuhr called for the recapture of the wholeness of life and a return to the organic relation of man to his fellow man and to the world. Niebuhr agreed with Spengler's assumption that civilization paid "for the achievements of its ripened intellect by the enervation of its vital capacities."<sup>137</sup>

In the article "Awkward Imperialists" the sources of Niebuhr's conceptions can be traced by an analysis of the way he handled the phenomena of imperialism. Niebuhr in his analysis of American imperialism and its causes turned to Weber and Tawney. Niebuhr stated: "Perhaps Weber and Tawney are right even our religion contributed to our prosperity." Niebuhr used this as a working hypothesis from which he concluded that: "In America a puritan religion, unhampered by classical or mediaeval contempt for the man of toil and glorification of the man of leisure could add moral self-respect to the more obvious incentives of commercial and industrial energy."<sup>138</sup> Niebuhr then continued his search for the reasons behind American imperialism by contrasting the ideas of Count Keyserling with those of Oswald Spengler. Niebuhr put forward the idea of Count Keyserling that: "America obeyed the impulse of youth for the attainment of the obvious ends and the completion

136. LE p. 1243.

137. Reinhold Niebuhr "Mechanical Men in a Mechanical Age" The World Tomorrow (Dec. 1930) p. 495.

138. Reinhold Niebuhr "Awkward Imperialists" Atlantic Monthly (May 1930) p. 672.

of the concrete task."<sup>139</sup> Niebuhr contrasted this presupposition with that of Spengler that Americans were really old Europeans rather than youthful Americans, who had certainly turned to extensive activities because its culture was dead, and it certainly surpassed every nation in industrial efficiency and commercial strength.<sup>140</sup>

In 1930 Niebuhr relied heavily upon and referred to three specific areas of philosophical insight, which were James' realism, Spengler's cultural analysis and Weber's economic analysis.

In 1930 Niebuhr gave the Forbes Lectures at the New York School of Social Work, which were published in 1932 as The Contribution of Religion to Social Work. Niebuhr wrote in the preface that the lectures had been printed "substantially" as delivered.<sup>141</sup> There is little doubt during which period of Niebuhr's career this was written when one examines the philosophical influences that are present. The philosophical influences did not include Marx, but did include Max Weber, Oswald Spengler and William James.

The first philosophical source of ideas to be referred to in The Contribution of Religion to Social Work is not surprisingly Spengler. "Oswald Spengler has made a convincing analysis of the decadence of culture and morals which inevitably results from the impersonal relationships of urban life, producing foot-loose and root-less individuals who fall into chaos because they are not integrally related to any great tradition."<sup>142</sup> Niebuhr made use

139. Ibid. p. 672.

140. Ibid. p. 672.

141. Reinhold Niebuhr The Contribution of Religion to Social Work (New York, 1932) p. v, hereafter cited as CRSW.

142. CRSW p. 37.

of Spengler's work to criticise the "acids of modernity" that had corroded the moral and religious traditions of civilization. Niebuhr in 1930 was still dependent on the analysis of Spengler when he confronted "modern" civilization. Niebuhr utilized Spengler's analysis to support his belief that religious conviction was needed in urban centers to decrease the chaos. There is no question that Niebuhr was dependent upon the analysis of Spengler when analyzing the many variations and subtles in civilization.

Another familiar philosophical source in The Contribution of Religion to Social Work is William James. In the chapter entitled "Religion and Maladjustment" one can clearly identify some of the continuing influences of James' ideas. Niebuhr recognised that reason was of use as did James, but was of the opinion that the need for religion came first. "But the gains are made by men of religion, in whose spirit the impulses of the flesh are fused with the impulses toward the ideal."<sup>143</sup> One can hear echoing from the above statement the same reasoning in James' statement "Our impulsive belief is here always what sets up the original body of truth, and our articulately verbalised philosophy is but its showy translation into formulas."<sup>144</sup> Niebuhr like James put religious impulse before reason and came to the conclusion that the impulse of belief was an important beginning.

Another area in which Niebuhr turned to Jamesian assumptions was in his concern with religious decay. Niebuhr quoted James' idea that "when religion has become an orthodoxy, its day of in-

143. CRSW p. 37.

144. VRE p. 58.

wardness is over; the spring is dry and the faithfully live at second hand exclusively and stone the prophets in their turn."<sup>145</sup> Niebuhr as did James abhorred the decay of religion particularly when religion became "more secondary than primary". Niebuhr made use of the idea of the dryness of religion when criticising the fact that the Catholic church insisted upon maintaining the mores which may have had "meaning in the agrarian life of an Italian village a century ago."<sup>146</sup> Niebuhr in the same vein criticised the Protestant church for "living by the standards of a Puritanism which had meaning for the middle class of two centuries ago, when they asserted their morality of thrift and continence against the luxurious habits of the rich and the vulgarities and sensualities of the poor, but which have little meaning today amidst the complexities of urban and industrial civilization."<sup>147</sup> James assumed that the traditionalism of the church was stifling to the religious impulse, Niebuhr as well recognised the danger of orthodoxy stifling the religious impulse. James as did Niebuhr after him was aware of certain dangers that were present in religion and the religious impulse. James was afraid of the fanaticism within religion as well as the traditionalism within religion, and like Niebuhr he viewed both dangers as being part of the same phenomenon. James opined that fanaticism was on the "wrong side of the religious account."<sup>148</sup> Both men

---

145. CRSW p. 59 VRE p. 337.

146. CRSW p. 59.

147. CRSW p. 59.

148. VRE pp. 342-343.

realised that the fanaticism within religion caused imbalance. Niebuhr wrote that religion "is dangerous in its life because its creative and vital impulses, impatient with the balancing force of reason may give themselves to narrow ends; or they may give themselves to high ends but pay too great a price for their achievement."<sup>149</sup> One can detect the same set of assumptions at work in James' statement about excess in religion that "excess in human facilities, means usually one-sidedness or want of balance; for it is hard to imagine an essential faculty too strong if only other faculties equally strong be there to cooperate with it in action."<sup>150</sup> James understood the need for balancing intellect and impulse; Niebuhr as well appreciated the need of balance between the extremes of religious belief; for if reason takes over then orthodoxy brings about stagnation and if religious impulse takes over then there is the danger of fanaticism. Utilizing again some of James' assumptions Niebuhr also undertook an analysis of communism and came to the conclusion that some of its faults were the faults of religion a theme to be often repeated in the coming years. Niebuhr explained the fanaticism of communism in terms of a religious phenomena and not as a political phenomena. Niebuhr wrote that communism "is fanatic", and continues by saying that "it has one goal, an equalitarian ideal for society and everything else is sacrificed for that goal". Niebuhr concluded that communism like other religions was clearly saying that "this one thing I do".<sup>151</sup>

---

149. CR3W p. 58.

150. VRE p. 340.

151. CR3W p. 60.

Niebuhr revealed the confusion that he felt during this period by agonizingly professing that this "is what ought to be said if we found one thing worth doing. But alas! it is so difficult to know if, and when we have."<sup>152</sup>

The other influence that stands out in The Contribution of Religion to Social Work is Max Weber. Niebuhr mentioned as he had before that modern business enterprise was given its sense of mission by Protestantism which was a major theme of Weber. A religious sense of mission was the thing that enabled the modern business man to get away from his feeling of inferiority that existed in the mediaeval and classical world which had helped the nascent modern business enterprise.<sup>153</sup> Weber in speaking of the difference between mediaeval and modern man declared that "It was the power of religious influence, not alone, but more than anything else, which created the differences of which we are conscious today."<sup>154</sup> Niebuhr as did Weber gave religion an important place in the motivation of man since it enhances tremendously our enthusiasm to follow our vocation.<sup>155</sup>

Another source of inspiration for Niebuhr is to be found in the work by I. Babbitt Rousseau and Romanticism. Babbitt has assumed that the religious view is superior to the Rousseauistic view since the "Rousseauist begins by walking through the world as though it were an enchanted garden, and then the inevitable clash between his ideal and the real, and he becomes morose and

---

152. CRSW p. 60.

153. CRSW p. 70.

154. PE p. 89.

155. CRSW p. 70.

embittered."<sup>156</sup> Babbitt continued by noting the tendency of over-reaction in the Rousseauist "Since men have turned out not to be indiscriminately good, he inclines to look upon them as indiscriminately bad..."<sup>157</sup> Niebuhr under the influence of this thesis reasons that "without paradox in religion" it is very difficult "to escape estimates of human nature which betray into absurdity by their consistency."<sup>158</sup>

Niebuhr in 1930 was still dependent upon James, Weber and Spengler as he had been in previous years. However, 1930 was the last year in which Niebuhr was to be involved with these men without the overshadowing influence of Karl Marx.

#### The Transition (1931)

In 1931 we find the first instance of Niebuhr's actual direct support of Marxist doctrines. This development is not surprising since there has been a pattern of deepening involvement with the Marxist philosophy for several years. Niebuhr became more and more pessimistic as the depression deepened and began to abandon all hope for liberal attempts at social reform.<sup>159</sup> One of the main problems that Niebuhr wrestled with during this time was whether or not European disasters and crises could be translated into American terms. Niebuhr saw the translation of European ideas into American terms as being impossible. Niebuhr, however, spoke of disaster and prophesied that the United States would have

156. Irving Babbitt Rousseau and Romanticism (Boston, 1919) p. 105, hereafter cited as RR.

157. RR p. 107.

158. CRSW p. 67.

159. Stone op. cit. p. 35.



only a few decades to divert itself from the crisis that was being faced in Germany, Niebuhr foresaw the large middle-class of the United States as being only possibly diverted from the crisis.<sup>160</sup>

In the middle 1920's when Niebuhr made a trip to Europe, he had come to the conclusion that the British Labor Party had discovered the secret of Christian politics.<sup>161</sup> Niebuhr had expected to see the demands of the British Labor Party conceded by the middle-class, but the British middle-class proved to be more resistant than Niebuhr had expected, and by 1931 the prospects of a peaceful Socialist victory seemed more remote than ever. Niebuhr, however, retained his conviction that there was an element of grace operating in British politics that was worthy of the envy of American radicals. In 1931 Niebuhr when writing from Britain remarked on the fact that the American left-wing was too hard on the British upper class. Even though the Labor Party did not have the power to bring about the workers state (August 24th the Labor cabinet collapsed); it was at least a vital Socialist Party which was a true mark of advance over America in Niebuhr's eyes. Niebuhr, however, saw British events to be an indication of the coming class struggle in America. Niebuhr's commitment to Marxism is still fairly confusing at this stage of his development in that he hoped that the forces of reason and conscience could be applied to bring about social peace in Britain,<sup>162</sup> which stands in direct variance with the Marxist idea of inevitable class struggle.

160. PSPR p. 228.

161. Merkley op. cit. p. 115.

162. Ibid. pp. 190-192.

In 1931 one can again see Niebuhr's involvement with the Marxist assumptions and the socialist forces of the times that were influencing him to an ever increasing extent. Although Niebuhr's ideas are not in complete agreement with Marx in 1931 nor ever will be, there is the first clear cut literary product of Niebuhr utilization of Marx's doctrines in an August article in the Christian Century that was entitled "Socialism and Christianity".

In "Socialism and Christianity" Niebuhr started off by noting the tremendous effect that the depression had had upon people. This quite clearly illustrates the underlying influence that the depression must have had upon Niebuhr thinking and the catalytic effect it had in bringing Niebuhr to Marx's ideas. Niebuhr hoped that the depression would have a catalytic effect on others besides himself and hoped for the "growth of a class-conscious labor movement and the expression of its political aims in terms of a collectivist social creed."<sup>163</sup> Niebuhr opined that this had happened in countries such as England and Germany and that the United States would soon follow the same path since the examples of these nations would cause the American worker to make certain discoveries about himself and come into the ranks of the socialists. Niebuhr when listing the discoveries that would change the political attitude of the American worker, revealed the depth of his involvement with Marxist concepts.<sup>164</sup>

Niebuhr in discussing the important discoveries to be made by the American worker about political life for the first time draws

163. Reinhold Niebuhr "Socialism and Christianity" Christian Century (Oct. 1931) p. 1038, hereafter cited as S&C.

164. S&C p. 1038.

upon the resources of Marxist realism in his analysis. Paul C. Merkley was of the opinion that there was nothing in the previous work of Niebuhr to prepare the reader for this turn to Marxist realism.<sup>165</sup> The coming discoveries of the American worker show quite plainly to what extent Niebuhr had begun to use Marxist thought, but the change is not as surprising as some have thought it to have been. However, Paul C. Merkley does summarize the opinion of the average reader of Niebuhr's work, during the period, and it probably was a great surprise for many.

Marx in the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" stated that: "Political power, properly so called, is merely the organised power of one class for depressing another."<sup>166</sup> Niebuhr when forecasting the first discovery of the American worker echoed this presupposition. "First they will learn how much political realities are the expression of economic class interest. They will learn that a dominant political group holds it power because it is the dominant economic group..."<sup>167</sup> Niebuhr as did Marx<sup>168</sup> before him called for the establishment of an organised power opposed to the oppressing class.<sup>169</sup> Niebuhr stated that: "The political power which an economic group has arrogated to itself can be destroyed or abridged only by setting organised power against it."<sup>170</sup> This echoed Marx's call for an organised

165. Merkley op. cit. p. 180.

166. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works in One Volume (London, 1970) p. 35, hereafter cited as SWOV.

167. S&C p. 1038.

168. SWOV p. 53.

169. S&C p. 1038.

170. Ibid.

proletariat to oppose the bourgeoisie and to consequently compel recognition of those particular interests of the workers.<sup>171</sup>

Niebuhr adhered to the Marxist axiom that "every class struggle is a political struggle."<sup>172</sup> Niebuhr understood that the political power which an economic group arrogated to itself could be destroyed by an opposing group as "the socialistic theory of class struggle."<sup>173</sup>

Another place in which Marxist thought holds a prominent place in "Christianity and Socialism" is in Niebuhr's call for the abolition of private property. This idea is a central one in Marxist thought. In the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" Marx underlined this idea as being central: "... the theory of the communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property."<sup>174</sup> Niebuhr in equally stringent terms called for the abolition of private property. "The only way in which political power in the hands of the worker can assert itself is by the continued abridgement, qualification and destruction of absolute property rights."<sup>175</sup>

Again in his discussion of the inevitability of the coming struggle and the historical process Niebuhr leaned heavily upon Marx. Marx and Engels wrote in the "Manifesto of the Communists Party" that "Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the

171. SWOV p. 43.

172. Ibid.

173. S&C p. 1038.

174. SWOV p. 47.

175. S&C p. 1038.

bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat,..."<sup>176</sup> Niebuhr had faith in Marx's timetable and predicted that: "The same historical processes which stripped the political autocrats of their power will operate relentlessly to qualify and finally destroy the economic and industrial autocrats."<sup>177</sup>

Marx called for the communal i.e. state ownership of all the means of production. Marx in fact considered the state ownership of production, i.e. public ownership, as one of the necessary actions that needed to be taken in order to remove the political character of public power. "When in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political power."<sup>178</sup>

Niebuhr reflected this doctrine in his statement that:

This is not yet socialism's 'social ownership of the means of production' but the conservatives are quite right in insisting that it points in that direction. Every extension of the claims of the general community upon the property of individuals is a development in the direction of socialism... But the obvious fact is that every industrial state is bound to move in the direction of the socialistic ideal of the progressive communal control of all significant sources of economic power.<sup>179</sup>

There were still doubts present in 1931, moreover, Niebuhr's doubts about the use of violence in the coming class struggle was still prevalent. Niebuhr was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the pacifist's position which was brought about by his increasing involvement with Marxist conclusions. Niebuhr appreciated that

176. SWOV p. 44.

177. S&C p. 1039.

178. SWOV p. 53.

179. S&C p. 1039.

the use of violence was sometimes foolish since it made the social foe more stubborn in the defense of his position. Niebuhr recognised as well that the use of non-violent coercion on the part of the "holding force" i.e. the utilization of economic power was just as unethical as the use of more violent types of coercion, on the part of the advancing group. Niebuhr in 1931 still did not approve of the use of violence and force but it is apparent that Niebuhr's ideas about pacifism have changed due to some extent to his contact with Marxist concepts. The Christian ideal of pacifism for Niebuhr had meaning in an industrial struggle only if it was "presented with a clear recognition of all the factors involved in the social struggle."<sup>180</sup>

The most striking part of "Socialism and Christianity" concerns the resolution of Niebuhr's confusion over the problem of the proper political program for the Christian church.

The more idealistic element in the Christian church does not however, find any difficulty with the ultimate aim of socialism. It sees quite clearly that the philanthropic charity is always less than the Christian ideal of life and it recognises the identity between its ideal and that of socialism.<sup>181</sup>

There can be little doubt that Niebuhr by 1931 had begun to turn to Marxist doctrine in his analysis of society.

"Socialism and Christianity" was to be but the first in a long list of articles in which Marxist ideals were employed. These articles were aimed at socially concerned Protestant laymen, and a large number of intellectuals with no church affiliation and no admitted religious concern.<sup>182</sup> Niebuhr had finally crossed that

180. S&C p. 1040.

181. S&C p. 1039.

182. Merkley op. cit. 180-181.

imaginary line into Marxism in his analysis of society which heralded the decline in influence of liberal thinkers such as Weber and Tawney.

In an earlier article "Let Churches Stop Fooling Themselves" which was published in March, 1931 Niebuhr still had serious doubts about the use of Marxist insights but one can see Niebuhr's progressive drift toward belief in the validity of some of Marx's conclusions. This article illustrates Niebuhr's involvement with Marxism in his continuing struggle with the Marxist philosophy, which was in progress before 1931 and finally ended in 1931 as already noted by Niebuhr's turn to Marxism. The intense struggle with Marxist philosophy and Niebuhr's indecision are met with in several statements in "Let Liberal Churches Stop Fooling Themselves". Niebuhr asserted that: "A pessimistic determinism may not be any closer to the facts than an optimistic determinism and the remnant of optimism with which the Marxist saves himself may also be an illusion."<sup>183</sup> Niebuhr in this article rejected the Marxist idea of paradise through catastrophe as well as the liberal idea that progress will always be present. "The dogma is that the world is gradually growing better and that the inevitability of gradualness guarantees our salvation."<sup>184</sup> Nevertheless, Niebuhr was in the process of evaluating Marxist presuppositions but was still undecided. Niebuhr took a very characteristic stand which is reminiscent of William James when he stated that: "The fact is that both pessimistic and optimistic determinism are dangerous to the moral

---

183. Reinhold Niebuhr "Let Liberal Churches Stop Fooling Themselves" Christian Century (March 1931) p. 403, hereafter cited as LLC.

184. LLC p. 402.

life."<sup>185</sup> As did James, Niebuhr again opted for the melioristic solution of putting your faith in neither extreme, but in progress and the center.

Niebuhr in "Let Liberal Churches Stop Fooling Themselves" seems to have listened seriously to some of the criticisms of Irving Babbitt about Rousseauism: Babbitt pointed out that:

The assertion of man's natural goodness is plainly something very fundamental in Rousseau, but there is something still more fundamental, and that is the shifting of dualism itself, the virtual denial of a struggle between good and evil in the breast of the individual. That deep inner cleft in man's being on which religion has always put so much emphasis is not genuine. Only gets away from an artificial society and back to nature and the inner conflict which is a part of the artificiality will give way to beauty and harmony. In a passage in his 'Supplement au Voyage de Bougainville', Diderot puts the underlying thesis of the new morality almost more clearly than Rousseau: 'Do you wish to know in brief the tale of almost all our woe? There once existed a natural man; there has been introduced within this man an artificial man and there has arisen in the 'cave a civil war which lasts throughout our life.'<sup>186</sup>

Babbitt in his study of this idea called to Niebuhr's attention the dangers because "The denial of reality of the 'civil war in the cave' involves an entire transformation of the conscience. The conscience ceases to be a power that sits in judgement on the ordinary self and inhibits its impulses."<sup>187</sup> Babbitt also declared that the Rousseauist believed that: "Since men have turned out not to be indiscriminately good he inclines to look upon them as indiscriminately bad and to portray them as such."<sup>188</sup> Niebuhr considered this line of criticism to be valid and followed the same line of reasoning: "Man is neither totally depraved nor naturally virtuous." Niebuhr recognised that mankind was neither

185. LLC p. 403. .

186. RR p. 130.

187. RR p. 130-1.

188. RR p. 105. .



good not bad unlike the romanticist. Niebuhr criticised them in the same way as did Babbitt. Niebuhr asserted that the romanticism of the liberal church revealed itself not only in its view of history, but also by its estimate of man. The liberal church held for the most part to the Rousseauistic view of human virtue. Niebuhr criticised the Rousseauistic idea of virtue by pointing out that: "The result is that it fails to understand the diabolical aspects which are revealed when selfishness and greed of individuals are expounded..."<sup>189</sup> Niebuhr and Babbitt both understood the danger of denying the "civil war in the cave" as valid or the continuing struggle between good and evil. This again illustrates that Niebuhr turned to Marx and also to other thinkers such as Babbitt in order to strengthen his criticism of the liberal church.

One can recognise Niebuhr's steady advance down the path toward his involvement with Marxism in the article "The Religion of Communism". The article was a complete review of Marxism's religious aspects that had fascinated Niebuhr for a number of years and contained a few of Niebuhr's doubts about Marxism some of which he would never abandon. The article was written for the Atlantic Monthly and appeared in the April 1931 issue. The theme of the religious aspects of Marxism was to be a continuing theme for Niebuhr.

Niebuhr first defined religion in "The Religion of Communism" as "devotion to a cause which goes beyond the warrant of pure rationality, and in maximum terms it is the confidence that the success of the cause and of the values associated with it is guaranteed by the character of the universe itself."<sup>190</sup> It is

189. LLC p. 403.

190. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Religion of Communism" Atlantic Monthly (April 1931) p. 462, hereafter cited as RC.

easily apparent that for Niebuhr Marxism fell into the classification of being within the minimum terms of religion; in fact Niebuhr felt that communism went beyond the limit. The degree of ardor shown by the communists for their doctrines clearly indicated for Niebuhr the amount of religious fanaticism that dwelt in the communist camp. Niebuhr concluded that it would be impossible for any scientific idea to so rapidly spread throughout the world without containing a great degree of fanaticism.

Niebuhr next opined that the faith of the communist was more realistic than the faith of the enlightenment i.e. the faith in the ongoing progress of man; this opinion would appear again, and it was one area in which Niebuhr's Marxist sympathies had already emerged. The enlightenment fostered the liberal belief in progress which was believed to be an automatic process. Niebuhr was in agreement with the Marxist school of thought which was less optimistic about the automatic coming of progress. Niebuhr, however, clearly recognised the utopian tendencies of communism at this stage of his involvement with Marxist thought. "It (Marxism) has utopian tendencies as certainly as had the eighteenth century, but it is catastrophic and apocalyptic rather than evolutionary in its view of history." Niebuhr continued by observing that: "Far from believing that history is proceeding automatically toward the millenium, it (Marxism) holds that history is drifting toward disaster. Its saving faith is that somehow the new world will spring out of the disaster."<sup>191</sup>

A combination of pessimism and optimism in the view of Niebuhr is a powerful incentive to social action. Niebuhr applied

---

191. RC p. 463.

this criteria to Marxism and concluded that Marxism adhered to this principle, i.e. combining optimism and pessimism to the best advantage:

Its potency derives from its combination of optimistic and pessimistic determinism. Pure optimism enervates action because it makes what is desirable inevitable and thereby it destroys the inclination to support hope by action. Pure pessimism is equally destructive of moral vigor because men find it difficult to sacrifice themselves for goals which seem impossible achievements. A world view which is at the same time pessimistic and optimistic is alone pregnant with moral incentive. Its pessimism lifts the individual above the processes of history so that he may judge contemporary facts in the light of his ideal, while its optimism saves him from enervating despair by promising that somehow victory will be snatched out of defeat.<sup>192</sup>

Niebuhr had commented that "Ethically communism holds at least one characteristic in common with all religions: it tries to oversimplify morals".<sup>193</sup> Niebuhr used communistic doctrine and Christian doctrine to critically analyse each other. Niebuhr appreciated the simplicity of their ethics. Where Christianity made love the absolute good; communism made the absolute good loyalty to the working class. Niebuhr compared the opposing schools of belief by pointing out that in the world of conflict the Christian is less brutal, but the Christian is less willing to change the inequalities of power than the communist.

Niebuhr next explored using other religions as a model the form of religion that communism assumed. Communism for Niebuhr had some of the same difficulties that other religions had encountered which came from having a few simple certainties. A faith which was born in feeling must seek the security of dogma which was exactly what had happened to communism. The communist

192. RC p. 463.

193. RC p. 465.

for Niebuhr had their own creed and church. The Bible was Marx and the writings of Lenin were the dogma like those of Aquinas. Communism underlined its religious aspects by its quick handling of heretics. Niebuhr admitted that many observers were not willing to regard communism as a religion, because communism missed one of the most basic characteristics of religion and that is the belief in a supreme being or higher power. It is this type of faith that historic materialism disavows, i.e. a faith in a higher power that is interested in the course of and process of man's history. Niebuhr questioned the seriousness of this disavowal by the communists. Niebuhr proposed that:

Marxian thought rests upon an inversion of Hegelian philosophy in which economic circumstances is substituted for the eternal idea as the determining factor in history. But confidence in the unflinching potency of the dialectic of history is so great that it may be said to rest upon a metaphysical and therefore upon a religious world view, not upon the conclusions of an historical science.<sup>194</sup>

Niebuhr concluded from his study of the religion of communism that the faith of the communist is real. Ostensibly communism believed that the pretensions of metaphysics do not pertain to the Marxist ideal. Nevertheless, in reality Marxist ideas have a confidence in the ultimate triumph of the proletariat which demonstrates that it is not only supported by a scientific analysis of history, but also backed by a mystical set of beliefs. Niebuhr realised that communism would never ascribe a personal character to the cosmic reality, because it was not sufficiently concerned with the individual personality to relate an individual believer to God. Niebuhr concluded that "communism can therefore never be a religion of individuals, but only of groups and

classes who are so busy with a social or historic task that they have not had time or inclination to feel the problem of life itself profoundly."<sup>195</sup> Niebuhr is obviously at this stage convinced of the power of communist beliefs and the strength of the Marxist ideals.

1931 was the year in which Niebuhr finally crossed that imaginary line into the Marxist camp. Niebuhr, however, did not do so in the one article "Socialism and Christianity" but throughout several years, and particularly in 1931. Niebuhr's intensifying interest in Marxism is apparent in several early articles in 1931 and not just in the later part of 1931. By reviewing some of the early articles of 1931 one realises that Niebuhr's turn to Marxism was imminent.

#### The Dominance of Marx (1932)

The year of 1932 was an extremely important year in the development of the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr. The year 1932 is considered by many to be the year in which Niebuhr turned to the ideas of Marxism. Donald B. Meyer is of the opinion that 1932 saw the "leap out of the utilitarian middle, where religion and politics were synthesized in social morality, into the dialectic, where religion and politics criticised each other." Meyer has determined that this was the point at which Niebuhr stopped and remained stationary, increasingly critical of the true believers on the communist and revolutionary left.<sup>196</sup> There is little question that this was a crucial year in the formulation of the theology of Niebuhr and a year of intense interest in the

---

195. RC p. 469.

196. PSPR p. 268.

ideas and doctrines of Marxism, however it was not the first year of intense Marxist involvement.

In 1932 the Socialist Party nominated Norman Thomas as a candidate for the Presidency. Niebuhr supported the 1932 candidacy of Norman Thomas<sup>197</sup> and was active in the Socialist Party during the campaign. Niebuhr was very energetic in the political battles of 1932, contesting with the liberals and bemoaning the lack of difference between the two major parties in the election. When Roosevelt was elected Niebuhr forecasted the imminent death of capitalism; he was of the opinion that Roosevelt was the tool of established interests and just a little shadier than most of the candidates.<sup>198</sup> Niebuhr had vigorously supported the Socialist ticket in 1932 and Norman Thomas recalled that Niebuhr during this election was an active socialist as well as being active in the Socialist Party.<sup>199</sup>

John C. Bennett a colleague of Niebuhr at Union Theological Seminary is convinced that Niebuhr's break with pacifism began in 1932. This break came according to Bennett as a result of the question of political coercion in the class struggle rather than the issue of international war. Bennett like others estimates that 1932 was the year in which Niebuhr labored under the strongest Marxist influence.<sup>200</sup> With this rejection of pacifism one can detect the formulation of a nascent pragmatic ethic.<sup>201</sup> There

197. CC p. 163.

198. Merkley op. cit. pp. 202-203.

199. Ibid. pp. 205-206.

200. John C. Bennett "Reinhold Niebuhr's Social Ethics" R&B p. 65.

201. Good op. cit. p. 75.

were some changes in emphasis in Niebuhr's pacifistic stance and as already noted he had doubts about non-violent coercion. Moreover, the first full statement of Niebuhr's criticism of the pacifist's position was published in 1932 in Moral Man and Immoral Society a book that marked the beginning of a great number of changes.

