

L II 6. REINHOLD NIEBUHR, after a few years as a Lutheran pastor, spent most of his life as a Professor at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, but no one in the field of religion had as much influence not only on religious thinking but also on political and international thinking in this country during his lifetime. Early in his life he was a socialist and a pacifist, but by mid-life he had rejected both those positions and reacted as well against liberal religion; he became known in religion as a main figure in what came to be known as neo-orthodoxy. He never became a political reactionary but often sounded more like an extreme liberal rather than a doctrinaire socialist. In international affairs he aligned himself with those called realists, and opposed the idealism of world government advocates. (His brother Richard Niebuhr, Professor in the Yale Divinity School, was also noted for his own unique contribution to religious thinking, especially in a book CHRIST AND CULTURE.)

Reinhold Niebuhr's religious position culminated in his Gifford Lectures, published in two volumes as THE NATURE AND DESTINY OF MAN in the early 1940s (one volume edition 1949). He was a prolific writer, and was much in demand as a lecturer on all sorts of political, international, and religious subjects all over the country. An early book (1927) was DOES CIVILIZATION NEED RELIGION: A Study in the Social Resources and Limitations of Religion in Modern Life. The reasoning is still of interest today. It was followed in 1929 by a book entitled LEAVES FROM THE NOTEBOOK OF A TAMED CYNIC in which some of his realistic ideas are first in evidence. In 1932 he published THE CONTRIBUTION OF RELIGION TO SOCIAL WORK.

Another book PUBLISHED IN 1932 has become a classic, MORAL MAN AND IMMORAL SOCIETY: A Study in Ethics and Politics. The title shows the thesis, that we are individually moral but society cannot be. He argues that society can at best be just rather than unjust, but humans can even try to embody a love ethic as society cannot. The book contains very sharp insight into the thinking typical of some among the common unskilled laboring people, and the thinking typical of more privileged classes of people. There are chapters on rational resources and religious resources for social living, and on how to preserve moral values in the political process.

Other Niebuhr books include REFLECTIONS ON THE END OF AN ERA (1934), AN INTERPRETATION OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS (1935), BEYOND TRAGEDY: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History (1937), CHRISTIANITY AND POWER POLITICS (1940), THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT AND THE CHILDREN OF DARKNESS: A vindication of Democracy and a Critique of its Traditional Defense (1944), DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES: Sermons for Today and Tomorrow (1946), FAITH AND HISTORY: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History (1949), THE IRONY OF AMERICAN HISTORY (1952), CHRISTIAN REALISM AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS (1953), THE SELF AND THE DRAMA OF HISTORY (1955). I have read eight of the above books over the years and can indeed recommend all of them, not by agreement with everything said, but for stimulating my thinking about the issues raised, and I learned a great deal from some of them.