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A Rhetorical Study of Selected Speeches by Reinhold Niebuhr (1930-1960).

Bill R. Love

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A RHETORICAL STUDY OF SELECTED SPEECHES BY
REINHOLD NIEBUHR (1930-1960).

THE LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND
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A RHETORICAL STUDY OF SELECTED SPEECHES
BY REINHOLD NIEBUHR (1930-1960)

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University
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in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of Speech

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine whether Reinhold Niebuhr was an effective public speaker. The development of the speaker is traced from his boyhood years through his seminary education at Yale, through the years of his ministry at Detroit, to Niebuhr's long career as a professor of Christian social ethics at Union Seminary in New York. The speaker's philosophy of rhetoric is reviewed, together with the major influences upon his thinking. A rhetorical analysis of four early sermons delivered on apologetic themes during the thirties is followed by the analysis of a second set of four sermons delivered in the forties and fifties on war and post-war themes. Two speeches delivered in the fifties at Union Seminary are then analyzed to discover Niebuhr's main concerns for ministerial education.

The study reveals that Niebuhr's ideas were constantly changing and developing. The speaker was rooted deeply in the thought of the Christian tradition as it found expression in the German Lutheranism of his early home. Niebuhr read widely and was influenced by most of the great thinkers in the Western cultural tradition. Niebuhr's thinking was influenced as much by events as by ideas. Events of personal, national, and international magnitude modified
the speaker's ideas as he tried to reconcile his theories of Christian social ethics with the hard realities of life. The end product of this process was "Christian realism," Niebuhr's unique contribution to Christian theology and political philosophy.

This analysis indicates that Niebuhr retained a vital Christian faith and a commitment to speak to the "intellectual despisers" of the faith both on the university campus and in society at large. Niebuhr's apologia was a complex analysis of the possibilities and impossibilities of social progress and of the glory and the misery of man: his thought was paradoxical because he understood life as complex and paradoxical. Niebuhr advocated an "adequate" and realistic faith which could admit the problems and complexities of life while retaining at the same time a "hope beyond tragedy." Niebuhr believed that this kind of realistic faith enables the believer to continue working for the common good in a world where he will never achieve more than piecemeal progress.

This study reveals that Niebuhr was not a "popular speaker," in the usual sense of that phrase. His greatest influence was felt by the spiritual, intellectual, and political leaders of the country. His was a "rhetoric of equals" in which he invited his audience to enter with him into an intellectual quest for the answers of life's complex problems. He made little accommodation to his
audience in either language or thought, speaking often in technical terms with rapid delivery and leaving the tension of his paradoxical ideas unrelieved. Niebuhr supplied his listeners with no easy answer for the perplexing problems of modern living. He chose rather to challenge their presuppositions about the nature of man, the nature of human history, and the relevance of the Christian faith. He called his listener to his own mental struggle for workable answers to life's complex problems.

The study concludes that the question of Niebuhr's effectiveness as a public speaker must receive an answer as paradoxical as the speaker's own thought. On the one hand, the speechcraft of Niebuhr's speeches was faulty in many respects, particularly in his lack of audience adaptation. On the other hand, the audience response to Niebuhr over his thirty years of public speaking was enthusiastic and positive. The final conclusion of the study is that Niebuhr was an effective speaker within carefully defined limits.
Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Reinhold Niebuhr was one of America's most influential thinkers in the second quarter of the twentieth century. International recognized as a political philosopher and theologian, he was also a professor and a preacher. Newsweek magazine commented upon his death in 1971: "Like the late Paul Tillich and Karl Barth, the two other giants of twentieth-century Protestant thought, Niebuhr was a powerful preacher as well as a subtle dialectician." ¹

From his first parish in Detroit in 1915 until the 1960's when Niebuhr retired as professor of Christian Social ethics at Union Seminary in New York, he used the public platform for the dissemination of his ideas. Although Niebuhr has been extensively studied as a thinker, no reference has been found to a systematic and thorough study of the man as a public speaker. In a letter to this writer (dated Feb. 16, 1973) Edmund A. Steimlie, professor of homiletics at Union Seminary, stated, "So far as I know there has never been a full-fledged systematic rhetorical study of Niebuhr as a preacher."

Although Niebuhr's influence was mediated through a variety of means, he was active as a speaker and doubtlessly influenced many people from the public platform. By the study of selected speeches of Reinhold Niebuhr against the background of his own life history and his own theory of rhetoric the following questions will be asked: (1) What were the issues which attracted the attention of the speaker? (2) What did the speaker say concerning these issues? (3) What rhetorical methods did the speaker use? (4) How effective was the speaker in communicating his ideas to his audience?

Contributory Studies

So far as this writer can discover there has never been a thorough study of Niebuhr as a speaker. The Cleary and Haberman bibliography of speech studies does not list his name. In searching through the Dissertation Abstracts this writer found no study of his speaking. However, considerable attention has been given to his social, political, and theological theories, including the following: James Luther Martin, Jr., "The Doctrine of Sin in the Theology of Emil Brunner and Reinhold Niebuhr," Ph.D., Religion, Yale University, 1951; Walter Merle Lengwood, "The Ends of Government in the Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr and Jacque Maritain: A Study of Christian Social Ethics," Ph.D., Social Science, Yale University, 1969; Donald Wayne Shaner, "The Marxian Doctrine and Practice of Race Relations in the
Light of the Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr," Ph.D., Social Science, Drew University, 1970.

A parallel study to the one reported here is Edward William Thron's doctoral dissertation completed at Indiana University, 1973, entitled, "Implications for Rhetoric in the Works of Reinhold Niebuhr." Thron's study dealt with the implicit rhetorical theory in Niebuhr's philosophy of man. In Thron's own words, his intent was that "this study will explore Niebuhr's implicit theory of preaching as it grew out of his philosophy of man." (p. 6) The analysis concluded that Niebuhr's rhetorical theory was Platonic in that it assumed "ideals" and norms for society. According to Thron, Niebuhr's social theory was based upon the norm of love conditioned by the realities of human nature and societal resistance to change. An "approximate" justice is the best society can expect after all its struggle. The dialectic of Niebuhr's thought ran as follows: thesis - "love," antithesis - the situation of man, the synthesis - "justice." Thron asserted that this "realism" about man determined Niebuhr's rhetorical theory and method. While Thron's conclusions seem justified this writer has reservations about using the word "Platonic" to describe Niebuhr's goals for social justice. Niebuhr's favorite word to describe his social ethics was the word "realism," in contrast to all kinds of idealism about man including the classical school of Platonic idealism.
At the end of his dissertation Thron indicated that an analysis of Niebuhr’s own speaking was still needed:

Niebuhr’s thought has been very thoroughly explored by previous researchers. However, there are still possible areas for future research by rhetorical scholars. Some of these areas have been previously alluded to in this dissertation. There is, for example, no extensive study of Niebuhr’s own preaching and lecturing. A critical study of his personal method of preparation, message content, organization, style, delivery, etc. would be illuminating. (p. 226).

The present study addresses the unanswered questions mentioned by Thron.

An abundance of material is available for the student of Niebuhr’s speaking. A few sources have been particularly important for gaining an understanding of this speaker. First is Niebuhr’s own journal, *Leaves From the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* in which the young minister in Detroit recorded the events of his life and his developing philosophy. The second is June Bingham’s detailed biography of Niebuhr, *Courage to Change*. This authorized biography furnishes valuable data about the speaker as a person. Third, Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall’s volume, *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social and Political Thought*, a collection of essays about the life and work of

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Reinhold Niebuhr, provides critical assessment of several facets of the speaker's work. Finally D. B. Robertson's Reinhold Niebuhr's Works: A Bibliography was of great assistance in finding primary source materials for this study.

In addition to these major sources of information three short studies of the speaking of Niebuhr have been helpful. There are scattered notes regarding Niebuhr's speaking in DeWitte Holland's Preaching in American History. A second brief study is Erdman Harris' essay in the anthology entitled Harry Emerson Fosdick's Art of Preaching. Harris compares the rhetorical methods of Fosdick and Niebuhr. The only systematic study of Niebuhr's speaking is the short chapter by Paul Sherer in the Kegley and Bretall volume mentioned above.

**Justification for the Study**

The justification for this study arises from two facts: first, Niebuhr's speaking has never been studied in depth even though he was quite active as a public speaker. Secondly, Niebuhr's influence upon American thought in the middle half of the twentieth century was extensive.

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Assessing precisely which method of communication served Niebuhr most effectively in the dissemination of his ideas is an impossible task. Niebuhr authored sixteen books, wrote over fifteen-hundred articles, lectured for over thirty years at Union Seminary, furnished leadership in numerous political organizations, and served as an advisor on many committees and to many political leaders in Washington. While public speaking was only one of several ways Niebuhr exerted his influence, the word "preacher" is used repeatedly in the appraisals of those who offered measurements of his influence. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. wrote about Niebuhr: "No man has had as much influence as a preacher in this generation; no preacher has had as much influence in the secular world." When Hubert H. Humphrey presented Niebuhr the Medal of Freedom in 1960 he commented: "No preacher or teacher, at least in my time, has had a greater impact on the secular world. No American has made a greater contribution to political wisdom and moral responsibility."9

The fact that Niebuhr was repeatedly referred to as a public speaker and the fact that Steimlie and Thron affirm that no thorough and systematic study of Niebuhr's speaking has been done indicate that a rhetorical study of Niebuhr


as a speaker is justified.

The speaker's influence extended far beyond the walls of Union Seminary in New York. Even a cursory study of Niebuhr's influence shows how significantly his thinking affected political, academic, and religious life in America.

Influence on Politicians

When Niebuhr died in 1971 Newsweek magazine mentioned that "he founded Christianity and Crisis, a small influential biweekly that made Niebuhr's influence upon several prominent political philosophers.

As a political activist, Niebuhr moved from the Socialist to the Liberal Party, and later was a founding father of the liberal Americans for Democratic Action. During the cold-war period he was an adviser to the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department and mentor to such influential liberal intellectuals as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Hans J. Morgenthau, Louis J. Halle and George F. Kennen, who once described the tall, peppery theologian as "the father of us all."10

Niebuhr's influence upon politicians can be seen in his relationship with men who were or would become presidential candidates and with their advisors. When Niebuhr suffered a stroke in 1952 Adlai E. Stevenson wrote a note assuring him that he had many admirers in Washington praying for his return to good health, "and I am honored to

be included as an irreverent member of the chorus."¹¹ In the 1956 presidential campaign Stevenson asked Niebuhr for his perspective on the "segregation issue." Niebuhr stated his position under four points, modestly disclaiming the role of advisor to Stevenson and giving his opinion of General Eisenhower:

I am going to put down a few points which I am sure you already have in mind, but I shall record them to show in what substantial agreement I am with you on this important issue. I have just written a little piece for the New Leader in which I expressed the conviction that your attitude is statesmanlike. I am afraid the attitude of the other candidate is governed purely by political considerations.¹²

In 1957 Stevenson asked if Niebuhr would join him for lunch at the Century Club because he was to give a speech in London about Asian-African relations and he wanted Niebuhr's advice. Stevenson wanted to know if what he was planning to say was "too highbrow for the massive London audience."¹³ Two years later when Stevenson was interviewed over the Yale radio station and asked whether he was much influenced by Niebuhr he answered, "I don't know, but I hope so." A Newsweek article about Stevenson as America's United Nations Representative mentioned that he often


finished a hectic day of diplomacy by reading one of Niebuhr's books at night.  

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. described the reactions of northern liberals to the nomination of Lyndon B. Johnson as the Democratic candidate for Vice President in 1960. According to Schlesinger, both the Kennedy and the Johnson forces disapproved the nomination. After a discussion with Reinhold Niebuhr, Schlesinger wrote in his journal, "I am reconciled to the Johnson nomination and believe that it may be seen as a master stroke."  

Niebuhr's acquaintance with Hubert Humphrey dated back to the forties when both men were members of Americans for Democratic Action. In 1953 Niebuhr received a letter from Senator Humphrey thanking him for explaining the immigration status for a Mr. Schramm and then added a personal note:

"I do hope you are getting well. I miss talking to you. You could do me a favor if you would be

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14 Bingham, p. 305.

15 Arthur M. Schlesinger, A Thousand Days (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965) p. 58. Schlesinger noted: "my own sense of outrage vanished in forty-eight hours. On Saturday morning I had a talk with Reinhold Niebuhr, who was a few miles away in Santa Barbara, and found him strongly in favor of Johnson's nomination. He pointed out that the Democratic party had pledged itself to the strongest civil rights plank in history. If, in addition, it had nominated a militant northern liberal for the Vice Presidency, this would only have confirmed the South in its sense of isolation and persecution. But the nomination of a southern candidate who accepted the platform, including the civil rights plank, restored the Democrats as a national party and associated the South with the pursuit of national goals."
willing to write and give me your thoughts on various problems we face here in the Senate. I would like to hear from you if you think I am doing anything wrong and I shall certainly welcome your guidance on any issue that comes to your mind.\textsuperscript{16}

In the 1976 presidential election race Niebuhr's name again became prominent. Former Governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter, pointed to Niebuhr as the theologian who had most influenced his thinking. In an article critical of Carter's understanding of Niebuhr, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. reported that "Mr. Carter has told newspapermen that Reinhold Niebuhr was his favorite theologian."\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Influence On Intellectuals}

The contact of Reinhold Niebuhr with the academic community can be seen in his correspondence. His general attitude toward the academic community was expressed in a letter to President James B. Conant of Harvard explaining why Niebuhr was declining an offer to teach at Harvard.

I do not believe in established religion anywhere and could ask for nothing better than a chance to participate in the meeting of minds and the free interchange of convictions which you suggest as the primary opportunity at Harvard. There are, of course, some advantages in doing my kind of work from inside the theological framework of this institution; and I carefully weighed them against the opportunities offered at Harvard and had come to the conclusion that I ought to choose

\textsuperscript{16}Letter from Hubert H. Humphrey (June 23, 1953) Niebuhr's papers, Library of Congress, Box 6.

the latter, partly at least because my own thought is constantly engaged in the problem of the relation between theology and philosophy to political science and social problems generally.\textsuperscript{18}

Niebuhr was able to meet and influence many intellectuals. The historian, James McGregor Burnes, is quoted to the effect that "the modern thinker has learned, partly from the teachings of men like Reinhold Niebuhr and partly from his own researches, that man is a complicated mixture of motives and attitudes, a mixture of compassion and egotism, of nobility and malice."\textsuperscript{19}

Although it was not a major area of Niebuhr's influence, the literary world also felt the impact of Niebuhr's thinking. Nathan Scott noted the influence of Niebuhr's \textit{Children of Light} and \textit{Children of Darkness} on Robert Penn Warren's \textit{Brother to Dragons}, and Frederick Buechner's novel, \textit{The Return of Ansen Gibbs}. The novel was written after Buechner had studied under Niebuhr at Union Seminary.\textsuperscript{20}

As one of the brilliant young physicists at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies where Niebuhr spent a year in 1958, Jeremy Bernstein wrote of his association with Niebuhr:

There was a wonderful interaction with him on general subjects—contemporary politics, the meaning of history, the relation between science

\textsuperscript{18}Letter To J. B. Conant (Nov. 7, 1942) Niebuhr's Papers, Library of Congress, Box 3.

\textsuperscript{19}Bingham, p. 335.

\textsuperscript{20}Nathan Scott, \textit{Reinhold Niebuhr} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963) p. 44.
and society, etc. We had a regular lunch group and he frequently came and ate with us... The average age was about thirty. We enjoyed his humor, wisdom and wide experience. I was, myself, always fascinated by the way in which he would extract the general from the particular, using a language which was deceptively simple, but really enormously subtle and abstract. He had never met any of the younger generation of physicists before and he found it interesting that they are quite normal and human. It was a kind of mutual friendship toward which we all look back with great pleasure.  

In 1962 a colloquium in honor of Reinhold Neibuhr was held at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York City. Three prominent intellectuals spoke of their association with Niebuhr and gave an estimate of the significance of his work. The three were: Paul Tillich, John C. Bennet, and Hans J. Morgenthau. Morgenthau characterized Niebuhr's contribution to American political philosophy under the heading "The Rediscovery of Political Man" and explained:

I think if one would want to bring into one formula the contribution which Reinhold Niebuhr has made to the political thinking and the political life of America, one could say that he is responsible for the rediscovery of Political Man. He has rediscovered the autonomy of the political sphere. He has rediscovered the intellectual dilemma of understanding politics and acting within the political sphere. He has rediscovered the moral dilemma of political action. He has restored the organic relationship between political actions. Finally he has rediscovered the tragedy which is inherent in the political act.  

21 Birgham, p. 377.

Morgenthau's final assessment of Niebuhr's contribution approached the laudatory.

Let me say in conclusion that I have always considered Reinhold Niebuhr as the greatest living political philosopher of America, perhaps the only creative political philosopher since Calhoun. It is indicative of the very nature of American politics and of our thinking about matters political that it is not a statesman, not a practical politician, let alone a professor of political science or of philosophy, but a theologian who can claim this distinction of being the greatest living political philosopher of America.  

John C. Bennett summarized the influence of Niebuhr on the intellectual community when he noted that Niebuhr was a creative thinker rather than an academic specialist. "The great theologians have often been makers of history even in their own time. It may be a symbol of what I am saying that while he never wrote a Ph.D. thesis there are few living persons about whom so many Ph.D. theses are written."  