Bennett also considered 1932 as important because for the first time we find Niebuhr writing critically of Walter Rauschenbusch and the "social-Gospel". This went hand-in-hand with Niebuhr's rejection of liberal tenets and emphasised his complete rejection of the whole fabric of liberalism.<sup>202</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. has concluded as well that Moral Man and Immoral Society was a notification by Niebuhr of his rejection of the "social-Gospel-Dewey" amalgam. Niebuhr rejected the presupposition of the social-Gospelers that the law of love could achieve social perfection. Niebuhr also rejected Dewey's followers concept that expertwisdom would bring about impartial wisdom.<sup>203</sup>

The year 1932 as already mentioned was the year in which the publication of Moral Man and Immoral Society took place. A work whose title could have more accurately been expressed as 'immoral man and even more immoral society'. This book propelled Niebuhr into the public eye and initiated his career as a public figure.<sup>204</sup> An example of this is that the New York Times had discovered Niebuhr's newsworthiness when Moral Man and Immoral Society had

202. Bennett op. cit. p. 63.

203. Schlesinger op. cit. p. 134.

204. CC p. 161.

caused a decided disturbance at many seminaries.<sup>205</sup> This book is of interest not only because of its change in stance but its unexpectedness. The book itself caused a great deal of general critical acclaim. This was also the year in which Contribution of Religion to Social Work was published even though it had been written two years before.<sup>206</sup>

Niebuhr showed himself to be free of a dogmatic approach to Marxism and the accompanying religious like belief in the article "Germany - A Prophecy of Western Civilization". Although in the past Niebuhr had made known his commitment to Marxism he demonstrated in this article that it was not uncritical commitment. Niebuhr searched for the reasons behind Marxism's failures. Niebuhr used the events in Germany as the basis for his analysis and discovered several reasons for Marxism's failure. The first error of the Marxist doctrine was its inability to correctly envisage the power and stability of the middle-class in Germany. The second cause behind Marxism's failure was the proletariat's lack of unification; it was divided into the socialist camp and the communist camp. Niebuhr offered as the third reason that: "certain cultural and historical forces maintain a more stubborn influence against economic factors than a purely economic interpretation of history allows for";<sup>207</sup> which calls forth Weber's analysis of the economic interpretation of history. Niebuhr held the opinion that the Marxist prophecy was "invalidated" by particular factors present in Germany. Niebuhr realised that the prophecy of Marx "has achieved a degree, but only a slight degree, of verification in the history of industrial nations in past

---

206. CC p. 161.

207. Reinhold Niebuhr "Germany - A Prophecy of Western Civilization" The Christian Century (March 2, 1932) p. 287, hereafter cited as GPWC.



decades, and its limitations are most clearly revealed in contemporary German political life."<sup>208</sup> Niebuhr was well aware of the fact that Marxist prophecy had been only successful in a limited way.

Not only is Niebuhr aware of the failure of Marxism in predicting the future; he also realised that revolution in Marxist terms is more difficult than the Marxist realised. Niebuhr continued to use the example of Germany and its situation as the basis for answering the question: "Why not a revolution?"<sup>209</sup> Niebuhr is completely cognizant of the difference between the agrarian revolution in Russia and a revolution in an industrial economy. Niebuhr pointed out the two different factors that dampen the "revolutionary ardor of the proletarian parties in industrial civilizations, such as the Socialist Party in Germany..."<sup>210</sup> The first consideration is given to the fact that revolution in a predominantly urban world is divorced from the soil and those whose "subsistence depends upon the intricacies of commerce and industry"<sup>211</sup> are imperilled by dislocation, more than the agrarian world. The second factor is that "no single class is sufficiently powerful or united to gain an easy or a rapid triumph over the other classes in the event of a revolutionary effort."<sup>212</sup>

Although the year of 1932 is considered by many as the year

---

208. GPWC p. 287.

209. GPWC p. 288.

210. GPWC p. 288.

211. GPWC p. 288.

212. GPWC p. 288.

of Niebuhr's 'conversion' to Marxism; he did not abandon the philosophers that he had used in earlier years. In the article "Perils of American Power" Niebuhr revealed his continuing involvement with the thought of Spengler. Spengler in the Decline of the West had advanced the idea that "culture" becomes "civilization". Spengler stated that "the culture suddenly hardens, it mortifies, its blood congeals, its force breaks down, and it becomes Civilization (Spengler's italics)".<sup>213</sup> Spengler postulated "Culture against Civilization". Niebuhr in this article was curious about America's apparent willingness to loose its soul. Niebuhr turned to Spengler for an explanation and advanced the theory that "perhaps this was due to the fact, as Spengler suggests, that culture and civilization are incompatible with each other, and that vast immigrant hordes who came to our shores dissipated their cultural inheritances to such a degree that they could give themselves to the extensive tasks of civilization with complete and fervent devotion."<sup>215</sup> Niebuhr not only used Spengler's idea of "Culture against Civilization" to make judgements about American society, but had also found Spengler's concepts helpful when formulating similar conclusions about Russia; he went further and saw the countries of the United States and the Soviet Union to be headed in the same direction.<sup>216</sup>

Niebuhr partook of the Marxist tools of analysis for his study of and conclusions about the social and political situation.

213. DW v. II p. 106.

214. DW v. II p. 252.

215. Reinhold Niebuhr "Perils of American Power" Atlantic Monthly (Jan. 1932) p. 90, hereafter cited as PA.

216. PA p. 90.

An excellent example of Niebuhr's employment of Marxism was in his analysis of the situation in Pineville, Kentucky, the site of strikes by coal miners in the article "Religion and the Class War in Kentucky". Niebuhr was of the opinion that there were visible signs of a class war in Pineville with "the poor mining community arrayed against the middle class community and as always in wartime charges of brutalities and atrocities on both sides."<sup>217</sup> Not only did Niebuhr utilize the Marxist idea of class antagonism, but took into account as well the hope of a proletarian victory with the church at the front of the fight.<sup>218</sup>

Niebuhr increasingly turned to the assumptions of Marx to criticize the ideas of perfectionism. Niebuhr's discussion of the impossibility of a society of pure love contained undercurrents of Marxist thought:

I do not see how a revolution in which the disinherited express their anger and resentment, and assert their interests, can be an instrument of God, and yet at the same time an instrument which religious scruples forbid a man to use. I should think that it would be better to come to ethical terms with the forces of nature in history and try to use ethically directed coercion in order that violence may be avoided.<sup>219</sup>

Niebuhr had given up a good many of his pacifistic ideas by the time that he wrote the above. In the same article Niebuhr, when commenting on the Japanese, called for the use of coercion to 'frustrate' Japan's designs. Niebuhr admitted that the ethical perfectionism of his brother Richard Niebuhr was "closer

217: Reinhold Niebuhr "Religion and Class War in Kentucky" The Christian Century (May 18, 1932) p. 637, hereafter cited as RWK.

218. RWK p. 637.

219. Reinhold Niebuhr "Must We Do Nothing?" The Christian Century (March 30, 1932) p. 416, hereafter cited as MWDN.

to the gospel" than his position, but he asserted in his own defense that: "As long as the world of man remains a place where nature and God, the real and the ideal meet, human progress will depend upon the judicious use of the forces of nature in the service of the ideal."<sup>220</sup> Niebuhr admitted that there was a need for the absolute in history; "man cannot live without a sense of the absolute, but neither can he achieve the absolute."<sup>221</sup> The absolute for William James had concrete value in that it brought about accomplishments by the existence of a belief in it. James as did Niebuhr considered the concept of the absolute as significant for the simple reason that it had been productive, but neither gave complete allegiance to this reasoning.<sup>222</sup> Both men approached the idea of the absolute in pragmatic terms. There were a number of differences between Niebuhr's approach and the approach of James, e.g. Niebuhr would have taken exception to the idea that one of the positive functions of the absolute is the possibility of a moral holiday for the believer.<sup>223</sup> However, Niebuhr did favor the method that James suggested for "settling metaphysical disputes" by "tracing its respective practical consequences", which again picks up the thread of Jamesian influence.

In the essay by Niebuhr "The Ethic of Jesus and the Social Problem", he clearly rejected what Schlesinger calls the "social-Gospel-Dewey" amalgam. Niebuhr rejected the perfectionist ideas

220. MWDN p. 417.

221. Ibid.

222. PNN p. 282.

223. PNN pp. 72-73.

of Rauschenbusch. "Valuable as this kind of perfectionism is (speaking of Rauschenbusch's concepts), it certainly offers no basis for a social ethic which deals responsibility with a growing society."<sup>225</sup> Niebuhr offered the opinion that the "struggle for social justice in the present economic order involves the assertion of rights, the rights of the disinherited and the use of coercion."<sup>226</sup> Niebuhr realised that the idea of "class struggle" is incompatible with the Gospel and could not be justified in terms of the Gospel. Niebuhr justified the idea of "class struggle" a Marxist axiom with a method reminiscent of James. "We must justify ourselves by consideration of the social situation which we face and the human resources which are available for its solution."<sup>227</sup> Niebuhr applied the concept of moral man and immoral society in his statement about the idea of "class struggle": "Whatever may be possible for individuals we see no possibility of a group voluntarily divesting itself of its special privileges in society."<sup>228</sup> Niebuhr was becoming convinced that there was to be a tragic result to the coming class struggle, when discussing the goal of equal justice by gradual process: "The inequalities of the social order, always increasing through natural process are bound to grow until an outraged sense of justice will produce a violent revolt."<sup>229</sup> Niebuhr rejected the idea of Dewey that was set forth in Human Nature and Conduct that education would solve the problem of self-interest in society, i.e. education would enable an organism to change its

225. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Ethic of Jesus and the Social Problem" Religion in Life (Spring 1932) p. 201, hereafter cited as EJ.

226. EJ p. 202.

227. Ibid.

228. Ibid.

229. EJ p. 204.

behaviour, although as recently as 1929 Niebuhr had called for the use of education to solve social problems. Niebuhr rejected religious perfectionism, as the solution to the assertion of interest on the part of the underprivileged. Niebuhr had become convinced that the ideas of Dewey and the religious perfectionist were erroneous:

In the one case it is expected that a change in educational technique will eliminate the drive of self-interest which determines economic life and in the other case there is a naive confidence in the possibility of changing human nature by religious conversion or religious inspiration. ... such hopes are corrupted by the sentimentalities of the comfortable classes and are caused by their lack of understanding of the realities of an industrial civilization.<sup>230</sup>

Niebuhr concluded this article with a choice for the reader; one that he himself had already made. "In the social struggle we are either on the side of privilege or need."<sup>231</sup>

The coming catastrophe in Marxist terms is seen in the writings of Niebuhr for the first time in 1932. Marx wrote in the "Manifesto of Communist Party" that:

the productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for the conditions by which they are fettered, and as soon as they overcome these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property.<sup>232</sup>

Niebuhr echoed these sentiments: "if centralised economic power is not brought under control progressively it will expand until resentment against its pretensions and exactions will produce a revolutionary mood which a more gradual adjustment of political

230. Ibid.

231. EJ p. 208.

232. SWOV pp. 40-41.

policy to economic necessity might be able to avoid."<sup>233</sup> Niebuhr unlike Marx thought that catastrophe could be avoided. Marx saw political power to be in the hands of one class to oppress another, and Niebuhr fully appreciated the validity of this idea, "both the workers and the general public still live under the illusion that the political state exists to arbitrate the conflict of interest between various economic groups, whereas a little observation must lead even a casual observer to the conclusion that the political state is always bent to the use of the dominant economic power,..."<sup>234</sup> In the article entitled "Catastrophe or Social Control" Niebuhr had pondered over the possibility of economic and social catastrophe and offered the hope of a gradual social change.

Another article of interest that was written by Niebuhr in 1932 that underlined his use of Marxist analysis and methods is "Moralist and Politics". Niebuhr in this article called for as did Marx and Engels the organisation of the proletariat. In "The Manifesto of the Communist Party" the outline of the program of the proletarian party was "the formation of the proletariat into a class, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie supremacy, conquest of the political power by the proletariat."<sup>235</sup> Niebuhr called for the same course of action and outlined a method for bringing this about. Niebuhr wanted the workers to "develop both economic and political power to meet the combination of political

233. Reinhold Niebuhr "Catastrophe or Social Control: The Alternatives for America" Harper's (June 1932) p. 115, hereafter cited as CSC.

234. CSC p. 116.

235. SWOV p. 46.

and economic power which confronts him."<sup>236</sup> Niebuhr estimated that the political power of the worker lay in his ability to interfere with the "economic process controlled by the dominant group." Niebuhr believed that the worker's political power had the possibility "of influencing or determining the policy of the political state."<sup>237</sup> These factors were not being applied and in Niebuhr's opinion if social power did not bring about equalization of privilege then the workers will "put their trust in violence".<sup>238</sup> The ideal of pacifism was almost completely repudiated in this article when applied to the social situation; moreover, the use of coercion in political life was utilized as a central principle by Niebuhr. Niebuhr was not in favor of violence nor advocated the use of violence, but he recognized the reality of violence. Niebuhr warned of the coming danger if human groups did not learn to minimize self-interest. Niebuhr saw the possibility of coming chaos if the modern nations did not abandon their pursuit of their own interests.<sup>239</sup> Marx considered the possibility of catastrophe to be likely and believed it likely that a violent revolution would occur,<sup>240</sup> while Niebuhr only saw the possibility of a violent revolution.

In the article "Is Peace of Justice the Goal?" Niebuhr again approached the question of Marx's criticism of religion. Marx

236. Reinhold Niebuhr "Moralists and Politics" The Christian Century (July 6, 1932) p. 858, hereafter cited as M&P.

237. M&P p. 858.

238. Ibid.

239. Ibid.

240. SNOV p. 45.



in his early writings had stated that: "the criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism."<sup>241</sup> Niebuhr revealed his agreement with the arguments of Marx: "there is a real measure of justification for this criticism of religious radicalism by the secular or, to speak in contemporary terms, the real Marxian."<sup>242</sup> Niebuhr perceived the need to criticize religion using not only religious criteria but also radical criteria.

Niebuhr attempted to identify the most disinherited group in the United States and opined that it was the Negroes. Marx recognised the dangerous class, i.e. the social scum, as being a necessary part of the revolution as did Niebuhr who feared that the Negro population could be the source of violence. Niebuhr again confronted the basic problem of justice without violence. A problem that is of no importance to Marx who believed that there was a need for the coming violent revolution by the proletariat.

Niebuhr in a letter to The Christian Century combined his Marxism with his "Christian realism". Niebuhr rejected both major political parties in this letter and the whole roster of politicians. Niebuhr controverted the presupposition of the difference between the two parties and the two candidates that they had nominated.<sup>243</sup> Niebuhr asserted that "the farmers and workers have not yet learned what they must learn in time, that

241. Karl Marx Early Writings trans. T.B. Bottomore (London 1963) p. 431, hereafter cited as EW.

242. Reinhold Niebuhr "Is Peace or Justice the Goal?" The World Tomorrow (Sept. 21, 1932) p. 275.

243. Merkley op. cit. p. 201.

both major parties are dominated by the economic interests of capital and that they will inevitably have tariff, taxation and other political policies which are detrimental to the interests of the workers and farmers."<sup>244</sup> Niebuhr saw the whole political system changed "only by a social struggle in which power is pitted against power."<sup>245</sup> This realistic and pragmatic approach contained strong undercurrents of Marxism.

The first book that Niebuhr wrote during the time that he was under the influence of Marx was Moral Man and Immoral Society which was published in 1932. One can identify Marxist influences as well as trace certain definite rejections of Marxist doctrines and ideas. In investigating the use of Marxism in Moral Man and Immoral Society it is possible to obtain a more unified picture of Niebuhr's involvement with Marxism. The area of primary interest is in the delineation of the sections of Marxism Niebuhr rejected and what portions he accepted, which also included the parts of Marxism Niebuhr remodeled for his own use.

Niebuhr underlined his Marxist inclinations in his discussion of Marxism in the chapter entitled "The Morality of Nations". Niebuhr asserted that if an oligarchy was inevitable in a technological society, which was a prophecy that is found in the work of Bertrand Russell, then Niebuhr boldly declared that if some form of oligarchy, whether capitalistic or communistic, be inevitable in a technological age, because of the inability of the general public to maintain social control over the experts who are in charge of the intricate processes of economics and politics, the communistic oligarch

---

244. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Stakes in the Election" The Christian Century (Nov. 9, 1932) p. 1380, hereafter cited as SE.

245. SE p. 1380.

would seem to be preferable in the long run to the capitalistic one.<sup>246</sup>

Niebuhr regarded the communistic oligarch as being purely political, and having no special economic interests that would tempt it to sacrifice a nation. Niebuhr in his discussion of the loyalty of individuals to the nation, again employs a Marxist assumption. Niebuhr commented that "Future developments may make the class rather than the nation the community of primary loyalty."<sup>248</sup> The importance of the difference in class as opposed to nations is seen in "the class character of national governments, which is a primary though not the only cause of their greed, present international anarchy may continue until the fear of catastrophe amends, or catastrophe itself destroys, the present social system and builds more co-operative national societies."<sup>249</sup> This statement by Niebuhr indicated that he was looking toward what can be labeled "Marxist catastrophism" as being a possible solution to the injustices of the day. Niebuhr pessimistically observed that: "There is certainly not enough intelligence to prompt our generation to a voluntary reorganization of society, unless the fear of imminent catastrophe quickens the tempo of social change."<sup>250</sup>

Niebuhr was convinced that there were certain advantages including a deeper insight into society when one applied the analysis of Marx. He quite clearly illustrated his penchant for

246. MMIS p. 90.

247. MMIS p. 90.

248. MMIS p. 91.

249. MMIS p. 111.

250. MMIS pp. 111-2.

In Fear of the Coming Catastrophe (1933) .

The year 1935 and the years leading up to the year of 1935 contain the height of Niebuhr's involvement with Marxism. The year 1933 saw the rise of Hitler which Niebuhr had feared and saw him initiate efforts to rescue the victims of Hitler's oppression.<sup>1</sup> In 1933 and 1934 Niebuhr's sense of crisis was at its sharpest; this was the period in which the fullest use of European events was applied in Niebuhr's analysis of America as well as the fullest use of Marxist analysis in juxtaposition to Niebuhr's most emphatic period of American exceptionalism.<sup>2</sup> The anguish of 1933 was emphasised by Niebuhr's preaching of the inevitability of Marxism while still favoring the eschatological expectations of Marxism.<sup>3</sup>

The year 1933 was an active year in many ways. In the fall of 1933 John C. Bennett a Congregationalist and one of the generation of younger theologians coming to maturity in the thirties expressed his discontent with liberalism in an article entitled "After Liberalism - What?" Niebuhr was not alone in his conviction that the illusions of liberalism were at the heart of the crisis of the depression. During this period the Theological Discussion Group began and met for the first time in New York City for two days of discussion and debate on pre-circulated papers. The realistic focus against liberalism was beginning in earnest which was confirmed by the appearance of

---

1. June Bingham Courage to Change an Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (New York 1961) p. 169, hereafter cited as CC.

2. Donald B. Meyer The Protestant Search for Political Realism (1919-1941) (Los Angeles 1960) p. 263, hereafter cited as PSPR.

3. PSPR p. 267.

Niebuhr not only regarded Marxism as the representative model of the views of the proletariat, but as the philosophy of the proletariat. In fact Niebuhr not only regarded Marxism as the philosophy of the international proletariat but also foresaw in Marxism the future philosophy of the American worker.

It is a fact that Marxian socialism is a true enough interpretation of what the industrial worker feels about society and history, to have become the accepted social and political philosophy of all self-conscious and politically intelligent industrial workers. Varying political and economic circumstances may qualify socialistic theory in different nations and in different epochs; but it would be impossible to deny that socialism, more or less Marxian, is the political creed of the industrial worker of Western civilization. If the American worker seems for the moment to be an exception, that fact can be explained in terms which will justify the confident prediction, that the full maturity of American capitalism will inevitably be followed by the emergence of the American Marxian proletariat.<sup>255</sup>

Niebuhr had concluded that Marxism was the philosophy of the proletariat and not just a creed that was invented by a few men. Niebuhr interpreted Marxism in a religious way and defended the religious view of Marxism:

If it should be maintained that this social philosophy and prophecy is the creed of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, rather than the faith and the hope of the proletarian worker, it need only be pointed out that, wherever social injustices rests heaviest upon the worker, wherever he is most completely disinherited, wherever the slight benefits, which political pressure has forced from the owning classes, have failed to materialise for him, he expresses himself in the creed of the unadulterated and unrevised Marx.<sup>256</sup>

In the author's preface of A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx stated:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum of these relations of production

255. MMIS p. 144.

256. MMIS p. 144.

constitutes the economic structures of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political super-structure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions and social political and intellectual life-process in general.<sup>257</sup>

Niebuhr turned to this statement of Marx, and went on to point out that healthy moral cynicism was expressed by Marx in his "materialistic and deterministic interpretation of history."<sup>258</sup>

Niebuhr was of the opinion that "the relation of social classes in society is conceived of wholly in terms of the conflict of power with power."<sup>259</sup>

Niebuhr positively evaluated the fact that the proletariat was assured by Marxist thought that they would win the class struggle because of the "increased centralisation of power in the capitalistic economy."<sup>260</sup> This classified the destruction of the power of the privileged class as an inevitable event, although the Marxist did expect a revolutionary struggle. Niebuhr undoubtedly felt that Marxism had certain valid insights that would help to envision the future.

Niebuhr in his analysis of the relationship between the intelligentsia and the proletariat turned to Lenin. Lenin stated that "the doctrine of socialism grew up out of the philosophical and historical theories that were elaborated by educated members of the propertied classes, by the intelligentsia."<sup>261</sup> Niebuhr

257. SWOV p. 181.

258. MMIS p. 145.

259. MMIS p. 146.

260. MMIS p. 146..

261. V. I. Lenin Works Vol. V. p. 141, cited in MMIS p. 148.

reasoned that this perspective "enabled Lenin to avoid many mistakes into which purer determinists fell."<sup>262</sup> Niebuhr looked upon this perspective as an interesting and helpful qualification to determinism, i.e. the addition of the "superior historical perspective of the educated man,"<sup>263</sup> to the experience of the worker. Niebuhr wholeheartedly agreed with Lenin in his approach to the association of the intelligentsia and the proletariat and in fact Niebuhr regarded the heterogeneous mass of the proletariat and the intelligentsia to be of importance for the pragmatic reason that it gave to the workers an increased advantage, because the combination of the proletariat and the intelligentsia gave them a commanding view of human history.

In connection with the attitudes of the proletariat Niebuhr commented on the moral cynicism of Marxism, particularly the agreed approach to the democratic state. Niebuhr avered that: "The true proletarian regards the democratic state as the instrument of the bourgeoisie for the oppression of the workers."<sup>264</sup> Lenin stated that: "Marx grasped this essence of capitalist democracy splendidly, when in analysing the experience of the commune, he said that the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class should represent and repress them in parliament."<sup>265</sup> Niebuhr was convinced that the ambiguous law and dictates of legislation which were in favor of the rich made the charge of Lenin

262. MMIS p. 148.

263. MMIS p. 148.

264. MMIS p. 148.

265. V. I. Lenin Selected Works in Two Volumes (London 1947) v. II p. 201.

hard to answer. Niebuhr did not toally agree with the views of Lenin, but found certain hypotheses that Lenin put forward in The State and Revolution to be instructive. In fact the observations made by Lenin may have caused Niebuhr to examine more closely the evils of nationalism and patriotism. Niebuhr identified himself with the conviction of Thomas Paine that "Society is the product of wants and government of our wickedness."<sup>266</sup> Niebuhr had become more cynical in his approach.

Niebuhr had previously made several general remarks about the religious aspects of Marxism. Niebuhr noticed "something rather imposing" about the doctrine of Marx. In fact Niebuhr had the impression that this was more than just a doctrine; but was in fact to a large extent a religious interpretation of the destiny of the proletariat. Niebuhr asserted: "In such insights as this, rather than in economics, one must discover the real significance of Marx."<sup>267</sup> Niebuhr gave credence to Marx because he placed value upon Marx's religious outlook. Marx for Niebuhr in 1932 took the "degradation of the proletarian" and made this the reason for its exaltation. Niebuhr recognised this as the application of the religious concept that the meek shall inherit the earth. Niebuhr understood the principle of Marx as one of snatching "victory out of defeat in the style of great drama and classical religion."<sup>268</sup> Niebuhr remarked that Marxism was another kind of slave revolt. Niebuhr noted that Marxism exalted the state of the lowly instead of the virtues of the lowly. There-

---

266. MMIS p. 150.

267. MMIS p. 154.

268. Ibid.



fore, it was not the meek, but the weak that would inherit the earth. Niebuhr contrasted this belief of Marxism to Christianity by pointing out that : "The Christian poor hoped that spiritual forces would ultimately endow meekness with strength, these modern poor believe that historical, 'materialistic' forces will automatically rob the strong of their strength and give it to the weak."<sup>269</sup>

Another religious influence Niebuhr hit upon was the religious overtones in the Marxist's view of equality. Engel in Anti-Duhring asserted that:

... the idea that all men, as men, have something in common and that they are therefore equal so far as these common characteristics go, is of course primeval. But the modern demand for equality is something entirely different from that; this consists rather in deducing from these common characteristics of humanity from that equality of men as men a claim to equal political and social status for all human being or at least for all citizens of a state or all members of a society.<sup>270</sup>

Niebuhr seemed to believe that Marxist equality was stated in a rigorous way because of its inherent religious overtones. Niebuhr concluded that the religious overtones in Marxist thought guaranteed that there would be no dilution of the ideal of equality. Niebuhr asserted that there was a positive value in the religious vigor that was to be found in Marxist thought.

Niebuhr regarded Marxist idealism as distinctive from other types of idealism. Niebuhr stated that "The distinctive features of the Marxian dream is that the destruction of power is regarded

269. Ibid.

270. K. Marx, F. Engels, V.I. Lenin and J. Stalin A Handbook of Marxism ed. Emile Burns (London 1935) p. 249-250, hereafter cited as Handbook.

as the prerequisite of its attainment."<sup>271</sup> Another basic pre-supposition of Marx that was essential in Niebuhr's view, and that was Marx's examination of power and his conclusion that power was the root of all evil. Niebuhr declared that: "We have seen how inevitably special privilege is associated with power, and how the ownership of the means of production is the significant power in modern society."<sup>272</sup> Niebuhr professed that the recognition of these facts about modern society were Marx's main contribution. Niebuhr continued by saying that "only the Marxian proletariat has seen this problem with perfect clarity."<sup>273</sup> Niebuhr was aware of the fact that mankind must reduce power to a minimum. Power had to stay as a part of society, but it must be put under control. Niebuhr concluded that the Marxists were essentially correct in their choice of rational goals towards which society must move. Niebuhr made the following assertion about the Marxist proletariat:

He is right not only in the projection of his social goal but in his insistence upon the urgency of its attainment. Comfortable classes may continue to dream of an automatic progress in society. They do not suffer enough from social injustice to recognise its perils to the life of society.<sup>274</sup>

The proletariat viewed the centralisation of power as destructive to the foundations of society itself. The Marxist proletariat foresaw disaster ahead for society and Niebuhr believed that these insights were essentially true. He was making use of Marxist assumptions about society and the Marxist diagnosis of

271. MMIS p. 163.

272. MMIS p. 163.

273. MMIS pp. 164-5.

274. MMIS p. 165.

society without being totally immersed in the ideology of Marxism. Niebuhr made use of the insights of Marx without letting them make use of him.