**Influence on Religious Leaders**

By the late 1920's it was becoming more and more apparent not only in America but also in British and European circles that there was a new voice in modern theology who had already begun to exert his influence. Both in religion and politics Niebuhr was standing in opposition to easy optimism, or what he called "sentimentalism." *Time* magazine put it this way in 1948:

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23Landon, p. 109.
24Landon, p. 58.
25Scott, pp. 29, 30.
It was a good deal easier to see that Tennyson was silly than to see that the attitude itself was silly. That was the blind impasse of optimistic liberalism. At the open end of that impasse stood a forbidding and impressive figure. To protestantism's easy conscience and easy optimism that figure was saying with every muscle of its being: No. His name was Reinhold Niebuhr.26

Niebuhr's influence on the religious world can be seen in the list of outstanding leaders with whom he corresponded: Albert Schweitzer, Emil Brunner, Rudolph Bultmann, Karl Barth, James A. Pike, Henry P. Van Dusen and others. Another way of gauging his impact is to study the testimony of prominent leaders to Niebuhr's influence on them. From the early thirties there was an exchange of ideas between Niebuhr and another New York religious leader, Harry Emerson Fosdick. Niebuhr's appointment calendar shows several conferences with Fosdick and notes indicating that Niebuhr occasionally spoke at Riverside Church.27 Years later when Fosdick wrote his autobiography he acknowledged that Niebuhr had been ahead of the American clergy, himself included:

To be sure, Reinhold Niebuhr's haunting analysis of sin—even our best good corroded by egocentricity and pride—was not in our minds then and our thinking would have been better balanced if it had been there. Nevertheless, we liberals too had long confronted what I called in 1922 "the same inescapable experience out of which the old doctrine of original sin first came...that humanity's sinful nature is not something which you and I alone make up by individual deeds of wrong, but that it is an inherited mortgage and handicap on

26"Faith For A Lenten Age," Time, 8 March 1948, p. 70.
27Niebuhr's Papers, Library of Congress, Box 23.
the whole human family.28

In relating his theological pilgrimage Martin Luther King, Jr., gave credit to Niebuhr. King described his journey from a rigid fundamentalism to an idealistic liberalism and finally to a realism more capable of dealing with the hard social problems of his time.

My reading of the works of Reinhold Niebuhr made me aware of the complexity of human motives and the reality of sin on every level of man's existence. Moreover, I came to recognize the complexity of man's social involvement and the glaring reality of collective evil. I realized that Liberalism had been all too sentimental concerning human nature and that it leaned toward a false idealism.29

In 1967, while looking back over the progress which had been made in the civil rights movement, King commented that as early as 1932 Niebuhr had indicated the economic pressure points where the Negroes could have applied boycotts to realize success. "These words have proved to be prophetic, for we have been seeing the success of this approach in the last few years."30 In an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation shortly before his death King indicated that the two greatest influences on his intellectual

30 Martin Luther King, Jr., Where Do We Go from Here, Chaos or Community? (New York: Harper's, 1967) p. 168.
development had been Niebuhr and Mahatma Ghandi.31

Paul Tillich was among the first German intellectuals Niebuhr helped escape Nazi Germany and find a teaching position in the United States. Tillich taught theology at Union Seminary in New York where he and Niebuhr became close friends. In the colloquium mentioned above Tillich bore testimony to Niebuhr's impact both on American theological situation and also upon his own thinking. His own personal devotion to his long time friend was expressed in these words:

Now this is enough; I was only asked to give a few ideas about the basic attitude of Reinie. I basically agree with his descriptions of human predicament. I do not agree with special points of theological formulations with respect to the doctrine of man. But it was a great experience, and decisive for my own development to have this ever and on-going talk with him as a friend....

Here I admire something and want to close with this: the mixture of a definite structure with admirable flexibility in a man of his age, his character, and his creativity. He has at the same time a clear profile and a remaining openness. Few better things can be said of a man of his achievements, his work, and his age. My only hope is that these living dialectics will go on for a long time.32

Nathan Scott gave his view of Niebuhr's place in the history of religious thought.

He is the one American who has established his claim on that modern theological pantheon which


32Landon, p. 35.
includes such Europeans as Friedrich S. Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl and Søren Kierkegaard and in which such distinguished contemporaries as Paul Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth will also ultimately find their place. And excepting possibly Kierkegaard (whose posthumous reputation is a development of our own period) and Paul Tillich, whose influence begins also to be widely felt--there is no other Christian theologian of the modern period whose work has exerted so profound an impact upon secular intellectual life.33

Martin Marty stated succinctly his own judgment of Niebuhr's place in twentieth century American protestantism:

But in the "Niebuhrian decade," he more than any other was responsible for reawakening the note of protest against churchly pretensions of reform of societal institutions. He represented a turning point as had Edwards, Bushnell, and Rauschenbush before him. He was the only one of these who did not share a kind of postmillennial chauvinist view of the American Protestant empire.34

This study seems justified for two reasons. First, Niebuhr's influence was pervasive in several areas of American life. Second, although he was quite active as a public speaker there has never been a thorough rhetorical study of his speaking.

Methodology and Limitations of the Study

This study attempts to describe and analyze selected speeches of Reinhold Niebuhr from which conclusions are made about the speaker's effectiveness as an oral communicator. The elements of the speaking situation as listed by

33Scott, p. 41.

classical rhetoricians will be considered: the occasion of the speech, the audience, the speaker, and the speech itself.

Historical and biographical research was of primary importance for understanding the speaker, his times, and the audiences to which he spoke. A survey of Niebuhr's own writings in books, periodicals, and books of sermons was made in order to establish Niebuhr's relation to persons and events around him.

Over a hundred speech outlines and manuscripts were studied as a basis for the selection of the ten speeches which will be studied here. These ten speeches were chosen in view of the following questions: Which speeches represent the speaker at his peak of influence? Which speeches fairly represent Niebuhr's concerns during his most productive years? Which speeches could be selected to show the variety of audiences the speaker addressed during these years? Which speeches give the best indication of Niebuhr's oral and written styles?

In assessing Niebuhr's effectiveness and influence as a speaker the writer reviewed the writings of many political, religious, and educational leaders as well as periodical literature to gauge the impact the speaker made upon his audiences.

The only serious limitations restricting this study were those imposed upon the analysis of Niebuhr's style and delivery in speaking. Three limitations existed in this
area: (1) Of all the speech materials studied the writer discovered fewer than twenty-five full manuscripts of speeches. Niebuhr typically spoke from a phrase outline and his outlines became more and more abbreviated as the years went by. (2) Of these full speech texts only three were found in the original form just as Niebuhr delivered them. Most of these texts had been carefully edited for publication. The writer transcribed two of the speeches studied here from tape recordings of Niebuhr's speaking. A third speech manuscript discovered among Niebuhr's papers was evidently transcribed verbatim and left uncorrected by the speaker. (3) A third limitation regarding the study of style and delivery is that all three of these last three speeches were delivered after Niebuhr suffered a stroke in 1952. Both the style and the delivery of his speeches were affected to some extent by this illness. Since no tapes or manuscripts of sermons delivered before the stroke are available, drawing conclusions about the speaker's style and delivery based upon these three speeches becomes a precarious undertaking. In view of these limitations conclusions throughout the study regarding the speaker's style and delivery will be both brief and tentative.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into six major chapters. Chapter one is an introduction to the study. The second chapter contains biographical material which shows the
development of the speaker and his rhetorical theory. Chapters three, four, and five are rhetorical analyses of ten selected sermons which are prefaced in each chapter by an historical survey of the situation in which the speeches were delivered. Chapter six includes an estimate of the speaker's influence as a speaker and the writer's conclusions about Niebuhr's effectiveness as an oral communicator.
CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPEAKER

The purpose of this chapter is to explore some of the formative influences in Niebuhr's life which helped shape the man as a speaker. His life will be viewed in three periods: from birth to his ministry in Detroit, the Detroit ministry, and his years as professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Finally, there will be an attempt to characterize Niebuhr's rhetorical theory and to discover the sources of his main ideas.

I. The Early Years (1892-1915)

One of his former professors wrote that Niebuhr frequently expressed gratitude for the security, love, and openness of his early family years.1 In his own intellectual autobiography Niebuhr wrote: "the first formative religious influence of my life was my father, who combined a vital personal piety with a complete freedom in his theological studies."2


The fourth child born to Gustav and Lydia Niebuhr on June 21, 1892, was christened "Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr." He was born in Wright City, Missouri, a small town fifty miles northwest of St. Louis, in an atmosphere remote from the problems of America's urban life. Many of the citizens of this small German town did not speak English, and as a minister of the Evangelical Synod Lutheran Church Gustav Niebuhr held services wholly in German.

Gustav Niebuhr had rebelled at his father's Prussian ways and had fled Germany to escape the military draft as soon as he finished high school. Consequently, he believed deeply in American egalitarianism and made freedom of thought and expression a cardinal rule in the Niebuhr household. The respect of the parents for the children was evident when Niebuhr later recalled being asked even as an adolescent his opinion about his father's taking another church in another town.

Reinhold's sister, Hulda, related how her father talked to young "Reinie" quite early about the problems of the ministry. After the family moved to Lincoln, Illinois, in 1902, Gustav asked his ten year old son what he wanted to be when he was grown. Reinhold answered, "A minister."

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3June Bingham, *Courage to Change* (New York: Scribner's, 1961) pp. 49-52. The Niebuhrs had five children: Hulda who became Professor of Christian Education at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago; Walter who became a newspaper man and pioneer producer of documentary films; Herbert who lived only six weeks; then Reinhold, and Richard, who was two years younger and became the renowned theologian and church historian at Yale.
When his father asked why the reply was, "Because you are the most interesting man in town." To this Gustav replied, "Then you must study Greek. We'll have a lesson every Saturday morning."\(^4\)

It was at Lincoln that Reinhold Niebuhr first observed the trauma of working in the church for social improvement. The people in that part of Illinois were hard-working German farmers who were always against taxes. Gustav Niebuhr spent much of his time trying to teach these farmers their social responsibility in this matter.\(^5\)

While just a boy Reinhold had his first lesson in the impracticality of idealism. In a period of recession a local merchant for whom young Reinhold worked extended credit freely to everyone, believing that God would protect him as long as his heart was right. Before long the large-hearted businessman went bankrupt. Later Niebuhr would preach against "sentimentality" and faith in "special providence."\(^6\)

Although the Niebuhr home encouraged mental discipline, Reinhold was never a bookish youth. He balanced his studies with a variety of other interests. Once when he and Walter learned of a man who proposed to walk across the United States, they decided to walk to the next town twelve miles

\(^4\)Bingham, pp. 57-58.
\(^5\)Bingham, p. 59.
\(^6\)Bingham, p. 62.
away. For a while Reinhold was a member of a trumpet band until it disbanded because the leader insisted on playing only hymns. June Bingham supplies information about Niebuhr's early interest in public speaking. In the eighth grade he reached the finals in a debate contest and greatly amused his listening father by referring to his opponent as a "blue-eyed son of a preacher."\(^7\)

When it was Reinhold's time to go to college he attended Concordia College in St. Louis and later Eden Seminary, both Lutheran schools. In his intellectual autobiography Niebuhr commented at length on his first educational experience:

I attended the college and seminary of my denomination. The little college had no more than junior college status in my day, and I was not interested in any academic disciplines. The seminary was influential in my life primarily because of the creative effect upon me of the life of a very remarkable man, Dr. S. D. Press, who combined a childlike innocence with a rigorous scholarship in Biblical and systematic subjects. This proved the point that an educational institution needs only to have Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other.\(^8\)

Evidently Niebuhr continued his interest in debate. Many years later, upon the request of Dr. Press, several of Niebuhr's classmates from Eden wrote their memories of those years. M. E. Seybold recalled how "Reinie" led Eden

\(^7\)Bingham, p. 61.

\(^8\)Kegley and Bretall, pp. 3-4. The Evangelical Synod Lutheran Church merged in 1934 with a Calvinist Communion to make the Evangelical and Reformed Church. This denomination in turn merged in 1956 with the Congregationalists to form the United Church of Christ.
to victory in debate over Concordia. Dr. Paul M. Schroeder supplemented the story. The Year was 1911-1912, and the topic was "Resolved that international arbitration is an effective method of eliminating war as an instrument of settling international disputes." Reinhold was assigned the affirmative, even though his convictions were against it.\(^9\)

Seybold was impressed with Niebuhr's intellect even at that time. In letters he conjectured that Niebuhr could have carried off prizes year after year, because his interests were so varied, but that he had no desire to do so. Seybold also commented that Niebuhr asked questions in class which never occurred to his classmates because he saw implications they missed.

While Niebuhr was at Eden his friend, Carl Vrooman, offered him a job in the Department of Agriculture in Washington with the promise of a sizable salary, but Niebuhr replied that his commitment was already made to the ministry. After his father died in 1913 Niebuhr was invited to take his father's place at the church in Lincoln, Illinois, but he chose rather to apply for graduate study at Yale.\(^{10}\)

When Niebuhr arrived at Yale he felt very much the outsider for several reasons. He came from a modest home, and most of the students were sons of the wealthy. He was from

\(^9\)Bingham, p. 64.
\(^{10}\)Bingham, pp. 61, 63.
the Mid-West, and most of his classmates spoke with the
Eastern accent. He was a second generation German American
at a time when Germans were suspect citizens. Perhaps his
greatest source of discomfort was the deficiency of his
academic background for a school like Yale. "I have bluffed
my way through pretty well by industrious reading," he wrote
Dr. Press, "but I feel all the time like a mongrel among
thoroughbreds, and that's what I am."11

After two years at Yale, Niebuhr received the M. A.
degree and wanted to go on to further graduate study. When
the Dean looked at his record he judged him deficient in the
sciences and literature and advised him to go back and
register as a sophomore at Yale. However, a new Dean was
soon installed and Niebuhr re-applied. This time Dean
Wilbur Cross granted him a conditional acceptance: if
Niebuhr would maintain an "A" average he would be enrolled
as a special student.12

At Yale Niebuhr first became interested in systematic
theology because of his association with Professor Douglas
Clyde Macintosh. Neibuhr was impressed both by the scholar­
ship and the personal warmth of the man. Later Niebuhr said

11 Bingham, pp. 79, 81, 84. One of the ironies of
Niebuhr's life is that he applied to Yale because he con­
sidered the standards of admission to Union Seminary in New
York beyond his reach. Later he would teach there and
become Vice-President.

12 Bingham, p. 82. Some thirty years later when Niebuhr
was presented the Doctor of Divinity by Yale, he walked in
procession with Cross, then governor of Connecticut. Gover­
nor Cross had forgotten the episode but was delighted to be
reminded of it.
that he had not been able to benefit fully from Yale because of his immaturity. "Incidentally, my brother, H. Richard, who came to Yale as a mature person some ten years later, profited much more than I could, in my youthful awkwardness, from Yale."13

While Niebuhr may not have been pleased with his performance at Yale, there is no indication that professors and peers were disappointed in him. Those who knew him at Yale seemed to have great respect for his scholarship. In his last year at Yale, in addition to his studies and part-time jobs, Niebuhr entered the Church Peace Union Student Essay Contest and won first prize, $100. Upon receiving the M. A. he wrote Dr. Press that he was amazed that some who began with him, with A. B. degrees, had failed. He said he had made "pretty good marks."14

Niebuhr's conservative religious background was evidenced in correspondence with Dr. Press as he was finishing at Yale. He was concerned that his association with Yale might jeopardize his influence in his church because he would be accused of becoming "liberal." As he completed work on the Master's degree Niebuhr was called by his denomination to fulfill his commitment and take an assignment to

13Kegley and Bretall, pp. 3, 4. "Professor Macintosh, the systematic theologian opened the whole world of philosophical and theological learning to me, lent me books out of his own library, and by his personal interest inspired a raw and timid student who had made his first contact with a great university."

14Bingham, p. 87.
a Detroit church. He accepted this assignment for several reasons; he was becoming restless in school, in his own words, "epistemology bored me." Other considerations were his family's financial needs, his commitment to the church, and his yearning to explore the relevance of his theology in the real world.15

II. The Detroit Years (1915-1928)

According to one writer the years Niebuhr spent in Detroit comprised the "first great formative experience of his life."16 "I cut my eyeteeth fighting Ford," was Neibuhr's comment.17

Niebuhr began his ministry in the company of eighteen families of Bethel Evangelical Church, "the little German church around the corner."18 He later corrected the view of a European writer who described his work as that in a "slum parish." "It was, as a matter of fact, situated on the spacious West Grand Boulevard, and it numbered in

15 Kegley and Bretall, p. 4. "Family needs (my father had died just before my entrance into Yale) and my boredom with epistemology prompted me to forego 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 ordainand was at the disposal of the Home Mission Board for two years after ordination. The board picked a newly organized parish for me in Detroit."


17 Bingham, p. 129.

18 Fackre, p. 16.
the flock everything from auto workers to two millionaires."19

Detroit in 1915 was still a frontier town, "one of the open shop capitals in the land."20 The industrialists were hostile toward unions, and large pools of cheap immigrant and adolescent labor were easily accessible. Niebuhr visited a family in which the man at age fifty-five was out of work because he became ill. Niebuhr promised to help him find a job, a promise that was hard to keep. He reflected on such experiences in his journal: "According to the ethics of our modern industrialism men over fifty, without special training, are so much junk."21

Ford developed the assembly line and hired efficiency engineers at the lowest possible cost to him. Niebuhr's sense of outrage was heightened because Ford was heralded throughout the world, not only as a brilliant industrialist, but as a large-hearted philanthropist. Ford let it be known that his employees were paid good wages ($5.00 a day), but failed to include the details of their situation. Behind the high wages lay Ford's high profits. There were efficiency-engineered speedups, model changeovers, and retooling with its long factory shutdowns and massive layoffs. As one writer described it, Ford allowed a "Charlie

19 Kegley and Bretall, pp. 4-5.
20 Bingham, p. 129.
Chaplin assembly line life, the shelving of aged workers and an anti-union policy."22

Looking back on his experience Niebuhr commented that his associations in Detroit did more to dash his liberal idealism than even the war in Europe:

But it wasn't the then distant war so much as the social realities in Detroit which undermined my youthful optimism. 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 $5 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."23

Niebuhr's reaction to Ford's operation ran the gamut from personal ministry to the unemployed to public statement denouncing the prevailing conditions. He welcomed labor representatives into his pulpit to inform the people of the situation and helped found the Emergency Committee for Strike Relief. Niebuhr filed periodic reports with the Christian Century voicing criticisms of the industrial enterprise and criticism of Henry Ford in particular.24

Niebuhr entered in his journal his observations of the comfortable clergy who were too slow to speak out for social justice: "A man like that reminds me of the eunuchs of old

22Fackre, p. 17.
23Kegley and Bretall, pp. 4, 5.
24Fackre, p. 16.
who were robbed of their virility that they might adorn
without endangering their Master's luxurious establish-
ments. 25

In 1926 Niebuhr was outraged by churches in the Detroit
area which would not allow union speakers in their pulpits
because they were "captured by interests of the middle
class." Niebuhr's caustic comment was that justice in
industry was less important to the protestant church leaders
than keeping the women from smoking. He decried the fact
that the church had historically been more concerned for
doctrine than for social ethics. "If the church could only
achieve schism over ethical issues." 26

Niebuhr tried again and again to spur the clergy into
responsible action. He made pointed observations every time
he had the chance. "It is always dangerous to be a
Christian;" "The Church needs a new casualty list;" "Nobody
challenges principles." 27

Not all the Detroit ministers were a disappointment to
Niebuhr.