The next Marxist sphere of thought that Niebuhr dealt with in Moral Man and Immoral Society which is of interest is the idea of justice through revolution. Niebuhr avered that "the breadth and depth of the world depression have, moreover, tempted others beside proletarians to express a temper of catastrophism."<sup>275</sup> The coming violence as always for Niebuhr caused a certain amount of uneasiness particularly the connection between violence and justice; Niebuhr again finds himself confronting the choice between justice and violence:

If a season of violence can establish a just social system and can create the possibilities of its preservation, there is no purely ethical ground upon which violence and revolution can be ruled out. This could be done only upon the basis of purely anarchistic ethical and political presuppositions. Once we have made the fateful concession of ethics to politics, and accepted coercion as a necessary instrument of social cohesion, we can make no absolute distinctions between non-violent and violent types of coercion or between coercion used by governments and that which is used by revolutionaries. If such distinctions are made they must be justified in terms of the consequences in which they result. The real question is what are the political possibilities of establishing justice through violence?<sup>276</sup>

Although Niebuhr was uneasy about the use of violence, the main question had now become: why was the revolution not come about? Niebuhr was aware that a system of power, based upon the force which was inherent in property, and augmented by the political power of the state was set against the demands of the worker. Niebuhr asked himself why there was so much resistance

275. MMIS p. 169.

276. MMIS pp. 179-180.

to the revolution of the proletariat, and he identified two basic reasons for the continuing tenacity of the status quo. The first reason Niebuhr gave was "the multifarious economic and social groups... which are able to defend their positions in society by political, and if need be by more martial weapons..."<sup>277</sup> These groups which seemed to be a permanent block to the parliamentary hopes of the labor movement. The second reason that Niebuhr presented was the division of labor. Niebuhr indicated that: "Modern technology develops a class of skilled and semi-skilled laborers, who achieved a more privileged social position than the unskilled."<sup>278</sup> Another conclusion of Niebuhr was that "as soon as workers have something more to lose than their chains, as soon as they have the slightest stake in the status quo they will suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, rather than fly to evils that they know not of." Niebuhr agreed with Trotsky who quoted the words of Marat with approval: "A revolution is accomplished and sustained only by the lowest classes of society, by all the disinherited..."<sup>280</sup>

Niebuhr carried on his analysis of Marxist catastrophism by underscoring the validity of the Marxist prognosis and prophecy of periodic crises. Niebuhr avered "Whatever the errors in the prophecies of Marx, he certainly made no mistake in his prophecies of periodic crises of increasing frequency and extent in the

277. MMIS p. 184.

278. MMIS pp. 184-185.

279. MMIS p. 185.

280. MMIS p. 186.

business world."<sup>281</sup> The confidence Niebuhr placed in certain of Marx's prophecies had become considerable compared to earlier judgements. Niebuhr had concluded that the world crisis of the depression was a vindication of Marx's analysis. However, Niebuhr did not know if these crises would cause enough fear in the privileged to change them, and in fact he was of the opinion that these crises were more helpful to the cause of the Facist than to the cause of the Marxist.

Niebuhr, however, had not abandoned completely his earlier allegiance to the Socialist Party and its concepts about parliamentary socialism. Niebuhr stated:

No one would care to deny that the degree of social idealism and intelligence which prevails in any class will affect the total quality of a community's life; will increase the wholeness and honesty of economic and political relations which develop within any given equilibrium of political and economic power, and will add to the possibility of adjusting conflicts of interest without violence. But it will not guarantee an adjustment of such conflicts in entirely new terms if some new radical force and interest is not introduced into the political situation.<sup>282</sup>

Niebuhr by 1932 had begun to doubt the validity of the philosophy of parliamentary socialism.

Niebuhr made a comment at the end of the chapter entitled "Justice through Political Force" which put his ideas concerning political and revolutionary force into perspective. Niebuhr declared that:

The contrasting virtues and vices of revolutionary and evolutionary socialism are such that no purely rational moral choice is possible between them. Whatever judgements are made depend partly upon personal inclination; whether one prefers the partial preservation of traditional injustices or the risk of creating new iniquities by the attempt to abolish old ones completely. They depend partly upon the extent to which one suffers from traditional social abuses; and they are partly determined by the degree

---

281. MMIS p. 189.

282. MMIS p. 216.

of crisis in which a society finds itself.<sup>283</sup>

Niebuhr did not choose one method of bringing about social change but he had concluded that the situation itself was the final judge of the proper method. It will be shown in the next section that Niebuhr in Moral Man and Immoral Society seems to prefer revolutionary Marxism as opposed to Parliamentary Socialism for strictly pragmatic reasons.

Near the end of Moral Man and Immoral Society Niebuhr indicated to what degree his belief in pacifism had been eroded and his orientation towards Marxism ideology had changed. Niebuhr differentiated between international wars and social conflicts, reasoning that social conflict aimed at the elimination of injustice; whereas an international conflict did not attempt to remove injustice. Niebuhr asserted that:

In this respect Marxist philosophy is more true than pacifism. If it may seem to pacifist that the proletarian is preverse in condemning international conflict and asserting the class struggle, the latter has good reason to insist that the elimination of coercion is a futile ideal but that the rational use of coercion is a possible achievement which may save society.<sup>284</sup>

Again Niebuhr made a determination by using criteria supplied by Marx. At the time that Moral Man and Immoral Society was written Niebuhr had moved a rather far distance from his perfectionistic and pacifistic position of the early twenties toward the Christian Marxism of the thirties.

Niebuhr approaches the problem of equality differently than does F. Engels, although he comes to a similar conclusion. Engels in his discussion of equality in Anti-Duhring confessed: "in both cases the content of the proletarian demand for equality is

283. MMIS p. 230.

284. MMIS p. 235.

the demand for the abolition of classes (Engels' italics). Any demand for equality which goes beyond that of necessity passes into absurdity..." Engels did realise that absolute equality is absurd and consequently did not make such a demand, however, his demands are rather more extreme than Niebuhr; Engels as did Niebuhr called for the removal of classes or in Niebuhr's case the privileged classes. Nevertheless, there are some differences to be found in the Marxist approach as opposed to the Niebuhrian approach.

An area of disagreement between the Niebuhrian approach and the Marxist approach is in their ideas about the philosophy of history. Niebuhr understood history to be a conflict between human character and impersonal fate, it was always an over-estimation in his opinion when a philosophy predicted the triumph of human character or impersonal fate. In relation to Marxist philosophy Niebuhr critically remarked: "The Marxian imagines that he has a philosophy or even a science of history."<sup>286</sup> Niebuhr believed that the Marxist had in reality something that was completely different from a scientific view of history. In fact Niebuhr was of the opinion that the Marxist's view of history was an "apocalyptic vision", i.e. a confident prophecy of the future and could never be anything more.

Another area of dissonance between Niebuhr and Marx was the emphasis placed on the proletarian class. The judgement of Niebuhr was that Marx had placed too much emphasis on the proletarian class. Marx through his vision of a classless society gave moral dignity to the proletarian class, but he also gave the pro-

285. Handbook p. 254.

286. MMIS p. 155.

letarian by that vision the wherewithal to escape for Niebuhr "the partial and the relative and bestwos the value of universality upon his efforts."<sup>287</sup> The claim of universality is proclaimed by all classes and nations, but Niebuhr warned of the dangers of such a position.

Niebuhr was highly critical of some of Marx's expectations for the future for pragmatic reasons instead of a difference in basic ideation. Niebuhr asserted that: "while idealism is genuine, nevertheless it is in constant commerce with a realism so searching, that it is in danger of discounting moral and rational factors in social life too completely."<sup>288</sup> The hope of the proletariat i.e. the removal of all injustice by the destruction of economic privileges, is impractical in Niebuhr's estimation. "The expectation of changing human nature by the destruction of economic privilege to such a degree that no one will desire to make selfish use of power, must probably be placed in the category of romantic illusions."<sup>289</sup>

Marx predicted in The Historical Tendency of Capitalist

Accumulation:

One capitalist always kills many. Hand in hand with this centralisation, or this expropriation of many capitalists by few, develop on an everextending scale the co-operative form of the labor-process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labor into instruments of labor only usable in common, the economising of all means of production of combined socialised labor, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market, and with this, the internal character of the capitalistic regime. Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process or transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploit-

---

287. MMIS p. 161.

288. MMIS p. 163.

289. MMIS p. 164.



ation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united and organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself.<sup>290</sup>

Niebuhr, however, doubted that the predictions would be borne out. These catastrophic predictions of Marx which had achieved for the proletariat the character of religious hope had been neither proven nor disproven. Niebuhr averred that:

The fact that the industrial workers actually shared some of the benefits of modern technology in the past fifty years, so that their living standards were raised, compared to their previous status, even though they did not win a comparatively larger share of the national income, and that their growing political power actually forced the dominant classes to yield concessions to them, seems to cast grave doubts upon the Marxian theory of revolution through the increasing misery of the workers.<sup>291</sup>

Niebuhr had grave doubts not only about the truth of the reasons but also about the need for a revolution. In the end of his discussion about justice through revolution Niebuhr reasoned that "Perhaps a society which gradually approximates the ideal will not be so very inferior morally to one which makes one desperate grasp after the ideal, only to find that the realities of history and nature dissolve it."<sup>292</sup> Niebuhr realised that communism would be unable to eliminate the weaknesses of human nature, since human nature could reach the heights of cruelty and unbearable tyranny which caused Niebuhr to inject a note of caution:

Difficult as the method of revolution is for any Western industrial civilization, it must not be regarded as impossible. The forces which made for concentration of wealth and power are operative, even though they do not move as unambiguously as the Marxians prophesied.<sup>293</sup>

290. SWOV pp. 233-4.

291. MMIS p. 181.

292. MMIS p. 199.

293. MMIS p. 189.

Niebuhr presumed that no matter what methods were used to obtain ideal society, the realities of human nature would always threaten it.

Lenin stated in The State and Revolution that: "The replacement of the bourgeois by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution. The abolition of the proletarian state, i.e. of all states is only possible through 'withering away'".<sup>294</sup> Niebuhr regarded the assumption that dictatorship was to be only a transitory state as erroneous. Niebuhr feared the romantic illusions that were a part of Marxism in particular its confidence in the transitory state of dictatorship. Niebuhr asked the question: "But can they destroy economic power without creating strong centers of political power? And how may they be certain that this political power will be either ethically or socially restrained?"<sup>295</sup> The great danger in Niebuhr's opinion is that the concentration of power will be in the hands of a few individuals and at best in the hands of a small group. Niebuhr condemned out of hand the theory of the "withering" away of the state. "This theory fails to do justice to the facts of human nature, revealed not only in the men of power but in ordinary men."<sup>296</sup>

Niebuhr had a great many objections to and criticisms of the use of political power by the parliamentary socialist. Niebuhr stated that: "there are difficulties and hazards in the programme of evolutionary and parliamentary socialism, which are not recog-

294. Handbook p. 739.

295. MMIS p. 192.

296. MMIS p. 193.

nised as clearly as they ought to be by those who place unqualified confidence in the parliamentary method."<sup>297</sup>

Niebuhr found fault with the thesis that the middle-class as a class would combine with the proletarian movement. Niebuhr was in agreement with Engels on the question both in theory and practice. Engels had dogmatically asserted that: "We can use in our Party individuals from every class of society, but have no use whatever for any group representing capitalist, middle-bourgeois or middle-peasant interests."<sup>298</sup> Niebuhr in speaking of the middle-class also asserted that: "it is even possible that a considerable proportion of this class will become rationally and morally committed to the labor ideal of an equalitarian society."<sup>299</sup> Niebuhr as did Engels before him recognised the fact that the individual could be moved by reason and ethics, but the group was different in character. Niebuhr pointed out that: "the fact is that the interests of the powerful and the dominant groups who profit from the present system of society, are the real hinderance to the establishment of a rational and just society."<sup>300</sup>

Another thesis was that the proletarian minority would win over the peasants instead of or along with the middle-class. There did not seem to be much evidence in Niebuhr's opinion that the parliamentary socialists had made any practical gains in the ranks of the peasants. Engels many years before had recognised

297. MMIS p. 209.

298. SWOV p. 631.

299. MMIS p. 211.

300. MMIS p. 213.

the difficulty of the task of winning over the small peasantry.<sup>301</sup> In Europe the peasant clung to the old feudal traditions which meant that they had a certain amount of personal loyalty to the landowners. There was a problem even in winning over the American peasantry in Niebuhr's estimation even though there was no feudal tradition to promote personal loyalty. The American small farmer remained an individualist and "even when poor, he may take refuge in a modest self-sufficing economy which has only a minimum dependence upon the outside world."<sup>302</sup> Writing about America Niebuhr concluded that the possibility of establishing a third party made up of the combined strength of the worker and farmer was "unrealistic for many decades to come."<sup>303</sup> Niebuhr acknowledged the fact that: "It may be that the farmer will never be able to espouse collectivist political goals fervently, no matter how much he suffers from a capitalistic system."<sup>304</sup> Niebuhr was sceptical about the possibility of a socialist party ever gaining a majority if it depended upon the votes of the middle-class or the farmers.

Niebuhr also had some practical objections to parliamentary socialism. The first objection was to do with the loss of 'real religious' zeal that was to be found in pure proletarian thought. A great danger for communism was inertia not fanaticism in the opinion of Niebuhr. Niebuhr made the ensuing affirmation about the great need of religious zeal, which incidently echoed the

301. SWOV pp. 634-5.

302. MMIS p. 217.

303. MMIS p. 218.

304. MMIS p. 218.

thought of W. James.<sup>305</sup> "It is rather obvious that society as a whole is more inclined to inertia than to foolish adventure, and is therefore in greater need of the challenge of the absolutist than the sweet reasonableness of the rationalist."<sup>306</sup>

The second practical disadvantage of parliamentary socialism could be unearthed when examining the temptations that arise from the political tactics which were used by the leaders of the parliamentary socialists. Since the leaders had to bargain in order to realise socialistic programs, the leaders had to collaborate with the other parties. Since "this bargaining must be done by leaders who are increasingly drawn into the high places of government, who consort with the great and mighty in the financial and industrial world, and are subject to all the blandishments with which aristocracies have learned to confuse their political opponents,"<sup>307</sup> it is an ever present danger that "they will forget the viewpoint of the toilers, who endowed them with political power, and will unconsciously absorb the social and political viewpoints of the more privileged groups."<sup>308</sup> At the time that Moral Man and Immoral Society was written Niebuhr still retained grave doubts about parliamentary socialism and seem to favor a purer form of proletarian thought, although he was in doubt about the attainment of this by revolutionary means. Niebuhr considered the application of non-violence as a possible solution but appeared to have some doubts concerning its practical

305. PNN p. 73.

306. MMIS pp. 222-3.

307. MMIS p. 223.

308. MMIS p. 223.

value and in fact admitted that it was a form of coercion.

Niebuhr pointed out that:

The perennial tragedy of human history is that those who cultivate the spiritual elements usually do so by divorcing themselves from or misunderstanding the problems of collective man, where the brutal elements are most obvious. Their problems therefore remain unsolved, force clashes with force, with nothing to mitigate the brutalities or eliminate the futilities of the social struggle. The history of human life will always be the projection of the world of nature. To the end of history the peace of the world, as Augustine observed, must be gained by strife. It will therefore not be a perfect peace. But it can be more perfect than it is. If the mind and the spirit of man does not attempt the impossible, if it does not seek to conquer or to eliminate nature but tries only to make the forces of nature the servants of the human spirit and the instruments of the moral ideal, a progressively higher justice and more stable peace can be achieved.<sup>309</sup>

The achievement of less injustice without sacrificing peace was the Niebuhrian aim. The Marxist approach in Niebuhr's view did help to bring more justice into existence, but he fully realised that coercion would be always present and always a factor in society, and the central question consequently revolved about the best application of force and how this was to be controlled. Niebuhr did not explicitly indicate the method he preferred to bring about a Marxist type change. The process that seemed to have a higher probability for success in Niebuhr's eyes was a more or less revolutionary form of Marxist thought, i.e. the purer form of proletarian thought, as opposed to parliamentary socialism, which in Niebuhr's assessment was drowning in its own opportunism.

One not only discovers the concepts of Marx, Engels and Lenin in Moral Man and Immoral Society; there are, moreover, other sources of ideas for Niebuhr even though the Marxist source was

---

309. MMIS p. 256.

dominant. Niebuhr demonstrated something that will become more evident later in his life and that was his knowledge of philosophy which was rather sweeping and not limited to the contemporary authors of his time or the Marxists.

Niebuhr in his discussion of the differences between rational men, when their own interests were not involved as opposed to the instance when their interest were involved, turned to two philosophical sources to support and underline his position. Niebuhr quoted Claude A. Helvetius a French philosopher of the enlightenment. Helvetius had realised the importance of the concept of self-interest. Niebuhr also turned to Jeremy Bentham who considered man's self-interest to be an important factor.<sup>310</sup>

Niebuhr as he had done in the past made use of David Hume's observations about egoism in politics. Niebuhr stated that: "David Hume declares that the maxim that egoism is, though not the exclusive, yet the predominant inclination of human nature, might not be true in fact, but that it was true in politics."<sup>311</sup> Hume stated that: "Political writers have established it as a maxim, that in contriving any system of government, and fixing the several checks and controls of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a knave, and to have no other end, in all his action than private interest."<sup>312</sup> Niebuhr had referred to this idea for a number of years. Niebuhr again turned to Hume when discussing the value of love, disinterestedness and benevolence in a social context. Hume stated in his An Enquiry Con-

310. MMIS pp. 44-46.

311. MMIS p. 141.

312. David Hume Philosophical Works (Edinburgh 1826) v.III p. 42.

cerning the Principles of Morals in the conclusion of the section entitled "Of Benevolence": "The social virtues are never regarded without their beneficial tendencies, nor viewed as barren and unfruitful. The happiness of mankind, the order of society, the harmony of families, the mutual support of friends, are always considered as the result of the gentle communion over the breasts of men."<sup>313</sup> Niebuhr stated that: "The utilitarian and social emphasis is a little too absolute in the words of Hume, but it is true within limits."<sup>314</sup>

Niebuhr made use of the work of early American statesmen for insight. Niebuhr in his discussion of power and its lack of inner checks quoted Madison. Madison had stated that: "The truth is that all men having power ought to be distrusted."<sup>315</sup> Niebuhr supported the Marxist outlook by comparing the understanding of society of Marx with that of Thomas Paine who held that "Society is the product of our wants and government of our wickedness."<sup>316</sup> In the case of both political writers Niebuhr used them to underline positions. The one was a more or less pragmatic position and the other a Marxist one.

Niebuhr was obviously familiar with a quite diverse number of philosophers. In his discussion about the harmony demanded of the self which was brought about to a certain extent by reason Niebuhr once again turned to George Santayana to whom he had previously turned.<sup>317</sup> Niebuhr agreed with the conclusion of

313. Ibid. v. IV p. 252.

314. MMIS p. 265.

315. MMIS p. 164.

316. MMIS p. 150.

317. MMIS p. 30.



Schopenhauer that religious asceticism was "the denial of the will-to-live."<sup>318</sup> Niebuhr, moreover, cited the Spanish existentialist Miguel de Unamuno's main work The Tragic Sense of Life when discussing the relationship between the will-to-believe and immortality.<sup>319</sup>

The years 1928 to 1932 were the period that covered the transitional phase of Niebuhr's change from a more or less liberal stance to a more or less Marxist stance. When one examines the philosophical sources of Niebuhr over this period one can trace the sowing of the seeds that were to bear Marxist fruit by sources that were being used by Niebuhr in the late 1920's. The seeds of Marxism were sown by Spengler and Weber in the late twenties which were to bear fruit in 1931 and 1932.

The Niebuhrian approach in 1928 contained the same philosophical sources that it had profited from in the mid-1920's. Weber's concepts were augmented by the thought of Tawney which played an important role in Niebuhr's analysis of society and religion in 1928. The ever present influence of William James is apparent in Niebuhr's choice of method in certain instances. The Spenglerian analysis enters into Niebuhr's thinking. However, there is no indication of any Marxist commitment in the work of Niebuhr in 1928. Nevertheless, the coming change can be detected by examining Niebuhr's changing attitude to pacifism which was becoming more realistic in its attitudes toward coercion.

In 1929 the growing seeds of Marxism were encouraged toward the coming harvest of Marxist ideas when the stock market 'crash'

318. MMIS p. 54.

319. MMIS p. 64.

occurred and forced Niebuhr to reexamine certain basic assumptions. 1929 found Niebuhr falling into a state of confusion which saw him approving of the socialistic program while at the same time making use of liberal tenets and assumptions. Niebuhr undoubtedly had by this time started upon the road of gradual change. However, in 1929 Niebuhr still condemned out of hand the illusions of communism and did not consider communism to a viable option.

1930 was the last year in which Weberian concepts played a prominent part as a source of ideas in Niebuhr's approach, although the importance of James and Spengler would decrease in their influence they would still be utilized by Niebuhr in the coming years. The stage was being set for the rapid advance of Marxist ideation. Hindsight enables one to examine the Weberian assumptions with an eye to the interplay between them and the Marxist assumptions. The Weberian assumptions that Niebuhr employed in 1930 and in previous years overlapped with certain assumptions of Marx. Both Weber and Marx extensively employed the assumptions of economic determinism an assumption that Niebuhr utilized throughout the period of transition. There were other overlaps in the ideas that Niebuhr drew from Marx and Weber illustrating the gradual transition from Weberian ideas to Marxist ideation.

Niebuhr in 1931 turned the corner and began his journey down the path of Marxism. Niebuhr began to support in 1931 certain basic criteria that are identifiable as Marxist assumptions that were to play a prominent role in his thinking for many years to come. Niebuhr as had Marx called for the organization of the proletariat. Niebuhr called for the abolition of

private property and looked forward to the coming class struggle; two ideas that were basic to Marx's conceptualizations. Niebuhr demanded the state, i.e. communal, ownership of property particularly the means of production another typical Marxist stance.

The year 1932 was the first year of heavy involvement with Marxist methods and analysis by Niebuhr, but it was not a completely uncritical involvement with Marxism. The writings of 1932 underlined the growing decay of Niebuhr's pacifistic ideals since he had called for the use of coercion and recognised the 'reality of violence'.

At the end of the transitional phase Niebuhr was pressing for the utilization of basic Marxist assumptions. Niebuhr in 1932 had stated that in his opinion Marxism was a better system than capitalism and called for more class loyalty. Niebuhr approved of the moral cynicism of Marxism as well as its deterministic interpretation of history. Niebuhr held that Marx had produced a representative model of society for the proletariat.

Niebuhr utilized extensively a number of Marxist concepts. The most important was that of the coming class struggle and the coming economic catastrophe. The second recurring theme was the need for an organised proletariat. Niebuhr agreed with the premise that religion was the starting point of all criticism. Niebuhr agreed with Lenin's premise that the efforts of the intelligentsia and the proletariat should be combined. The Marxist assumption that the most powerful man in society was the owner of the means of production and not the politician played an important part in Niebuhr's thinking.

This was not to say that Niebuhr entirely agreed with all of Marx's assumptions. There were many doubts in Niebuhr's mind

in this early and intense period of Marxist involvement which in some peoples opinion was the most uncritical period of Niebuhr's Marxist involvement. Niebuhr did not think that the historical approach of Marx was complete since the conflict in history was for Niebuhr between the human personality and impersonal fate. Niebuhr made the assumption that no confident prophecy could exist and consequently he doubted the depth of confidence expressed by the followers of the Marxist prophecy.

The outcome of the 1928 to 1932 period of transition was that Niebuhr had come to consider revolutionary Marxism to be a strong and realistic approach to many of society's problems as well as an adequate instrument for the criticism of liberalism. Nevertheless, Niebuhr owed less to Marxism than would be at first imagined from this analysis since his basic ethical standards had profited a great deal from the ethical standards set up by the "social-Gospel" camp. Niebuhr's analysis of society was in terms of the conflict and balance of powers which was a fundamentally a non-Marxist concept although he gave this a Marxist application when he applied it to the economic struggle. Niebuhr had obviously rebelled against the liberal tradition, but he never fell into the complete relativism of Marx which led to complete faith in economic determinism and moral instrumentalism. Niebuhr in Moral Man and Immoral Society had travelled through history and over the globe collecting examples of the hypocritical morals of nations and privileged classes, but the hand of Marx was less in evidence than one might expect. Niebuhr sought to explain the crises of society and was led by a more gradual process than some realise to a Marxist analysis of society.<sup>320</sup> However, the ideas of Marx already permeate a great deal of Niebuhr's thinking.

---

320. Charles C. West Communism and the Theologians (London 1958) p. 118-122.

Chapter 3

Marxist Involvement

In Fear of the Coming Catastrophe (1933) .

The year 1935 and the years leading up to the year of 1935 contain the height of Niebuhr's involvement with Marxism. The year 1933 saw the rise of Hitler which Niebuhr had feared and saw him initiate efforts to rescue the victims of Hitler's oppression.<sup>1</sup> In 1933 and 1934 Niebuhr's sense of crisis was at its sharpest; this was the period in which the fullest use of European events was applied in Niebuhr's analysis of America as well as the fullest use of Marxist analysis in juxtaposition to Niebuhr's most emphatic period of American exceptionalism.<sup>2</sup> The anguish of 1933 was emphasised by Niebuhr's preaching of the inevitability of Marxism while still favoring the eschatological expectations of Marxism.<sup>3</sup>

The year 1933 was an active year in many ways. In the fall of 1933 John C. Bennett a Congregationalist and one of the generation of younger theologians coming to maturity in the thirties expressed his discontent with liberalism in an article entitled "After Liberalism - What?" Niebuhr was not alone in his conviction that the illusions of liberalism were at the heart of the crisis of the depression. During this period the Theological Discussion Group began and met for the first time in New York City for two days of discussion and debate on pre-circulated papers. The realistic focus against liberalism was beginning in earnest which was confirmed by the appearance of

---

1. June Bingham Courage to Change an Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (New York 1961) p. 169, hereafter cited as CC.

2. Donald B. Meyer The Protestant Search for Political Realism (1919-1941) (Los Angeles 1960) p. 263, hereafter cited as PSPR.

3. PSPR p. 267.

the Theological Discussion Group at the height of the convulsions of the "social-Gospel" and heralded the new reformation of Protestantism which was to be catalyzed by its involvement with politics.<sup>4</sup>

By 1933 the United States had renewed diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and for another fifteen years the possibility would not occur to the average American that to be a communist might be treasonable.<sup>5</sup> The surprisingly poor showing of the Socialist Party in the elections of 1932 after the dramatic gains of 1930 gave weight to the arguments of the 'militants' that it was time for newer hands to be in control. The electoral successes of Adolf Hitler in 1932 and 1933, followed by the disastrous rout of the German left convinced the 'militants' among the American Socialist Party that they must cultivate the cooperation of the communists in the left against the growing threat of American Fascism. The Socialist Party became convinced that formal overtures needed to be made to the communists.<sup>6</sup>

Niebuhr in 1933 was becoming interesting to the newspapers an interest that was to be sustained for many years. The New York Times, which had discovered Niebuhr's newsworthiness when Moral Man and Immoral Society had disturbed the peace of the seminaries, seems to then have assigned a man to bring back the most shocking of Niebuhr's statements. The new news magazine Newsweek introduced Niebuhr to its readers in an egregiously inaccurate presentation in April, 1933 in which he was made to

4. PSPK pp. 240-2.

5. CC p. 211.

6. Paul Charles Merkley Reinhold Niebuhr: The Decisive Years (1916-1941) (unpublished thesis, 1966) pp. 208-209.

appear as a victim of an early class struggle. Despite these brief flashes of notoriety Niebuhr's influence was confined in the mid-thirties to the ranks of the radical clergy and the wider circle of the readers of Radical Religion.<sup>7</sup>

In the year 1933 Niebuhr was predominantly involved with Marxism which was itself dominated by an interest in the affairs of Germany. Niebuhr was as expected critical of liberalism and its ideas,<sup>8</sup> but it is no longer the focus of Niebuhr's involvement. Niebuhr was involved with an examination of Marxism and he had already begun to criticise Marxism because of its failure to combat fascism in Germany.