Niebuhr's involvement in economic, social and
political affairs was influenced to no small
extent by prophetic figures on the Detroit scene.
One of them was Episcopal Bishop Charles Williams.
While other clergymen ran for cover in the contro-
versy, Williams consistently supported worker
rights, justice for blacks and peace movements.

25Niebuhr, Leaves, pp. 97-98.
26Niebuhr, Leaves, pp. 132, 117, 96.
27Niebuhr, Leaves, pp. 164, 218.
He stood as proof to Niebuhr that the church could still produce an Amos.28

There were growing questions in Niebuhr's mind about capitalism. One Thanksgiving Day Niebuhr returned home from church to record that nationalism was drugging the people, making them calloused to the social injustices about them. That Thanksgiving worship was not offered to the Lord of Hosts, he said, but to Uncle Sam — Thanksgiving was becoming more and more "pharisaical."29

In the midst of his deepest social concern Niebuhr developed realism about the limited possibility of social reform. He acknowledged the complexity of the problems, admitting that the church, like the Red Cross, "does not materially alter the fact of the struggle itself." But he felt the church should show compassion and should be clearly heard, holding up the banner of justice and fairplay. Niebuhr acknowledged that "beside the brutal facts of modern industry, how futile are all our homiletical spoutings." He added that most Americans were to some extent guilty of compounding the problem because the great majority wanted the things produced in the factories.30

In these early years Niebuhr began to express the criticism of liberal protestantism which was to become one

28Packre, p. 18.
29Niebuhr, Leaves, p. 74.
30Niebuhr, Leaves, pp. 134, 100.
of his major themes: the pride of the idealistic liberal who talks well about problems but never gets involved in the mundane business of working for reform.31

III. The Years At Union (1929-1960)

In 1928 Niebuhr was called to Union Theological Seminary in New York City, to assume the chair of Christian Ethics. In his intellectual autobiography he said that his friend, Sherwood Eddy, had instigated the invitation. Niebuhr was uncomfortable for the first several years in his new role: "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."

Especially important for this study is the passing comment Niebuhr made in regard to these early years at Union: "My practical interests and the devoting of every weekend to college preaching prevented any rapid acquisition of competence in my ostensible specialty."32 In describing his role at Union Niebuhr expressed how important his weekend preaching was to him:

I have taught Christian Social Ethics for a quarter of a century and have also dealt in the ancillary field of "apologetics." My avocational interest as a kind of circuit rider in the colleges and universities has prompted

31Niebuhr, Leaves, p. 75.
32Kegley and Bretall, pp. 8, 9.
an interest in the defense and justification of the Christian faith in a secular age, particularly among what Schleiermacher called Christianity's "intellectual despisers." 33

The move to Union did not remove Niebuhr from the swirl of political and social activity. According to Nathan Scott, Niebuhr's involvement increased.

A year after the appearance of this first book Niebuhr resigned his Detroit pastorate and went to New York City to join the faculty of Union Theological Seminary, where he was to remain until his retirement in 1960. But his removal from a parochial ministry to an academic post was in no way accompanied by any withdrawal from the arena of social action and political debate: indeed, if there was any shift in this phase of his life, it was toward a deepening of involvement. In 1929, he was serving with Paul Douglas (then a professor at the University of Chicago, and later to become a member of the United States Senate) and John Dewey on the Executive Committee of the League for Independent Political Action; he was still active in the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the leading pacifist organization of the American scene; and in 1930, he was founding the Fellowship of Socialist Christians and running for Congress as the candidate of the Socialist party in the Morningside Heights community of New York City. And, despite all these and other activities in public life, his restless pen was fast becoming one of the most prolific in American intellectual life. 34

This was a period of almost frantic involvement in matters of public concern. One who knew him best commented that if an organization was doing "one good thing Reinhold would join it." In the thirties and forties his name was used by a hundred organizations. 35

33 Kegley and Bretall, p. 3.
34 Nathan Scott, p. 13.
35 Bingham, p. 205.
In 1930 Niebuhr was drafted and ran as the Socialist Party candidate for Congress against Sol Bloom and lost. He was so involved in public affairs that one reporter said, "Don't tell me Reinie takes that God business seriously." Niebuhr commented upon hearing this, "Some people think I teach ethics as sort of a 'front' to make my politics more respectable."36

Bingham's biography of Niebuhr supplies many interesting insights into the developing speaker. She narrates an incident which took place after Pearl Harbor when, as chairman of the Union for Democratic Action, Niebuhr was expected to make a fund raising speech. Although he had great devotion to his cause, he became self-conscious when it came to soliciting money. Bingham says "he grew so ruddy, so moist, so distressed at the job of begging people for money that his success was enormous. People gave in order to let him sit down."37

1930 was an important year for Niebuhr for another reason. That was the year Ursula Kappel-Compton came from Oxford to study at Union. She and the young professor fell in love, and a year later, when they were out for a walk, Reinhold blurted out, "Well, Ursula, it's inevitable isn't it?" "Yes, dear," she replied and they were married a short

36 Bingham, pp. 163, 12.
37 Bingham, pp. 255, 256.
time later. They shared both their domestic and intellectual lives:

The relationship has had its intellectual electricity as well as its warm personal dimensions. Mrs. Niebuhr, demonstrating her own theological alertness through her teaching at Barnard (ultimately heading the department of religion) has proved to be one of the most astute critics of her husband's thought influencing him significantly, as he testified in later years.

Niebuhr's activities in the area of religion did not diminish during this time. He was on three commissions of the Federal Council of Churches: Research and Education, Racial Relations, and Goodwill Between Jews and Christians.

In the late thirties Niebuhr was becoming better known in Britain and on the Continent. This was due partly to his writings and partly to his involvement in the international religious scene. The first of his many journeys to Europe was in 1936 when the Federal Council of Churches sent him to help prepare for the world conference on Church, community and state to be held at Oxford the next year. During this visit Niebuhr established many lasting friendships in England. One early associate was Sir Stafford Cripps, later Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Labor Party. Cripps was a tall ascetic lampooned by Winston Churchill: "There, but for the grace of God, goes God." Niebuhr reflected later that Cripps "was baffled by my theology, but we agreed on

38 Bingham, pp. 183, 184.
39 Fackre, p. 23.
40 Bingham, p. 159.
politics because I was a simple-minded Socialist in those
days." The well-known Anglican theologian and preacher,
John Baillie, commented on Niebuhr's intellect after meeting
him in person: "Niebuhr is head and shoulders, his legs, and ankles, above any other American." 41

It came as no great surprise to Niebuhr's colleagues
at Union when he was invited to deliver the prestigious
Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in the
spring of 1939. 42 Something of the intense mental concentra-
tion which characterized the speaker became evident dur-
ing those lectures:

We had our first air attack yesterday from planes
which sought to destroy ships in the naval base a
few miles distant. By mistake, no air raid warn-
ings were sounded. The raid came while I was
lecturing and I was too preoccupied with theology
to hear the anti-aircraft guns, though I noticed
that my audience was not too attentive. This
struggle between bomber and dreadnaught is going
to be pretty grim." 43

During the war Niebuhr's days were filled with activ-
ities of various kinds to assist in the cause of freedom.
He helped German refugees find their way out of Germany. He
had little time for casual reading. When his wife suggested
that he take a walk and relax his answer was, "Where to?" 44

41 Bingham, p. 276.
42 Scott, p. 30. These lectures which later appeared in
two large volumes entitled The Nature and Destiny of Man,
comprise Niebuhr's Magnum Opus.
43 Niebuhr, "Leaves From the Notebook of a War-Bound
44 Bingham, p. 291.
Of special interest for this study is Niebuhr's activity as a speaker during these years. According to Sherer, the mood on the American campus in those days was especially receptive to Niebuhr's kind of thinking. Niebuhr was more and more in demand as a speaker. The disillusionment following World War I left many young people anxious to replace their fathers' symbols and loyalties with a set of their own. When Niebuhr came making a critical assessment of the accepted way of life they saw him as a prophet of the future. Niebuhr was critical of the complacent church and self-indulgent society. He condemned these in a powerful manner:

It was an exhilarating experience for both young and old to hear him 'pour it on' of a Sunday morning, looking like a hawk and swooping upon his prey, hawk-fashion, to the accompaniment of wing-like gestures and torrential sentences. Here was something new and different in the pulpit - complete vitality of mind and body, words trying to catch up with ideas and therefore never obscuring them, deadpan humor oftentimes with a sting in it, and a sudden change of pace from direct address to a kind of dramatic dialogue between the preacher and God or the Devil. The remark of a chap who was very chary about churchgoing, but who never missed Niebuhr, is a fair summary of the pre-World War II impression that he created among his listeners: "I feel as if I had been caught in an air-raid." 45

In addition to Niebuhr's message the young people were attracted to his honesty, his willingness to talk with them, and his great energy. His biographer commented that if there was a crowd of students buzzing around a professor at Union Seminary one could almost know the professor was

45Bingham, pp. 320-321.
Niebuhr. In class he challenged his students to disciplined thinking. One of his favorite spurs to thinking was, "How do you know?"46

Almost from the first of his Detroit ministry Niebuhr traveled frequently to speak on University campuses. This activity continued for more than fifty years, Niebuhr's popularity with university audiences growing all the time. In 1960 five hundred were turned away from the Harvard chapel where he was speaking because there were not seats left in the chapel. Several faculty members at Harvard who would not attend church called themselves "atheists for Niebuhr."47 According to Niebuhr's engagement calendar for the year 1936 he spoke forty-five times that year on university campuses.48 On one occasion in May, 1960, the students at Union Seminary filled to overflowing the lecture hall where Niebuhr was to give the noonday lecture. When he walked to the platform the students gave him a standing ovation so long that Niebuhr had to sit down. He sat there, his biographer relates, "perspiring and finally charged, head down, out of the room."49

46Bingham, pp. 23, 28.
47Bingham, pp. 102, 360. In a letter to Dean Sperry of Harvard, October 16, 1942 Niebuhr wrote: "I have been debating with secularist college professors for the past twenty years and have on the whole enjoyed it." (Niebuhr's Papers, Library of Congress, Box 3.)
48Niebuhr's Papers, Library of Congress, Box 23.
49Bingham, p. 332.
Wherever Niebuhr went he seemed to enjoy easy rapport with students. Niebuhr traveled to Oxford to receive an honorary doctorate and while there he augmented his reputation as a spokesman for Christianity to the students. Oxford's own popular biblical theologian at the time of Niebuhr's visit was C. H. Dodd. According to the Anglican Church Times the students showed their admiration of Niebuhr by a parody of Jesus' "greatest commandment:" "Thou shalt love the Lord thy Dodd with all thy heart, and all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thy Niebuhr as thyself."  

In the rush of excitement of the forties Niebuhr kept enough perspective to laugh at himself. In 1946 he was awarded the Doctor of Divinity Degree by Glasgow University, and the same honor was given to him in 1947 by New York University. His biographer commented: "He lectured in San Francisco and Upsala, Sweden -- and preached, it seemed, almost everywhere in between." On one speaking appointment in St. Louis his schedule was so rushed his old friend Bishop Scarlett arranged a police escort to get him to his train on time. "The police escort was wonderful:" he wrote Scarlett in his bread and butter note, "took just four minutes to get to the station. The taxi driver enjoyed it as much as I. Sense of power!"
Niebuhr's last years at Union Seminary brought him still other honors. He was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters and to its fifty member Academy. In 1958 Niebuhr was invited to spend a year at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton. He was invited to write a book analyzing the current political crises of his day. He was reluctant to go, fearing that his health might not permit him to finish the project. But his wife took a leave of absence as Chairman of the Religion Department at Barnard and they went. They enjoyed the year and were reluctant to return to New York.52

Niebuhr continued mentally alert and productive in spite of his poor health. An indication of his energy and breadth of his expertise is the fact that in the 1961-62 school year he accepted an invitation to teach as guest lecturer at Harvard, the first semester in the Department of Government, the second semester in the Divinity School.53

IV. Niebuhr's Philosophy of Rhetoric

Beginning with the Detroit journal and continuing through the early thirties Niebuhr made several comments regarding preaching which can be pieced together to form a kind of philosophy of rhetoric.

52Bingham, p. 376. The book which resulted from this research was The Structure of Nations and Empires (New York: Scribner, 1959).

53Bingham, p. 23.
Reinhold Niebuhr never expressed fully his own philosophy of rhetoric. Consistent with his own academic interest, his main ideas concerning speaking had to do with the ethics of the speaker, and the ethical impact of the speech. In 1916, while just a young minister at Detroit, he wrote:

But let us not be too cynical and too morbidly introspective. I may find something worth saying in time and escape the fate of being a mere talker. At any rate I swear that I will never aspire to be a preacher of pretty sermons. I'll keep them rough just to escape the temptation of degenerating into an elocutionist. Maybe I had better stop quoting so much poetry. But that is hardly the point. Plenty of sermons lack both beauty and meaning.54

During those early years Niebuhr had a strong negative reaction to "elocutionists." In 1925 he wrote that Amie Simple McPherson was more show than substance and that while she offered no real cures, she was typical of the age. Niebuhr observed that the only thing unique about her was her phenomenal success.55 The most upsetting aspect of the "elocution" problem to Niebuhr was the practice of his own denomination. In 1923 Niebuhr visited a little village near Detroit to deliver a high school commencement address. He met a local minister there, a humble, hardworking, and very unselfish man who made a significant contribution to the life of the community, especially to the young people. He did not see the big city churches as the "natural goal

54Niebuhr, *Leaves From...A Tamed Cynic*, p. 27.
55Niebuhr, *Leaves From...A Tamed Cynic*, pp. 103, 104.
of his ambition." "Fortunately," Niebuhr wrote in his journal, "this young fellow has an astute intelligence without being an orator. If he were a more gifted speaker he would probably have been promoted -- and spoiled -- long ago." The next year Niebuhr noted that one church wanted to secure a minister who had both scholarship and "punch." They evidently secured such a minister for an annual salary of $15,000. Niebuhr commented that there should be some limits placed on such "oversized salaries." In 1928 he wrote that it was just as well that advancement and money were the rewards for the gift of "rhetoric," because it seemed inconsistent to him that these measures of status should reward the "better preacher" for helping people find God.56 There is a motif running through Niebuhr's work that the speaker's gift should be used for the good of society, not for his own aggrandizement.

Niebuhr also felt that "sensationalism" was in poor taste, and even immoral. In one of the sermons in his book Beyond Tragedy, Niebuhr explained the Old Testament story of Zedekiah, a prophet who for the favor of the kings of Judah and Israel made for himself horns of iron and paraded before them to predict that they would defeat the Syrians. Niebuhr commented in passing that Zedekiah was probably the

56Niebuhr, Leaves From... A Tamed Cynic, p. 65, 85, 208.
first "popular sensationalist preacher." In the same narrative it was Micaiah, the prophet, who spoke the truth even to the displeasure of the kings. He was a tiny minority, four hundred prophets including Zedekiah had spoken what the kings wanted to hear. Niebuhr commented that the ratio was probably still about the same: four hundred cowardly to one honest prophet.

In the thirties, Niebuhr and his wife attended a Christmas service at an Episcopal church in New York. Niebuhr's caustic remarks regarding the Bishop's sermon indicate his insistence on a speaker's integrity and on a certain consistency between the man and his words:

The bishop is preaching this morning. I don't like anything about his sermon. My democratic soul rebels at the obsequious verger who bows him into the pulpit. I don't like the bishop's kind of self-consciousness. He talks about the lowly Jesus with the accompaniment of imperious gestures calculated to suggest that he - the bishop - is a prince of the church. Perhaps I am prejudiced against this bishop because I happen to know many of his attitudes on public and theological questions and I don't agree with any of them.

If the Episcopal Bishop was somewhat pompous for Niebuhr's taste, his own protestant fellow preachers seemed just as proud. In an article entitled "Weaknesses of Common Worship

57Reinhold Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy (New York: Scribner's, 1937) p. 75.

58Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 83.

in American Protestantism," he asserted that "Free" worship was too tied to the person leading the worship, sometimes running to a rank exhibitionism. He had, himself, been embarrassed upon occasion by the cult of personality in the churches. He recounted his experience of being introduced as the speaker to a group of ministers only to have a fellow clergyman devote the whole prayer to a thanksgiving for Niebuhr and his rhetorical talents. In short, Niebuhr believed that the speaker should focus attention not so much upon himself as upon his message and the needs of society. The speaker should not speak merely for personal aggrandizement.

In this connection Niebuhr especially attacked the religious pretensions of clerical speakers. He pointed up the hypocrisy involved in speaking of an ideal in such a way as to indicate that the ideal could easily be achieved and that the speaker had already mastered it. "It makes a pharisee of the preacher also. He is a holy man telling other people to be as holy as he is."

The first of Niebuhur's convictions about speaking was that the speaker must be a person of genuine integrity devoted to the good of his fellow men. He continually


called his fellow ministers to honesty regarding their motives in speaking. "Sometimes we cannot be honest with people because we love them too much. More frequently we cannot be honest with them because we are not honest with ourselves."62

A second tenet of Niebuhr's view of speaking was the integrity of one's ideas and his own intellectual industry and honesty. In 1953 he wrote a tribute to Harry Emerson Fosdick, commenting how seldom such a "prince of the pulpit" was also an original thinker and influential in the world of ideas. He credited Fosdick with an active and contributing mind in addition to a powerful speaking ability.63 By contrast he criticized the famous English chaplain during the first World War, G. A. Studdert-Kennedy, who allowed his sense of the complexity of life to be resolved into an unthinking and simplistic concept of love.64 Early in his career, while still in Detroit, Niebuhr recorded his conviction in his journal that every minister should take several "radical journals" to remind him of the position of others who feel that he is totally out of touch with society


64Reinhold Niebuhr, Discerning the Signs of the Times (New York: Scribner's, 1946) p. 149.
and its problems. Niebuhr believed the failure to keep in touch with current thought brings a sense of the archaic into Christian worship. On the other hand, the minister who would be a blessing to his people should be a student of history and should know the riches of the Christian faith through the ages. This, of course, cannot be achieved by the speaker who is intellectually lazy. Niebuhr observed that church music often brings the worshipper into contact with the faith of the ages, while the sermon often presents merely the illusions of the current vogue in ideas without the benefit of any of the profundities of ancient insights.

A third quality Niebuhr believed indispensible for the speaker was courage. In his early journal he commented that the only way to secure freedom and independence in a pulpit was to insist upon it from the first and to act accordingly. By contrast he commented a few years later that the kind of cowardice which tempers convictions to satisfy the whims of a wealthy congregation "reaches the heights of religious perversity."

Scattered throughout Niebuhr's writings are notes regarding the speech itself. For example, he believed that the speaker should not leave his ideas on the level

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65 Niebuhr, *Leaves From...A Tamed Cynic*, p. 204.
of generalizations, but should make specific and clear applications of his thought. He often commented that men agree on general principles, but the risk comes and progress is made when general ideals are applied to concrete social situations. In particular Niebuhr thought that men need to face their own self-centeredness. In 1953 he addressed a minister's conference and commented that part of the business of preaching is to face "strong men with their weakness."

I was always intrigued by the prophet who stood before David, the king. He gave us an illustration of a good homiletic art. David, in his pride, couldn't be convinced of sin, so the prophet had to invent a parable of a wealthy man who took a ewe lamb away from a poor man. The king was aroused to a fury of righteousness as he condemned the sin of another man. "That man shall surely die." And the prophet said, sticking to the stiletto, "Thou are the man." This is how one must practice guile in preaching the gospel to people who won't believe in it.68

Niebuhr had appreciation for what was appropriate in a given situation. After attending the Christmas service mentioned above he wrote that he preferred "a liturgical church with as little sermon as possible" because "there are not many poets in the pulpit" and Christmas is not the time for a rational defense and an historical discussion to persuade man's intellect.69

68Speech by Reinhold Niebuhr at the Conference on the Ministry, March 29, 1953, Union Theological Seminary, New York, Library of Congress, MS, Niebuhr's Papers, Box 14, p. 5.

Niebuhr believed that speaking must be relevant, that the speaker must have a feel both for the general mood of the times and for the specific needs of the audience. In 1930 Niebuhr underlined the need for ministers to know human nature, including their own if they were effectively to speak to the needs of men.\textsuperscript{70} In his critique of the Bishop's sermon already mentioned Niebuhr especially criticized the speaker for his lack of relevance.

As I summed up the bishop's points I was struck by the remarkable similarity between the sermon and the cathedral. It was both empty and archaic; or rather it was archaic when it was not empty. His conception of supernaturalism was archaic, his idea of missionary zeal was empty and his exposition of "Christian morality" was both.\textsuperscript{71}

In the second volume of Niebuhr's paper \textit{Christianity and Crisis}, he wrote an editorial entitled "Preaching in War Time." He contended that preachers could not ignore the war since it is the stuff of universal history, and God is the Lord of History. His kingdom is to touch ground where people live. "This is no time for the preacher to seek the deceptive security of the ivory tower, either for himself or for his people. The ivory tower is no longer bomb-proof." He specified the need to deal with hatred and fear engendered by the war. "Together with egocentricity," he commented, "to which they both contribute, they are now known

\textsuperscript{70}Niebuhr, "The Preaching of Repentance," p. 779.

to be the most prolific causes of mental disease."  

Reinhold Niebuhr was not concerned just to "persuade" his audiences in the usual sense of the term. In a study of the preaching of Harry Emerson Fosdick, Erdman Harris has compared Fosdick and Niebuhr in terms of their basic intent in speaking. Some ministers are concerned to make their hearers see their own ideals in a more telling and vivid way. Others are intent upon showing that the ideals commonly accepted must be modified or abandoned altogether. Harris saw these two approaches in the plays of Shakespeare and Ibsen respectively. Fosdick then was considered Shakespearean, while Niebuhr was considered Ibsenian.  

Niebuhr's friend and long-time professor at Union, Paul Scherer, agreed with this analysis. Scherer commented that Niebuhr saw any presentation of the Christian gospel in a "neat package, gift-wrapped," as an abomination, a betrayal of the fact, and untrue to the struggles of real life.  

Although Niebuhr despised the kind of oversimplification used by popular evangelists he did have strong convictions of his own, and he wanted to move people to review their own positions and to accept his. The article

72Niebuhr, "Preaching in War-Time" Christianity and Crisis, 2, 9 February 1942, p. 1


74Kegley and Bretall, p. 326.
Niebuhr wrote for the *Christian Century* in 1930, "The Preaching of Repentance," becomes of central importance for understanding his own rhetorical method. The following quotation from that article supplies the key for understanding Niebuhr's basic approach to public speaking:

> What is needed there (in the churches) is not so much outlines of general programs, ideals and policies as an honest analysis of the facts of human nature and contemporary civilization which will help the individual to gain a perspective upon himself and his world. The pulpit could well afford to be less "heroic" in its utterances if it were willing to be more objective in its analysis.75

The context of the statement is an article calling Christian preachers to speak with understanding and insight rooted both in Judeo-Christian prophetic thought and in an understanding of the specific issues of the day. He discussed specifically the needs of the family, the problem of crime, speculation in the stock market, and control of giant economic interests and the deception of philanthropy. He called on his fellow ministers to speak honestly and perceptively about the real issues of the day.

In 1941 Niebuhr had reviewed "An Ineffectual Sermon on Love," in which a minister asserted that the ideal of love would be enough to stop the threat of Nazism. Niebuhr felt that the speaker missed the needs of the listeners who were dealing with the cruel realities of Hitler's power. "The critical hearer wondered whether that meant that Christ's

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75Niebuhr, "The Preaching of Repentance," p. 780.
love was not pure enough since it did not soften Pilate's heart nor save Judas from his treason and apostasy. How blindly these apostles of love who seek to make a success story out of the cross.... They think they can rob human life and history of its tragic note by just a little more moral admonition."^76

This kind of analytical thinking prompted Niebuhr's emphasis in his sermons and speeches on the limitations (sin) of man. He believed that the liberal faith, both secular and religious, had become too enamoured of the idealism of the nineteenth century and needed words of sobering "realism" about man's selfishness.77

V. The Speaker's Ideas

During his first year as a minister in Detroit Niebuhr recorded in his journal that he had exhausted the supply of sermon outlines he brought with him from seminary and he felt drained of ideas."78 Thirteen years later he commented about the apology a fellow preacher made in his church paper. The harried minister was apologizing because the previous Sunday evening he had been unprepared and had failed to "get the ball over the plate." Niebuhr was dis-


77Kegley and Bretall, pp. 440-441.

78Niebuhr, Leaves From the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, p. 22.
mayed under the pressure of delivering two sermons each week.

There you have the whole weakness of a professional ministry, striving each Sunday to make an interesting speech. It simply can't be denied that the business of furnishing inspiration twice each week, on a regular schedule, by a person who is paid to do just that and whose success is judged by the amount of "pep" he can concentrate in his homilies, is full of moral and spiritual dangers. To follow such a program without running into spiritual bankruptcy requires the resources of a saint. 79

Niebuhr's sermon outlines of this period indicate that he gave his share of ordinary sermons, some lacking both in imagination and in materials. However, by the publication of his first volume of sermons in 1936 he had enriched his stock of ideas. In the sermon "The Tower of Babel," thirty separate references are mentioned. 80

An essay by Richard Kroner in the volume by Kegley and Bretall concerned the roots of Niebuhr's thought. A study

79 Niebuhr, Leaves From the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, p. 211.

of twenty-five of Niebuhr's early sermons confirms the sweeping statement Kroner makes about the breadth of Niebuhr's knowledge:

The historical roots of his thought are therefore widespread. They embrace not less than the whole tradition of Western civilization. There is hardly any great figure or any important school or movement of the past that has not affected his mind at least to a certain degree and that has not left some traces on his thought. All theological doctrines from that of the apostle Paul to those of Schleiermacher and Ritschl may be called the roots of this thought; but he is also tinged or even formed by the main political and social, scientific and literary upheavals and revolutions. It is, therefore, extremely difficult to single out of this enormous range certain special thinkers or ideas and to identify them specifically as the historical roots of his own doctrines.®1

Moving back in time Kroner explained Niebuhr's indebtedness to writers of the nineteenth century who first recognized the disparity between the grand illusions of the Enlightenment and mankind's real situation, men like Dostoevsky, Ibsen, Zola, and Strindberg. Unamuno's stirring book on The Tragic Sense of Life had a marked influence on Niebuhr's philosophy, as did Oswald Spengler's The Decline of the West. From Melville's Moby Dick Niebuhr received confirmation of his belief that human sin seems much worse in the consequences than in its intentions. However, in contrast to pessimists like Schopenhauer and Spengler, Niebuhr stood more in the line of Dostoevsky and Unamuno. He believed that there was a reason for hope "beyond

®1 Kegley and Bretall, p. 178. The analysis offered here of the roots of Niebuhr's thought follows Kroner's essay.
tragedy." Soren Kierkegaard's works were quite influential on Niebuhr's thinking particularly his category of "paradox." The two shared the conviction that the Christian message cannot be simply stated and expressed without losing its deepest meaning. Niebuhr commented that Kierkegaard "more accurately than any modern and possibly than any previous Christian theologian" interpreted the human self in realistic terms. Also in this regard Niebuhr drew upon the thought of Blaise Pascal, who stressed the paradox of man's great promise and poor performance. Pascal also pointed out the contradictory nature of human selfhood in his famous sayings regarding the greatness and smallness of man's intellect.

According to Kroner the Christian theologian who most influenced Niebuhr's methodology was Martin Luther. Niebuhr read and appreciated Luther's dialectical approach to theology more than John Calvin's dogmatic approach. Niebuhr came from the Lutheran tradition. However, on the matter of a Christian's relation to government Niebuhr stood closer to Calvin than to Luther. Like these Reformation leaders, Niebuhr owed a great intellectual debt to Augustine, as he commented: "It must be recognized that no Christian theologian has ever arrived at a more convincing statement of the relevance and distance between the human and the divine than he." And ultimately, the source of Niebuhr's

82 Kegley and Bretall, pp. 179-187.
Christian thought is Saint Paul. Niebuhr's critical message was a judgment on the pride and pretensions of his age and a statement of hope rooted in man's relation with God. In 1925 Niebuhr explained how important he found the writing of Paul:

> We had a communion service tonight (Good Friday) and I preached on the text "We preach Christ Crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness, but to them that are called the power of God and the wisdom of God." I don't think I ever felt greater joy in preaching a sermon. How experience and life change our perspectives! It was only a few years ago that I did not know what to make of the cross; at least I made no more of it than to recognize it as an historic fact which proved the necessity of paying a high price for our ideals. Now I see it as a symbol of ultimate reality. It seems pathetic to me that liberalism has too little appreciation of the tragedy of life to understand the cross and orthodoxy insists too much upon the absolute uniqueness of the sacrifice of Christ to make the preaching of the cross effective.83

Although Niebuhr claimed a "duality of spiritual experience" in that he also read and was influenced by the classics, Kroner observed that in the essence of this thought "he would always subordinate Athens to Jerusalem, philosophy to theology, the affairs of the world to the counsel of God's prophets and the ethic of Jesus."84

While it is true that Niebuhr subordinated the "affairs of the world to the counsel of the prophets and the ethic of

83Niebuhr, *Leaves From the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, p. 106.

84Kegley and Bretall, p. 190.
Jesus," it is also true that the affairs of the world provided a catalyst for the process of his social comment. He was as much influenced by his struggles with Henry Ford as by Pascal, by World War I as by the Reformation thinkers, and as much by the rise of Hitler as by the writings of Augustine. His life and work should be seen as a continuing dialectic between his understanding of the Christian ethic and the application of that ethic to current issues and problems. The events challenged and changed the ideas as much as the ideas determined Niebuhr's judgments of the events. After the publication of Beyond Tragedy in 1937, Niebuhr's brother, the renowned church historian and theologian H. Richard Niebuhr, wrote him a letter in which he commented upon the tie between Niebuhr's theology and the world affairs: "But what's the odds! Each man speaks his own tongue and you are understood because you speak about real things."85

Summary

Reinhold Niebuhr came from hardy German Lutheran stock in remote Wright City, Missouri. Before his death in 1971 he was a cosmopolitan man known internationally as a leader in politics, social ethics, and religion.

As early as the eighth grade Niebuhr was involved in debating. He continued this interest through his training

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at Eden Seminary and was quite successful as a debator. His college classmates marked him early as an outstanding intellect. At Yale Niebuhr broadened his horizons. He pursued his love of theology, making excellent marks. But instead of continuing in graduate studies Niebuhr accepted the assignment of his church to the parish ministry in Detroit.

The Detroit years were a crucible for the young idealist. There he met the hardened efficiency of Henry Ford and measured for the first time the difficulty of social reform. He felt for the first time his frustration with his fellow clergymen who would not become involved in social concerns. Niebuhr's church in Detroit grew in numbers and vitality. He also grew in his understanding of applied theology.

In 1928 Niebuhr was called to the chair of Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York. For a full decade he felt unequal to the assignment because he had not had enough time in Detroit for disciplined reading. By avid reading he soon compensated for his deficiencies and became one of Union's outstanding professors.

From the early twenties Niebuhr was in much demand as a speaker on college campuses. His energy, creativity, and courage to change the world were especially attractive to the college generations of the twenties, thirties, and forties. He was a multi-faceted man, involved with
religion, politics, and the academic world. The years under study here, 1930-1950, were among Niebuhr's most active years.

From Niebuhr's speaking in Detroit and from his many experiences speaking on campuses in the late twenties and early thirties he formulated a rhetorical theory which he followed the rest of his life. He came to believe that the speaker must have integrity, intellectual vitality and courage. The method he developed over the years was exposition, the attempt to persuade by analyzing, defining and explaining the issues as he saw them.
Chapter III

Introduction

Chapters three, four, and five provide a rhetorical analysis of selected sermons which Reinhold Niebuhr preached between 1930 and 1960. These speeches are divided into three groups according to chronology and subject matter. The first four speeches were delivered in university chapels in the mid-thirties and early forties and develop domestic and apologetic themes. The second group consists of four sermons which were delivered toward the end of the War and in the period just following the War. These speeches address the problem of adjustment to the post-war situation in the world. The third group consists of two sermons which were delivered at Union Seminary and deal more narrowly with the subject of the Christian ministry. These sermons were selected because they are representative of the themes which occupied Niebuhr's attention during this period of his life, because they emphasized varied themes, and because they present a variety of speaking situations.

A chapter will be devoted to each group of sermons. At the beginning of each chapter the historical and biographical setting of the sermons will be presented in order to see better what issues interested Niebuhr and how his statements related to those questions. The central concern
in these introductions will be to determine how Niebuhr related to these issues and events. The analysis of each sermon will include the following elements: a short statement to relate the sermon to the historical background, an examination of the speaker's main thesis, a survey of his line of reasoning, discovery of his forms of supporting material, observations concerning style and delivery, and an assessment of the effectiveness of the speech.
Chapter III

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF FOUR EARLY SERMONS

Historical Background

The church historian Edwin Scott Gaustad observes that American theologians rarely answer for their thought by the recitation of a creed. More characteristically they speak from personal experiences and private hopes.¹ This is true of Reinhold Niebuhr. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. concludes that "Niebuhr's philosophy always bore to a degree the imprint of events; this was an essential source of his strength and its relevance...."² Consequently, a rhetorical analysis of Reinhold Niebuhr's speaking requires the description of the historical situation which shaped and determined his thinking.

Niebuhr's Intellectual Heritage Challenged

The atmosphere which nourished Niebuhr intellectually in his early years was the easy optimism rooted in the idea of "inevitable progress," an ideology which came to boistrous expression in America about the turn of the


century. The mood of the times was expressed by Senator Chauncey Depew:

There is not a man here who does not feel 400 percent bigger in 1900 than he did in 1896, bigger intellectually, bigger hopefully, bigger patriotically, bigger in the breast from the fact that he is a citizen of a country that has become a world power for peace, for civilization and for the expansion of its industries and the products of its labor.3

While many liberal Americans began to have doubts about their optimistic creed during the twenties and the thirties, this disillusionment began even earlier for Niebuhr.

Incidentally, all the speeches of the Divinity School Commencement, including a little junior effort of my own, in June of 1914, celebrated an optimistic faith which was to be challenged by the outbreak of the European War during that very summer. But it wasn't the then distant war so much as the social realities in Detroit which undermined by youthful optimism. 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 $5-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."4

In 1939 Niebuhr explained how the optimistic gospel he learned in seminary failed to meet the real needs of the


industrial city with all of its human suffering. He noted that:

...such theological convictions which I hold today began to dawn upon me during the end of the pastorate in a great industrial city. They dawned upon me because the simple little moral homilies which were preached in that as in other cities, by myself and others, seemed completely irrelevant to the brutal facts of life in a great industrial center. Whether irrelevant or not, they were certainly futile. They did not change human actions or attitudes in any problem of collective behavior by a hair's breadth, though they may well have helped to preserve private amenities and to assuage individual frustrations.5

Niebuhr's revulsion against optimism which began in the struggles in Detroit became more serious as the cost of the great War dawned upon him. Toward the end of his pastorate in Detroit Niebuhr was referring to himself as a war casualty.

My mind was not yet formed when the war began. Budding theologue, I was busy trying to build a faith out of the wreck and on the ruins of the creeds of my childhood and adolescence, when the war broke upon the world. Perhaps that relates me to deformed children of the war whom hunger dwarfed.... The war may have left a permanent mark upon the minds of the mature without changing the fundamentals of their mental outlook; but it created my whole world-view. It made me a child of the age of disillusionment. When the war started I was a young man trying to be an optimist without falling into sentimentality. When it ended and the full tragedy of its fratricides had been revealed, I had become a realist trying to save myself from cynicism.6


Niebuhr's reservations about American liberalism grew rapidly when he saw that the American economic system could not deal adequately with the problems of the Great Depression. Niebuhr's reaction grew stronger in the thirties, providing him a message for the optimistic liberals, both religious and secular. Niebuhr's basic theme during this period was that the "liberal culture" in America was bankrupt intellectually, spiritually and morally. Both the high idealism of the secular liberals and the optimism of the religious Social Gospellers came under Niebuhr's attack.