The first article of interest from 1933 is "Optimism and Utopianism" which contained a reply to the criticisms of Moral Man and Immoral Society. Niebuhr underlined his position in this article as well as applying a label to himself. Niebuhr stated that "As a Marxian I have no illusions about the collective behavior of man in capitalistic civilization. I believe that self-interest determines his conduct to a larger degree than contemporary liberal idealism is willing to admit." However in the next sentence Niebuhr revealed the basis for his criticism of Marxism and the qualifications he had imposed on the ideas of Marx. "As a Christian I am a step beyond Marxism and have no illusions about the collective behavior of mankind in general in any age or under any social system."<sup>9</sup> Even at this early stage

7. Merkley op. cit. pp. 229-230.

8. Reinhold Niebuhr "A Christian Philosophy of Compromise" The Christian Century (June 7, 1933) pp. 746-8.

9. Reinhold Niebuhr "Optimism and Utopianism" The World Tomorrow (Feb. 22, 1933) p. 180.



of Niebuhr's Marxist involvement the seeds of doubt are already in evidence. Niebuhr stated that: "hopes and illusions for absolute justice are derived from a confusion of the absolute and historical" and "this confusion is the mark of the intellectual immaturity of our whole liberal culture, and to a certain degree Marxism has inherited it from liberalism."<sup>10</sup>

Niebuhr felt caught between the two poles, one Christian and the other Marxist which he revealed in a comment in "An Editorial Conversation" in the Christian Century. Niebuhr was well aware of the paradox that is involved when one is a Marxist and a Christian. Niebuhr felt the pull of both sets of ideas, the criticisms of the Christians and the criticisms of the Marxists. The editor of the Christian Century had declared that Niebuhr had accepted the "absoluteness of economic determinism". Niebuhr denied this and pointed out that "I qualify the fact of determinism, perhaps too rigorously". After defending himself against the criticisms of the Christian community Niebuhr went on to declare that "at any rate a recent communist reviewer of my book declares that there is 'so much Christian sauce' in my 'communist pudding' that I ought to be arrested for 'confusing good Marxist' and for being more dangerous 'than a thug'."<sup>11</sup>

In 1933 Niebuhr was concerned with the situation in Germany and wrote a number of articles concerning the rise of Hitler to power in Germany. Niebuhr was shaken by the rise of the National Socialist and the lack of real opposition that had failed to

10. Ibid. p. 180.

11. Reinhold Niebuhr "Editorial Conversation" Christian Century (July 26, 1933) p. 950.

develop against the racist from the left both from the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. Niebuhr had realised that the Nazi movement had successfully destroyed the opposition, which for Niebuhr consisted of the communist and socialist. In the article "The Opposition in Germany" Niebuhr noted that "thousands of both socialist and communist have been able to enter and have entered the Hitler Storm Troopers."<sup>12</sup> Niebuhr noted with some hope that the Communist Party had continued a desperate existence. However, Niebuhr had lost all faith in the communist in Germany. "Whatever actual communist strength may be at the present time, there is no question that Communism is not in the immediate future a force which can be compared in significance with the radical elements in National Socialism itself."<sup>13</sup> Niebuhr then turned to the socialist cause with even greater disappointment. "The socialist cause is even more hopeless than that of Communism. It is in fact so hopeless that it can be stated with almost dogmatic certainty that National Socialism had destroyed German Social Democracy."<sup>14</sup> Niebuhr quite gloomily pointed out that "The church after all has its strength in the very class which feel themselves saved from a Marxian revolution by Hitler, the small farmers, the middle-class of the city and the professional classes."<sup>15</sup>

Niebuhr in the article "Why German Socialism Crashed" commented

12. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Opposition in Germany" The New Republic (June 28, 1933) p. 169.

13. Ibid. p. 169.

14. Ibid. p. 140.

15. Reinhold Niebuhr "Religion and the New Germany" The Christian Century (June 28, 1933) p. 845.

that Hitler's speeches were full of the glorification of the past and hope for a vague future. Niebuhr considered Hitler's technique to prove the "power of inadequate symbolism in politics." Niebuhr commented that the symbol should "be at once vague, as Hitler's symbols were, and it will catch the young idealist, the imperiled industrialist, the bankrupted store-keeper, the aggrieved ex-soldier and everyone who suffers so much from the sling and arrows of outrageous fortune that he had become willing to fly to other that he knows not of." Niebuhr then remarked that: "Roosevelt's 'new deal' belongs in the class of vague symbols."<sup>16</sup>

Niebuhr applied the lessons learned from the events in Germany to the ideas and methods used by the parliamentary socialist with whom he disagreed. Niebuhr considered the socialist to be "too completely wedded to the parliamentary method of procedure."<sup>17</sup> Niebuhr lacked faith in democratic methods and consequently in the ideas of parliamentary socialism. Niebuhr interpreted the situation in Germany as the outcome of the expected crisis in capitalism. Niebuhr avered that "the democratic forms disappear in the stage when capitalism faces the peril of disintegration from within and increasing animosity from the workers." Niebuhr then went on to recognize that stalemate could be the final result of this situation. "This is the more true because amid the complexities of modern industrial civilization it is practically impossible for either a radical or a conservative party to gain a sufficiently large majority to resolve the impasse between conservatism and radicalism."<sup>18</sup>

---

16. Reinhold Niebuhr "Why German Socialism Crashed" The Christian Century (April 5, 1933) p. 453, hereafter cited as WGSC.

17. WGSC p. 453.

18. WGSC p. 453.

Niebuhr regarded the failure of the socialist as the basis for the final victory of the nationalist. Niebuhr reminded his readers that the socialist had failed to create the socialist state when they had only 50 per cent of the vote while the nationalist with even less, i.e. 44 per cent of the vote, were able to set forth and act upon their ideas.<sup>19</sup>

Niebuhr, because of the failure of Marxism in Germany, was driven to a closer examination of the ideas of Marxism. Niebuhr became totally immersed in the ideas of Marx with the almost total exclusion of all other sources except those connected with Marx. In the article "A New Strategy for Socialist" Niebuhr criticised some of Marxism's presuppositions when he examined Marxism's failure in Germany. Niebuhr offered two different reasons for the total failure of Marxism's opposition in the form of socialism and communism to fascism. Niebuhr avered that the "failure to respond to Marxist radicalism is due partly to their want of understanding of the true realities of modern economic society. But this is not the only difficulty some of the difficulties are on the Marxian side."<sup>20</sup> Niebuhr was speaking about the industrial worker. Niebuhr had always had reservations about certain Marxist ideas, and considered the Marxist approach to collectivism to be too dogmatic to capture the sympathy of the middle-class. Niebuhr agreed with the concept of collectivism of industry and financial centers, but he questioned the wisdom of the Marxist in calling for collectivism when it is applied to all private property. Marx himself as well as Engels was aware of the difficulty of this position, i.e. collectivising all private

---

19. WGSC p. 453.

20. Reinhold Niebuhr "A New Strategy for Socialist" The World Tomorrow (August 31, 1933) p. 490, hereafter cited as NSS.

property. Marx stated that "The transformation of scattered private property, arising from individual labor, into capitalistic property is naturally a process incomparably more protracted, violent, and difficult than the transformation of capitalistic private property, already practically resting on socialised production, into socialised property."<sup>21</sup> Niebuhr recognised that the forceable removal of private property could cause great difficulty especially the removal of the property of farmers. Niebuhr was worried about the tendency of Marxism to drive the "farmers into the arms of reaction."<sup>22</sup> This is not to say that the farmer did not desire the destruction of the centers of finance, but Niebuhr had determined that the farmer wanted to run his own farm and if this was not economically feasible, "events have to prove that to him".<sup>23</sup> Niebuhr was directly criticising the forceable subjection of the peasants to a policy of collectivism that was being undertaken in Russia. Engels had realised the far reaching ramifications of the problem of peasant private property. In the article "The Peasant Question in France and Germany" Engels opposed as did Niebuhr the forceable collectivisation of peasant private property. Engels had stated that "our task relative to the small peasant consists, in the first place, in effecting a transition of his private enterprise and private possessions to co-operative ones, not forcibly but by dint of example and the proffer of social

21. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works (London 1970) p. 234, hereafter cited as S. Works.

22. NSS p. 490.

23. NSS p. 490.

assistance for this purpose."<sup>24</sup>

The criticism that Niebuhr leveled at Marxism was aimed at a flaw in one of Marxism's basic assumptions. Niebuhr argued that the Marxist had inadequately dealt with the problem of the lower middle-class. Niebuhr recognised that Marx had believed that "the worker has no country and it expresses itself in terms of extreme cynicism toward national sentiments of all kinds."<sup>25</sup> Niebuhr had criticised socialism for capitulating to the idea of nationalism, but he did not question the essential correctness of the Marxist approach. Niebuhr did, nevertheless, criticise the attitude of the Marxist "toward cultural traditions and inheritances, including religion, which had the same effect of alienating the middle-class in which these traditions still have power."<sup>26</sup> Niebuhr considered dogmatic internationalism to contain dangerous elements as did dogmatic nationalism.

Niebuhr indicated that he stood squarely in the communist tradition i.e. the Marxist tradition as opposed to the socialist tradition. However, he hoped that the division between Marxism and socialism would be avoided. Niebuhr called for the avoidance of this dangerous division "not by a less rigorous but by a more rigorous Marxism."<sup>27</sup> Niebuhr clearly believed that Marxist doctrines should continue. Niebuhr's solution to the crisis in Germany resembled his solution to the division between the socialist and the communist. Niebuhr wrote that "a radical movement must be more certain about the

24. S. Works pp. 634-635.

25. NSS p. 491.

26. NSS p. 491.

27. NSS p. 491.

essentials of Marxian theory and less dogmatic about the non-essentials,"<sup>28</sup> if the German left wish to be victorious. This type of criticism is in evidence in several of Niebuhr's articles.<sup>29</sup>

A fairly general overview of Niebuhr's position can be pieced together from the article "After Capitalism - What?". Niebuhr not only assumed that the death of capitalism was at hand but that this death was desirable. Niebuhr had no hope and held out no hope for a capitalistic reformation at this juncture of his developing thought. The basic question for Niebuhr was not whether capitalism would perish but how it would perish. Niebuhr framed his explanation of fascism and its rise, in terms of the collapse of capitalism. Niebuhr stated that the "disintegrating social system will try to save itself by closing ranks and eliminating the anarchy within itself." Niebuhr foresaw the possibility of capitalism perpetuating itself for a few more decades by relying upon fascism, but he predicted that capitalism would inevitably fall because it could not cure the "inequality of consumption and international anarchy."<sup>30</sup> It is obvious in this article that Niebuhr held out little hope for the success of socialism through parliamentary methods and procedures that were being attempted in Europe during this period. However, this did not mean that Niebuhr believed that revolution was the only way that the cap-

28. NSS p. 492.

29. Reinhold Niebuhr "Making Radicalism Effective" The World Tomorrow (Dec. 21, 1933) pp. 682-684.

30. Reinhold Niebuhr "After Capitalism - What?" The World Tomorrow (March 1, 1933) p. 204, hereafter cited as ACW.

italistic system would come to an end. Niebuhr admitted that "the final transfer of power may come through the use of a general strike or some similar technique."<sup>31</sup> Niebuhr realised that neither the revolutionary nor the non-revolutionary course "offers modern society an easy way to the mastery of a technological civilization."<sup>32</sup>

Niebuhr foresaw no way for forestalling the coming struggle.

Niebuhr advised that:

Those who wish to participate in such a struggle creatively to help history toward a goal of justice and to eliminate as much confusion, chaos and conflict in the attainment of the goal as possible, will accomplish this result only if they do not permit their own comparative emancipation for the determining and conditioning economic factors to obscure the fact these factors are generally determining. No amount of education or religious idealism will ever persuade a social class to espouse or seek a goal which is counter to its economic interest.<sup>33</sup>

Niebuhr advised his readers that the failure to recognise the "covert brutality of the social struggle is probably the greatest weakness of the middle-class liberal, and it lends a note of hypocrisy and self-deception to every moral pretension which seeks to eliminate violence in the social struggle."<sup>34</sup>

Niebuhr revealed in this statement that he had moved a tremendous distance away from his original beliefs about violence. Niebuhr obviously had abandoned pacifism completely by the time that he wrote this article in favor of Marxism and its accompanying possibility of revolution or at the very least coercion

31. ACW p. 204.

32. ACW p. 204.

33. ACW p. 205.

34. ACW p. 205.



through strikes. The final downfall of the pacifistic ideal was brought about by Niebuhr's involvement with a combination of pragmatic and Marxist ideals, but the official end to his pacifistic stance had to wait until 1934. Niebuhr still had not completely given up searching for a peaceful solution to the problem, i.e. one that did not depend upon violence such as a general strike, but he no longer considered the non-violent way as the only option. Niebuhr by this time had come almost completely under the spell of Marx; that is as far as Niebuhr would come to rely upon the thought of any other man. Niebuhr had abandoned for the most part by this time the idea of pacifism under the pressure of Marxist doctrines and the belief in the coming class struggle which presupposed the possibility of violence.

There are parallels and contrasts between the ideas of Marx and the ideas of Weber that have a bearing upon Niebuhr's own thinking a fact that has already been noted. Weber understood Christianity as being basically a religion of the urban artisanate, whereas Marx saw it as being the religion of the migrant peoples. However, Marx did emphasise that the Christian ethical outlook formed a vital current when Rome plunged into moral decay. Marx realised that the Reformation had provided a similar moral regeneration in relation to the coming new system as Catholicism had done for the old feudal system.<sup>35</sup> Niebuhr retained certain Weberian features in this thinking although they were now hidden behind the mask of Marxism. "Marxism is not wrong in regarding Protestantism as, on the whole, the religious

---

35. Anthony Giddens Capitalism and Modern Social Theory (Cambridge 1971) pp. 207-207, hereafter cited as CMSF.

sublimation of the interest of the middle-class just as Catholicism is in the main organic to a more feudal agrarian world."<sup>36</sup> Niebuhr made use of this concept in his defense of religion and disagreed with Marx's sweeping denunciation of religion. Niebuhr referring to the ideas of Marx stated in defense of religion that "my own belief is that he confused certain phenomena of middle-class religion with religion itself."<sup>37</sup>

Niebuhr in the article "The German: Unhappy Philosophers in Politics" disclosed something that one could have suspected from the beginning, i.e. his preference for the German 'stream' of philosophy as opposed to the British 'stream'. Niebuhr asserted that: "The Germans will probably always provide more interesting philosophy than the British. They explore the heights and depths of life more fully."<sup>38</sup> Niebuhr understood the German philosophers to be men of extremes. He noted that German philosophy contained the consistent optimism of Leibnitz as well as the most thorough going of pessimist, Schopenhauer. The most ruthless revolt against Christian morals was precipitated by Nietzsche and the "most consistent philosophy of rebellion against the bourgeois civilization was developed by a German Jew, Karl Marx."<sup>39</sup> Niebuhr revealed his opinion of Eduard Bernstein's thought when he commented that the catastrophic elements in Marxism did not seem to inspire the workers

36. Reinhold Niebuhr "Marxism and Religion" The World Tomorrow (March 15, 1933) p. 253.

37. Ibid. p. 253.

38. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Germans: Unhappy Philosophers in Politics" The American Scholar (October 1933) p. 418.

39. Ibid. p. 418.

who were beginning to reap some of the benefits of industrial civilization, which "was revised by another German Jew, Eduard Bernstein and the revision was more consistent than the semi-socialism or English Fabianism."<sup>40</sup>

Not unexpectedly Niebuhr was still under the influence of Oswald Spengler. Niebuhr noted that one of the 'most brilliant books' that has come out of the present political movement was Jeunger's Der Arbeiter.<sup>41</sup> The political movement referred to in the work is that of the Hitler regime and in particular the hoped for revolution which was to be found in the Storm Troopers. Niebuhr considered Jeunger to be a valuable source of information and he commented that Jeunger followed the ideas of Spengler, "in many ways". Niebuhr however did realise that there was a difference between the two men. Niebuhr maintained that Jeunger "glories in what Spengler depreciates, namely the fact that in a technical age the man who runs the machine controls the significant power in the hour of crisis and therefore can count on ultimately making his will prevail."<sup>42</sup>

#### A Continuing Radicalism (1934)

The year 1934 was an interesting year in terms of Niebuhr's development and the changing scene in America. By 1934 the national income had risen above the depths reached during the depression by more than twenty per cent and the trend was

40. Ibid. p. 418.

41. Reinhold Niebuhr "Notes from a Berlin Diary" The Christian Century.

42. Ibid. p. 873.

definitely upward.<sup>43</sup> However, there was still an increase in the amount of radical activity in the United States. It was during the period following the electoral defeats of 1932 and 1933 that the socialist movement experienced a serious inter-party revolt by the 'militants'. The 'militants' felt that contact should be made with the communist to form a joint Socialist-Communist Party. This group of 'militants' were young and were gathered around Norman Thomas. This revolt led to great confusion and guerilla warfare within the party that went on for several years. Until the 'militants' launched their own paper early in 1935, Niebuhr stood briefly at the editorial cockpit of the 'militant' cause, which was the offices of the World Tomorrow.<sup>44</sup> Kirby Page remarked that among all the trades and professions the highest percentage of socialists in the country were in the Protestant clergy.<sup>45</sup> 1934 saw the collapse of the World Tomorrow, which was brought about by a determined effort to make the publication into an effective instrument of the left, but the strain between this stance and the hard core pacifistic concerns of the journal brought about an unbearable strain. The strain of debate between the Marxist and the pacifist proved too much for the child of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and before 1934 had ended the journal had collapsed under the strain.<sup>46</sup> Another sign of the vigorous radicalism that was still prevalent in the country can be seen at Union Theological

---

43. CC p. 223.

44. Merkley op. cit. pp. 207-210.

45. Ibid. p. 219.

46. Ibid. p. 212.

Seminary itself. A few students on May day climbed on to the roof and substituted a red flag for the American stars and stripes that flew over Union Seminary. President Coffin of Union was of the opinion that the students should be expelled. J. Bingham pictures Niebuhr as being "torn between loyalty to Coffin and to the students, some of who were his boys..."<sup>47</sup>

During 1934 Niebuhr was busy with the formation of the Fellowship of Southern Churchman. Niebuhr was seen as the spiritual Godfather of this fellowship. During its early stages he helped the delegates to descriminate between truth, fantasy and fiction.<sup>48</sup>

Donald Meyer puts forth the opinion that Niebuhr began in this year of 1934 to withdraw from a general basis for his evidence which he would later in his career discard to a large extent and begin to look forward to a more explicit, individual, and inward looking type of evidence on which he would later rely upon more heavily. This was an indication of Niebuhr's germinating neo-orthodoxy in Meyer's opinion since Niebuhr ultimately used evidence that come from inside the shelf.<sup>49</sup> Even though the roots of orthodoxy may be found taking root in 1934 this was one of the years in which Niebuhr's sense of crisis was at its height and this was like 1933 a year in which Niebuhr made full use of Europe as a model with which to instruct America as well as making full use of the Marxist analysis.<sup>50</sup>

47. CC p. 166.

48. CC p. 206.

49. PSPK p. 243.

50. PSPK p. 263.

In 1934 Niebuhr published Reflections of the End of an Era which quite clearly illustrated the depth of Niebuhr's use of the Marxist approach and his deepening sense of catastrophe. Niebuhr's readership was also widened since this book was a selection of the Religious Book Club.<sup>51</sup> Reflections on the End of an Era represents Niebuhr's deepest involvement with Marxism. The Marxist type of dogmatism in Reflections on the End of an Era add forcefulness to the volume. Niebuhr's wide reputation as a powerful champion of Marxism was brought about by the publication of Reflections on the End of an Era. Merkley is of the opinion that this volume was the most powerful product of Niebuhr's so-called Marxist phase. The book wedded the vigorous style of Niebuhr's preaching to a lengthy presentation of his overall views. This was Niebuhr at his most powerful. Niebuhr began shortly after the publication of this volume his slow fall away from Marxism. Niebuhr after 1934 became less and less convinced over the years of Marxism's validity as a critical instrument. By the time the work Christianity and Power Politics had been published in 1940 Niebuhr had reached the conclusion that Marxism was too dangerous to use.<sup>53</sup>

Niebuhr in 1934 had come to believe that the world was well down the path leading to international war and the chaos that would follow.<sup>54</sup> Niebuhr at this juncture considered strict American neutrality to be justified under any circumstances.<sup>55</sup>

51. CC p. 166.

52. Merkley op. cit. p. 171.

53. Ibid. p. 179-184.

54. Robert Crocker Good The Contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr to the Theory of International Relations (unpublished thesis 1956) p. 57.

Niebuhr's deep involvement with the radical cause and his approval of fairly extreme political measures is apparent in the statement that "true socialism must be neither be shocked by 'illegality' nor take a prematurely negative attitude toward constitutional methods."<sup>56</sup> Niebuhr was seemingly open to any method that would bring about socialist objectives. Niebuhr had categorically stated that "socialist principles are certain to play a role in our American life." Niebuhr continued by indicating that the basis for decisions should be socialist principles which should determine the method to be used. "Any honest discussion of the ways and means which must be used to establish a socialist commonwealth is therefore realistic rather than academic..."<sup>57</sup>

In 1934 Niebuhr turned to the realistic approach in his efforts to determine the direction of coming events. Niebuhr avered that "Christian Socialist are not particularly interested in what the orthodox Marxian may say about the issue. What they are interested in is the political and economic realism of Marxism."<sup>58</sup> Niebuhr had again turned to a tactic that now has become familiar, i.e. the setting of one group of beliefs and ideas up against another set of ideas in order to bring the one set of ideas more clearly into focus. Niebuhr turned to

55. Reinhold Niebuhr "Shall We Seek World Peace or the Peace of America" The World Tomorrow (March 15, 1934) p. 133.

56. Reinhold Niebuhr "Ex Cathedra" The World Tomorrow (July 21, 1934) p. 362.

57. Ibid. p. 362.

58. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Fellowship of Socialist Christians" The World Tomorrow (June 14, 1934) p. 298.

the assumptions of realism in order to bring into focus and to determine how to best make use of the ideas of Marx. Niebuhr wrote that the "political realism of the Marxians revealed in both its analysis and its strategy, is not incompatible with profound Christianity though it may be at war with modern liberal versions of the Christian faith."<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, Niebuhr's doubts about Marxism are in evidence when he examines the concepts of Marxism through the spectacles of realism. "Some Christian Socialist feel that the utopianism of Marxism is a product of its naturalism and that in this utopianism Marxism remains a child of liberalism."<sup>60</sup> It is significant that Niebuhr was willing to class Marxism with liberalism which had become Niebuhr's traditional enemy.

Niebuhr supported the realistic approach of Marxism and revealed his doubts about the utopian aspects of Marxism when he published the article "When Will Christians Stop Fooling Themselves?" Niebuhr praised the "healthy realism among laymen" that breaks through "the illusions created by superficial moral preaching."<sup>61</sup> Niebuhr called for the application of the ideal of realism to the social struggle. "It is just this kind of realism the church has been failing to supply in the social struggle. It has preached too much moral idealism at the expense of religious realism."<sup>62</sup> Niebuhr had begun to

59. Ibid. p. 298.

60. Ibid. p. 298.

61. Reinhold Niebuhr "When Will Christians Stop Fooling Themselves?" The Christian Century (May 16, 1934) p. 658.

62. Ibid. p. 658.



examine the ideas and tenets of Marxism with the tools of realism. Niebuhr stressed the fact that he had used only part of the Marxist approach. Although Niebuhr had praised certain elements of religion in Marxism, he never made use of the religious aspects of Marxism, and he had begun to differentiate between two parts of Marxism, i.e. the religious aspects as opposed to the economic aspects. Niebuhr asserted that "Marxian politics and economics are extremely realistic", however he went on to accuse Marxism of having religious pretensions that were a form of blindness "and this blindness is dangerous not only to society, but to the cause...".<sup>63</sup>

Niebuhr had long been under the influence of James, but pragmatism had taken a back seat for the first few years of the 1930's, but it began to reappear as the 1930's progressed. The first issue of Radical Religion finds Niebuhr stressing the pragmatic appeal of socialism. "Being a pragmatic people that part of the American church which takes the social and economic problems seriously has more or less drifted into socialism simply because it became convinced that there is no hope of social justice in the old individualism."<sup>64</sup>

The first issue of Radical Religion is also of interest since it contained a concise summary of Niebuhr's views as well as the views of the F.S.C. Niebuhr recognised that his objectives and those of the Fellowship were different from the "ultimate presuppositions about life" that were in pure Marxism. Niebuhr wrote that the Fellowship believed that "a capitalistic society

63. Ibid. p. 659.

64. Reinhold Niebuhr "Why We Need A New Quarterly" Radical Religion (Fall 1935) p. 3.

is destroying itself and yet it must be destroyed lest it reduce, .... our whole civilization to barbarianism."<sup>65</sup> There was a second area of general agreement with Marxism in that the Fellowship had called for the "social ownership of the means of production" which was the "only basis of health and justice for a technical age."<sup>66</sup> There was one other general area of agreement between Marxism and the Fellowship, both believed "that such a society can be established only through a social struggle and that in that struggle we ought to be on the side of the working-man."<sup>67</sup> As one can see the Fellowship agreed with the central presuppositions of Marxism, i.e. the prophecy of the coming catastrophe; calling for social ownership and looking toward the coming class struggle. "If we (Fellowship of Socialist Christians) qualify the consistency of Marxian determinism and the optimism of Marxian utopianism we do so without apology to the socialist cause because we believe that these errors of Marxism complicate its political problem and imperil its political success."<sup>68</sup>

Niebuhr extensively employed Marxist concepts in 1934; an example is his criticism of the church. Niebuhr still relied heavily upon certain Marxist assumptions, but he was shaping some of them to his needs. In the article "The Church and Political Action" Niebuhr expressed the opinion that the church should center its activities around the dispossessed. Niebuhr

65. Ibid. p. 5.

66. Ibid. p. 5.

67. Ibid. p. 5.

68. Ibid. p. 5.

asserted that the middle-class expected to transcend in the form of the church through political idealism the political prejudices that it had toward labor. Niebuhr emphatically stated that "the church cannot transcend the class struggle if it does not first espouse it and take it into its own life."<sup>69</sup>

At this juncture of his life Niebuhr still was profiting from Marxism and an excellent example of this is in the way he examined the ideas and methods of Barth. Niebuhr criticised the Barthian for "religious absolutism which begins by making conscience sensitive to all human weakness and ends in complacency toward social injustice."<sup>70</sup> Niebuhr asserted that:

The selfishness of the privileged groups who are trying desperately to prevent the organization of the social order in which all men will have basic security is confusedly identified with human selfishness in general, and the workers are told that they must suffer from injustice as punishment for the sins of mankind... the harassed unemployed might well express their scorn for these theological subtleties and insist that they are at least entitled to a world in which all men suffer equally from the consequences of human sin.<sup>71</sup>

In the article "The Problem of Communist Religion" Niebuhr reiterated his dissatisfaction with the communist position on religion. Communism in Niebuhr's estimation is definitely a religion and took exception when Max Eastman called for the removal of all religious elements from communism. Niebuhr was in agreement with Harold Laki's position that the source of political strength in communism was to be found in its religious

69. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Church and Political Action" The Christian Century (Aug. 1, 1934) p. 993.

70. Reinhold Niebuhr "Barthianism and Political Reaction" The Christian Century. (June 6, 1934) p. 758.

71. Ibid. p. 758.

character. Niebuhr, however, was aware that the religious elements had both an evil and a positive effect. This view is summed up in the statement that "the religious character of a political movement is the source of its political strength and demonic peril."<sup>72</sup> Niebuhr was forced to ask the question: "What is to be done if the source of inhumanity in a political movement is also the source of its power?"<sup>73</sup> Niebuhr realised that the inhumanity that was intrinsic in the movement of communism could not be removed without destroying its power. Niebuhr scornfully commented that: "Its (communism) dogmatic oversimplifications falsify the actual facts of Western Civilization, and accordingly lead to faulty tactics."<sup>75</sup> Niebuhr, however, gave pragmatic approval to certain religious elements. "It is therefore merely a sober truth to regard the working class as a group destined to a high fate in the history of contemporary civilization."<sup>76</sup> Niebuhr had only acknowledged a need for the feeling of mission and he felt that the inclusion of religion only brought about inhumanity. Niebuhr still retained his basic belief in the tenets of Marxism. "But it will make a great difference in the history of our civilization whether the philosophy which informs our radicalism proceeds from jealous religious assumptions or rests upon a secure foundation of sober

---

72. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Problem of Communist Religion" The World Tomorrow (July 26, 1934).

73. Ibid. p. 379.

74. Ibid. p. 379.

75. Ibid. p. 379.

76. Ibid. p. 379.

social and political judgements."<sup>77</sup>

By 1934 Niebuhr had progressed far beyond his initial encounter with Marxism and was beginning to look more objectively at its doctrines. This attitude was to be dominant throughout the thirties, but there was a growing dissatisfaction with Marxism that came to culmination in the 1940's. The period covering the third decade of the twentieth century is normally considered to be the second stage in Niebuhr's political development. The first being his liberal stage and the third a return to a more conservative base with a re-orientation towards pragmatism, which had never been entirely left behind.<sup>78</sup> After Niebuhr's initial intensive encounter in 1932 with the beliefs and doctrines of Marx he began to find fault with the metaphysical claims which Marx had made which was a secularised expression of the Kingdom of God. Niebuhr throughout this period was concerned with the whole social problem and with other classes besides the proletariat.<sup>79</sup> Niebuhr dealt with the problems of the world in terms of Marxist principles, but had not been completely dominated by the ideas of Marx. Niebuhr from the beginning had been aware of the dangers that Marxist doctrines held, and very quickly was able to identify these dangers and warn of their evil.