Schlesinger's valid observation that world events provided the source and power of Niebuhr's thinking makes a survey of the main events of the thirties necessary for understanding the speaker's ideas and speaking.

During this period three issues seemed most important to Niebuhr: The Depression and questions of the economy, the intellectual ferment on the American campus including a general disillusionment with Christianity, and the threat of a world war and the controversy over American intervention. Each of these issues will be discussed briefly with an attempt to show how Niebuhr reacted.

The Depression.

Carl Degler called the Great Depression the "third American revolution," so severely did it try the American social fabric. The ravages of the depression touched

every sector of national life. The record of the period shows the severity of the situation. By the summer of 1932 national industrial production was 51 percent below the level of the peak year of 1929. Unemployment grew from 3 million in April of 1930 to 14 million in 1933. Local unemployment was sometimes critical. In 1932, 50 percent of Cleveland's workers were jobless, 60 percent in Akron, and 80 percent in Toledo. Already in desperate straits by 1929 American farmers saw their income shrink from almost 12 billion dollars in 1929 to 5 billion in 1932.

The dimensions of the economic misfortune that befell the American people from 1929-1933 can perhaps be comprehended by the following summary view: National income declined from $87,800,000,000 in 1929 to $40,200,000,000 in 1933; adjusted for the cost of living, per capita income declined from $681 to $495. Salaries decreased 40 percent, dividends nearly 57 percent, and manufacturing wages 60 percent.

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt accepted the Democratic nomination in 1932 he promised "a new deal" for the average American. The "first hundred days" of Roosevelt's presidency were filled with legislative activity unimpaired by a lack of a synthesizing philosophy. He declared a "bank holiday" and put temporary controls on currency. Most of


9 Burl Noggle, Unpublished Class Notes, Louisiana State University, 1969.

10 Link and Catton, p. 370.
the nation's banks were reopened with the government's support and approval within weeks. The President was willing to try anything and everything which might promise to revive the ailing economy. Roosevelt was not trying to replace American capitalism with another economic philosophy, he was trying rather to restore capitalism to robust good health.

Reinhold Niebuhr, on the other hand, was ready for basic changes which would alter the whole American economic system. In 1932 Niebuhr wrote that "the middle class paradise which we built on this continent, and which reached its zenith no later than 1929, will be in decay before the half-century mark is rounded...." Three days before Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933 Niebuhr wrote in World Tomorrow, "Capitalism is dying and ought to die."\(^{11}\)

The economic collapse in America was for Niebuhr a conclusive refutation of liberal hopes. In his book, Moral Man and Immoral Society, Niebuhr rejected the "Social Gospel - John Dewey amalgam, with its faith in the politics of love and reason."\(^{12}\)

Schlesinger asserts that Niebuhr's critique was not always adequately informed on the issues of economic policy, but that he saw socialism as the only alternative to the

\(^{11}\)Cited in June Bingham's **Courage to Change** (New York: Scribner's, 1961) p. 155.

\(^{12}\)Schlesinger, p. 165.
kind of capitalism known in America up to that time.

Niebuhr believed that Roosevelt's experimentalism was inadequate to meet the needs of the nation.

...the incurable experimentalism of the New Deal clearly seemed to him to stand in sorry contrast to the clear-cut logic of socialism. Roosevelt was concededly "better than most of his reactionary critics," said Niebuhr in 1939. "But no final good can come of this kind of whirligig reform. If that man could only make up his mind to cross the Rubicon! Let him beware lest he turn into a pillar of salt!"13

Early in this struggle Niebuhr took the Protestant church to task for being too closely associated with America's moneyed interests and insensitive to the needs of the poor.

The good people of our large cities are depersonalized specialists who flee from the filth of the city to their suburban homes or find a similar asylum from its pressing problems in the fastness of their apartment houses. At the same time the city is governed by gangs of racketeers whose methods of earning a living differ in degree rather than in kind from the predatory attitude taken by respectable business toward society as such. Between the good citizens whose own attitude toward life does not differ sufficiently from that of the racketeer to allow for an honest resentment against him, we have come to a pretty pass in our whole urban problem.14

The church, he said, could hardly be expected to persuade those who hold privilege and power to divest themselves voluntarily of their privilege, but it could deal more realistically with man's basic selfishness and pride so that an atmosphere for open discussion might be created. "Reli-

13Schlesinger, p. 174.

gion is very easily used to obscure rather than to reveal the primitive forces which control so much of human action. Religion without a constantly replenished force of penitence, easily becomes a romance which brutal men use to hide the real sources of their actions from themselves and from others."^{15}

While the majority of the Protestant ministers were apologists for the American economic and political system, Niebuhr and others began movements to advance their radical ideas. In 1931 a group of avowedly Socialist ministers met to discuss the answers of Christianity and Marxism to national problems. They called themselves the Fellowship of Socialist Christians. The Fellowship was never large, but several influential leaders were involved; Niebuhr was on the original planning committee.

In 1932 Niebuhr helped establish a Conference of Younger Churchmen in New York City. The group believed the platform of the Socialist party was most consistent with the Christian ideal of social justice.^{16} In the election of that year, the party issued a statement supporting Norman Thomas for President. Niebuhr appealed to the readers of The Nation to support his candidate.^{17} In 1934 Niebuhr

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^{15}Niebuhr, "Let Liberal Churches...," p. 404.


^{17}Niebuhr, (Letter in Support of Norman Thomas) The Nation, 17 August 1932, p. 147.
co-edited the periodical, *World Tomorrow*, with Kirby Page, Devere Allen, and Paul H. Douglas. The paper advocated both Marxism and Christianity. The editors saw Marxism as desirable because of its concept of the classless society and the demand for immediate social justice, and Christianity because it offered unique insights into the meaning of history and life.18

By 1935 Niebuhr was criticizing his fellow socialists for their excessive "romanticism" and lack of realism. He contended that capitalism was breaking down, but that American socialism was too immature to adapt the themes of American history in a meaningful way in order to lead the nation out of the darkness. He accused the intellectuals among the socialists of being more interested in finding personal answers than in working for the solutions to society's ills. According to Niebuhr, the British Labor Party was developing a pragmatic program and could serve as a model for American socialists.

While radicalism fails to offer a genuine alternative to the ambiguities of middle class politics the latter are rushing at us at incredible speed from the futilities of Rooseveltian "liberalism" to the worse confusion of a political program concocted by a radio priest and a Louisiana "king-fish." Perhaps our only hope lies in western agrarianism, which is in one sense the only authentic and indigenous radical movement in America. But that hope is slender too....19

18 Miller, p. 90.

That same year at Columbus, Ohio, the United Christian Council for Democracy was born. It was a federation of left wing religious groups. Miller observed that "Niebuhr, almost inevitably, became chairman," and that they almost inevitably rejected the principles of profit-seeking and capitalism in favor of socialism.\textsuperscript{20} In 1935 Niebuhr was one of forty-five well known religious leaders who wrote Roosevelt a letter stating that no permanent recovery would come to the country as long as it depended on palliative measures within the capitalist system.\textsuperscript{21}

Through all of these years Niebuhr had continued to work with concrete and specific problems of social justice. An example is his continued involvement with the labor movement. From the early Detroit years Niebuhr had never ceased his involvement with labor. When the Emergency Committee for Strikers Relief was formed in Detroit in 1926, Niebuhr was one of the leaders. In 1937 labor experienced a showdown at an automobile plant in Flint, Michigan. There were sit-down strikes and violence, in which the brother of Walter Reuther was killed. The sit-down strike was a highly controversial tactic, disagreeable even to many of labor's own leaders. Niebuhr was one of the few Protestant leaders who spoke in defense of the sit-down strikes.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20}Miller, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{21}Bingham, p. 166.

\textsuperscript{22}Miller, p. 281.
In a book review of Jerome Frank's *Save America First*, Niebuhr stated as an alternative to Frank's theories his own understanding of the economic problems of the depression years.

The basic typical problem of contemporary industrialism is: given the disproportion of economic power in modern capitalism, can this disproportion be prevented from resulting in such flagrant inequalities of privilege as to wreck the productive process itself? Can this be done by using political power (still more equal than economic power) to equalize economic privilege (through taxation upon the rich and social services to the poor) or must the basic disproportion of economic power be destroyed before modern society can achieve health?23

The Crisis on Campus.

To sketch the climate of American higher education in this century's third decade is to picture movement and change. The university was the site of many kinds of ferment: intellectual, political, religious and social. Reinhold Niebuhr's speaking during this period can best be understood as his contribution to this great marketplace of ideas. The state of flux on campus in the thirties can be described under three categories: currents in political and social theory, ferment in education and intellectual life, and the struggle for and against religion.

Currents in Political and Social Theory. The thirties was a decade of severe testing for democratic ideas throughout the world. The totalitarian powers seemed determined by

whatever means necessary to capture the minds of men. American democracy furnished a free marketplace of ideas where a great variety of wares were hawked and many cherished tenets of the liberal culture were challenged. The progressive, liberal idea of inevitable progress was brought more and more into question. In 1926 Will Durant wrote, "Never was our heritage of civilization and culture so secure, and never was it half so rich."24 Before the end of the decade such an easy optimism was hard to find on the American campus. The situation described by Link and Catton found its fullest expression on the university campus:

The 1930's were a time of severe testing for democracy throughout the world as Fascism, Nazism, and militarism grew audacious, and the democracies trembled in fear of aggression and war. At the same time the totalitarian powers used all the weapons of modern psychological warfare in a great campaign to capture the minds of men. The American democracy was throughout the decade a vast free market place where tenders peddled their ideological wares, often by deceit and cunning but always with such freedom as befits a democracy.25

Merle Curti commented that during this time many American intellectuals, attracted by the success of the "5 Year Plan" in Russia were more and more fascinated by the socialist philosophy and some believed that capitalism was in its "final stage of collapse." Some concurred with Spengler's Decline of Western Civilization, some reflected

25Link and Catton, p. 448.
the boredom and despair of the "lost generation" and Hemmingway's characters.26

William Clyde DeVane has observed that many college students were driven to the campus during the thirties by a lack of jobs and, consequently, they came questioning Wall Street and capitalism in general. However, student revolts were neither widespread nor of serious magnitude and very few students actually considered themselves communists or even socialists.27 One of the pockets of radicalism seems to have been Niebuhr's own Union Theological Seminary where a few students hoisted the Russian flag in place of the "Stars and Stripes" on May Day, 1934. A professor Henry F. Ward had taught a course on Marxism and the students were attracted to the new philosophy. The student body president came to Niebuhr after the episode and accused him of being partly to blame. "I know, many of us are responsible," admitted Niebuhr.28 Among the religious youth of the land the Northern Methodists were the most radical. In 1934 the National Council of Methodist Youth held its first meeting in Evanston, Illinois, where the young men and women signed decision cards, reading:

I surrender my life to Christ. I renounce the Capitalistic system based on economic individualism

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26Curti, p. 731.


28Bingham, p. 166.
and the profit motive and give myself to the building of an economic order based on cooperation and unselfishness.... I believe that the possession of wealth is unbecoming a Christian.29

The thirties saw an increased participation by college professors in governmental affairs especially those in the political sciences. This had not been the case in the twenties when "doing good" and getting involved was considered dull business or, as H. L. Mencken put it, "in bad taste." George Jean Nathan expressed the self-centeredness of the twenties.

The great problems of the world -- social, political, economic, and theological -- do not concern me in the slightest. If all the Armenians were to be killed tomorrow and if half of Russia were to starve to death the day after it would not matter to me in the least. What concerns me alone is myself, and the interests of a few close friends. For all I care the rest of the world may go to hell at today's sunset.30

In the thirties, by contrast, there was a growing interest among intellectuals toward more involvement in public affairs. "A common noise of the 1930's was the collapse of ivory towers."31 The New Deal years were important for the intellectual life of the country because college professors were called into governmental service as they never had been before and artists were supported by government programs.

29Miller, pp. 132, 135.


As a result, many professors and artists were stirred to get involved in political and civic questions as they had not since 1917. Even a cursory survey of Niebuhr's writing, speaking, and organizational activities during the decade of the thirties would suggest that there was no more politically involved professor in the nation than the teacher of Social Ethics at Union Seminary.

Ferment in Education and Intellectual Life. In 1962 Harold R. Landon introduced a colloquium honoring Reinhold Niebuhr at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York by referring to the intellectual excitement he experienced as a student at Union Seminary in the 1930's.

It is difficult today to convey something of the intellectual ferment and excitement of Union Seminary in the 1930's, when Reinhold Niebuhr was at his prime, and Paul Tillich had just come. It was a moment of fulfilled time, a kairos, when suddenly the light of revelation seemed to dawn upon us, and we began to discard the vapid and sentimental illusions that passed for Christianity, and to see something of the depth and profundity of the Christian faith.

Not only at Union Seminary, but across the land higher education was rapidly changing in the 1930's, in both form and substance. The university underwent significant structural changes in form and composition. William Clyde DeVane listed the important developments which can be noted

\[\text{\textsuperscript{32}}\text{Link and Catton, p. 446.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{33}}\text{Harold R. Landon, Reinhold Niebuhr: A Prophetic Voice in our Time (Greenwich, Conn.: The Seabury Press, 1952) p. 11.}\]
generally about American higher education in the decade:

A. There was an increase in enrollment. In 1919 there were approximately 600,000 students enrolled in American colleges. In 1929 there were 1,000,000 and by 1939 there were 1,500,000.

B. There was a growing tendency for colleges to assume the responsibility for the student's total education: moral, cultural, social as well as intellectual.

C. The face of the administration changed. Many new offices were established: deans of all kinds and functions, chaplains and career consultants, growing departments of health, containing a corps of psychiatrists in the wealthier institutions; offices dispensing financial aid to students, and offices of education research advising the administrations on a variety of problems.

D. The establishment of junior colleges as feeder schools. In 1920 there were 52 junior colleges; in 1930 there were 277; and in 1941 there were about 450.

E. Special attention was paid to shaping a modern curriculum, with a concern for the new breadth of knowledge, the concern for a well-rounded education, and a commitment to increasing the quality of education.

"In short," concluded DeVane, "it was now the task of the college to justify its existence, to reassert its integrity, and to assume the intellectual leadership of the nation as it had not done for many years."34

Curriculum changes came often during the thirties. DeVane observed that the elective system, a relatively new development in higher education, had done its work in shattering the older, more rigid curriculum. The natural and social sciences now took their full places in the studies of the university, even in making the development of the modern university possible. These new studies freed the schools from denominational control where that was

34DeVane, pp. 58-68.
necessary, and opened up new vistas for intellectual inquiry.\textsuperscript{35}

In addition to these changes in form the thirties was a decade which brought far-reaching philosophical changes in many fields of study. Individual disciplines were in a state of flux. Only a few decades before many had looked to science to furnish the absolutes they had lost when the religious orthodoxies of the nineteenth century were abandoned. Now "science itself was permeated by basic uncertainties." Functionalism in biology and the studies of relativity in the physical sciences had slowly changed the face of science. Discoveries in astronomy had demonstrated the infinitesimal size of the earth in relation to the universe.\textsuperscript{36}

"Relativity" had also entered the study of communication. Men like Richards, Korzybski, Malinowski, Ogden, and Burke introduced a new and disturbing study of the meaning of meanings.\textsuperscript{37}

No field of study on campus more faithfully reflected the desperate mood of the Depression years than American literature. One of the remarkable features of American literature in the thirties was its close relation to the daily life of the common people. An example of the literature of auto-

\textsuperscript{35}DeVane, pp. 57, 74.

\textsuperscript{36}Curti, pp. 122, 123.

\textsuperscript{37}Curti, p. 728.
biography was Tom Kromer's *Waiting for Nothing*. At age twenty-three Tom Kromer lost his teaching job in West Virginia and went to the wheat fields of Kansas to find work. There was no work and the police made him move on. He rode the rails to California, feeling the despair of the people as he went. *Waiting for Nothing* tells Kromer's experiences and portrays the hunger and the spiritual bankruptcy of many Americans during those bleak days.\(^{38}\)

Three novels by John Dos Passos, *The Big Money*, *The Forty-Second Parallel*, and *1919*, were radical comments on the social and economic ills of the day. The domination of money over American life is the theme which runs through the three novels. *The Forty-Second Parallel* pictures the years of business expansion before World War I. *1919* portrays the effects, psychological and social, of the war on the American public at home. *The Big Money* catches the mood of booming years of the twenties, showing how greed dominated American life.\(^{39}\) The literature of the decade probably contributed significantly to an increased social consciousness among university students. In reviewing the literature of the thirties Halford Luccock identified seven characteristics:

1. The ill-fed, ill-clothed supplied a greater number of the subjects for literary treatment


than in any previous period in American history.

2. There was a weakening of the American tradition of the happy ending (although this, of course, was not a distinctly American characteristic in literature).

3. There was a movement "from Freud to Marx," that is from a literature of the psyche to a literature of politics and economics.

4. There emerged a new self-consciousness among Americans, increasing steadily after World War I.

5. The treatment of fear as a human emotion, became the "leading mark of the decade" in literature.

6. Violence in literature reached a new popularity with the works of Hemmingway, Jeffers, and Caldwell.

7. The moral-religious content of literature was conspicuous, especially in the "labor" novels.40

Reinhold Niebuhr made a significant contribution to this mixture of educational and social theories. In regard to education Niebuhr challenged the theories of John Dewey:

The most persistent error of modern educators and moralists is the assumption that our social difficulties are due to the failure of the social sciences to keep pace with the physical sciences which have created our technological civilization. The invariable implication of this assumption is that, with a little more time, a little more adequate moral and social pedagogy and a generally higher development of human intelligence, our social problems will approach solution... In America our contemporary culture is still pretty firmly enmeshed in the illusions and sentimen
talities of the Age of Reason.41

40Lucock, pp. 34, 35.

In 1941 when Niebuhr was invited to deliver the prestigious Gifford Lectures he accepted with humility, saying that he had no expertise except the study of "man." If any single work can be cited which captures Niebuhr's contribution to American intellectual life the two volume work, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, resulting from those lectures, would have to be named. Niebuhr affirmed the central thesis that man is neither good nor evil by a complex and bewildering combination of both and that any program for the improvement of man which does not take into account his basic complexity is doomed to failure. One of the most lucid summaries of Niebuhr's *magnum opus* is offered by Nathan Scott:

> It is impossible to convey the riches of the Gifford Lectures which is a result of the author's seeming to carry in his head the whole of Western intellectual tradition and to have a constantly simultaneous vision of all its myriad strands.