However, the continuing power of Niebuhr's radical opinions are evident in his abandonment of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. In the article "Why I Leave the F.O.R." Niebuhr clearly

---

77. Ibid. p. 379.

78. Charles C. West Communism and the Theologians: Study of an Encounter (London 1958) p. 122-3.

79. Ibid. p. 123.

established his high opinion of Marxist principles that existed at this time and that held sway over his thinking about society even though they were tempered by Christian principles. Niebuhr was a pacifist only in the sense of refusing to participate in an international war and was no longer willing to consider pure pacifism as an option. Niebuhr had come to argue that "In the case of the social struggle which is being waged between the privileged and the disinherited classes in every Western nation some of us, at least know that there are possibilities that modern civilizations will drift into barbarism with the disintegration of the capitalist system."<sup>80</sup> Niebuhr appreciated that the "problem of social justice is a pragmatic and even a technical one. Modern capitalism breeds injustice because of the disproportions of economic power which it tolerates and upon which it is based."<sup>81</sup> Niebuhr then averred that there is "no basic economic justice without a destruction of the present disproportions of power and we do not expect the latter without a social struggle."<sup>82</sup> Niebuhr combined pragmatic and realistic reasons for rejecting the F.O.R.'s position and using Marxist principles, e.g. the inevitability of class struggle. Niebuhr believed that when one limited the action of the disinherited to non-violent coercion it gave "an undue advantage to that portion of the community which is always using non-violent coercion against the disin-

---

80. Reinhold Niebuhr "Why I Left the F.O.R." The Christian Century (Jan. 3, 1934) p. 18.

81. Ibid. p. 18. .

82. Ibid. p. 18.

herited."<sup>83</sup> Niebuhr revealed the dual character of his thought and his fatalistic acceptance of a coming tragedy when he stated that "as a Marxian and as a Christian I recognise the tragic character of man's social life, and the inevitability of conflict in it arising from the inability of man ever to bring his egoism completely under the dominion of conscience."<sup>84</sup>

As before Niebuhr employed other philosophical assumptions from other philosophical sources, but to a lesser degree than the twenties since his thinking was in the shadow of Marxist assumptions and doctrines. Niebuhr spent the majority of his time during this period calling for a revision of Marxist thought or putting forward Marxist ideas.<sup>85</sup> However, there are several references to major figures in philosophy in the article "The Churches in Germany" specifically to Thomas Hobbes<sup>86</sup> and David Hume,<sup>87</sup> but that is the only real use of specific philosophical ideas in Niebuhr's articles in 1934 except for several references to Oswald Spengler's thought. This is not surprising when one considers Niebuhr's intense involvement with the events in Germany as well as his preoccupation with the coming crisis and his immersion in Marxism.

In the article "Religion as a Source of Radicalism" Niebuhr again turned to the now familiar source of Spengler. Niebuhr

83. Ibid. p. 18.

84. Ibid. p. 19.

85. Reinhold Niebuhr "Comment on an Appeal to the Socialist Party" The World Tomorrow (April 12, 1934) p. 185.

86. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Churches in Germany" The American Scholar (Summer, 1934) p. 348.

87. Ibid. p. 346.

examined Spengler's assumption that the radicalism of the workers was due to a degenerate type of religion. Niebuhr noted that Spengler's view was that religion "becomes a dangerous source of social disintegration when the priest of religion mistakenly imagines that the pure ideals of religion can become the basis of political reform, and gives support to radical political programs." Niebuhr continued "Spengler attributes modern radicalism to these religious aberrations and quite correctly derives modern Marxism from the prophetic tradition in religion."<sup>88</sup> Niebuhr certainly did not agree with Spengler's basic call to the Prussian aristocracy to subdue with nailed fist the radicalism of the workers. Marx considered religion to be the source of conservatism and political reaction, while Spengler considered religion to be a basis for radicalism. Niebuhr shows his deep understanding by agreeing with both of these outlooks and using them together. Niebuhr was of the opinion that the "real fact is that religion is the source of both radicalism and conservatism; for the light of its sanctities can be used with equal success to obscure the imperfections of society and to bring them into bold relief."<sup>89</sup>

Although Niebuhr violently disagreed with Spengler's basic stand as we will discover later he still utilized Spengler's reactionistic approach to religion to his advantage. Niebuhr appreciated that religion was a vulnerable target for both the Marxist and Spenglerian type of reaction for Niebuhr main-

88. Reinhold Niebuhr "Religion as a Source of Radicalism" The Christian Century (April 11, 1934) p. 491.

89. Ibid. p. 491.



tained that there was a need for a study which would incorporate both extremes.<sup>90</sup>

Niebuhr employed Spengler's three alternatives for giving expression to religion i.e. the monk, the priest, and the prophet as the symbols of the three differing religious possibilities. Spengler used the symbol of the priest to stand for the religious approach to reality and its tendency to reconcile the imperfections of the world. On the other hand the monk for Spengler represented the purer type of religion which obviated the necessity to compromise with the relativities of a political and economic order. Niebuhr asserted that "in so far as the ascetic isolates religious-moral sensitivity in the monastery and prevents it from becoming effective in society in general he may have as conservative an influence upon social life as both Spengler's praise and Marxian criticism suggest."<sup>91</sup> An excellent example of Niebuhr's ability to intertwine differing view points in order to reach a conclusion without being dominated by either thinker. Niebuhr, however, made evident his displeasure with Spengler's analysis of the symbol of the prophet. "Spengler's praise of priest and monk as legitimate types of religion and his condemnation of the prophetic social radical as a degenerate religious type is merely the value of judgement of an arch-reactionary who judges all things in terms of the usefulness to a traditional society."<sup>92</sup>

Niebuhr's widening disagreement with Spengler was under-

90. Ibid. p. 493.

91. Ibid. p. 493.

92. Ibid. p. 493.

lined when less than a month later a book review appeared that Niebuhr had written for The World Tomorrow entitled "Historian, Poet - Junker" which was extremely critical of Spengler's latest work The Hour of Decision which was the work that Niebuhr seemed to be referring to in the article "Religion as a Source of Radicalism", but never directly referred to by name. Niebuhr from the first sentence of this review showed that his dissatisfaction with Spengler was growing and in particular his dissatisfaction with the newest of Spengler's works. "All that is worse in Spengler is in this political tract."<sup>93</sup> Niebuhr observed that Spengler had become dominated by Prussian prejudices which were only slightly in evidence in what Niebuhr called his "poetic work", i.e. The Decline of the West. Niebuhr criticised Spengler because he had "ceased to be a determinist in this volume", referring to The Hour of Decision. Niebuhr had come to realise that Spengler "is no longer describing the inevitable decline of Western Culture but is nerving his little class of aristocrats for a desperate struggle against the colored hordes of the orient and against the rebellious workers of the Western World."<sup>95</sup> Niebuhr seemed to hint that since Spengler had abandoned his former position, Spengler's appeal had been lessened. One is again made aware of the importance of the deterministic position for Niebuhr a position that Spengler had emphasised earlier; one that apparently attracted Niebuhr during the later 1920's which was yet another way in which Nie-

---

93. Reinhold Niebuhr "Historian, Poet - and Junker" review of The Hour of Decision in The World Tomorrow (April 26, 1934) p. 211.

94. Ibid. p. 211.

95. Ibid. p. 211.

buhr had begun the criticism of liberalism which finally led him to Marx.

Niebuhr condemned out of hand the latest work of Spengler by informing the reader that the ideal "social system for Spengler is the old feudal order in which the lord commands and the peasants obey...".<sup>96</sup> Since modern capitalism had destroyed this ideal world for Spengler, he hated the capitalist as much as he hated the socialist for the destruction of the feudal world that he considered to be the ideal system. However, Niebuhr scathingly noted that "Spengler has no scheme for getting rid of a technical civilization or modern industrial process."<sup>97</sup>

Niebuhr opined that there was a gradual downward spiral in Spengler's overall view. Niebuhr reminded one that in the Decline of the West Spengler had no idea of opposing the course of events, however, later Spengler sought to oppose the course of events. Niebuhr wrote about Spengler that he "wrote a little book entitled Man and Technics in which he advised the blue-bloods to make a heroic, though necessarily futile, defense of their crumbling world against the rebellious workers."<sup>98</sup> Spengler by the time that he wrote The Hour of Decision had arrived at the opinion that the defense by the bluebloods might be successful. Niebuhr scornfully asserted that Spengler's conceptualisation remained incomplete, since he did not suggest what a Prussian general is to do if "the workers in his factory fail to yield him that obedience, reverence, and gratitude which are

---

96. Ibid. p. 211.

97. Ibid. p. 211.

98. Ibid. p. 211.

his just due."<sup>99</sup>

Niebuhr ended this rather savage book review on a mournful but very informative note. Niebuhr mourned the "going" of Spengler, but he confirmed that he had already been apparent which was that he was profoundly affected by the early work of Spengler. Niebuhr sorrowfully commented that:

Spengler has never been a reliable historian. But there was an imposing grandeur in the poetic conceptions of his magnum opus. Now the poet of reaction has turned into a bawling and rather incoherent 'counterrevolutionary'. The psychoses which his nations suffers seems to have affected him.<sup>100</sup>

Niebuhr blamed the situation in Germany for the downfall of Spengler's ideals, but he also admitted having early doubts about Spengler. However, Niebuhr quite readily admitted that Spengler was a source of inspiration for him.

In 1934 the same year in which he finally rejected pacifism the last remnant of liberalism Niebuhr wrote the work Reflections on the End of an Era. This volume disclosed Niebuhr's consistent concern with the need for a radical approach in order to bring about social change. "Radicalism for Niebuhr is not only denoted by revolutionary activity, but conoted by a thorough going change."<sup>101</sup> This volume is considered by some to be the "great product of Niebuhr's Marxist phase."<sup>102</sup> Others consider this volume to be the first volume to indicate a shift from the basic tenets of Marxism.<sup>103</sup>

99. Ibid. p. 211.

100. Ibid. p. 211.

101. J.M. Danielson The Evolution of the Political Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (unpublished thesis, 1965) p. 78.

102. Merkley op. cit. p. 183.

103. Danielson op. cit. p. 78.

The Marxist influences that were abundant in Moral Man and Immoral Society were in evidence as well in Reflections on the End of an Era. This volume like Moral Man and Immoral Society will be primarily investigated in order to discover what influences are affecting the beliefs of Niebuhr with particular attention to the influence of Marx. The first area to be investigated will be the area to do with Marxist assumptions and doctrines and how Niebuhr utilized or rejected them, ~~as well as other philosophical sources.~~

Niebuhr reasserted in Reflections on the End of an Era his basic belief in the Marxist prognosis about civilization by asserting that:

With rather pathetic irony modern civilization proceeded to tear itself asunder in its conflict between nations and classes while modern culture dreamed of perpetual peace. The trader is not a conscious imperialist; but he needs raw products for his machine, markets for his goods and investment opportunities for his surplus capital. Each modern industrial nation was therefore forced into imperialism; and its imperialism came in conflict with that of other nations, driven by the same necessities. The very reason that each of the modern nations is forced to be excessively imperialistic was due to the fact that the dominant economic groups in each of them would not divide the benefits of the productive process with the masses sufficiently to provide markets for the process within the boundaries of each nation. It is instructive that during the period of decay in this system of production a world economic conference should be held in which each nation insisted on the necessity of freer trade between the nations while every nation continued to raise tariff barriers and to seek trade advantages in depreciated currencies in the vain effort to sell the world more goods than it was willing to buy from the world. It is significant too that the ultimate disintegration of such a civilization should be foreshadowed by rising international control of the League of Nations, the one achievement (or was it gesture?) of the liberal spirit of the era.<sup>104</sup>

Again Niebuhr has underlined his two basic reasons for employing Marxist assumptions. At the end of the above statement Niebuhr

---

104. Reinhold Niebuhr Reflections on the End of an Era (New York 1934) p. 14, hereafter cited as RBE.

emphasised his basic strategy, i.e. employing Marxism as a means of criticising liberal ideals, as well as employing Marxism's predictions about the ultimate disintegration of capitalism. Niebuhr presupposed that the destruction of civilization would come from tensions and stresses that were already present in civilization. Marxism was confident that the cause of this self-destruction would be economic as was Niebuhr.

As has been noted previously Niebuhr employed Marxist assumptions in his analysis of liberal ideals and capitalistic civilization in the main. An example of this application is found in the following:

The hope of harmony between the classes has been as cruelly disappointed as the liberal dream of international reciprocity. The mechanical civilization of the commercial and industrial oligarchs tends to fall apart not only internationally but intranationally. The class struggle is indeed as old as history; but in other ages personal relations and organic societies tended to mitigate and to obscure the force of class antagonisms. It remained for a social order which hoped for a perfect mutuality of interest between social classes to generate the most venomous and destructive class antagonisms. <sup>105</sup>

Niebuhr presupposed the "falling apart" of civilization. Niebuhr in fact seemed to be viewing civilization through Marxist spectacles. Marx and Engels wrote in the Manifesto of the Communist Party:

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie possesses, however, this distinctive feature; it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. <sup>106</sup>

105. REE p. 15-16.

106. S. works p. 36.

Niebuhr was still convinced in 1934 that history was basically a matter of class struggle. Niebuhr's understanding of history had taken on a more pronounced Marxist coloring which was not evident too such a large degree early in the 1930's, which underlined Niebuhr's heavy involvement with Marxist analysis. Niebuhr appears at this stage to be completely at home with the writings of Marx and Marx's approach to history. Niebuhr agreed with one basic conclusion that came from the Marxist analysis of society, i.e. present society for Niebuhr had become self-destructive with the inclusion of the ideas of class struggle and imperialism. As can be noted in the earlier quotation (104) Niebuhr basically agreed with Lenin's definition of imperialism which was the striving for annexation by one nation toward another.<sup>107</sup> Niebuhr considered the desire of each capitalistic society to annex more markets as one of the reasons underlying the disintegration of civilization.

Niebuhr in the chapter aptly entitled "Prophecy of Doom" underlined and emphasised even more strongly than before his basic belief in the coming self-destruction of civilization a subject that had always intrigued him. Marx and Engels in the Manifesto of the Communist Party had stated: "The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market has given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country."<sup>108</sup> After pointing out that there was a large world-market that included almost every nation. Marx and Engels went on to point out that this world-market was controlled by a few.

107. Karl Marx, F. Engels, V.I. Lenin and J. Stalin A Handbook of Marxism (London 1935) p. 692.

108. S. Works p. 39.

"It (bourgeoisie) has agglomerated population, centralized means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands."<sup>109</sup>

Marx and Engels outlined the gloomy results of mass consumption and centralization that had been brought about by the bourgeoisie.

Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of the means of subsistence industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much industry too much commerce. The productive forces at the disposal of society no longer tend to further the development of the conditions of bourgeois property; on the contrary, they have become too powerful for these conditions by which they are fettered, as soon as they overcome these they bring disorder into the whole of these fetters, they bring disorder into the whole of bourgeois society, endanger the existence of bourgeois property.<sup>110</sup>

Marx and Engels were of the opinion that the world-market was undergoing a series of crises which were caused by overproduction. The Marxist conception of civilization favored the idea that there would be a series of crises that will be world wide, and that these crises will bring about the downfall of society because of the fact that production has outstripped mass consumption. Niebuhr asserted that:

The sickness from which modern civilization suffers is organic and constitutional. It is not due to an incidental defect in the mechanism of production or distribution but to the very character of the social system. The system provides for the private ownership of the productive processes upon which the health of the whole civilization depends. Private ownership means social power; and the unequal distribution of social power leads automatically to inequality and injustice. By the vesting of power of ownership in the hands of comparatively few individuals the present social system insures the faulty distribution of the wealth which modern machines create.

Mass production requires mass consumption; and capitalism is unable to provide mass consumption. From this basic ill of modern society all other defects seem to spring.<sup>111</sup>

109. S. Works p. 39.

110. S. Works p. 39.

111. REE p. 24.



Within the above assertion there is a great deal of evidence that points to Niebuhr's agreement with three Marxist assumptions. The first was the centralization of power which represented for Niebuhr and Marx a great danger. Marx was perfectly correct in Niebuhr's view in his belief that an expanding capitalistic society means an ever increasing degree of centralization. Secondly, Niebuhr as did Marx feared mass consumption and mass production which contained a 'fundamental difficulty' for society. Niebuhr was of the opinion that the overproduction of 'modern civilization' was a basic flaw and not an incidental defect. Thirdly, Niebuhr understood as had Marx that overproduction was likely to be mortal to capitalistic society.

A discussion that throws light upon Niebuhr's thinking was his application of Marxist analysis to the "social struggle in America". Niebuhr in this discussion employed Marxist concepts in his analysis of American society. Niebuhr observed that the "disintegration of capitalism through overproduction is more obvious in America than in any other nation but it is not yet obvious to the American mind."<sup>112</sup> However, Niebuhr had come to realise that there was "no authentic proletariat in America."<sup>113</sup> The proletariat in America thought of itself as being made up of individuals in America and consequently there was the accompanying lack of class feeling and unity, since for the most part the American proletariat lived in the hope of rising to the comparative comfort of the middle-class, as individuals. There

---

112. REE p. 78.

113. REE p. 82.

was no conscious class struggle in America in Niebuhr's opinion and consequently an insignificant revolutionary labor party was functioning. Niebuhr believed that:

There is, in short, nothing in the unique character of American life which can prevent a social struggle, inherent in the nature of modern society, from working itself out to its logical conclusion. But there are unique elements in our life which may postpone the ultimate crisis until the end of the century.<sup>114</sup>

Niebuhr not only applied the analytical methods of Marx but also drew some conclusions about America that were reminiscent of Marx, i.e. a prophecy of the coming class struggle.

In writing about mythology and its connection with history in particular the application of myth to history, Niebuhr came forth with several enlightening observations about Marxism and in some ways a defence of Marxist doctrine. Niebuhr declared that "an adequate philosophy of history, in short, must be a mythology rather than a philosophy."<sup>115</sup> Niebuhr described an adequate mythology of history as being able to do justice to the suggestion of meaning in momentary chaos. Niebuhr continued:

It must be able to realise that forces which are not immediately conscious of purpose, at least not of ultimate purpose, may be used to weave meaning into the strands of history. It must not be assumed that any mythology of history can do justice to all of its detailed facts nor that it will be absolutely true in the sense that it is the only possible interpretation of all the facts. But neither can it be assumed that a science of history which disavows mythology is more accurate in its description of the detailed facts.<sup>116</sup>

The view of Niebuhr was that Marxism was a mythology which did not agree with the scientific view of Max Eastmann. Niebuhr placed Marxism "between the mythology of the Christian sects and

114. REE p. 82.

115. REE p. 122.

116. REE p. 126.

the faith of liberalism."<sup>117</sup> The Marxist mythology like liberalism emphasised the belief in human responsibility for the historic process. Marxism stood with certain Christian sects in its belief that historical patterns were not developed by those who consciously tried to make the patterns. Niebuhr recognised the fact that Marxism was too certain that its interpretation of contemporary history was scientific rather than mythological. Niebuhr expressed the belief that no matter how much the Marxist claimed a scientific validity for his thesis, it was quite clearly a mythology which was revealed by its mythological construction. The Marxist had a great deal of faith in the processes of history, which was unlike the liberal hope of an easily and historically achieved ethical ideal or the classical religious belief that God himself could redeem the chaos and no other. The Marxist lived with the hope that the "processes in history support those who are willing to affirm these processes."<sup>118</sup>

Marx wrote to L. Kugelmann of Hanover that:

World history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favorable chances. It would on the other hand be of a very mystical nature; if accidents played no part. These accidents naturally form part of the general course of development and are compensated for by other accidents. But acceleration and delay are very much dependent upon such accidents including the accident of the character of the people who first head the movement.<sup>119</sup>

Niebuhr realised that if accidents were "the only element in Marxian philosophy of history which 'saves' it from being mystical."<sup>120</sup> then it contained a great many mystical elements.

---

117. REE p. 126.

118. REE p. 128.

119. S. Works p. 671.

120. REE p. 128.

Niebuhr in extending this line of thought concluded that the Marxist held a belief in the inexorable tendency of history. Trotsky ended his work My Life by stating that:

On April 26, 1852, Proudhon wrote to a friend from prison 'The movement is no doubt irregular and crooked, but the tendency is constant. what every government does in turn in favour of revolution becomes inviable; what is attempted against it passes over like a cloud; I enjoy watching this spectacle, which I understand every single picture; I observe these changes in the life of the world as if I had received their explanation from above what oppresses others elevates me more and more, inspires and fortifies me; how can you want me then to accuse destiny, and as for men they are too ignorant, too enslaved for me to feel annoyed with them.'  
Despite their slight savour of ecclesiastical eloquence those are fine words. I subscribe to them.<sup>121</sup>

Niebuhr underlined the fact that Trotsky had added the last paragraph because of Trotsky's awareness of the religious overtones in this confession. The Marxist's faith in Niebuhr's estimation had part of its belief founded on the hope that history would support the moral purpose of the proletarian. This faith in history went so far as to hold that the enemy will defeat itself. The Christian idea of "the last shall be first and the first shall be last" was for Niebuhr a part of the Marxist hope. Niebuhr regarded the way in which the Marxist made use of the economic facts as being indicative of the mythological character of the Marxist faith. He observed that "economic facts as such never disclose a moral purpose or meaning if the moral imagination does not read the meaning into them."<sup>122</sup> However, in the case of Marxism the moral imagination of the Marxist lighted upon exactly that meaning in

---

121. Leon Trotsky. My Life: The Rise and Fall of a Dictator (London, 1930) p. 497.

122. REE p. 130.

economic facts which made the victory of the proletariat possible in the eyes of those who believed in Marxism. Niebuhr believed that this had the advantage of giving courage to the faithful, which was another reason for their "indomitable hope."

Niebuhr continued his examination of Marxist religious and mythological aspects by putting forward the hypothesis that Marxism had been strengthened by determinism because determinism had given it energy to pursue the moral and social goal that it sought, because those who were pursuing the goal were certain of obtaining it. However, like Christianity Marxism revealed that there were fatalistic perils in every deterministic theory. Lenin fought against the sleep of fatalism that threatened Marxism when men regarded Marxist historical goals as pre-ordained. Lenin opposed Kautsky who he believed had succumbed to the fatalism which meant just waiting for the coming crisis. Lenin insisted that the objective forces in history must be consciously directed toward a revolutionary goal. The battle of Lenin against the ideas of Kautsky was for Niebuhr a battle against 'sleepy fatalism' which coincided with other battles within the Christian church. For Niebuhr this type of battle only served to underline the religious character of Marxism.<sup>123</sup>

Niebuhr went so far as to classify Marxist mythology as a part of the "general category of Jewish apocalypticism in distinction to the Hellenistic interpretations of life and history."<sup>124</sup> There were differences between Marxist hopes and Christian eschatology, since Christian eschatology is dependent upon God for some change in human nature not on historical process. Nie-

---

123. REE p. 131.

124. REE p. 132.

buhr noticed that in its pure form Christian eschatology because of moral scruples prevents the believer from participating in the historical processes which could bring about the final defeat of evil.

Niebuhr clearly understood Marxist mythology to be of great importance to the Christian religion. Niebuhr maintained that "If Christianity is to survive this era of social disintegration and social rebuilding, and is not to be absorbed in or annihilated by the secularized religion of Marxism it must come to terms with the insights of Marxist mythology."<sup>125</sup>

Niebuhr's judgement was that Marxist mythology contained essential truths because "it is more able to affirm the moral meaning in contemporary chaos than orthodox Christianity".<sup>126</sup>

Niebuhr warned that while "Christianity must come to terms with Marxian mythology it cannot afford to capitulate to it."<sup>127</sup>

The capitulation to Marxism by Christianity would be a betrayal of Christianity to the illusions that were present in liberalism and Marxism.<sup>128</sup> Marxism as a whole offered a better political strategy than Christianity for Niebuhr, but Marxism did not have a deep enough insight to be able to replace the whole of Christian thought in Niebuhr's judgement, i.e. it was dependent to a large degree upon an illusion.

In 1934 Niebuhr had almost abandoned the hope of a parliamentary solution. Niebuhr had come to distrust the parliamentary

125. REE p. 135.

126. REE p. 135.

127. REE p. 135.

128. REE p. 136.

approach for pragmatic reasons and he felt that it would not achieve the desired aims. This distrust was quite evident in Reflections on the End of an Era.<sup>129</sup>

Niebuhr commented in a general way on the conflict between Socialism and Capitalism. For Niebuhr any conflict, including the conflict between Socialism and Capitalism was in "reality a battle between conflicting social wills."<sup>130</sup> This conflict of social wills was determined by the comparative strength of the competing collective wills. The most determined group would win the coming conflict in Niebuhr's judgement. Niebuhr had concluded that the workers would be victorious because of their determined stance.

Besides the determination of the laborers, Niebuhr also put forth even more instructive reasons for the ultimate victory of the worker. Niebuhr maintained that "his victory (the worker) is certain because the logic of history demands his type of society rather than the one which the owner is trying to preserve and because he possesses more significant social power than that of ownership."<sup>131</sup> Karl Marx in his letter to P.V. Annenkov in which he disputed certain assumptions of M. Proudhon, concisely summarized this type of historical outlook:

In place of the great historical movement arising from the conflict between the productive forces already acquired by men and their social relations, which no longer correspond to those productive forces; in place of the terrible wars which are being prepared between the different classes within each nation and between different nations; in place of the practical and violent action of the masses by which alone these conflicts can be resolved in place

129. REE pp. 157-8.

130. REE p. 160.

131. REE p. 161.

of this vast, prolonged and complicated movement Monsieur Proudhon supplies the whimsical motion of his own head.<sup>132</sup>

In Niebuhr's work there were echos of the terrible conflicts that Marx considered to be inevitable which would lead to the victory of the proletariat.

Niebuhr's definition of radicalism was tied into his conception of the coming catastrophe. Niebuhr defined radicalism:

as a method of observation that brushes the moral pretension and cultural elaborations of a given civilization aside to discover what kind of power-relations is to be found at the foundation of the social structure. Radicalism as a method of action seeks to level centers of power in the interest of justice. The radical is therefore necessary in every society but he is particularly needed in an era in which old social forms are disintegrating and new ones are emerging.<sup>133</sup>

Niebuhr's belief in the prognosis of a self-destructive society in all probability has Marxist roots, however it was not completely Marxist in origin; Niebuhr's interest in the possible destruction of society can be traced to Russell and Spengler. The need for action against "power centers" illustrates the suasion of Marxism. The call for the removal of cultural and moral pretensions in order to uncover the true nature of society is seen in the Manifesto of the Communist Party. "But communism abolishes eternal truth, it abolishes all religion, and all morality instead of constituting them on a new basis; it therefore acts in contradiction to all past historical experience."<sup>134</sup>

Niebuhr clearly maintained that there were certain features

132. Karl Marx Karl Marx in Two Volumes ed. V. Adoratsky (London 1903) p. 376.

133. REE p. 251.

134. S. Works p. 52.



of Marxism that had met with his approval. "But he (the Marxist) is not wrong in setting the absolute demands of justice against the inequalities of the present social order nor in believing that the destruction of present disproportions of economic power through collective ownership will make for a more equal justice."<sup>135</sup> Niebuhr quite adamantly pointed out that there were advantages to the religious tendencies of Marxism. Niebuhr asserted that "the religious character of this demand for equal justice is attested by the whole of religion."<sup>136</sup> However, as well be shown in the section of this paper dealing with Niebuhr's objections to Marxist thought; Niebuhr did not view religious fervor as being constructive.

At the end of the chapter headed "A Radical Theory" Niebuhr re-asserted the basic rightness of the Marxist analysis.

If modern society moves with inexorable logic toward collectivism that does not mean that all property will be as rigorously collectivized as it has been in Russia, nor that socialization will solve all political and moral problems. It means only that the disproportion of economic power, inherent in the private ownership of a social process, is the main cause of modern injustice and that this particular cause will therefore be eliminated or mitigated by social ownership.<sup>137</sup>

There can be no question that Niebuhr trusted and relied upon Marxism in his analysis, and particularly when referring to the evils of ownership and economic power. Niebuhr as did Marx alleged that power was mainly a product of economic forces. Niebuhr maintained as Marx did before him that private ownership was the root of social evil and believed that the coming defeat of ownership would be a major step in removing injustice. Nie-

135. REE pp. 270-1.

136. REE p. 271.

137. REE p. 238.

buhr felt that socialization would be instrumental in bringing about a better world, but he was aware that there would be no coming utopia.