The guiding premise of Niebuhr's anthropology is grounded in a vision of human existence as composed, in its most essential character, of ambiguity. Man is, on the one hand, a creature of nature who is "unable to choose anything beyond the bounds set by creation in which he stands." He needs air to breathe and space in which to abide; he cannot survive without the nourishment of warmth and food; yet however abundant may be that nourishment, his life is but a short duration -- and, as Pascal says, he is engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces...which know (him) not.

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Man is, for Niebuhr, "both free and bound, both limited and limitless." It is the necessity of recognizing his essentially ambiguous character of the human situation that provides him with the basic requirement of adequacy in terms of which he evaluates the various accounts of man's estate that are furnished by history and culture. He finds the trouble with rationalism or Renaissance humanism, in modern naturalism or in idealistic and romanticist philosophies -- to lie in a tendency to collapse the fundamental antinomousness of human existence into some formula which either stresses man's dignity and under- stresses his "wretchedness" or overemphasizes his limitation and fails sufficiently to appreciate his radical freedom. But the genius of what he calls "Biblical faith" does for him become most apparent precisely in the kind of dialectic that it maintains between its doctrine of man as a creature and its doctrine of man as imago Dei. The contention that he argues, with great learning and rhetorical power, in book after book -- but most persuasively perhaps in The Nature and Destiny of Man -- is that "the Christian view of man is (most) sharply distinguished from all alternative views; just in the clarity with which it perceives that man belongs to both realms, the realm of nature and the realm of the spirit."43

The Struggle For and Against Religion. Toward the end of his career Niebuhr summarized his vocation as a teacher of Christian Social Ethics and his avocational interest as a "circuit rider to the colleges and universities....in a secular age, particularly among what Schleiermacher called Christianity's 'intellectual despisers.'"44 Martin E. Marty has explained just how many critics Christianity had on the campuses during the period when Niebuhr was preaching in the university chapels.

43Nathan A. Scott, Reinhold Niebuhr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963) pp. 31, 32.
44Kegley and Bretall, p. 3.
The number of cultured despisers rose. The American university of the 1930's found it housed an elite generation which sometimes held rather romantic views of Stalinism, and these pro-Communists took over from Marxism the belief that religion was the opiate of the people. Editors and lawyers like H. L. Mencken and Clarence Darrow were joined by a generation of novelists like Sinclair Lewis and Ernest Hemingway, who saw no positive place for the churches. The academic-intellectual style wavered between mere agnosticism on one hand and satiric or vitriolic rejection on the other. Fundamentalists, revivalists, peddlers of religion, and mountebanks were on the scene to provide these despisers with raw material for their attacks.45

The combination of these influences must have fostered cynicism among many students regarding religion. The mood of many young sophisticates in the eastern universities was captured in a joke about compulsory chapel attendance: "Please do not rattle the funnies in chapel; remember that others are trying to study."46

Emilia L. Rathbun surveyed the state of religion on campus in the thirties and concluded that the most serious problem was the need of both students and faculty for a religion compatible with the scientific age. She reported that few religious organizations were taking the challenge seriously or attempting to struggle with it.47


46 Bingham, p. 225.

The crisis of religion on campus in the thirties was not a unique phenomenon in American life; America generally had been in need of a renewed vision for more than a generation. During the twenties Liberal Protestantism was losing any independently grounded vision of life and became more and more the creature of American culture rather than its creator. "If the theology of the fundamentalists was archaic and anachronistic," Sidney E. Mead observed, "that of the liberals was secularized and innocuous." 48

By the mid-thirties Protestant leaders called for renewal. Harry Emerson Fosdick dramatized the change in 1935 by his provocative sermon, "The Church Must Go Beyond Modernism," delivered at Riverside Church in New York. Fosdick indicted modernism for placing too much emphasis on intellectualism, for its sentimentalism, for its humanized conception of God, and for its capitulation to the modern culture. Fosdick believed the time had come for Christians to stand apart from the "prevailing culture" and challenge it.

A decade earlier Niebuhr had challenged his fellow Liberals to rediscover a faith which would be equal to times. He blamed the Liberals for leaving the task of Christian proclamation to the Fundamentalists and then challenged them not to be afraid of wholesome dogmatism.

Frantic orthodoxy is never rooted in faith but in doubt. It is when we are not sure that we are doubly sure. Fundamentalism is therefore inevitable in an age which has destroyed so many certainties by which faith once expressed itself and upon which it relied. But it has been aggravated by liberalism which has frequently played truant to the real task of religion because it was more anxious to appear unbiased in its search for truth than to establish truths which preserve and validate the imperiled personal and spiritual values of life.

Thus religion approaches life with the hypothesis that the universe is at the heart spiritual and personal and therefore benevolent, and that this universe will not leave man to the mercies of a physical environment which destroys his dearest values by its blind and capricious forces.

Such an assumption is, of course, astounding. It can be held only by souls who have the courage to defy immediate facts...It is this necessity of defying immediate facts in the hope of securing ultimate evidence for your hypothesis which continually betrays religion into absurd dogmatisms. Dogma is necessary to religion, for dogma is simply a stubbornly held hypothesis.

In this analysis of the problem eating at the heart of liberalism, Niebuhr talks of intellectual pride, a theme which will occur again and again in his speeches.

Yet liberalism lacks prophetic passion. It has not been bold enough in stating the great affirmations of the Christian faith. Anxious to appear sophisticated it has shunned "the foolishness of preaching," which alone can guard the imperiled human spirit from naturalistic philosophies and, what is equally important, naturalistic ethics.49

Reinhold Niebuhr, along with others like Harry Emerson Fosdick, made contributions to significant changes in the theology of liberal Protestantism during the thirties.

49Niebuhr, "Shall We Proclaim the Truth or Search For It?" The Christian Century, 42, 12 March 1925, pp. 345, 346.
According to Winthrop Hudson the most fundamental of these changes can be listed as follows: a restatement of sovereignty of God over history and any determinism, a reaction to optimism about human progress, a new appreciation for Biblical revelation, a revival of interest in Christology, a concern to find wholeness in the life of the church, and a tendency to move right theologically while moving to the left politically.50

The Crisis Regarding Intervention.

June Bingham entitled her biography of Niebuhr, Courage to Change. The title was suggested partly by Niebuhr's famous "prayer for serenity" and partly because Niebuhr often changed his opinion when change was most costly. The most obvious example of this feature of Niebuhr's personality is his changing position on the issue of America's intervention in international affairs. According to the historian, Martin Marty, the issue of intervention and pacifism of the thirties and forties led Niebuhr and the "Niebuhrians" into the most direct conflict with other liberal Protestants they ever experienced.51

The pacifists' tradition in America dated back many years before the debate in the late thirties. When Theodore Roosevelt was presenting his famous justification of war on Christian grounds, advocates of peace were preparing a

50Hudson, pp. 381, 382.  
51Marty, p. 241.
rebuttal. During the years which followed the Spanish-American War pacifists were successful in gaining support among the American people, and the American Peace Society more than doubled its membership. Many denominations attacked war as "uncivilized and unchristian" and issued official pronouncements to that effect. As the War came Niebuhr was just leaving Yale Seminary. He recorded in his journal in 1918 that he hated war and that he had mixed feelings about the chaplains who went off to war. On the one hand he saw them as "priests of the great god Mars" and on the other hand he admitted: "Yet I am overcome by a terrible inferiority complex when I deal with them. Such is the power of a uniform." Niebuhr had problems reconciling the war with his understanding of the Christian ethic and wondered if a friend who was going off to war was not guilty of "suspending the question about war and the Christian ethic." He commented upon the pretensions of statesmen who were actually enjoying a "fellowship in arms" as they used moral pretensions to mask their opportunism. He considered the Kaiser a "boob" who was not so much filled with malice as a child playing with dangerous toys. After a trip to Europe in 1923 Niebuhr recorded his impressions of the devastation and ill will wrought by the war:

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53 Niebuhr, Leaves, p. 61.
When we arrived at Cologne after spending days in the French zone of occupation we felt as if we had come into a different world. The obvious reluctance of the British to make common cause with the French in the Ruhr adventure has accentuated the good will between the British troops and the native population. But a day in Cologne cannot erase the memory of Essex and Duesseldorf. It rests upon the mind like a horrible nightmare. One would like to send every sentimental spellbinder of war days to the Ruhr. This, then, is the glorious issue for which the war was fought! I didn't know Europe in 1914, but I can't imagine that the hatred between peoples could have been worse than it is now.

This is as good a time as any to make up my mind that I am done with the war business....54

Disillusionment with the war and with Wilson's kind of Christian idealism was widespread during the twenties. Not only had America not "made the world safe for democracy," but communism had conquered Russia, Europe was gripped in a terrible economic recession and the Treaty of Versailles seemed to many a mockery of justice. Warren G. Harding promised to return to what he called "normalcy" by which he and most Americans meant the "good old days" of 1910-1914.55

During this period the churches went into deep repentance over their involvement in the war. As historians laid bare the evidence of the government's faked atrocity stories and smooth propaganda operations, clergymen repented of their patriotism during the conflict.

54Niebuhr, Leaves, p. 68.

Leading churchmen during the twenties and thirties took the pacifist position. Reinhold Niebuhr asked men to repent and be done with war; Fosdick proposed never to bless war again. Sherwood Eddy, YMCA secretary, became an absolute pacifist. Samuel McCraea Cavert, general secretary of the Federal Council of Churches, after expressing his disillusionment, said, "I have come slowly but clearly to the conclusion that the church in its official capacity should never again give its sanction to war or attempt to make war appear as holy. Rabbi Stephen S. Wise viewed his support of World War I with everlasting regret and pledged himself never to support any war again. Charles C. Morrison, editor of The Christian Century, became a pacifist and called upon the clergy never again "to put Christ in khaki or serve as recruiting officers." The long list of ministers who took pacifist positions in this period between the wars included Ralph W. Sockman, Ernest F. Tittle, Henry H. Crane, George Buttrick, Bernard Idding Bell, Charles E. Jefferson, Harold A. Bosley, and E. Stanley Jones.56

Surveys taken in churches of all denominations showed that the greatest disillusionment was among the Methodists, Baptists, Disciples, and Congregationalists while the Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Lutherans were less repentant. The program advanced by the pacifists was "for the League of Nations to repudiate the Treaty of Versailles, abandon imperialism and nationalistic capitalism, while the United States was to relinquish her holdings in the Orient, and withdraw within her own boundaries. Such a program, they declared, would undoubtedly bring peace at once."57 During the twenties and early thirties the country felt more self-contained and self-sufficient and the popular slogan


summarized the prevailing mood, "Let Europe stew in her own juice."\(^{58}\)

It was the seizure of Manchuria by Japan in 1931 which first cracked the wall of collective security which had been so carefully built during the twenties. War was no longer a topic for academic discussion, and many pacifist clergymen began struggling with the hard questions: "How can aggressor nations be halted without the use of force? Are there evils worse than war?" Still, many churchmen including Niebuhr were opposed to an economic boycott of Japan because they were afraid that this would be seen as a "warlike gesture."

At the same time Niebuhr was unable to ignore the storm clouds gathering over Europe. In 1931 he wrote an article criticizing the liberal churches for naive optimism about world problems and expressed a concern which was growing great in his own mind:

Worst of all, the growing anger of the German people over the economic slavery to which the Treaty of Versailles condemns them, voiced particularly in the Hitler movement, threatens not only the parliamentary government of Germany but the whole peace of Europe. There is no real health and there are only a few signs of convalescence in the body politic of continental Europe.

But liberal religion has a dogma and it views the contemporary world through the eyes of this dogma. The dogma is all the more potent in coloring opinion because it is not known as a dogma. The dogma is that the world is gradually

\(^{58}\)Curti, p. 688.
During this period Niebuhr had become convinced that the use of force for righting social wrongs within a society might be necessary, but he was not ready as yet to accept the same principle as it applied to international affairs. To those pacifists who criticized Ghandi for the use of peaceful resistance Niebuhr said that the ideal of pacifism when applied to hard realities of political life would always necessitate the use of some kind of force. In regard to the use of force for solution of interclass struggle Niebuhr said: "The issue in our day is not between voluntary and coerced justice but between coerced justice and chaos."  

In 1934 Niebuhr wrote an article explaining why he was leaving the pacifists' organization, the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He labeled as "perfectionism" the disavowal of any kind of force for social purposes. He granted that the use of force between nations would be "suicidal," but he denied that doctrine that force should never be used in class struggle. When asked why he could not take the more moderate position of peaceful resistance Niebuhr replied that the middle position had no moral authority and power because it was devoid of any stable absolute. At the end of the article Niebuhr's inner struggles with the question be-

59Niebuhr, "Let Liberal Churches..." p. 402.

came apparent: "Recognizing, as liberal Christianity does not, that the world of politics is full of demonic forces we have chosen on the whole to support the devil of vengeance against the devil of hypocrisy." He admitted that his path might be wrong and that some day he might regret the position he was taking: "But our traffic with devils may lead to corruption and the day when we will be grateful for those who try to restrain all demons rather than choose between them."61

By 1937 national political leaders were under such pressure from the electorate that the Neutrality Act was passed. By this act the United States served notice that it would pass no judgments on the rightness or wrongness of other nations' wars, that it would sell to any who had cash to buy, and would stay out of all international conflicts. Such slight deterrent as the United States might have been to the belligerent nations now seemed to be entirely removed. Isolation was now complete.62

Two short years later Niebuhr was in Britain delivering the Gifford Lectures. While there he filed a series of reports on the European situation with Christian Century. In this series of reports Niebuhr came more and more to


believe that war was inevitable and that intervention would be necessary. "Listening to the German radio," wrote Niebuhr, "I am more and more convinced that Hitler wants war." Niebuhr reported his own despair at the war's beginning:

Our hopes were wrong and our fears were right, War has begun.... The first bombs have been dropped. There is nothing to say. How can one do justice to the stupendous character of what has happened? As one who has been certain for years that this would be the consequence of "appeasement," I am no less shaken than those who had more hopes than I. How much more tragic is history than all the little formulas by which men have tried to comprehend it in the past decades! The liberals with their simple ideas of progress, through education -- how wrong they have been! The most obvious sign of progress is that this war will engage civilians as no other war, and will destroy them. People are already beginning to carry gas masks about with them.63

The November 15, 1939, letter included the report of a conversation Niebuhr had had with a member of the British Peace Pledge Union. The man was especially critical of British foreign policy while he was tolerant toward Hitler and Stalin. Niebuhr commented, "I do not find much virtue in the kind of moral sensitivity which gags at the sins of the British Empire and leans over backwards to appreciate the Nazis." He compared the sins of Britain, France, and America with the sins of the Facists: "Whatever may be wrong with the British Empire or with American imperialism or French nationalism, it is still obvious that these

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nations preserve certain values of civilization."\textsuperscript{64}

As the year came to an end Niebuhr was frustrated with America's reluctance to get involved in Britain's struggle with facism.

The attitude of America will remain one of essential irresponsibility. One might wish it otherwise, but that is the inevitable political consequence of continental security. I do not agree with Americans who seek to make a virtue of this fact. There is no virtue in it. It is merely a political fact - it is an inexorable one, until something happens to destroy our continental isolation, as the airplane destroyed the British island security.\textsuperscript{65}

Two weeks later Niebuhr offered his analysis of America's determination to stay out of the war. This report was written in response to Lindburgh's radio address advocating non-intervention.

Just as a nation at war finds it difficult to admit to itself that it is fighting for anything but freedom and justice, so a nation not in a war finds it difficult to admit to itself that anything but devotion to "civilization" prompts its actions. The exact reverse is of course the case. America hates Hitlerism but will not help to destroy it for the simple reason that American national interests are not obviously or immediately imperiled. Nations can fight for ideals but not unless there is coincidence between vital national interest and those ideals.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{64}Niebuhr, "Leaves from...a War-Bound American," 56, 15 November 1939, p. 1,405.

\textsuperscript{65}Niebuhr, "Leaves from...a War-Bound American," 56, 6 December 1939, p. 1,502.

\textsuperscript{66}Niebuhr, "Leaves from...a War-Bound American," 56, 27 December 1939, p. 1,907.
Niebuhr came more and more to reject the kind of liberal attitude expressed by Bertrand Russell who said that he personally abhorred Nazism, but his objections were just "a matter of taste." Niebuhr was now completely convinced that western civilization was being threatened by a massive barbaric evil.

The threat of war changed Niebuhr's mind about Roosevelt's foreign policy even though he could never reconcile himself to the President's New Deal economic policies. In June of 1940 Niebuhr resigned, after a dozen years, from the Socialist Party on the issue of intervention. In November he cast his first vote for Roosevelt. In that same year the *Christian Century* asked prominent Protestant leaders to answer whether they would support a war if it should come. Niebuhr answered in the affirmative and wrote that there is a place for a consistent Christian "perfectionism" which would serve as a conscience for the Christian community, but that the kind of pacifism expressed by many of his fellow Christians was mixed with "bourgeois utopianism."

While Niebuhr had reversed his thinking about intervention he was still no radical interventionist. Mayor LaGuardia sent a sermon outline to many American clergymen

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67 Bingham, p. 238.
68 Schlesinger, p. 174.
69 Niebuhr, "If We Were Drawn Into War," *Christian Century*, 57, 18 December 1940, pp. 1,578-1,580.
for the State Department in 1941 encouraging them to defend the war effort. Niebuhr commented both on the hysteria the sermon created on the part of the pacifist ministers on the one hand, and the lack of wisdom displayed by LaGuardia and the State Department on the other hand. According to Martin Marty, Niebuhr kept some balance on the subject of armed intervention and made a contribution toward sanity in a very unstable time. "Niebuhr fought off both the 'holy war' which came easy to the old-line Protestants and the new isolationists."71

Niebuhr's new position for intervention brought a storm of protests from those who felt betrayed by a former fellow pacifist. A deep rift occurred between Niebuhr and the editor of Christian Century, Charles Clayton Morrison, and in the mid-forties the number of articles by Niebuhr the journal published decreased rapidly. Niebuhr partly understood the resentment he created but he did comment upon one occasion about some of his more violent pacifist critics: "I do wish they'd hate Hitler more and me less."72

Paul Tillich later judged that Niebuhr made a significant difference in the mood on American campuses regarding the issue of intervention.