The second area of interest that attracts investigation in Reflections on the End of an Era as before with Marxist oriented volumes, is the differing ways in which Niebuhr's disagreement with Marx affected his beliefs. In the chapter entitled "The Significance of Facism", Niebuhr discussed the reasons for Engels' failure to correctly predict the existence of capitalism in England almost a hundred years after its expected downfall. Engels predicted that revolution would occur sometime during the middle of the nineteenth century. Niebuhr explained that the error came about because of an excess of moral passion, i.e. Engels imagined that social injustice would not survive for the simple reason that it ought not to survive. Niebuhr, although he defended Marxist thought, also pointed out that Marxism like all other methods of political analysis fell prey to many faults.

Niebuhr again stressed his fear that because of the liberal heritage of Marxism that it could have inherited some of the weaknesses of liberalism. An example of this fear of inherent liberal weaknesses in Marxism is apparent when Niebuhr asserted that:

There are indications that communism will substitute a mechanistic collectivism for the mechanistic individualism of a bourgeois civilization. Its collectivism is mechanistic partly because it is, like capitalism, the product of a mechanical civilization and partly because it is like liberalism a fruit of rationalism. In this as in some other respects, communism is too much the child of capitalism and lives too much by a precise negation of the vices of the latter to bring peace and happiness to mankind.<sup>138</sup>

Niebuhr believed that Marxism had more to offer than liberalism, but he still feared the liberalistic elements of Marxism. Since Marxism was a reaction against capitalism it was directly linked to capitalism and consequently was limited by capitalistic mechanism and rationalism. This connection for Niebuhr between the destroying force and the thing to be destroyed was one of the continuing tragedies of human history. The reason for the phenomenon was that the destroying force or the "instrument of judgement" must be in the same category as the thing to be destroyed. The destroying force must consequently employ some of the instruments of that which is to be destroyed. Niebuhr had concluded "thus some evil, which is to be destroyed, is always transferred to the instruments of its destruction and thereby perpetuated."<sup>139</sup> The continuation of certain evils that came from bourgeoisie culture consequently had been absorbed by Marxism which was one of Niebuhr's basic and major underlying reasons for not totally committing himself to Marxism. Niebuhr recognised that Marxism could not have transcended all of the evils of capitalism. Niebuhr was aware that there was evil within the structure of Marxism itself, that could not be removed.

Niebuhr assumed that Marxism would bring about the continuation of certain evils that were to be found in any mechanical and rationalistic culture. In fact Niebuhr acknowledged that communism was even more dangerous than certain aspects of bourgeois culture. Niebuhr conceived of the family as being something of lasting importance not only the immediate family

---

but also the larger family, i.e. the web of secondary blood ties. Niebuhr was afraid that the very core of the family, i.e. the relation between man and wife was being threatened by a mechanical and rationalistic civilization. The individualism of modern society was gnawing away at this structure according to Niebuhr. Niebuhr regarded complete individualism as being a very dangerous institution since it left the individual without resources to combat the crowd which meant that the individual would be submerged in the group and no longer be an individual, which was in some ways a paradox. Not only did Niebuhr consider these tendencies to be present in liberalism, but also identified them as being in Marxist thought. Niebuhr asserted:

The rationalistic character of communist culture is attested by the fact that it seeks consciously to reduce the family to even less significance than bourgeois culture has unconsciously done. It furthermore excludes the romantic element (as a bourgeois accretion) so that the family becomes a highly rationalized and "efficient" institution for the pro-creation of the race. This is done for the very purpose of fitting the individual more completely into the mass. Here is one of the instances in which communism reveals itself to be the victim and not the nemesis of a capitalistic civilization, destined not to correct the weaknesses of bourgeois culture, but to develop them to the last impossible and absurd consistency.<sup>140</sup>

Niebuhr not only foresaw Marxism as having continued some of the practices of the bourgeois, but he also believed that in certain cases that Marxism would cause greater harm than had the bourgeoisie. Marxism had not just failed to correct some of the weaknesses of bourgeois culture, but had in fact exaggerated some of these weaknesses e.g. the loss of individualism. However, Marxism was a victim of liberalism since it inherited certain

---

140. REE p. 102.

weaknesses from bourgeois culture. The intensified rationalism that is part of Marxism is inherited from the bourgeois culture that it has set out to destroy. It is interesting that even though Niebuhr quite clearly understood the faults of Marxism he excused these faults by placing the blame to a certain extent on bourgeois culture. Not only did Niebuhr consider Marxism to be a victim of bourgeois evils, but he had decided that these evils were necessary in order to bring about the destruction of capitalism. It was necessary to employ certain methods of bourgeois culture because in order to destroy something one has to employ weapons that will have an effect upon the thing to be destroyed.

Engels and Marx wrote in The Manifesto of the Communist Party:

The modern labourer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth. And here it becomes evident that the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society, and to impose its conditions of existence upon society as an over-riding law. It is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave with this slavery, because it cannot help him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society.<sup>141</sup>

However, Niebuhr had some pragmatic objections to this theory.

Niebuhr remarked that:

actual hunger and malnutrition may sap the physical foundations of martial courage. That is why the Marxian theory of "increasing misery" as the basis of revolutionary ardor may be interpreted in terms untrue to the actual facts. Revolutionary ardor arises when physical need destroys caution and begets desperation. But actual hunger may enervate rebellious heroism.<sup>142</sup>

Another familiar pattern that has been noticeable in previous

141. S. Works p. 45.

142. REE p. 144.

statements comes through in the above statement. Niebuhr put forward certain pragmatic objections to Marxist theory. Niebuhr agreed with the presupposition that people would become more rebellious with hunger, but he made one telling, but simple, critical observation, i.e. hunger not only increases hate, but at the same time lessens the effectiveness of those who hate. The interesting feature is the interplay of Marxism with Niebuhr's constant pragmatic undercurrent.

The reign of the worker for Niebuhr was inevitable, but he was anxious about certain aspects of the coming change. Niebuhr declared that: "The inevitability of the reign of the workers proves nothing in regard either to the time which will be required to establish it or the possible benefits which mankind may derive from it. The barbarian revolt against or invasion of a civilization is never an unmixed blessing."<sup>143</sup> Niebuhr quite straight forwardly stated that any change contained evils, and consequently he believed that the take over of the worker would also introduce new evils.

As has been noted earlier in this discussion Niebuhr was uneasy about the consequences of the proletariat's understanding of itself as an instrument of judgement and justice. There were for Niebuhr two perils that arose from the proletariat conception of itself as "the instrument of justice". The first danger was the vindictiveness of the proletariat toward their enemies that could perpetuate "the building of a society in which perennial human values are foolishly suppressed."<sup>144</sup> The

---

143. REE p. 147.

144. REE p. 174.

second peril of the proletariat comes from the possible alienation of the poor who were not members of the proletariat, i.e. the poorer middle-class and the peasants.

Niebuhr declared:

If the proletarian worker insists that his characteristic attitudes on life, religion, patriotism, family and art are absolutely essential for a revolutionary movement he will succeed only in driving other poor classes, whom capitalism has also disinherited, and who are potential allies, into the arms of the enemies.<sup>145</sup>

Niebuhr cited examples of both dangers, both of which had been realised in Russia, and in fact predicted that the vindictiveness of the Russian proletariat would have an international effect and international consequences.

Another area of Niebuhr's disagreement with Marxism is the way in which it combines religious and irreligious factors. Communism was a religion in Niebuhr's judgement because its mythology gave meaning to human life and history. However, communism and the naturalism of the bourgeois culture contained irreligious pretension, i.e. a scientific analysis of history that supposedly gave meaning to history but denied the existence of a conscious author. Niebuhr asserted that:

Science may give detailed accounts of the relation of isolated events to each other in various cause-effect series, but it cannot give a picture of the whole without introducing presuppositions which are not immediately apparent in the facts and can be found in them only after they have been suggested by the predisposition of the observer. The very fact that the history-pictures of bourgeois naturalism and proletarian communism are so completely different disproves their scientific pretensions. In the one case it is imagined that history moves gradually and by evolutionary inevitability toward an ethical goal. The world-view of the bourgeois naturalist is optimistic. And the goal toward which history moves is an ethical ideal, characteristic of bourgeois life, the ideal of free co-operation, of a libertarian social order. The world-view of the proletarian is also

optimistic. It is believed that a moral ideal will be completely realised in history. Significantly the ideal which is to be realised is one suggested by the needs and hopes of proletarian life, that of equal justice. But the proletarian world-view is not purely optimistic. There is a catastrophe note in it that the present social order will disintegrate before the ideal one can be established.<sup>146</sup>

Niebuhr was able to identify a certain amount of continuity in the outlook of the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Niebuhr had concluded that there were scientific pretensions in naturalistic bourgeois culture. The scientific pretensions of Marxism have already been treated with scorn by Niebuhr, witness his confrontation with the ideas of Max Eastmann.

In the latter part of Reflections on the End of an Era, Niebuhr again disagreed with the utopian pretensions of the Marxist radicals which has been an on going point of disagreement. Niebuhr in discussing the unequal endowment of men stated that: "The fact that this will be a perennial problem in every social system may prove the Marxian radical wrong in assuming that a collectivist society will finally eliminate every basis of injustice."<sup>147</sup> Niebuhr had ascertained that the utopianism of the Marxist variety falsely tended to limit human nature. Niebuhr reasoned that if justice was achieved as the result of political action it lessened the expression of pure disinterestedness. The vindictiveness of the proletariat consequently made the proletariat as the activators of a utopian society that had pure justice as its basis an impossibility.

Niebuhr came to the conclusion that it was necessary that:

146. RBE pp. 194-5.

147. RBE p. 270.



radical spirituality be brought under the scrutiny of the more absolute demands and the higher perspectives which are characteristic of classical religion. The most courageous and honest effort to establish justice in history must remain under the discipline of pure spirit through which the imperfections of every historical achievement are recognised and the perils to society in every assertion of interest against interest are discovered.<sup>148</sup>

Niebuhr believed that radicalism could help in bringing about more justice. However, it was desirable to keep the actions and ideas under the scrutiny of the eye of "pure spirit" since pure disinterestedness can only be assured through pure spirit. Since radicalism is not pure spirit it can err and needs to be scrutinized by pure spirit. Niebuhr recognised that radicalism would not agree to be checked by what Niebuhr had labeled as pure spirit. The utopianism of Marxism in Niebuhr's opinion was at the roots of Marxism's inability to take criticism. Niebuhr remarked "Its (Marxism) utopianism makes it incapable of recognising the relativities of its moral attitude and the possibilities of new tyrannies and injustices in its policies."<sup>149</sup> Niebuhr pragmatically observed that: "A moral perspective which is high enough to discover the perils and relativities in every historic movement naturally makes demands which are not capable of complete realization in history."<sup>150</sup> Niebuhr believed that Marxism was acceptable since it could achieve certain objectives, but it should be able to listen to criticism. Niebuhr considered the utopianism of Marxism to be perilous because it deafened the Marxist radicals to criticism which would threaten radicalism

---

148. REE p. 273.

149. REE pp. 273-4.

150. REE p. 274.

itself.

The criticisms that Niebuhr directed at Marxism were not at this stage of his development meant to destroy Marxism, but to correct some of the faults that were a part of Marxism and in some cases warn of possible dangers. Niebuhr did not pretend that he had given a perfect and complete critique of Marxism and consequently he did not pretend to have produced a completely perfected Marxism as a result of the criticisms. The criticisms of Niebuhr were meant to warn about certain trends that were present in Marxist thinking. The following is an excellent summary of Niebuhr's thinking on Marxist ideals and doctrines, after his critical comments:

These criticisms do not imply that the Marxian ought to sacrifice the central positions of his political program. The disinherited worker is fated to see the realities of the social struggle as the other classes cannot see it. His catastrophism is truer to the political realities of our era than the liberal optimism to which most of the middle-class cling and he is therefore bound to be the guiding factor in any political policy adequate to the task of social reconstruction. Marxian radicalism cannot afford to allow the dilutions of liberalism which the middle-class intellectuals try to press upon it. An adequate radical political policy must be Marxian in the essentials of political strategy.<sup>151</sup>

Reflections on the End of an Era as had Moral Man and Immoral Society contained the imprint of other philosophers besides those found in the Marxist camp. However, unlike Moral Man and Immoral Society, Reflections on the End of an Era only contained a few other thinkers. The work was almost completely dominated by the ideas of Marx and Engels and others that were in the Marxist camp such as Lenin and Trotsky.

Niebuhr still labored under the influence of philosophers that he had utilised in the past throughout his earlier works.

---

151. REE p. 177.

Niebuhr still was wrestling with the ideas of James; there was as well as the re-emergence of the thought of Whitehead. The sharp clash with James' idea that the belief in the absolute brought about a moral holiday again re-emerges.<sup>152</sup> Niebuhr while defending determinism struck out at James' assumption.

The belief that determinism inevitably leads to an inclination to take 'moral holidays' (William James) is a typical illusion of a rationalistic and individualistic age. On the contrary men develop the highest energy in the pursuit of a moral or social goal when they are most certain that they are affirming the pre-ordained counsels of God.<sup>153</sup>

Niebuhr had not completely rejected the ideas of James during this period, but the ideas of James which had been used by Niebuhr since the beginning and those with which he had disagreed, such as the idea of a moral holiday were being examined with the help of Marxist methods and to a certain extent some of these ideas had been found wanting as has Marxism when it was examined in the light of certain pragmatic ideas.

In Reflections on the End of an Era Niebuhr also turned to another familiar source. Niebuhr referred to the distinction Whitehead had drawn between a secular and a religious ethic. Niebuhr appropriated the two different ways of viewing reason from Whitehead's essay The Function of Reason. Whitehead proposed that there were two ways of considering reason. "We can think of it as one among many operations involved in the existence of an animal body, and we think of it in abstraction from any particular animal operation."<sup>154</sup> Niebuhr ended his comments with Whitehead's observation that: "The Greeks have

152. William James Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking (New York 1946) p. 78.

153. REE pp. 130-1.

154. Alfred North Whitehead The Function of Reason (Boston, 1969) p. 9.

bequeathed to us two figures, whose real or mythical lives conform to these two notions - Plato and Ulysses. The one shares Reason with the Gods and the other shares it with the foxes."<sup>155</sup> Niebuhr applied this assumption of Whitehead to the field of morals. The passion for pure rationality "expresses itself practically in the field of morals" when "it issues in the demand for complete disinterestedness and insists that all life, rather than the life of the ego be affirmed."<sup>156</sup> Niebuhr applied the idea of the mythical character of reason to the field of morals by judging that "the practical character of this demand transmutes rationality in morals into a spirituality which affects and is affected by will and emotions."<sup>157</sup> Niebuhr reasoned that both the elements of reason "Plato" and "Ulysses" were present in the application of reason to the field of morals. It is quite apparent that Niebuhr was still indebted to the ideas that he had gained from his study of Whitehead.

Another thinker that Niebuhr turned to in Reflections on the End of an Era was Spengler. Niebuhr referred again to the main work of Spengler which Niebuhr had employed in the past and in his review of Spengler's book The Hour of Decision in which he had held up The Decline of the West as a great poetic work although he expressed his disappointment with Spengler's later works. Niebuhr examined Spengler's assumption that Faustian man, i.e. western man, had a high degree of self-consciousness

---

155. Ibid. p. 10.

156. RBE p. 263.

157. RBE pp. 263-4.

which was thought to be a peculiar characteristic of its culture. Niebuhr was aware of the effect that Christianity had had upon bourgeois civilization. Niebuhr had been interested in the effect of Christianity on bourgeois society since the 1920's. Niebuhr considered the self-conscious aspect of western man to confirm once again the effect of Christianity on bourgeois civilization, since the self-conscious aspect of western man developed from the Christian insistence that each soul was of transcendent worth. Niebuhr made use of Spengler's earlier prediction that the power of the worker would seal the doom of the privileged social classes. Spengler assumed that "what grows is not the number of heads but the use of hands."<sup>158</sup> Although Niebuhr recognised that Spengler looked forward to this triumph in Man and Technics with fear and foreboding, he still had confidence in the validity of the Spenglerian prediction. Niebuhr maintained that some were not filled with melancholy when looking forward to this coming triumph of the worker and referred one to Ernest Juenger's work Der Arbeiter.

#### Nascent Doubts (1935)

The year 1935 is the last year to be examined in this work since it contained the last major work of Niebuhr's Marxist phase. Also as has already been noted one can already detect the signs of the Marxist assumptions coming under increasing critical fire. In 1935 there were hints that Niebuhr had begun to drift away from his heavy dependence upon Marx and had started upon a long search for an alternative source of inspiration in

---

158. Oswald Spengler Man and Technics (London 1931) pp. 70-1.

order to bring about a more realistic approach to the social and political problems facing America. The fruits of this search were harvested in such works as The Nature and Destiny of Man. Nevertheless, one can detect in 1935 Niebuhr's involvement in the beginnings of his search for a better strategy for approaching the problems of human nature.

The mid-1930's saw Niebuhr involved in the work of many political and social organizations and 1935 was no exception. It was in the midst of this active participation in both religious and political affairs that Niebuhr further refined his theological and ethical outlook. An indication of this change can be seen in Niebuhr's refusal to support the F.O.R. and his subsequent resignation from this organization. During this period Niebuhr maintained that neither the liberal nor the orthodox Protestant took the world seriously enough to deal realistically with its problems. Niebuhr continued his search for an adequate theological and ethical framework, although Marxism in 1935 was still being heavily utilised both as a framework and strategy, since the Marxist analysis for Niebuhr did put into focus the contemporary situation.<sup>159</sup>

In 1935 Niebuhr addressed the annual student peace strikes in New York City.<sup>160</sup> Niebuhr also joined 45 other religious leaders in writing to say that there would be no permanent recovery in the United States as long as it depended upon the capitalistic system.<sup>161</sup> Niebuhr was also involved in the battle

159. William Allen Greenlaw Reinhold Niebuhr as Theologian a New Interpretation (unpublished thesis) p. 32.

160. Merkley op. cit. p. 218.

161. CC p. 166.

with the communist minority of the Teacher's Union of New York City who had achieved a disproportionate degree of power.<sup>162</sup>

There is little doubt that 1935 like the years before and the next few years to follow were the busiest in Niebuhr's entire life. He was in constant demand as a sponsor of causes, as a speaker and also as a writer.<sup>163</sup>

In the autumn of 1935 the journal Radical Religion was founded and brought about the beginning of a lively discussion that was to continue between Christianity and socialism for two decades. A great deal of the burden of filling the pages fell on the shoulders of Niebuhr. In an average issue Niebuhr would supply at least one large article and most of the editorial comment. There was little question that the journal had a distinct editorial line which shaped the thinking of almost all of the contributors. Niebuhr carried over into the journal Radical Religion his scornful assessment of Roosevelt and his New Deal which he had already expressed in the Christian Century and the World Tomorrow.<sup>164</sup> The year of 1935 was in some ways the high point of Niebuhr's involvement with the ideas of Marx and his followers. Yet there were also definite signs of Niebuhr's realization that the source of his inspiration was full of errors and was full of hidden dangers. Niebuhr was not totally convinced that a dogmatic belief in the Marxist ideals and doctrines was needed.

In 1935 An Interpretation of Christian Ethics was published

---

162. CC p. 210.

163. Merkley op. cit. p. 218.

164. Ibid. pp. 230-3.

which was the first attempt by Niebuhr to present a system of ethics. This was Niebuhr's first major work that did not appear to be a discussion of religion in a basically instrumental or functional form. Niebuhr within this work seemed to be searching for a Christian ethic within the Christian tradition. An Interpretation of Christian Ethics represented Niebuhr's first attempt to feel his way along a new path in a large work and as such it was an unfinished product. What the work did reveal was theological clarity about man's nature and destiny which was an important prerequisite for engaging in Christian ethics. One must remember that this work was written in what may be called the end of an era, i.e. the upheaval in Europe and the changing face of theology. This work in some ways represented the beginning of a new approach in Niebuhr's work that was to mature in years to come.<sup>165</sup> The seeds of doubt were beginning to drive Niebuhr to the abandonment of the ideas of Marx. However, even considering this, one can recognise that Niebuhr was still caught up in Marxism which was illustrated in his first editorial in Radical Religion, but he was coming to realise that there were failings within Marxism as a political philosophy as well as a religion.<sup>166</sup> It is impossible to say at what point Niebuhr began to abandon his Marxist views, but by 1935 one comes to realise that he was already aware of the dangers of Marxism and had begun to shift his emphasis, as is evident in An Interpretation of Christian Ethics. At the end of the 1930's Niebuhr had become convinced

165. Greenlaw op. cit. p. 81.

166. Ronald Henry Stone Reinhold Niebuhr's Perspective on U.S. Foreign Policy (unpublished thesis, 1968) pp. 41-3.



that Marxism like liberalism presented an oversimplified ethic.<sup>167</sup>

There is little doubt that Niebuhr still was involved with Marxism. An interesting article that was published in 1935 was "Our Romantic Radicals" which foresaw capitalism breaking down in America with the radical movement unable to offer an adequate alternative. Niebuhr pointed out that the Socialist Party had been weakened by the squabbling between the left and right wings. Niebuhr underlined the point that neither side took American tradition into account when looking for the sources of radicalism. Niebuhr had opined that the Socialist Party should have "envisaged its task as that of saving what is good in the democratic tradition from the corruptions of the plutocracy and from annihilation at the hands of the imperiled and desperate oligarchy."<sup>169</sup> Niebuhr continued with this line of reasoning: "it is the business of a wise socialism to save democracy by adapting it to the realities of an industrial civilization and to prove to a confused nation that only by such an adaption can democracy be saved."<sup>170</sup> Niebuhr was less distrustful of certain features of parliamentary socialism than he had been in Moral Man and Immoral Society. Niebuhr was quick to point out that he was not advocating a blind acceptance of constitutional tradition, but he felt that a socialism that had become blinded to American constitutional tradition would not be equal to the 'tragic era': Niebuhr argued

167. Danielson op. cit. p. 102.

168. Reinhold Niebuhr "Our Romantic Radicals" The Christian Century (April 10, 1935) p. 474.

169. Ibid. p. 474.

170. Ibid. p. 474.

that the Communist Party which had realism "to its credit in its analysis of the catastrophic character of modern capitalism, is nevertheless a hopelessly sectarian movement in American radicalism."<sup>171</sup> Niebuhr was obviously examining the ideas of the political parties of the Communist and the Socialist using the yardstick of realism. This was a continuation of a theme that was found in the writings of 1934.

Niebuhr, however, had not abandoned his basic Marxist pre-suppositions which were expressed in the article "The Revolutionary Moment". Niebuhr in fact verified that he was still dependent upon the Marxist analysis. Niebuhr stated that "what ever the values of democracy may be in the struggle of the workers for power -and the values are still considerable - it ought to be fairly clear that a worker's movement can never make democracy an end in itself nor even go upon the assumption that it is a certain means to its ultimate end."<sup>172</sup> Niebuhr went on to state that "Democracy is not merely the construct of capitalism". Niebuhr was searching for the best possible way to bring about victory for the workers. Niebuhr remarked: "It has not been proved that the instrument of democracy will avail in a final hour of crisis when two social wills and social groups stand in exact juxtaposition and the triumph of the one means the annihilation of the other."<sup>173</sup> Niebuhr had rediscovered the value of democracy a step away from his original position in Moral Man and Immoral Society but he did

171. Ibid. p. 474.

172. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Revolutionary Moment" The American Socialist Quarterly (June 1935) p. 8.

173. Ibid. p. 8.

not in any way abandon the Marxist assumption that the capitalistic crisis should be prepared for by the workers so that they may win the final struggle for power.

Niebuhr was still concerned with the coming of the catastrophe that would confront capitalism. Niebuhr in his search for the necessary steps to be taken in preparation for the coming moment of revolution turned to Trotsky who observed that one should not "mistake the third month for the ninth month"<sup>174</sup> in the coming birth of socialism. Niebuhr warned of the possibility of the revolutionary birth being in need of expert surgical help in bringing about the revolution. Niebuhr declared that: "A realistic socialism must in short fully appreciate and be in intimate contact with the slow and historic movements without falling into the illusion that they guarantee the victory of socialism."<sup>175</sup> Niebuhr called for realism within the framework of Marxist ideas and strategy which had become more and more subject to the scrutiny of other sets of ideas, such as realism, as well as a pulling away from certain radical positions.

Niebuhr still admired Marx, and continued to use the strategy of Marxism. However, Niebuhr still continued to be critical of Marxism. Niebuhr noted that the Marxist had prided themselves upon their scientific realism by which they claim to have arrived at certain knowledge, i.e. the idea that "unjust civilizations will destroy themselves", which Niebuhr considered to be a "secularized version of the prophecies of

174. Ibid. p. 13.

175. Ibid. p. 13.

doom in which the Old Testament abounds."<sup>176</sup> Niebuhr argued that such knowledge was a product of religious realism and not scientific realism as the Marxist had claimed. Niebuhr used the idea of religious criticism to call into question certain presuppositions of Marxism. Niebuhr was convinced that the prophets "were too realistic to share the illusion of modern rationalism that men would desist from evil once they had discovered it."<sup>177</sup> Niebuhr subjected Marxism to the yardstick of realism as well as the yardstick of religious tradition. Niebuhr after having subjected Marxism and socialistic ideals to the yardstick of religious realism came to the conclusion that "A Christian socialism in our day could find an adequate theology and an adequate political strategy by a return to the dialectic of prophetic religion."<sup>178</sup>

Niebuhr in the article "Is Religion Counter-Revolutionary?" basically agreed with the three charges that Marxism had leveled against religion, but he had begun qualifying his statements and his praise. Niebuhr agreed that religion was "an opiate and that its general influence upon society is reactionary,"<sup>179</sup> and he divided this accusation into three specific charges. The first was that "religion creates a reverence for authority and encourages a humble obedience toward and patient acceptance of the exactions of power, thus aggravating the injustices of a

176. Reinhold Niebuhr "Marx, Barth and Israel's Prophets" The Christian Century (Jan. 30, 1935) p. 138.

177. Ibid. p. 138.

178. Ibid. p. 140.

179. Reinhold Niebuhr "Is Religion Counter-Revolutionary" Radical Religion (Autumn 1935) p. 14.

social system and retarding it."<sup>180</sup> The second was that religion in general "beguiles men from consideration of their mundane problems by the hope of other worldly bliss."<sup>181</sup> The third and last charge was that it was the "real root of the idealistic philosophies which interprets morals, culture and the spiritual life of man in terms which obscure the relation of economic interest and physical facts to the world of ideals and ideas."<sup>182</sup> Niebuhr still employed these Marxist conceptions to criticise religion but the theme that was taking root was the subjection of Marxism to the critical concepts of other doctrines and systems of thought. Niebuhr believed that it must be recognised "that the too simple Marxist might regard it (prophetic religion) as counter-revolutionary at the precise moment when it is functioning most perfectly."<sup>183</sup> Niebuhr went on and pointed out in strong terms that prophetic religion was of value when it called "attention to the fact that proletarian culture can be no more absolute and final than bourgeois culture was and that therefore the working class ought to be content to fulfill a great and fateful task in history without claiming to be a messianic class which will usher in the kingdom of God."<sup>184</sup> Niebuhr had begun to juxtapose certain Marxist assumptions with prophetic religion.

Another indication of Niebuhr's discontent with Marxism can

180. Ibid. p. 14.

181. Ibid. p. 16.

182. Ibid. p. 18.

183. Ibid. p. 19.

184. Ibid. pp. 19-20.

be seen in the article "The Revival of Feudalism". Niebuhr argued that a serious revision in the position of communism was needed in order that it may succeed. It is very revealing that at the height of Niebuhr's involvement with the ideas of Marx and the socialist movement that he was already aware of the dangers of Marxism some of which were to cause the final break with Marxism or at least to contribute to the abandonment of Marxism. Niebuhr made a very revealing statement in the article when he asserted that "communism is, like capitalism, the fruit of a mechanical and rationalist age and this approach to life is, for all of its ability to arouse a furor of sentiment, mechanistic and rationalistic."<sup>185</sup>

Niebuhr turned to only a few other philosophers in 1935 as has been the case for the last few years that have been studied. Marxism was still the dominant source of ideas until later in the decade. Niebuhr employed Santayana in a minor way as he had before when he referred to the fact that the function of the mind is synthetic and it eliminates chaos and cross purpose in human action.<sup>186</sup> There were also several occasions in which the ideas of Spengler were used. Niebuhr in discussing social conflict commented that on one level enemies were as Spengler had pointed out "beast of prey". There is a recurrence of Spengler's concept that religion was the root of radicalism in "Religion and Marxism". Niebuhr commented that Marx was in "error singling out religion as

185. Reinhold Niebuhr "The Revival of Feudalism" Harper's (March 1935) p. 486.

186. Reinhold Niebuhr "Christianity and Its Relation to the Perennial and the Contemporary Man" Religion in Life (Autumn 1935) p. 553.

187. Reinhold Niebuhr "Is Social Conflict Inevitable?" Scribner's (Sept. 1935) p. 166.

being particularly conservative"<sup>188</sup> Niebuhr held the non-Marxist position that "Religion per se cannot be called either reactionary or revolutionary because it is the primary and the ultimate act of faith by which life is endowed with meaning."<sup>189</sup>

The first sign of a new source of philosophical insight is to be found in the review of Bergson's The Two Sources of Morality and Religion. Niebuhr had a mixed reaction to the insights that were put forward by Bergson. Niebuhr was somewhat sceptical of Bergson's findings, e.g. that there are two kinds of "morality and two kinds of religion, a closed and open morality and a static and dynamic religion...".<sup>190</sup> Niebuhr's scepticism was obvious in his examination of the two types of morality. The open morality was completely individualised and the closed morality social. Niebuhr then revealed his Marxist bias by asking: "What would M. Bergson do with a modern radical class morality which conforms in its emphasis upon social cohesion to the attributes of his closed morality, but which affirms the interests of 'mankind' and the ideal of equality just as does his open morality and which moreover, combines the interests of a particular community of loyalty with its avowal of a general ideal?"<sup>191</sup> Niebuhr, however, did not entirely disapprove of Bergson's treatment of the subject. Niebuhr in reviewing Bergson's chapter entitled "Static Religion"

188. Reinhold Niebuhr "Religion and Marxism" Modern Monthly (Feb. 1935) p. 712.

189. Ibid. p. 712.

190. Reinhold Niebuhr review of The Two Sources of Religion and Morality in New York Times Book Review (April 28, 1935) pp. 3, 17.

191. Ibid. p. 3.

was full of praise. "Bergson rightly emphasises that primitive man's refusal to admit the fact of chance and to attribute every event to a supernatural cause is his way of expressing the ideal of a meaningful universe."<sup>192</sup> Niebuhr continued "the discussion on static religion is rich in profound insights and offers a wholesome antidote to some of the modern interpretations of primitive and conventional religion..."<sup>193</sup> Niebuhr was in agreement with one of the basic thesis of Bergson, although for a different reason, which recalled some of the assumptions of Spengler and Marx. "Thus religion is to such a degree both the most conservative and the most radical force in life that Bergson would seem justified in ascribing the two tendencies to two different sources."<sup>194</sup> Niebuhr, however, underlined his ambiguous reaction to the work of Bergson when he criticised Bergson's closing remarks for only "an avocational interest in a great and perplexing subject."<sup>195</sup>

In An Interpretation of Christian Ethics Niebuhr evinced his Marxist position when he declared that:

It is significant for the history of modern Christianity that the more realistic portion of the church which recognises the weaknesses and limitations of a liberal culture, inclines to substitute a radical Marxian world-view for the discarded liberal one. That disillusionment over the weaknesses of liberalism should lead Christian radicalism to substitute Marxian catastrophism for liberal optimism is in itself commendable.<sup>196</sup>

It is quite evident that Niebuhr still held that Marxism was of

192. Ibid. p. 3.

193. Ibid. p. 3.

194. Ibid. p. 3.

195. Ibid. p. 3.

196. Reinhold Niebuhr An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (London 1941) p. 27, hereafter cited as ICE.



worth and could be of use to Christians. Niebuhr reiterated his underlying reason for his turn to Marxism which was its application in the hoped for defeat of liberalism.

Niebuhr further delineated his view of Marxism by stating as he had done in "Is Religion Counter-Revolutionary?" that Marxism was a "secularised and naturalised version of the Hebrew prophetic movement."<sup>197</sup> Niebuhr considered Marxism to be a "purer derivative of the prophetic movement" than liberalism. "Its (Marxism) materialism is 'dialectic' rather than mechanistic; and the dialectic (i.e. the logic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis) is much truer to the complex facts of history than the simple evolutionary process of liberal naturalism."<sup>198</sup> Again Niebuhr underlined his belief that Marxism was superior to liberalism, but subjected Marxism to the scrutiny of the prophetic movement.

Marxism's understanding of history contained an element of catastrophism which was close to the catastrophism of Jewish prophecy according to Niebuhr. In common with apocalyptic religion Marxism "transmutes an immediate pessimism into an ultimate optimism by its hope in the final establishment of an ideal social order through a miracle of history."<sup>199</sup> Marxism for Niebuhr was a secularised religion in which the divine activity was replaced by the "logic of history" which pre-ordained that the mighty would fall and give their political might to the weak: Niebuhr alleged that the Marxian conception

197. ICE p. 28.

198. ICE p. 28.

199. ICE p. 28.

is incidentally the fruit of a profound religious feeling and of astute social observations. The paradoxes of high religion are in it and the actual facts of history substantiate it to a considerable degree."<sup>200</sup>

The prophetic religious quality of Marxism was a theme that could be found throughout the writings of Niebuhr during the period but it was particularly emphasised in 1935. The positive aspect of the Jewish prophetic quality of Marxism was that this approach made Marxism truer to part of human history; it also gave hope to its followers by promising a coming ideal society. This tendency to hope for a paradise to come is seen in Marx's Private Property and Communism:

It (communism) is the genuine solution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man. It is the true solution of the struggle between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution to the riddle of history and known itself to be this solution.<sup>201</sup>

Niebuhr concluded that the people who make "common sense judgement adopt the scientific account of a moral act consistently."<sup>202</sup> Niebuhr indicated that even a rigorous determinist like Marx who at certain periods described the social behaviour of the bourgeoisie in terms that read like a problem in "social physics"; at other times subjected the bourgeoisie to "withering scorn", which "only the presuppositions of moral responsibility could justify."<sup>203</sup> An interesting example of this "scorn" is found in The Manifesto of the Communist Party:

200. ICE p. 29.

201. Karl Marx Karl Marx's Early Texts trans. and ed. by David McLellan (Oxford 1971).

202. ICE pp. 91-2.

203. ICE p. 92.

Our bourgeois, not content with having the wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other's wives.

Bourgeois marriage is in reality a system of wives in common and thus, at the most, what the communist might possibly be reproached with, is that they desire to introduce, in substitution for a hypocritically concealed, an openly legalised community of women.<sup>204</sup>

It was of interest to Niebuhr that "Marxism is anxious to reduce the processes of human consciousness to terms which would relate them to the 'laws of motion' in the physical world the strategy of communist parties always includes the charge of moral dishonesty against its foes."<sup>205</sup> It is quite evident that during the writing of this volume that Niebuhr did not as did Max Eastmann consider Marxism to be a means of scientifically analysing the situation that was confronting society.

The Marxist in Niebuhr's opinion was essentially right when he placed his emphasis upon the means of production as the actual basis of spiritual achievements. Niebuhr was confident that the means of production was important because of "the necessities of physical existence as the most primary influence upon human ideas."<sup>206</sup> Another area of agreement that Niebuhr had with Marxism was the assumption that conflicts between national communities are accentuated by economic interests. Niebuhr professed that "...the Marxians are right in insisting that the class interests of dominant economic classes within the nations accentuate these conflicts,..."<sup>207</sup> Niebuhr did not

204. S. Works p. 50.

205. ICE p. 92.

206. ICE p. 133.

207. ICE p. 136.

totally agree with the idea that this is the only reason for conflicts between national communities, but he viewed this idea as having some merit.

Niebuhr was clearly under the shadow of Marxism when he wrote about the effects of economic power. Engels in Socialism: Utopianism and Scientific asserted that:

The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life, and next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought not in men's brains, not in men's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in the change in the modes of production and exchange.<sup>208</sup>

Further on in the same work Engels had stated that:

In every crisis, society is suffocated beneath the weight of its productive forces and products, which it cannot use, and stands helpless, face to face with the absurd contradiction that the producers have nothing to consume, because consumers are wanting.<sup>209</sup>

Niebuhr's belief in economic determinism which was based upon Marxist assumptions was apparent in his assertion that:

In modern society the basic mechanisms of justice are becoming more and more economic rather than political in the sense that economic power is the most basic power. Political power is derived from it to such a degree that a just political order is not possible without the reconstruction of the economic order. Specifically this means the reconstruction of the property system. Property has always made for an unjust distribution of the common social fund. But a technical civilization has transmuted the essentially static disproportions of power and privilege of an agrarian economy into dynamic forces. Centralization of power and privilege and the impoverishment of the multitudes develops at such a pace, in spite of slight efforts at equalization that the whole system of distribution is imperiled. Markets for the ever increasing

208. S. Works p. 411.

209. S. Works p. 425.

flood of goods are not adequate because the buying power of the multitudes is too restricted. Consequently a periodic glut of goods leads to unemployment, crisis and general depressions. Efforts to solve this problem, short of the socialization of productive property, lead to dangerous increases in the power of the state without giving the state final authority over the dominant economic power.<sup>210</sup>

In the above statement one is able to glimpse the way in which Niebuhr was able to employ Marxist conceptualization for his own ends, although he was aware of Marxism's defects. Niebuhr had come to believe that the events of the early 1930's had themselves given sufficient reasons for having faith in the ideas of Marxism.

An excellent example of Niebuhr's ability to employ Marxist assumptions while avoiding dogmatism is seen in Niebuhr's criticism of religion.<sup>211</sup> Niebuhr commented that "considering the tremendous perils of these religious pretensions, Marxism is quite right in asserting that 'the beginning of all criticism is the criticism of all religion'."<sup>212</sup> Niebuhr even utilised this assumption of Marx against the religious pretensions of Marxism.

Niebuhr pointed out that Marxism was as naturalistic as modern liberalism, which meant that it was "therefore deficient in an ultimate perspective upon historic and relative moral achievements."<sup>213</sup> A now familiar criticism was that Marxism had within its structure some of the dangers which were present in liberalism. One of the weaknesses which came from liberalism

210. ICE p. 194.

211. Karl Marx Karl Marx's Early Writings trans. and ed. by T.B. Bottomore (London 1963) p. 43.

212. ICE p. 243.

213. ICE pp. 27-8.

which was also rooted in the naturalism of Marxism was the weakness of utopian fantasy. The danger comes about according to Niebuhr "whenever naturalism appropriates the mythical symbols in religion of the unconditioned and transcendent, to make them goals in time and history it falsely expects the realization of an absolute ideal in the relative process."<sup>214</sup> Niebuhr regarded the "anarchistic millenium of Marxism", which was the period that each person would receive according to his need and each would give according to his ability with social conflicts resolved and human needs fulfilled, as the product of naturalistic religion. Naturalistic religions for Niebuhr always attempted to fit the vision of perfection into the inevitable imperfections of history. This meant that any utopianistic plan must lead to disillusionment, which included the utopian hopes of Marx. Niebuhr's assessment was that there is grave danger for any kind of Christianity which leant unduly on or borrowed excessively from naturalistic idealism, whether liberal or radical which was really betrayed into dependence upon corruptions of its own ethos and culture.<sup>215</sup>

A major disparity between the ideas of Marx and Niebuhr was brought about by Niebuhr's exacting judgements concerning human finiteness. Niebuhr realised that there were demonic forces at work in the class conflicts of modern civilization. Niebuhr, however, believed that this was a limited view of the situation, since he was convinced that there was "no human situation not

---

214. ICE p. 29.

215. ICE p. 31.

even the most individual relationship, whether in a crassly unjust society or in one which has achieved a modicum of justice,"<sup>216</sup> in which conflict did not reveal itself. Marxist thought had not recognised the qualified and determined character of its own spirituality and consequently that "the recognition of human finiteness has been transcended."<sup>217</sup>

Niebuhr did not see any reason for overlooking the "spiritual pretensions" in Marxism in fact he warned against the use of them. Niebuhr warned that "there is no reason to suppose that this demonic element in communism will be any less dangerous than the moral and spiritual pretensions of either the aristocrats or the merchants."<sup>218</sup> An example of this was Marxism belief that every social theory and every social judgement was formed by a particular economic as well as social interest. Niebuhr appreciated this insight as being a "great contribution to social thought", but it was also used to satisfy "the sinful desire of finite man to be more than finite."<sup>219</sup> This insight forced Niebuhr to conclude that the relative position of the proletariat was for them more than finite in fact the Marxist considered its position as being an absolute one. Marxism believed that the victory of the workers was "automatically a victory for the whole of society, and that the civilization to be built by them will be a utopia in which everyone will give according to his ability and take according to his

216. ICE p. 134.

217. ICE p. 134.

218. ICE p. 145.

219. ICE p. 144.

need, that is, the law of love will be perfectly fulfilled."<sup>220</sup>

Obviously such a series of events is impossible and it is a moral and spiritual pretension to consider the inevitable outcome of man to be perfection. Niebuhr regarded this general observation as being true when applied to the middle-class or the proletariat or any other group.

The perfection of the coming communist society was taken for granted in many of Marx's writings. An example of this was in the German Ideology in which Marx wrote:

It is just as empirically established that, by the overthrow of the existing state of society by the communist revolution... and the abolition of private property which is identical with it, this power, which so baffles the German theoreticians will be dissolved, that then the liberation of each single individual will be accomplished in the measure in which history becomes transformed into world history ... Only then will the separate barriers, be brought into practical connection with the material and intellectual production of the whole world and be put in a position to acquire the capacity to enjoy this all-sided production of the whole earth (creations of man).<sup>221</sup>

Niebuhr throughout An Interpretation of Christian Ethics attacked the utopian elements in Marxist thought. In Niebuhr's discussion of the "Law of Love in Politics and Economics" he asserted that:

Communist romanticism and utopianism are a further hazard in orderly and non-violent social change because it imagines that a pure and anarchistic democracy will grow out of a dictatorship, once the latter has destroyed the capitalistic enemy of democracy. This hope rests upon a totally false analysis of the political problems. It attributes the corruptions of justice solely to capitalistic power and does not recognise that all power is a peril to justice; and that democracy, whatever its limitations, is a necessary check upon the imperialism of oligarchs, whether communistic or capitalistic.<sup>222</sup>

220. ICE p. 144.

221. David McLellan The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction (Edinburgh 1971) pp. 217-8.

222. ICE pp. 201-2.



Niebuhr was quite willing during the period that An Interpretation of Christian Ethics was written to employ the thought of Marx. However in some cases Niebuhr used the ideas in a totally different way from the way intended by Marx. An example of this was Niebuhr's use of Marx's ideas about religious criticism. Niebuhr still made the ideas of Marx a major reference point for his thought even though he was aware of the dangers in Marxism. Niebuhr felt that Marxism when purged of the dangers would be of use in the development of a better Christian ethic.

Niebuhr during the writing of An Interpretation of Christian Ethics had judged utopianism and the "preoccupation of radicalism with the mechanisms of social life"<sup>223</sup> to be an error of radicalism. Niebuhr wrote that "these errors of radicalism undoubtedly increase the hazards of social change and tend toward violence."<sup>224</sup> Niebuhr followed this comment with a request for a more realistic approach to the social situation. Niebuhr's underlying pragmatism was coming into conflict with his commitment to Marxism. This conflict is underlined in Niebuhr's assertion that "when dealing with actual human situations realistically and pragmatically it is impossible to fix upon a single absolute."<sup>225</sup> This statement applied to the absolute elements in Marxism as well as other manifestations of absolutism.

Again in the last chapter of An Interpretation of Christian

---

223. ICE p. 202.

224. ICE p. 203.

225. ICE p. 207.

Ethics Niebuhr attacked the utopianism of Marxist thought, which had been a constant source of irritation for Niebuhr from the beginning of his so-called Marxist phase. Niebuhr stated in no uncertain terms that he was convinced that the utopian desires of Marxism were harmful. Niebuhr asserted that: "The most grievous mistake of Marxism is its assumption that an adequate mechanism of social justice will inevitably create individuals who will be disciplined enough to give according to their ability and take according to their need."<sup>226</sup> Niebuhr again scorned the utopian hopes of the Marxist because they did not recognize certain basic limits to human beings. The three basic objections of Niebuhr in An Interpretation of Christian Ethics stemmed from Niebuhr's concept of man, his pragmatism, and his fear of spiritual pretension.

In An Interpretation of Christian Ethics many philosophers were referred to, but Niebuhr's emphasis had drifted and the work of people like Tawney and Spengler did not appear in this work. Almost all of the philosophers that had become prominent within this work were among the many sources that Niebuhr turned to in a small way in previous works.

There are passing references to several philosophers that have already been noted in earlier works. Niebuhr made a passing reference to Unammuno,<sup>227</sup> Thomas Hobbes,<sup>228</sup> and George Santayana.<sup>229</sup> Niebuhr also made use of Irving Babbitt's

226. ICE p. 211.

227. ICE p. 24.

228. ICE p. 49.

229. ICE p. 80.

Rousseau and Romanticism which has already been noted as a source of information and ideas in earlier works.<sup>230</sup> Niebuhr has again begun to turn to a large range of thinkers without being dominated by one thinker, i.e. Marx. Niebuhr was returning to an earlier strategy of using many philosophical sources without depending upon any single one to a large extent. Marxism's predominant position had already begun to decline.

Niebuhr utilized Bertrand Russell's criticisms conforming to the earlier pattern of using Russell's criticisms to analyze the faults of religion. Niebuhr in this case employed Russell's indictment of metaphysics as a covert theory. For Russell's metaphysics could not relate to all the details revealed by science so it used presuppositions in constructing a coherent scheme.<sup>231</sup> Another source of concepts that was also made use of was Thomas Hobhouse whose work had been used by Niebuhr in a minor way before. In An Interpretation of Christian Ethics Niebuhr used Hobhouse's hypothesis that good is "harmony in the fulfilment of vital capacity."<sup>232</sup>

The works and concepts of Weber and Whitehead still played a small role in the thinking of Niebuhr. Each of these thinkers were only used once which differs sharply from Niebuhr's earlier works where both held predominant positions in supplying ideas and suggestions for Niebuhr's analysis. Weber was again cited in connection with his thesis that Protestantism in general and particularly Calvinism had an intimate relationship with capit-

230. ICE p. 238.

231. ICE p. 23.

232. ICE p. 48.

alism,<sup>233</sup> which was still a primary area of speculation for Niebuhr. Another significant fact was that Niebuhr only made use of Whitehead in one passing reference.<sup>234</sup> Niebuhr had begun to shift his area of concentration from Marx, but he was not just going back to old sources. This gives a clue to the coming shift from Marxism which would involve a further change sources.

One would expect that once Niebuhr had relegated his former sources of information to a minor position he would choose other sources of ideas. One would guess from the review of Bergson's book Two Sources of Morality and Religion that Bergson might become a source of information. This proved to be true. Niebuhr had admired Bergson's ideas concerning primitive religion in his book review so one could reasonably expect Niebuhr to turn to these ideas. Niebuhr in fact did use Bergson's idea that religion was a defensive reaction of nature against intelligence. Niebuhr employed this idea when indicating that intelligence may enervate moral action since intelligence strengthens egotistic impulses and puts every conceivable value in balance against every conceivable value.<sup>235</sup>

Niebuhr looked to Bergson's condemnation of the Stoics who tried to produce a set of morals consistent with their idealism.<sup>236</sup> Bergson believed that the Stoics had failed because they had only produced a philosophy even though they had believed that all

233. ICE p. 243.

234. ICE p. 76.

235. ICE p. 104.

236. ICE p. 217.

men were equal and that all men were brothers.<sup>237</sup> Niebuhr like Bergson seemed to find himself out of step with the Stoics and Kantian morality. Niebuhr agreed with the idea that the various types of rational idealism do not provide an adequate dynamic for their ideals. Niebuhr also employed Bergson's criticism of the rationalist idea of obligation that was to be found in the first chapter of the Two Sources of Morality and Religion.

Another area that interested Niebuhr in his review of the Two Sources of Morality and Religion was Bergson's examination of the idea of mysticism. This is an excellent example of Niebuhr's ability to disagree with a part of an idea, but still employ the idea. Niebuhr stated that "The word mysticism to designate what Bergson has in mind is badly chosen because of the tendency Bergson himself recognised but seeks to confine to the eastern rather than the Christian mystics."<sup>238</sup> Niebuhr immediately continued and argued that "his idea is correct", i.e. Bergson's idea.<sup>239</sup> The idea that Niebuhr was referring to was the belief that religious force could break through the closed morality of devotion to the family and community. Niebuhr averred that: "The motive power of love which transcends the impulses of nature is a combination of obedience to God and love."<sup>240</sup>

237. Henri Bergson The Two Sources of Morality and Religion (London 1935) pp. 46-7.

238. ICE pp. 221-2.

239. ICE p. 222.

240. ICE p. 222.

Niebuhr made several references to John Dewey's ideas that are to be found in Human Nature and Conduct. The use as would be expected considering Niebuhr's long standing opposition to Dewey is a negative one. Niebuhr considered naturalistic rationalism to be a philosophy that held that reason supplied the direction and the natural power of life-as-impulse. Niebuhr had concluded that this theory was wrong since the theory understood the impulse of man to be a unity; a view for Niebuhr that was totally false.<sup>241</sup> Niebuhr singled out Dewey's idea of eliminating conflict and uniting men of good will by stripping their "spiritual life of historic, traditional and supposedly anachronistic accretions."<sup>242</sup> Niebuhr disagreed with Dewey because Dewey had put too much faith in reason and its ability to transcend the partial perspectives of the natural world.

There is little question that on a close examination of An Interpretation of Christian Ethics and the sources of ideas that Niebuhr made use of within the work, that there was a new direction being developed in the work. Niebuhr undoubtedly still was enamoured with the ideas of Marx at the time of the composition of the work, but already he was subjecting the assumptions of Marx to outside criteria from a growing number of sources. An Interpretation of Christian Ethics was different in that the ideas of Marx no longer play such a central role as they did in Reflections on the End of an Era. Niebuhr employed a multitude of ideas in An Interpretation of Christian Ethics,

241. ICE p. 218.

242. ICE p. 234.

which he had not done for a number of years notably since his encounter with Marxism. There were some initial signs of Niebuhr's coming shift from his dependence on Marxism, but there are many years between 1935 and Niebuhr's eventual abandonment in the 1940's, however the coming shift is not surprising considering the uneasiness found in 1935.

The years between 1933 and 1935 cover Niebuhr's heaviest involvement with Marxism and consequently gives a good indication of Niebuhr's dialogue with Marx and his followers. These were also not unexpectedly the years in which Niebuhr labored under the sharpest sense of crisis.

In 1933 Niebuhr considered himself to be a Marxist and in fact so labeled himself. In 1933 the failure of the left in Germany was painfully apparent, and consequently this failure was a cause of great concern to Niebuhr. Niebuhr understood this failure to be in particular a failure of parliamentary socialism; however, Niebuhr admitted that this could be viewed as a complete failure of the left. Niebuhr presented reasons for this failure and called for their correction. Niebuhr considered Marxism to be too dogmatic in its approach to collectivism and he felt that Marxism had dealt with the lower middle-class and their traditions in a shallow fashion. Niebuhr was completely involved with Marxism at this juncture. Niebuhr not only considered himself a Marxist but looked forward to the victory of the Marxist. Niebuhr in fact called for a more rigorous Marxism and foresaw the eventual death of capitalism and felt that this death was desirable.

The year 1933 finds Niebuhr basically attempting to correct the "faults" of Marxism in certain areas. However, the failure

of Marxism in Germany and the inability of the left to put its ideas into action, and its loss to National Socialism caused Niebuhr to pause and look again at the doctrines of Marxism.

Not surprisingly in 1934 Niebuhr was still worried about the situation in Germany and the rest of Europe and he wondered in what way this would effect the hopes of the Marxist. Niebuhr had a heightened sense of crisis which was easily identifiable in his writings and general outlook. 1934 was significant in another way in that this was the year in which Niebuhr abandoned officially the idea of pacifism.

What came out very strongly in 1934 was Niebuhr's sympathy with the workers and consequently he spent the majority of his time calling for revisions in the Marxist ideals for the expressed purpose of helping as quickly as possible the working class. However, Niebuhr tested Marxism by setting its ideals against the ideas of realism and religious tradition. Niebuhr still retained his basic belief in Marxism, but there were already signs of his growing dissatisfaction with certain religious elements within Marxism.

There were many ways in which Niebuhr agreed with Marxism and these are presented in Reflections on the End of an Era. Niebuhr was always looking toward the self-destructive tendency of capitalism and feared as did Marx the coming hordes of barbarians. Niebuhr approved of the Marxist strategy and called for an analysis of the United States to be undertaken using Marxist analytical methods. Niebuhr underlined the mystical and mythological character of Marxism in its approach to the moral problems. Lenin's ideas about imperialism also meet with Niebuhr's



approval. As before Niebuhr foresaw a coming crisis because of the twin evils of overproduction and centralization of power.

The dual character of Niebuhr's thought, i.e. the Christian and the Marxist elements, was clearly evident in the pages of Reflections on the End of an Era. Niebuhr commented on the deterministic character of both the Christian tradition and the Marxist tradition. Another similarity for Niebuhr between the two sets of beliefs was the Jewish apocalypticism that existed in both traditions. Niebuhr argued that Christianity and Marxism complimented each other and one gave depth to the insights of the other.

However, Niebuhr did have reservations about the doctrines of Marxism and these were set out in Reflections on the End of an Era. The first was that Marxism had not been able to correctly present a picture of coming events and had failed to predict the disaster in Europe. This in Niebuhr's eyes made Marxism suspect and he set out to correct certain defects in Marxism. The first evil for Niebuhr was the universalization of the ideals and culture of the proletariat by Marxism. Niebuhr was also suspicious of the underlying scientific approach to history that the Marxist claimed to utilize, and considered this to be a naturalistic pretension. Niebuhr as he had for some time warned of the utopian pretensions of the Marxist and had concluded that this evil in Marxism stemmed from its liberal roots. Marxism put too much stress on individualism in Niebuhr's opinion and consequently worsened a feature that was already intolerable since it was working toward the dissolution of the individual into the mass.

However, it should be pointed out that these criticisms were

meant to correct a system that Niebuhr still considered valid. Niebuhr continued to hope for a better world to come. Niebuhr's sympathy for the workers that had been a feature of his writing for a number of years was still prominent.

Niebuhr still employed the assumptions of James, Whitehead and Spengler. Spenglerian thought, however, had become more and more suspect, and 1934 saw the advent of a major disagreement with Spengler develop. There was a growing disenchantment with Spengler's works in the 1930's and in particular The Hour of Decision with which Niebuhr totally disagreed.

The year 1935 finds Niebuhr again searching for a proper theological and ethical framework. This was the year in which Niebuhr began to turn to new sources of ideas in particular Bergson's ideas. Niebuhr, however, was still concerned with the worker. Niebuhr subjected Marxism to the analysis of prophetic religion and thus revealed a growing disenchantment with certain religious connotations that were present in Marxism.

The year 1935 was unusual in that Niebuhr for the first time in a number of years turned to a new source of ideas. However, Niebuhr did not completely abandon his old sources of ideas. Niebuhr again turned to Weber and somewhat surprisingly returned to Bertrand Russell's thought for critical tools with which to study religion. Niebuhr for the first time in a major work made use of Bergson in several ways in An Interpretation of Christian Ethics. This is of importance since this was the first time Niebuhr made use of a new source in a prominent way since his encounter with Marxism. This underlined Niebuhr's growing discontentment with Marx and his consequent search for a new way to approach social and religious problems.

In An Interpretation of Christian Ethics Niebuhr approved as well as disapproved of certain aspects of Marxism. Niebuhr approved of Marxisms' realistic approach. Niebuhr still made use of the catastrophism that was in Marx and still clung to the idea that capitalism was self-destructive. Niebuhr understood basic power to be economic and utilized Marxism to criticise religion.

Niebuhr, however, was more and more afraid of the utopian aspects of Marxism and the fact that it led to disillusionment. Niebuhr also disapproved of Marxism's limited view of human nature. Marxism in Niebuhr's opinion had not realised that its own character was limited. Niebuhr still bewailed the scientific pretensions of Marxism, as well as the romantic overtones.

Niebuhr obviously had intensified his call for a revision of Marxism. Niebuhr presented three basic objections to Marxism. The first was an objection to the limited view Marxism had of human nature. The second was the unpragmatic approach of several of the doctrines of the Marxist. The third and the most damaging is the objection to the Marxist spiritual pretensions that Niebuhr felt were present in Marxist thought, and present in its dogmas. Obviously the seeds of Niebuhr's abandonment of Marxism are already being sown in 1935 and although the abandonment of Marxism will take many years this abandonment is not surprising when one considers the doubts that were already present in Niebuhr's thought at the supposed height of his Marxist involvement.