70Niebuhr, "Church and State in America," Christianity and Crisis, 1, 15 December 1941, pp. 1-2.

71Marty, p. 242.

72Bingham, p. 249.
When I gave a lecture on the Trinity, or on the Biblical studies in the Fourth Gospel, immediately when the discussion started a student got up and asked, "What do you think about pacifism?" Of course I was hesitating on this point, because I never was even now am not a pacifist. This disappeared after Reinie had made his tremendous attack. This question went into the background and it was replaced by the problem of the human predicament. Now I cannot evaluate this. I believe it was absolutely necessary, and I tried to support him as much as I could in my lectures and early writings; but he was a man who changed the climate in an almost sudden way.73

The sermons analyzed in this chapter must be seen within the context of this dynamic period of Niebuhr's life. In the twenty years which elapsed between his graduation from Yale in 1914 until 1934 the "child of optimism" received three staggering blows to his idealism: the Detroit experience, the aftermath of the war, and the Depression. Niebuhr would always afterward endorse what he called "Christian realism." In the summer of 1934 Niebuhr offered a pastoral prayer at the end of a Sunday evening sermon at a small church in England. This prayer, which was to become much better known than its author, effectively gathers up the mood of the new "realism" which was coming to mark Niebuhr's thought:

"Oh God, give us the serenity to accept what cannot be changed, Courage to change what should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."74

73 Landon, p. 33.
74 Packre, p. 23.
Analysis of Speeches

Analysis of the Sermon, "The Transvaluation of Values"

Historical Background.

Niebuhr's reaction to the political-economic situation in the 1930's was a criticism of prevailing American values. He believed that political and economic power was deceptively well mannered in order to cover basic greed. The professor charged that America's "sentimental" liberals, both secular and religious, were easily deceived by the philanthropy of the rich and the powerful. "The liberal church is easily fooled by the little amenities which have always veiled the nakedness of the lust for power." 74

Paralleling the lust for economic and political power, according to Niebuhr, was the intellectual pride which always is a temptation in the academic climate, but was especially tempting in the 1930's when so many were discounting religious faith for intellectual reasons.

In the sermon, "The Transvaluation of Values," which Niebuhr preached on university campuses in the mid-thirties, the speaker presents an analysis and refutation of prevailing American values from the perspective of the Christian faith. 75

74Niebuhr, "Let the Liberal Churches Stop Fooling Themselves," p. 404.

75Reinhold Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy (New York: Scribner's, 1937) pp. 195-214. References to the texts of the four speeches analyzed in this chapter will be indicated by the appropriate page numbers in parentheses following each reference.
Thesis

The thesis that Niebuhr presents in this speech is that Christianity does turn the values of society upside down, and that this transvaluation is not harmful but beneficial for society. An attending idea is that, while history periodically judges the world's value system by casting down the proud, this same truth can be grasped by faith if one can accept the revelation of God in the Old Testament prophets, in Jesus Christ, and in St. Paul.

Line of Reasoning.

The speaker's line of reasoning developed in the following way: (1) Nietzsche's accusation that Christianity turns upside down all of society's values is absolutely true according to the Scripture and the genius of the Christian religion. (2) It is not true that this transvaluation is destructive to society, rather history itself periodically reminds us of the validity of the Christian values when the proud are cast down. (3) This historical judgment can be seen as it condemns the three worldly values mentioned in the text. The "mighty" are a necessary part of society because they are the movers and organizers of the society, but they invariably begin to claim too much reward for their contribution and are eventually thrown down. The "noble" are condemned because they always confuse manners with morality and try to hide their guilt for social abuses behind a screen of philanthropic goodness. The "wise" are not as wise as they see themselves, and history proves again and
again that many of their judgments are false. (4) While the validation of the Christian transvaluation of values can be seen again and again in history, it can also be seen by the eye of faith in the words of the Old Testament prophet, of Jesus Christ and of Paul. (5) So if the Christian is one of the elite let him hold his position with humility, knowing that the Christian transvaluation is ultimately true and the values of the culture are ultimately false.

Arrangement.

Niebuhr used a combination of organizing principles in this speech. The overall organization follows a logical pattern as the line of reasoning reveals. To be more specific, a method of residues is used in the speech. Almost from the first Niebuhr asserted that the world's values are destructive to civilization. He then proceeded to take three of these (power, position, and learning) and show how each fails when enthroned as the ultimate value of life. Only at the end of the speech does the speaker offer his alternative: the values exemplified in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

Yet there is in the Christian religion an insight into this matter which does not depend upon the corroboration of history. Even if history did not periodically pass its judgments upon the wise, the mighty and the noble, the words of St. Paul would still be true and would convince those, who view life in terms of the Christian faith, of their truth. The Christian faith is centered in one who was born in a manger and who died upon the cross. This is really the source of the Christian transvaluation of all values. The Christian knows that the cross is the truth. In that standard he sees the ultimate success of what the world calls
failure and the failure of what the world calls success. (p. 213)

From a consideration of audience adaptation it is significant that the speaker changed the order of the three biblical categories from "wise, mighty, noble" to "mighty, noble, wise." He explained that he chose to treat the "mighty" first "for the sake of bringing the most obvious group to judgment first." (p. 200) Probably Niebuhr treated the "wise" last because he was speaking to a university audience where intellectual pride was a larger problem than either the pride of power or the pride of position. If this is the case the speech is planned upon the psychological principle that the most offensive argument should be saved until last in the hope that the speaker will by then have captured the sympathy of the audience enough to confront them with their own faults.

Since this speech was prepared and printed as a "ser- monic essay," the transitional elements may be studied with the general assumption that Niebuhr used more signposts in his oral presentation than in the printed sermon. However, this sermon as it appears in print retains several helpful transitions and summary statements which show Niebuhr's understanding of the rhetorical principles involved in effective communication. Beginning his discussion of the three classes mentioned in the text Niebuhr said, "Let us consider the various classes of eminence in order." At the end of this discussion of the judgment of history on the "mighty," Niebuhr restated his point before moving to the
next point.

This interesting historical observation could be put in another way, as follows: every human society ultimately transgresses the law of the Kingdom of God, wherefore God's ultimate judgment upon the mighty is also a periodic judgment in history. (p. 204)

The speaker then signalled his audience that he was making a major transition with the words, "Let us continue our bill of particulars. 'Not many noble are called.'" At the end of his discussion of the "noble," the speaker again summarizes his thought.

The noble are not called in the Kingdom of God, at least not many of them, because they are lacking in inner honesty. But they, as well as the mighty, are subjected not only to this ultimate judgment of the Kingdom. They are subjected as well to periodic judgments in history, when what is hidden becomes revealed and society suddenly becomes aware of the moral and social realities, hidden behind the decencies of its political rituals and cultural amenities. (p. 207)

When he introduced "wise" as the third category Niebuhr made a transitional statement which not only showed his movement of thought but also appealed to the good will of his academic audience before confronting them with their own failures.

"Not many wise men after the flesh are called." This judgment seems a little more perverse than the others. The wise men will inevitably regard such a judgment as a revelation of the natural obscurantism of the religious prophet. Would not all of the problems of society be solved if Plato's dream would only come true and wise men were made the rulers of society? Do not the wise save us from the ignorant caprice of the mighty? And are they not the seers who disclose the hidden secrets of nature and history to us? Why should the wise not be called? (p. 208)
Within this last and most important section of the speech the speaker made sure he was understood by supplying additional transitions between sub-points. He used the language of the text to indicate movement of thought. "Why should the wise not be called?" asked the speaker. "Perhaps because they are not wise enough...." Then, giving another reason for the rejection of the "wise" he says, "The wise may not be chosen, not only because they are not wise enough but because they are too wise...." In this last transition Niebuhr reviewed the previous point and led the listeners to the next point.

Although Niebuhr used a kind of "method of residues" by systematically eliminating the world's values and then presenting the Christian value system as an alternative at the end of his speech, he did not leave his answer as a simple alternative without qualifying it. Here is a prime example of the paradoxical nature of Niebuhr's thought: after arguing at great length for the superiority of the Christian value system he is careful to warn his listener not to feel superior to those who have not as yet found the Christian system of values and made it their own. In this qualification he may have sacrificed something of the force of his method of residues, but an integral part of Niebuhr's thought was to show issues in their complexity. The following paragraph provides what could have been a consistent and strong concluding note for the speech:
The Christian faith is centered in one who was born in a manger and who died upon the cross. This is really the source of the Christian transvaluation of all values. The Christian knows that the cross is the truth. In that standard he sees the ultimate success of what he would call failure and the failure of what the world calls success. (p. 213)

But the complexity of Niebuhr's thought led him to qualify his statement and to warn the Christians about the danger of pride in their own system of values.

If the Christian should be, himself, a person who has gained success in the world and should have gained it by excellent qualities which the world is bound to honour, he will know nevertheless that these very qualities are particularly hazardous. He will not point a finger of scorn at the mighty, the noble and the wise; but he will look at his own life and detect the corruption of pride to which he has been tempted by his might and eminence and wisdom. If thus he counts all his worldly riches but lost he may be among the few who are chosen. The wise, the mighty and the noble are not necessarily lost because of their eminence. St. Paul merely declares with precise restraint that "not many are called." Perhaps, like the rich, they may enter into the Kingdom of God through the needle's eye. (p. 213)

Perhaps it was Niebuhr's unwillingness to simplify his ideas for logical resolution and rhetorical power that precluded his ever becoming a well known popular orator.

Forms of Support.

In this speech Niebuhr used several kinds of supporting materials which will be discussed here in the order of their importance. Of equal and primary importance are Niebuhr's use of biblical materials and his own exposition of the Christian system of values.
In the speech Niebuhr used biblical materials extensively to support his argument. At the very beginning, in order to show that Christianity does indeed transvalue the world's values, he quoted the Old Testament prophets, Amos and Isaiah. He quoted Mary's Magnificat, and the sayings of Jesus: about the rich man entering the Kingdom with as much difficulty as a camel passing through the eye of a needle, the parable of Dives and Lazarus, and especially the sayings about the "poor in spirit." This last forms the keystone thought of the whole speech.

In the Beatitudes he pronounces blessing upon the poor in spirit. In the Lukan version this is rendered, "blessed be ye poor," and the logic of transvaluation is completed with the corollary, "Woe unto you that are rich! ...Woe unto you that are full. There is no real contradiction between Matthew's and Luke's version; for in all probability they are merely different renderings of the Hebrew amha--ares, the poor of the land," a phrase which includes the connotation of humility as well as poverty. It is in fact this double connotation which gives a clue to the whole meaning to the gospel's transvaluation of values. (p. 199)

Of equal importance with the use of scripture citations was the speaker's own exposition of the Christian value system as over against the world's value system. In the following lengthy quotation Niebuhr's exposition combined social comment with an argument from linguistics.

...Who are the noble? They are the children and descendants of the mighty. The Greek word which St. Paul uses means the well-born. It is the same word from which "eugenics" is derived. But the connotation of that word is not that of physical or mental health. The well-born are not the healthy. They are the aristocratic. To be well-born means to be born in that circle of society in which to be born is to be well-born.
This circular reasoning is an accurate description of the logic by which the children of the mighty arrogate all the virtues of life to themselves because of their favoured position in society.

In every language the words used to designate the favoured few have a double connotation. They designate both social preference and moral worth. The basis of this confusion lies in the identification of manners and morals, a characteristic of every aristocratic estimate of human beings. The Greek word used by Paul (eugenes) has exactly the same double connotation as the word noble. To be noble means to be high-minded and to be high-born. "Gentlemen" also has the same double connotation. So had the Latin word generousus; also the German edelig and Edelman. Following the same logic, those who are not aristocratic are bad. The English villain, the German Kerl and the Latin malus all designate the poor who are also the morally evil. Why should they be regarded as lacking moral qualities? Most probably because they have not learned the "gentle" manners of the leisured classes.

For to be a gentleman towards a lady means both to deal with her in terms of sincerity and integrity and to bow her into the drawing room with eclat. All these double connotations hide the moral confusion of the mighty in the second and third generation. The first generation of mighty men may be rough fellows who make no claims to gentleness in either manners or morals. But the second generation uses the privileges amassed by the power of the father to patronise the arts, to acquire culture, to obscure, consciously or unconsciously, the brutalities of the struggle for power which goes on in every society and which constitutes its very life. (pp.204, 5)

Another example of Niebuhr's own analysis used as supporting and illustrating material is the passage which explains that the "wise" are not "chosen" because they are not as wise as they see themselves to be. Here Niebuhr combined his own analysis with a knowledge of historical figures and their ideas, and finally made a judgment of his own about the view of education as life's ultimate value.
...Even when the wise men are not consciously dishonest, which they are usually not, they are not as wise as they think themselves. They are, at any rate, not wise enough to reach a perspective which truly transcends the peculiar interest of the group or nations with which they are intimately associated. Aristotle was not wise enough to see that his justification of slavery was incompatible with the fact of human nature and the experience of history. Plato was not wise enough to see the weaknesses of the Spartan system which he used as a model for his utopia. Voltaire was not wise enough to know that his criticisms of feudalism were inspired as much by bourgeois perspectives as by the disgust of a rationalist for superstition. Few of the wise men of the great nations were wise enough in 1914-18 to do more than clothe the prejudices and express the passions of their respective nations in more plausible and credible terms than the ignorant. Much of what passes for education removes no unwarranted prejudices but merely gives men better reasons for holding them. (p. 209)

Of less importance but still significant as a form of supporting detail is the speaker's quotation from authorities in this speech. At the beginning he used the two statements of Nietzsche to focus attention on the problem he wished to discuss. On the one hand, said Niebuhr, Nietzsche was correct in affirming that Christianity "transvalued" the world's values. On the other hand, asked the speaker, was Nietzsche justified when he lamented, "everything is obviously becoming Judaised, or Christianized or vulgarised -- it seems impossible to stop this poisoning through the whole body politic of mankind"? The rest of the speech may be seen as proof that Christianity is not "poison" for the body politic. In this first section Niebuhr employed audience adaptation and showed rhetorical skill in first accepting the description by the philosopher whom many
intellectuals of the day admired, and then "turning the tables" by refuting Nietzsche's conclusion.

In Niebuhr's discussion of the self-destructive tendencies of the "mighty" he used a quotation from another author to bolster his argument:

In Egon Fridell's *A Cultural History of the Modern Age*, this self-destroying inclination of all oligarchies is succinctly expressed in the following words: "In every state there is but one single class that rules, and this means that it rules illegally. It is darkly conscious of this -- and it seeks to justify it by clearer dialectic and fiery declamation, to soften it by brilliant deeds and merits, by private integrity, by mildness in practice; but seldom it even suffers under it. But it cannot help itself.... Deep-rooted in human beings, this heart's inertia, this spiritual cowardice that never dares to acknowledge its own wrongdoings is the secret malady of which all societies perish.... It is the common abyss that will swallow Liberalism, Clericalism, plutocracy and proletarian dictatorship. Salvation from the curse of injustice is possibly only in a Christian state but such a state has never existed." (p. 203)

When Niebuhr asserted that "wise men" are easily turned into "servile camp-followers of the mighty" he quoted from Julien Benda's *Treason of the Intellectuals* to show that in the World War (I) the intellectuals found themselves speaking the truth as their respective sides saw the truth. (p. 208)

In that same section Niebuhr asserted that the intellectuals were too fond of logical consistency where the analysis of human nature is concerned and then he quoted from Blaise Pascal to the effect that only in Christianity can one find the mystery of man's complex nature sufficiently presented. (p. 211)
Of minor importance in supporting his argument were Niebuhr's references to popular literature and to poetry. In discussing the pride of the "mighty" Niebuhr referred to "an interesting book of Wall Street gossip entitled They Told Barron in which one of the characters, after an interview with one of the financial "overlords," explained his discomfiture in the words, "I have just been subjected to the unconscious arrogance of conscious power." (p. 202) This literary allusion was used probably as much to illumine the speaker's thought as to support it. When Niebuhr advanced the idea that much of the Christian religion seems foolish to the worldly wise he quoted the lines:

"The truth that wise men sought
Was spoken by a child;
The alabaster box was brought
In trembling hands defiled." (p. 211)

Style

Allowing for the fact that this speech was carefully prepared for publication by the speaker after the event of the speech itself, some generalized observations about style may still be justified. The power of Niebuhr's visual imagery is evident in this use of simile, in which he compared the greed of the "mighty" to large trees in a forest:

The mighty men are like tall trees whose branches rob neighbouring trees of the sunshine they require for their life. In other words, the social sin of the mighty is that they demand too high a price from society for the services they render. (p. 202)

Equally forceful language is used when Niebuhr described the attempts by the "noble" to cover their social sins with
philanthropy and good manners.

The noble are not "called" because they sprinkle rosewater on the cesspools of injustice and because they clothe tyrannical power with broadcloth and surround it with soft amenities, and fool themselves and others by their pretensions...

Every "lady bountiful" who takes established injustice for granted but seeks to deodorise it with incidental philanthropies and with deeds of kindness, which are meant to display power as much as to express pity; every act of aristocratic condescension by which the traditional reputation of the "gentle" has become established falls under this judgment. (p. 207)

One of the characteristics of style which corresponds to the nature of Niebuhr's thought is that paradoxical statement in which reason seems to turn back upon itself. "Much of what passes for education removes no unwarranted prejudices but merely gives men better reasons for holding them." (p. 209)

"The Christian knows the cross is the truth. In that standard he sees the ultimate success of what the world calls failure and the failure of what the world calls success." (p. 213) Another of Niebuhr's stylistic trademarks is his succinctly stated summary of thought: "The Christian faith is centered in one who was born in a manger and who died upon a cross. This is really the source of the Christian transvaluation of all values." (p. 213)

Assessment of Effectiveness.

This speech was a confrontation between speaker and audience over what the speaker considered to be the degenerate values of a decadent society. He believed that Americans had traditionally been too consumed with wealth, power, and learning to the neglect of a deeper life of
service and inner development. Niebuhr systematically presented his case following the categories found in the sermon text, rearranged for the speaker's own purposes. He used a method of "residues" which left his hearers with Niebuhr's own answer as the best. The speaker supported his cause by reference to biblical texts, by quotation of authorities, and by his own authority as a specialist in the area of religion and ethics. The style of the speech reflected clarity, power, and economy. If the qualities of this speech are taken together, and if speechcraft is a trustworthy criterion of judgment, this was a most effective speech in conveying Niebuhr's ideas.