Niebuhr by the 1940's had re-oriented his social-ethical analysis from the radical base of the 1930's and turned to a purer pragmatic base. Niebuhr's social-ethical concern changes

from the working man to the preservation of the genius of the democratic traditions. Marxism had become another illusion which interfered with the pragmatic task. Marxism had been relegated to being just another misleading analysis and a utopianistic approach that threatened the democratic state.<sup>243</sup> However, Niebuhr undoubtedly profited from his encounter with Marxism and this encounter left him with lasting values and more flexible methods of analysis.

---

243. West op. cit. pp. 123-4.

Bibliography of the Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr  
to 1935

1916-1919

"Failure of German-Americanism" Atlantic Monthly (July 1916)  
Vol. 188, pp. 13-18.

"The Nation's Crime Against the Individual" Atlantic Monthly  
(November 1916) Vol. 118, pp. 609-614.

"Twilight of Liberalism" (a letter) New Republic (June 14, 1919)  
p. 218.

1920-21

"The Church and the Industrial Crisis" The Biblical World  
(November 1920).

"Religion's Limitations" The World Tomorrow (March 1920) 3,  
pp. 77-79.

"Heroes and Hero Worship" The Nation (February 23, 1921) 112,  
pp. 293-294.

1922-23

"The Church and the Middle-Class" The Christian Century  
(December 7, 1922) 39, pp. 1513-1515.

"The Paradox of Institutions" The World Tomorrow (August 1923)  
6, pp. 231-232.

"Protestantism in Germany" The Christian Century (October 4,  
1923) 40, pp. 1258-1260.

"Wanted: A Christian Morality" The Christian Century (February  
15, 1923) 40, pp. 201-203.

"Youth Movement of Germany" The Christian Century (November 1,  
1923) 40, pp. 1396-1397.

(Letter in reply to New Republic Editorial "War and Christian  
Ethics") New Republic (February 22, 1922).

1924

"Christianity and Contemporary Politics" The Christian Century  
(April 17, 1924) 41, pp. 498-501.

"European Reform and American Reform: How They Differ" The  
Christian Century (August 28, 1924) 41, pp. 1108-1110.

"The German Klan" The Christian Century (October 16, 1924) 41,  
pp. 1330-1331.

"Is Protestantism Self-Deceived?" The Christian Century  
(December 25, 1924) 41, pp. 1661-1662.

"What Are the Churches Advertising?" The Christian Century (November 27, 1924) 41, pp. 1532-1533.

### 1925

"Can Christianity Survive?" Atlantic Monthly (January 1925) 135, pp. 84-88.

"Can Schweitzer Save Us From Russell" The Christian Century (September 3, 1925) 42, pp. 1093-1094.

"Capitalism: A Protestant Offspring" The Christian Century (May 7, 1925) 42, pp. 600-601.

"Germany and Modern Civilization" Atlantic Monthly (June 1925) 135, pp. 843-848.

"Shall We Proclaim the Truth or Search for It?" The Christian Century (March 12, 1925) 42, pp. 344-346.

### 1926

"Does Religion Quiet or Disquiet?" The World Tomorrow (November 1926) 9, pp. 220-221.

"How Philanthropic is Henry Ford?" The Christian Century (December 9, 1926) 43, pp. 1516-1517.

"Our Secularized Civilization" The Christian Century (April 22, 1926) 43, pp. 508-510.

"Puritanism and Prosperity" Atlantic Monthly (June 1926) 137, pp. 721-725.

"Reverend Doctor Silke" The Christian Century (March 11, 1926) 43, pp. 316-318.

"The Threat of R.O.F.C." The World Tomorrow (October 1926) 9, pp. 154-156.

Editorial Page, The Nation (October 20, 1926) 123, pp. 387-

### 1927

"Beauty as a Substitute for Righteousness" The Christian Century (September 29, 1927) 44, pp. 1133-1134.

"A Critique of Pacifism" Atlantic Monthly (May 1927) 139, pp. 637-641.

"Ford's Five-Day Week Shrinks" The Christian Century (June 9, 1927) 44, pp. 713-714.

"Missions and World Peace" The World Tomorrow (April 1927) 10, pp. 170-171.

"The Practical Unbelief of Modern Civilization" in Religion on the Campus ed. by F.P. Miller, N.Y.: Association Press, 1927.

"A Religion Worth Fighting For" Survey (August 1, 1927) 58, pp. 444-446.

"Students and the Religion of Today" in A Survey of our Student Life and of the Present Religious Situation As It Affects American Students by Reinhold Niebuhr, Bruce Curry and G.A. Studdert-Kennedy, at the National Student Conference, Milwaukee, December 28, 1926 - January 1, 1927.

"To Whom Shall We Go? - Sermon" The Christian Century (March 10, 1927) 44, pp. 299-301.

"Why I Am Not a Christian" The Christian Century (December 15, 1927) 44, pp. 1482-1483.

#### 1928

"Oriental Versus Occidental Strategy of Life" The World Tomorrow (January 1928) pp. 21-23.

"Barth - Apostle of the Absolute" The Christian Century (December 13, 1928) 45, pp. 1523-1524.

"The Confessions of a Tired Radical" The Christian Century (August 30, 1928) 45, pp. 1046-1047.

"Pacifism and the Use of Force" The World Tomorrow (May 1928) 11, pp. 218-220.

"Protestantism and Prohibition" The New Republic (October 24, 1928) 56, pp. 265-267.

"What the War Did To My Mind" The Christian Century (September 27, 1928) 45, pp. 1161-1163.

"Why We Need a New Economic Order" The World Tomorrow (October 1928) 11, pp. 395-398.

"Would Jesus Be a Churchman Today" The World Tomorrow (December 1928) 11, pp. 492-494.

#### Book Review

Bell, Clive, Civilization in The World Tomorrow (December 1928) 11, p. 375.

#### 1929

"Christianity and Redemption" in Whither Christianity? pp. 110-122, ed. by L.H. Hough (New York: Harper's, 1929).

"It Was a Sermon on Love" The Christian Century (December 11, 1929) 46, pp. 1540-1542.

"The Minister as an Expert" in Effective Preaching pp. 81-92 (Boston University School of Theology, Conference on Preaching, 1929).

"The Perils of American-European Relationships" in J.H. Holmes The Community Pulpit Series, No. 11, pp. 1928-1929.

"Political Action and Social Change" The World Tomorrow (December 1929) 12, pp. 491-493.

"Religion and Moral Experience" in pamphlet entitled "What Religion Means to Me" by Reinhold Niebuhr, H.E. Fosdick, A.B. Curry, E.F. Tittle, et. al. (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1929).

"Senator Norris and His Clerical Critic" The World Tomorrow (April 1929) 12, pp. 169-170.

"The Terrible Beauty of the Cross" The Christian Century (March 21, 1929) 46, pp. 386-388.

"The Unethical Character of Modern Civilization" in J.H. Holmes The Community Pulpit Series, No. 10, 1928-1929.

"The Unhappy Intellectuals" Atlantic Monthly (June 1929) 143, pp. 790-794.

"The Use of Force" in Pacifism in the Modern World ed. by Devere Allen, (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1929).

"We are Being Driven" The Christian Century (May 1, 1929) 46, pp. 578-579.

"Would Jesus Be a Modernist Today?" The World Tomorrow (March 1929) 12, pp. 122-124.

### 1930

"At Oberammergau" The Christian Century (August 13, 1930) 47, pp. 983-984.

"Awkward Imperialists" Atlantic Monthly (May 1930) 145, pp. 670-675.

"Christian Faith in the Modern World" Introduction to Ventures in Belief ed. by H.P. Van Dusen (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1930).

"Church Currents in Germany" The Christian Century (August 6, 1930) 47, pp. 959-960.

"Church in Russia" The Christian Century (September 24, 1930) 47, pp. 1144-1146.

"Europe's Religious Pessimism" The Christian Century (August 27, 1930) 47, pp. 1031-1033.

"The German Crisis" The Nation (October 1, 1930) 1313, pp. 358, 360.

"Germany Wrestles with Her Debts" The Christian Century (July 16, 1930) 47, pp. 935-936.

"Glimpses of the Southland" The Christian Century (July 16, 1930) 47, pp. 893-894.



"If You Were President - How Would You Proclaim Thanksgiving?" The Christian Century (November 26, 1930) 47, p. 1452.

"Is Stewardship Ethical?" The Christian Century (April 30, 1930) 47, pp. 555-557.

"The Land of Extremes" The Christian Century (October 15, 1930) 47, pp. 1241-1243.

"Mechanical Men in a Mechanical Age" The World Tomorrow (December 1930) 13, pp. 492-495.

"Political Action and Social Change" in A New Economic Order ed. by Kirby Page (New York: Harcourt, Brose and Co., 1930).

"The Preaching of Repentance" The Christian Century (June 18, 1930) 47, pp. 779-781.

"Russia Makes The Machine Its Goal" The Christian Century (September 10, 1930) 47, pp. 1080-1081.

"Russian Efficiency" The Christian Century (October 1, 1930) 47, pp. 1178, 1180.

"Russia's Tractor Revolution" The Christian Century (September 17, 1930) 47, pp. 1111-1112.

"The Speculation Mania" The World Tomorrow (January, 1930) 13, pp. 25-27.

"The Spirit of Life" Addresses and Proceedings of The National Educational Association of the U.S., 1930, pp. 610-618.

### 1931

"When the Virtues are Vices" Christian Century (January 21, 1931) pp. 114-115.

"Property and the Ethical Life" The World Tomorrow (January 1931) 14, pp. 19-21.

"Let Liberal Churches Stop Fooling Themselves" The Christian Century (March 25, 1931) 48, pp. 402-404.

"The Religion of Communism" Atlantic Monthly (April 1931) pp. 462-470.

"Economic Perils to World Peace" The World Tomorrow (May 1931) Vol. 14, pp. 154-156.

"The Weaknesses of the Modern Church" The Christian Herald, (May 1931) pp. 42-43.

"An American Approach to the Christian Message" in A Traffic in Knowledge ed. by W.A. Visser, T. Hooft, pp. 54-85 (London: S.C.M. Press) 1931.

"A Comment on 'Barthianism and the Kingdom'" An article by E.G. Romrighauser, The Christian Century (July 15, 1931) 48, pp. 924-925.

"The Common Root of Joy and Pain" in What Can Students Believe? pp. 129-138 ed. by E.M. McKee (New York: R.R. Smith, 1931).

"Crises in British Socialism" The Christian Century (September 30, 1931) 48, pp. 1202-1204.

"The Crisis of Society" The Congregationalist and Herald of Gospel Liberty (August 27, 1931) 116, pp. 1157-1159. Also published in The Christian (September 5, 1931) 7, pp. 682-684.

"Making Peace with Russia" The World Tomorrow (November 1931) 14, pp. 354-355.

"Radicalism and Religion" The World Tomorrow (October 1931) 14, pp. 324-327.

"Socialism and Christianity" The Christian Century (August 19, 1931) 48, pp. 1038-1040.

"Toward a New Economic Society: A Program for Students by a Commission", Introduction by Reinhold Niebuhr, Student Christian Association Movement, Economics Commission, F.A. Henderson, Chairman (New York: Eddy and Page c. 1931).

"What Chance Has Gandhi?" The Christian Century (October 14, 1931) 48, pp. 1274-1276.

#### 1932

"Catastrophe or Social Control: The Alternatives for America" Harper's (June 1932) 165, pp. 114-118.

"The Ethic of Jesus and the Social Problem" Religion in Life (Spring 1932) 1, pp. 198-209.

"Germany - Prophecy of Western Civilization" The Christian Century (March 2, 1932) 49, pp. 281-289.

"Is Peace or Justice the Goal?" The World Tomorrow (September 21, 1932) 15, pp. 275-277.

"Moralists and Politics" The Christian Century (July 6, 1932) 49, pp. 857-859.

"Must We do Nothing?" A Critique of an Article by H. Richard Niebuhr entitled "The Grace of Doing Nothing" The Christian Century (March 30, 1932) 49, pp. 415-417.

"Perils of American Power" Atlantic Monthly (January 1932) 149, pp. 90-96.

"Religion and the Class War in Kentucky" The Christian Century (May 18, 1932) 49, pp. 637-638.

"The Stakes in the Election" The Christian Century (November 9, 1932) 49, pp. 1379-1381.

"Thomas for President" a letter to the New Republic, August 17, 1932, p. 22.

"Idealist and the Social Struggle" The World Tomorrow (October 26, 1932) V. 15, No. 15, pp. 395-397, from introduction of MMIS.

Book Review

Spengler, Oswald, Man and Technics in The World Tomorrow (April 1932) Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 121.

1933

"After Capitalism - What?" The World Tomorrow (March 1, 1933) 16, pp. 203-205.

"A Christian Philosophy of Compromise" The Christian Century (June 7, 1933) 50, pp. 746-748. Discussion continued in issues of July 26 and August 9.

"A Christmas Service in Retrospect" The Christian Century (January 4, 1933) 50, pp. 13-14.

"An Editorial Conversation (With C.C. Morrison)" The Christian Century (July 26, 1933) 50, pp. 950-951, continued in issue of August 9, pp. 1006-1008.

"The Germans: Unhappy Philosophers in Politics" The American Scholar (October 1933) 2, pp. 409-419.

"Germany Must Be Told" The Christian Century (August 9, 1933) 50, pp. 1014-1015.

"Hitlerism - A Devil's Breed" The World Tomorrow (April 19, 1933) V. 14, pp. 369-370.

"Human Nature and Social Change" The Christian Century (March 15, 1933) 50, pp. 363-364.

"Making Radicalism Effective" The World Tomorrow (December 21, 1933) 16, pp. 682-684.

"Marxism and Religion" The World Tomorrow (March 15, 1933) 16, pp. 253-255.

"Nationalism, Socialism and Christianity" The World Tomorrow (August 1933) 16, pp. 469-470 (H. Richard, Niebuhr).

"A New Strategy for Socialists" The World Tomorrow (August 31, 1933) 16, pp. 490-492.

"Notes From a Berlin Diary" The Christian Century (July 5, 1933) 50, pp. 272-273.

"Notes From a London Diary" The Christian Century (July 12 and 19, 1933) 50, pp. 903-904; 927-929.

"The Opposition in Germany" The New Republic (June 28, 1933) 45, pp. 169-171.

"Optimism and Utopianism" The World Tomorrow (February 22, 1933) 16, pp. 179-180.

"Religion and the New Germany" The Christian Century (June 28, 1933) 50, pp. 843-845.

"A Reorientation of Radicalism" The World Tomorrow (July 1933) 16, pp. 443-444.

"Why German Socialism Crashed" The Christian Century (April 5, 1933) 50, pp. 451-453.

#### 1934

"Barthianism and Political Reaction" The Christian Century (June 6, 1934) 51, pp. 757-759.

"The Church and Political Action" The Christian Century (August 1, 1934) 51, pp. 992-994.

"Churches in Germany" The American Scholar (Summer 1934) 3, pp. 344-351.

"Comment on an Appeal to the Socialist Party" The World Tomorrow (April 12, 1934) 17, pp. 185-186.

"Comment on 'The Christian Cult of Violence'" an Article by Jerome Davis, Religion in Life (Summer 1934) 3, pp. 439-441.

"The Fellowship of Socialist Christians" The World Tomorrow (June 14, 1934) 17, pp. 297-298.

"The Problem of Communist Religion" The World Tomorrow (July 26, 1934) 17, pp. 378-379.

"Religion as a Source of Radicalism" The Christian Century (April 11, 1934) 51, pp. 491-494.

"Shall We Seek World Peace or the Peace of America?" The World Tomorrow (March 15, 1934) 17, pp. 132-133.

"Study in Black and White: A Reply" (to an article by E.E. Vollkel with the title "A Study in Black and White") The Christian Century (June 20, 1934) 51, p. 837.

"When Will Christians Stop Fooling Themselves?" The Christian Century (May 16, 1934) 51, pp. 658-660.

"Why I Left the F.O.R." The Christian Century (January 3, 1934) 51, pp. 17-19.

#### Book Reviews

"Uncorrupted Optimism" review of H.A. Overstreet, We Move in New Directions, The World Tomorrow (April 12, 1934) pp. 189-190.

"Perfect Revelation of Moral Confusion" a review of Roger Babson, Finding A Job - The World Tomorrow (May 19, 1934) 17, p. 259.

"German Socialism Still Lives" a review of Socialism's New Democracy, a pamphlet by Miles (pseud.) for the Industrial Democracy, The Nation, (August 1, 1934).

"A Footnote on Religion" a review of John Dewey A Common Faith - The Nation (September 26, 1934) pp. 358-9.

"A Bourgeois Takes a Stand" a review of L. Lewisohn The Permanent Horizon - The Nation (October 17, 1934) pp. 455-6.

"Militant Pacifism" a review of R.B. Gregg The Power of Non-Violence - The Nation (December 12, 1934) 17, p. 718.

Spengler, Oswald, The Hour of Decision in The World Tomorrow (April 26, 1934) vol. 17, No. 9, p. 211.

"Ex Cathedra" The World Tomorrow (July 26, 1934) 17, pp. 338, 362.

"Optimism, Pessimism and Religion, Faith" (The Ware Lecture delivered before American Unitarian Association) The Christian Register (May 1934) v. 113, # 22 pp. 356-358 and # 23 pp. 349-381, Christian Register (June 2 - 9, 1934) v. 37, # 22, 23, pp. 685-687, 716-718, also Chapter 14 - 15 in Christianity and Power Politics.

### 1935

"Christianity and Its Relation to the Perennial and the Contemporary Man" Religion in Life (Autumn, 1935) 4, pp. 551-558.

"Don't Preach Ideals in a Vacuum" The American Friend (May 30, 1935) 23, pp. 208-209.

"Marx, Barth and Israel's Prophets" The Christian Century (January 30, 1935) 52, pp. 138-140.

"The Pathos of Liberalism" The Nation (September 11, 1935) 141, pp. 303-304.

"Radical Religion" Radical Religion (Autumn 1935) 1, pp. 3-5.

"Is Religion Counter Revolutionary?" Radical Religion (Autumn 1935) 1, pp. 14-20.

"The Revival of Feudalism" Harper's (March 1935) 170, pp. 483-488.

"The Revolutionary Moment" The American Socialist Quarterly (June 1935) 4, pp. 8-13.

"Our Romantic Radicals" The Christian Century (April 10, 1935) 52, pp. 474-476.

"Sects and Churches" The Christian Century (July 3, 1935) 52, pp. 885-887.

"Is Social Conflict Inevitable?" Scribner's (September 1935) 98, pp. 66-69.

"Pacifism and Sanctions" Radical Religion (Winter 1935) pp. 27-30.

### Book Reviews

"Mr. Laski Proceeds" a review of H. Laski The State in Theory and Practice, The Nation (March 20, 1935) pp. 338-339.

Letter (appealing on behalf of the Southern Tennant Farmers' Union for strikers' relief) signed by Norman Thomas and Reinhold Niebuhr - The New Republic (March 20, 1935) p. 161.

"Sacred and Confused Liberals" a review of Everett D. Martin's Farewell to Revolution and R.C. Brooks' Deliver Us From Dictators, The Nation (April 3, 1935) pp. 393-4.

"Disinterested Intelligence" a review of E.F. Corritt's Morals and Politics - The Nation (May 15, 1935).

"A Catholic Liberal" a review of R.W. Chambers' Thomas More, The Nation (August 28, 1935) p. 249.

"The Historical Jesus" a review of Charles Guignebert's Jesus - The Nation (December 25, 1935) pp. 747-748.

### Editorials - Radical Religion

#### Fall 1935

Why A New Quarterly?  
Plain Speaking and Fellowship  
On the Ethiopian War  
George Lansbury: Christian and Socialist  
Angelo Herndin and Civil Liberties  
Salvation through Education  
Who Pays the Piper Calls the Tune  
Roosevelt and the Clergy

#### Winter 1935

The United Front  
The Political Confusion of Dr. Kagawa  
Fascism, Communism and Christianity  
The Supreme Court Decision  
The Conflict in the Socialist Party  
The National Manufacturers Association  
Morals and Mechanism  
Prosperity  
The Churches and the Social Security Act  
The Church Speaks

### Book Review

Bergson, Henri, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion in New York Times Book Reviews (April 28, 1923) p. 3.

Books by Reinhold Niebuhr

Does Civilization Need Religion?: A Study in the Social Resources and Limitations of Religion in Modern Life, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927.

Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, Chicago: Willett, Clark and Colby, 1929.

The Contribution of Religion to Social Work, New York: Columbia University Press, 1932.

Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932.

Reflections on the End of an Era, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934.

An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935.

Secondary Literature

- Allen, Edgar, L. Christianity and Society: A Guide to the Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr, (London: Hodder, Stoughton), 1950.
- Babbitt, Irving, Rousseau and Romanticism, (Boston: Houghton & Mifflin), 1919.
- Bennett, John C. "The Contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr", Union Seminary Quarterly Review, V. xxix, No. 1, (Fall, 1968), pp. 3-16.
- Bendix, Reinhard, Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait, (London, Meuthen Co. Ltd.), 1959.
- Bergson, Henri Louis, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, trans. by R.A. Anara and C. Brereton, (London, Macmillan), 1935.
- Bingham, June, Courage to Change: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr, (New York, Scribner's), 1961.
- Blosch, D.G., Reinhold Niebuhr's Re-evaluation of the Apologetic Task, unpub. doc. thesis, University of Chicago, 1956.
- Brown, Carl Houston, The Moral Theory of Reinhold Niebuhr, unpub. Th. D. thesis, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957.
- Carnell, E.J., Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, (Grand Rapids, Mich., Eerdmans), 1951.
- Collingwood, R.G., "Oswald Spengler and the Theory of Historical Cycles" Antiquity Vol. 1 (1927) pp. 311-325, 435-446.
- Cunningham, Gustavus Watts, A Study in the Philosophy of Bergson, (London, Longmans, Green and Co.), 1916.
- David, W. E. Comparative Study of the Social Ethics of Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr, unpub. doc. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1958.
- Danielson, J. M., The Evolution of the Political Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr, unpub. doc. thesis, Univ. of Kansas, 1965.
- Davies, D.R. Reinhold Niebuhr: Prophet from America, (London, J. Clark & Son), 1945.
- Davies H.R., The Political Philosophy of Reinhold Niebuhr, unpub. doc. thesis, University of Chicago, 1951.
- Davis, H.R. and Good, R.C. Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics, (New York, Scribner's), 1960.
- Dellbrugge, Georg Heimann, Simul Justus et Peccator: A Study in the Theologies of Martin Luther and Reinhold Niebuhr, unpub. doc. thesis, Yale University, 1962.
- Doyle Mathias Francis, Theology and Politics in the Works of Reinhold Niebuhr, unpub. doc. thesis, Notre Dame University, 1968.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th edition under "Niebuhr, Reinhold" V. 13, pp. 74-75



- Gaede, E.A. Reinhold Niebuhr and the Relationship of Politics and Ethics, unpub. doc. thesis, University of Michigan, 1960.
- Gardiner, Patrick, ed. Theories of History, (Glencoe, Illinois, C. Allen & Unwin), 1959.
- Giddens, Anthony, Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber, (London, Cambridge University Press), 1971.
- Good, Robert Crocker, The Contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr to the Theory of International Relations, unpub. doc. thesis, Yale University
- Greenlaw, William Allen, Reinhold Niebuhr as Theologian: A New Interpretation, unpub. doc. thesis. Duke University
- Griffin, David, "Whitehead and Niebuhr on God, Man and the Worlds," The Journal of Religion, (April, 1973), pp. 149-175.
- Harland, Gordon, The Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr, (New York, Oxford Univ. Press), 1960.
- Hartmann, Robert Hill, The Use of Theology in Reinhold Niebuhr's Interpretation of History, unpub. doc. thesis, Northwestern University, 1969.
- Heilbroner, Robert L., The Worldly Philosophers, (New York, Time Inc.) 1953.
- Hoffman, Hans, Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, (New York, Scribner's) 1956.
- Hudgins, Walter Edward, The Changing Conception of Pacifism in American Protestantism of the Twentieth Century with Special Reference to the Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr, unpub. doc. thesis, Duke University, 1957.
- Hughes, H. S., Oswald Spengler: A Critical Estimate, (New York, Scribner's), 1952.
- Hulse, James W. Revolutionists in London, (Oxford, Clarendon Press), 1970.
- Hume, David, Philosophical Works, (Edinburgh, A. Black and W. Tait) 1826.
- Ilie, Paul, Unamuno: An Existential View of Self and Society, (Madison, Milwaukee and London, Univ of Wisconsin Press), 1967.
- James, William, A Pluralistic Universe, (New York, Longmans, Green & Co.), 1909
- James, William, The Varieties of Religious Experience, (New York Longmans, Green & Co.), 1902
- James, William, Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy, (London, Longmans, Green & Co.), 1911.

James, William, Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, (New York, Longmans, Green & Co.), 1946

James, William, Essays on Faith and Morals, (London, Longmans, Green & Co.), 1949.

Kegley, C.W. and Bretall, R.W., ed. Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social and Political Thought, (New York, Macmillan), 1956.

Knowles, Chip, Niebuhr's Philosophy of Social Reconstruction, unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1934.

Krutch, Joseph Wood, The Modern Temper, (London, Harcourt, Brace & Co.), 1930.

Landon, H.R. ed. Reinhold Niebuhr: A Prophetic Voice in Our Time (Greenwich, Conn., Seabury Press), 1962.

Maier, V.E. Ideology and Utopia in International Politics: A Critique of the Ethics of International Politics of Reinhold Niebuhr and E.H. Carr, unpub. thesis, University of Chicago 1963.

Marx, Karl Early Writings, trans. T.B. Bottomore (London, C.A. Watts) 1963.

Marx, Karl, Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production, (London, Swan Sonnenschein), 1906.

Marx, Karl, Selected Works in Two Volumes, ed. V. Adocatsky, (London Laurence and Wishart), 1943.

Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick, Selected Works in One Volume, (London, Lawrence and Wishart), 1970.

Marx, Karl, Early Texts, trans and ed. by David McLellan, (Oxford, Basil Blackwell), 1971.

Marx, K., Engels, F., Lenin, V.I. and Stalin, J., A Handbook of Marxism, ed. Emile Burns, (London, Victor Gollancz), 1935.

McLellan, David, The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction, (Edinburgh, Macmillan), 1971.

Merkley, Paul Charles, Reinhold Niebuhr: The Decisive Years (1916-1941), unpub. thesis, University of Toronto, 1966.

Meyer, D.B., The Protestant Search for Political Realism 1919-1941, (Los Angeles, University of California Press), 1960.

Newsweek "Reinhold Niebuhr" (June 14, 1971), p. 61.

Perry, R.B., The Thought and Character of William James, (London, Oxford University Press), 1937.

Potts, Hal, The Development of the Apologetic Method: A Study of Niebuhr's Experimental Years, unpub. Th. D. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964.

- Ruhe, Algot and Paul, Nancy Margaret, Henri Bergson An Account of His Life and Philosophy, (London, Macmillan), 1914.
- Russell, Bertrand, The Prospects of Industrial Civilization, (London, The Century Co.), 1923.
- Santayana, George, The Life of Reason: Reason in Religion, (London, A. Constable), 1905.
- Schall, J.V., "The Political Theory of Reinhold Niebuhr", Thought (Spring, 1968), pp. 62-80.
- Spengler, Oswald, The Decline of the West, (London, G. Allen & Unwin Ltd.), 1922.
- Spengler, Oswald, Man and Technics, (London, G. Allen & Unwin Ltd.) 1932.
- Stone, Ronald Henry Reinhold Niebuhr's Perspective on U.S. Foreign Policy unp. doc, thesis, 1968.
- Stump, Harley, The Educational Philosophy of Reinhold Niebuhr, unp. doc. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1964.
- Tawney, R.H., Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, (London, John Murry), 1926.
- Trotsky, Leon, My Life: The Rise and Fall of a Dictator, (London, Thorton Butterworth), 1930.
- Unammuno, Miguel de, The Tragic Sense of Life, (London, Macmillan) 1921.
- Weber, Max, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, (London, G. Allen & Unwin), 1930.
- Weber, Max, General Economic History, trans. by Frank H. Knight (London, G. Allen & Unwin), 1923.
- Weber, Max, The Sociology of Religion, (London, Methuen), 1956.
- West, Charles C., Communism and the Theologians: A Study of An Encounter, (New York, SCM Press), 1958.
- Whitehead, Alfred North, Religion in the Making, (Cambridge, University Press), 1930.
- Whitehead, Alfred North, Science and the Modern World, (Cambridge, University Press), 1926.
- Whitehead, Alfred North, The Function of Reason, (Boston, Beacon Press), 1969.
- Wise, Ralph Eugene, Irrational Man and the Modern Dilemma, unp. doc. thesis, Syracuse University, 1963.