Analysis of the Sermon, "The Ark and The Temple"

Historical Background

Reinhold Niebuhr preached the sermon "The Ark and the Temple," sometime in the mid-thirties on various university campuses and published it later in his book Beyond Tragedy. It was a sermon very much tied to current events. While facism grew stronger in Europe and war seemed inevitable Americans were divided as to what action the nation should take. While some were ready for full involvement even to intervention and war, many seemed determined to stay out of the conflict. Many citizens were still disillusioned by American involvement in the first great war; the hollow pretensions of American virtue, the horrors of modern warfare,

76Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, pp. 47-68.
and the high cost in human life and property. After a war to "make the world safe for democracy" Americans were disturbed at the prospect of another European conflict. Many said that going to war was unthinkable for a Christian nation.

Niebuhr changed his position on intervention between the early twenties and 1940. The sermon "The Ark and The Temple," was prepared during the years when the change was almost complete. By the time he delivered this speech, Niebuhr had become convinced that some use of force might be necessary for social change within a society. He was rapidly moving toward the position that force might also be necessary to turn back the barbarism of a Hitler. Clearly the speaker urged that Christians should not be allowed to stand on too simple moral grounds regarding these intricate matters of social ethics. In this speech Niebuhr uses ancient biblical symbolism to challenge the idealism of those who were dogmatic pacifists.

**Thesis.**

In the first sentence of the sermon Niebuhr suggested that simplistic moral objections to America's involvement in war were not the last word from a Christian viewpoint. "David was a man of war and also a man of God." The speaker intended his audience to face this paradox and see its implications for America's current dilemma regarding international affairs. In this speech Niebuhr challenged the ground of his opponents' argument, namely that refusal to
get involved was the virtuous and moral answer for the
dilemma. He asserted that those who insisted on purity
through non-involvement were both hypocritical about their
own goodness and irresponsible as citizens of the world.

Line of Reasoning.

Niebuhr's line of reasoning in this sermon may be sum­
marized as follows: (1) Every nation enlists its god for
the preservation of its national traditions and values; for
example, the hallowing of the memory of its war dead as
sacred. (2) At the same time these nations build shrines
and cathedrals to their gods as universal deities embodying
absolute values by which all nations are judged. (3) So
the problem arises: how can a people who take their tribal
god into the thick of battle then come home and build a
temple to that god as a universal deity? Stated ethically
the question is: how can any nation be responsible about
protecting its own particular interests and at the same time
function in a responsible and moral way to secure justice
for all nations? (4) The most common answer to the problem
is: let the religious people of the nation build the tem­
ples while the secular people attend to war and civic
affairs of questionable morality. (5) But his is a misun­
derstanding both of Christianity and the church. The church
is not a gathering place of the pure and the uninvolved, but
the community of those who try to live responsible and moral
lives in the world and who come confessing a need for God's
grace to supply what is lacking in their lives. (6) The
solution is to live as responsible and involved citizens with an understanding that man's best efforts in the world for good are always in need of correction and completion. There is no escaping responsibility by retreating to the high ground of moral purity.

Arrangement of Ideas.

Niebuhr's basic method of arrangement in this speech was the problem-solution order. The speaker began by observing how nations see their gods both as tribal and universal deities. He asserted that this is problematical in that those who would remain pure by non-involvement become irresponsible in regard to the good of all nations. How can a nation be both pure and responsible? This is the problem for which the rest of the speech is meant to supply the solution. The speaker next explored the most popular solution to the problem: the division of labor between the religious and the secular citizens. The Union professor then attempted to show that such a division is false and that all people must live under grace and no nation is really good enough to build a temple for the god of absolute goodness. His solution, then, was that the nation must strive both to be responsible in world affairs and to be under the judgment and grace of the universal God of justice.

The sermon is only sparsely furnished with transitional elements. At the beginning of the fourth section the speaker said, "One further significant fact remains to be recorded in regard to the temple and the ark. The ark
was placed in the temple." In these words the ethicist introduced his solution to the problem under discussion. The absence of verbal signposts in this speech may be accounted for by two considerations: first, the speech was carefully rewritten for print and the printed text supplied the reader with certain visual signposts not available to the original audiences; and second, Niebuhr delivered the speech to academic audiences and characteristically expected more of these audiences than of the less well educated audiences. Although Niebuhr's argument was intricate and complex he still laid out his reasoning with sufficient clarity for his audience to follow his basic argument.

Forms of Support.

In this speech the speaker used two major and several minor forms of support. Primarily he used argument from example, and exposition both for clarification and for proof.

Niebuhr used examples in the first major section of the speech where he generalized that the god of every nation is enlisted to serve as a tribal god for the preservation of national traditions and values. To support the claim he offered four examples: the gods of the Roman empire, the god of bourgeois society which became a rallying point for fraternity and for revolution, the god of the American dream, and the feudal god of Europe which embodied feudal values and traditions. The speaker then tied these examples together to clinch his first point before moving
The god of a culture and a civilization is thus always the god of the ark which accompanies the warrior. He is the god of a particular culture in conflict with other cultures; the god of a particular type of human existence in conflict with other types of human life. Yet he is more than that; and it is by that more that he becomes an effective ally in the battle. For human beings who develop a life which involves more than existence do not fight well if they are not certain that more than existence is involved in the struggle. The god of the ark is thus the source of what is in modern days called "morale." (pp. 53, 54)

In the second section Niebuhr again used examples to show the conflict between the ideals of purity and responsibility in national affairs: although King David of Israel wanted to build a temple he could not because he was a man of war. The ancient empires of Egypt, Babylon, and Rome all struggled with the difficult balance between necessary self interest and international social justice. Americans who are too pure for involvement in European politics have forgotten how this nation acquired Oregon, California and Texas. The speaker concluded: "There is, in short, no method by which men can extricate themselves so completely from the warfare of human existence as to be worthy of building a Temple."

The professor used examples again in the third major section of the speech to show that man builds the temple and in so doing he tends to claim the universal god as his private god. Three examples are woven together in the space of a few lines:
Ignatius Loyola was a warrior and a monk, and his Christ was a combination of warrior and monk. Francis of Assisi was a pure ascetic and his Christ was pure monk. Gregory VII was a Caesar and a pope, and his Christ was half Caesar and half pope (p. 61)

In the final section of the speech Niebuhr asserted that nations must hold both to their private interests and a concern for the universal good, both to their tribal god and to their belief in absolute goodness, both to the ark and to the temple. By the use of three examples Niebuhr attempted to demonstrate that this policy is possible. The speaker pointed first to the way most American Christians already held the two together as symbolized in many church sanctuaries by the presence of the national flag. Next, he mentioned King David who assembled the materials for the temple even when he would not build it himself. The third example was Abraham Lincoln who believed that God's will was greater than either Northern or Southern interests but who also was able to make qualified moral judgments enough to carry on war against the Confederacy.

Another form of support used almost as much as example in this speech was historical exposition. Woven throughout the speech are passages of exposition explaining the biblical narrative of David and the building of the temple. At the front of the text as it appears in the book there is reprinted lengthy biblical narratives of the story. In the first section Niebuhr explained that the ark went into battle with Israel as a symbol of God's presence with his
people and that this understanding of God was not unique to Israel. In the second section of the speech the professor explained David's dilemma as he approached the building of the temple as a man of blood.

Comparing David's solution with other ancient peoples as they dealt with this same problem, Niebuhr then judged current American attitudes in light of his own exposition of this nation's history during the years of its expansion westward. He concluded that "pacifism is the luxury of nations and classes who have what they want." (p. 59)

In the third section of the speech the speaker returned to the story of David to explain the paradox that the temple was finally built both by Solomon's pure conscience and by David's accumulated wealth. With this perspective the speaker made the theological observation that the church is not supported by the self-righteous and the innocent but by those who know themselves as sinners and seek the grace of God. As mentioned above, Niebuhr made reference to Lincoln as he presented his solution to the problem, offering his own exposition of the mind of Lincoln who struggled with both the demands of absolute goodness and duties of immediate, proximate justice.

There are other important but less dominant forms of support in the speech. Niebuhr used refutation as he set forth the most popular solution to the problem and then systematically showed how inadequate that answer was. Twice in the speech the speaker used quotations to establish
and illustrate his points. In the second section Niebuhr emphasized the difference in the view of God as a tribal deity and the view of God as universal sovereign by a quotation from Julien Benda. (p. 55) Near the end of the sermon Niebuhr illustrated the dilemma Lincoln faced by a quotation from Stephen Vincent Benet's *John Brown's Body*. (p. 66) In both cases the speaker used these quotations not so much for fresh insight but because they stated his own thesis in words that were particularly suggestive and striking.

**Style.**

In regard to style two features of this speech are especially noticeable. First, Niebuhr used religious symbolism. The speaker took the biblical symbols of "ark" and "temple" and used them both in the historical sense and in the symbolic sense as representing the two poles of the dilemma under discussion. The "ark" symbol is clearly defined early in the speech:

> The ark of David's religion is a symbol of all cultural religion in which the highest values of devotion are intimately bound up with our own existence. These culture religions always have a god as ambiguous as the God of Israel before the prophets spoke. He is a good who establishes, defends, and sanctifies our own values. But he also suggests that these values are not just our own.... (p. 52)

Two pages later in the printed text the speaker defined the "temple" symbol.

> When David, the man of war, stopped fighting and decided to build a temple to house the ark in place of the itinerant tabernacle of the battlefield, the same God who had given victory in battle now seemed to change his character....
The God who spoke to David in that hour was a god who transcended the partial and relative values which are in conflict in all historical struggles. (pp. 54, 55)

Having thus defined his religious symbols, Niebuhr used these throughout the rest of the speech in sharp juxtaposition to show the tension between the two views of God.

The ark was placed in the temple. The symbol of god of battles found a resting place in the temple dedicated to the God of peace who condemned David's shedding of blood. The god of the ark who both transcended and sanctified the highest sanctities of Israel was subordinated to the God of the temple, but not wholly excluded from its worship. (pp. 62, 63)

By the time the speaker reached the end of his speech the symbols were clearly enough defined in the minds of his audience for him to risk concluding his statement in highly symbolic language. After the example of Lincoln's achievement in holding to both ultimate values and immediate values, Niebuhr summarized his case in these words:

This is a religion in which the ark has not been removed from the temple, but in which the temple is more than the ark. Unfortunately the Christian Church manages only occasionally to relate the ark to the temple as perfectly as that. But the example of Lincoln, as well as of David, reveals the possibility... (p. 68)

Using a second stylistic characteristic of this sermon, Niebuhr distilled his problem and the solution into short statements in which the paradox became especially forceful. In refutation of the idea that the "pure" should build the temple Niebuhr referred to the story of David and Solomon, the latter supposedly innocent enough to build the temple. "But was he really better than David?" asked the speaker.
"He may have been 'young and tender' but he was no so ten­
der when he was no longer so young." (p. 57) Stating the
same paradox a little later the speaker said, "The real
fact is that the temple of God was built not by Solomon's
goodness but by David's uneasy conscience. The church is
created not by the righteousness of the Pharisee but the
contrition of the publican; not by the achievement of pure
goodness but by the recognition of the sinfulness of all
human goodness." (p. 60)

Assessment of Effectiveness.

Into the "either - or" atmosphere of America's debate
over involvement in international affairs Reinhold Niebuhr
injected a "both - and" note. He challenged his college
audiences with the idea that one cannot decide between in­
volvement and non-involvement as a simple matter of moral
choice. He attempted to show his listeners that non-involve­
ment might be as immoral as involvement and that America
had responsibilities to discharge in the world community.
As an ethicist he insisted that Americans hold firmly both
to the "ought" of absolute morality and the "is" of practi­
cal daily decision making. All of this, Niebuhr explained,
operates under the grace of God and so there is no illu­
sion on the part of the responsible Christian about his re­
taining spotless moral purity.

Niebuhr struck a fine balance between condescending to
his audience in both biblical and historical exposition and
leaving them wondering what he was talking about. His
explanations were brief and challenging intellectually. The speaker made his paradoxical thesis easier to understand by stating his principles one at a time and then supplying several examples by which his audience could see his idea as it had been lived out in history. The speech was intellectually challenging and full of fresh insight for his university audiences. In style, in argument, and in content it is apparent that Niebuhr intended his speech for the intellectually sophisticated hearers in the chapels of America's better universities.

An Analysis of the Sermon, "Deceivers, Yet True"

Historical Background.

During the 1930's the attitude of many leading American intellectuals toward religion still showed the influence of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920's and the new vogue in literature which discounted the Christian faith as a leftover superstition from a more "primitive" age. An advocate of Christianity like William Jennings Bryan took the Scriptures literally, but without much real understanding of the faith rooted in those writings. The defense of fundamentalist Christianity which Bryan presented at the Scopes trial supplied many well educated people with ample reason to discard Christianity as a childish pastime. The sermon, "Deceivers, Yet True," is addressed to this new secularism among America's intellectuals.\(^{77}\) In this first

\(^{77}\)Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, pp. 1-24.
sermon of the book, *Beyond Tragedy*, Niebuhr presented his own understanding of Christian myth in order to challenge the humanism of the eastern intellectual community. This sermon provides a glimpse of Niebuhr filling the role he later described as a messenger to Christianity's "intellectual despisers."

**Thesis.**

In this speech Niebuhr asserted that Christianity may appear simple to the intellectually proud because religious language seems simple and unsophisticated. However, he argued, the fact that Judeo-Christian religion is a profound understanding of life may be discovered by an adequate study of religious myth.

The professor from Union affirmed that life's ultimate mysteries cannot be fully described in scientific or rationalistic terms, and that religious myth is an important vehicle for communicating the meaning of life and the essence of human existence. Early in the speech he asserted: "For what is true in the Christian religion can be expressed only in symbols which contain a certain degree of provisional and superficial deception." (p. 3) More specifically Niebuhr stated his thesis in the second main section of his speech:

The Christian religion may be characterised as one which has transmuted primitive religious and artistic myths and symbols without fully rationalizing them.... Every Christian myth, in one way or another, expressed both the meaningfulness and the incompleteness of the
temporal world, both the majesty of God and his relation to the world. (p. 7)

In this definition the emphasis in terms of Niebuhr's thesis comes at the end of the first part: "without fully rationalizing them." The ethicist was speaking in this sermon, not to the fundamentalists who took the Bible too literally, but to rationalists who believed they could distill the meaning of the ancient myths into a short paragraph logically stated in report language.

Especially interesting for the student of communication is Niebuhr's philosophy of language as it unfolds in this speech. Niebuhr's understanding of language forms a central element in the speaker's thesis:

Consequently the relation of time and eternity cannot be expressed in simple rational terms. It can be expressed only in symbolic terms. A rational or logical expression of the relationship invariably leads either to a pantheism in which God and the world are identified, and the temporal in its totality is equated with the eternal; or in which they are separated so that a false supernaturalism emerges, a dualism between an eternal and spiritual world without content and a temporal world without meaning or significance. (p. 4)

The central point of this speech was not a defense of religious myth as an admissible method of religious communication, but the assertion that the Christian faith presents depths of meaning which cannot be communicated without the use of mythological language.

Line of Reasoning.

Niebuhr's line of reasoning in this speech can be traced without much difficulty. It may be stated briefly
as follows: (1) When St. Paul was accused of teaching deceptively why did he begin his defense by saying, "We are deceivers, yet true"? The reason is that religious symbolism always has a certain deceptiveness about it when taken at face value. Nevertheless, religious symbolism speaks of what is true in a way that cannot be matched by purely rationalistic language. (2) To clarify what is meant by deception for sake of the truth one may compare the use of religious symbolism with the work of an artist as he deceives the viewer in order to convey the impression of depth in his painting. (3) In a similar way the Christian faith transmutes the ancient myths into communication of essential truth, but without rationalizing them. (4) The paradoxical nature of religious symbolism becomes apparent as one examines the great myths of the Christian faith: Creation, The Fall of Man, Incarnation, Atonement, and The Second Coming and Last Judgment. (5) Therefore, Christians are "deceivers, yet true" in that they speak in terms offensive to the reason but which nevertheless speak the truth about a God who lives beyond history and beyond man's rational categories.

Arrangement

In consideration of his audience Niebuhr developed this speech according to a logical pattern. His thesis emerged in the introduction, it was clarified in the first main section, supported in the second and third main sections and summarized in the conclusion.
A unique feature of arrangement in this speech is Niebuhr's distinct and well-defined introduction, transitional elements, and conclusion. Typically, these features are less clearly evident in Niebuhr's speeches. The introduction served to catch the attention of the audience with a paradox: why would one plead guilty and then try to defend his innocence? In introducing four of the five myths Niebuhr used the transitional formula: "We are deceivers, yet true when we say that...." Twice on the last two pages of the text Niebuhr signalled his audience that he was summarizing his argument when he used the word, "Therefore." Speaking of the "bourgeois version...of illusory apocalypticism...the idea of progress," Niebuhr affirmed that the ambiguities of history always will stand in the way of the fulfillment of such simpleminded dreams. "Therefore," concluded the speaker, "it is Christ who is both the judge of the world and the author of its fulfillment; for Christ is the symbol both of what man ought to be and of what God is beyond man." (p. 23)

In the final paragraph of this sermon Niebuhr expresses his understanding of the Christian hope "in the midst of tragedy" by explaining for his listeners the substance of that hope as expressed in myth:

We are therefore deceivers, yet true, when we insist that Christ who died on the cross will come again in power and glory, that he will judge the quick and the dead and will establish his Kingdom. We do not believe that the human enterprise will have a tragic conclusion; but the ground of our hope lies not in
human capacity but in divine power and mercy, in the character of the ultimate reality, which carries the human enterprise. This hope does not imply that fulfilment means the negation of what is established and developed in human history. Each moment of history stands under the possibility of an ultimate fulfilment. The fulfilment is neither a negation of its essential character nor yet a further development of its own inherent capacities. It is rather a completion of its essence by the annihilation of the contradictions which sin has introduced into human life. (p. 24)

Forms of Support

Niebuhr supported his main argument in this speech primarily by discussing five specific instances in which his thesis was demonstrated. After stating his thesis in the introduction, clarifying it in the first main section, and restating the thesis more fully in the first part of the second section, the speaker carefully examined five major myths of the Christian faith showing how each appears simple on face value but conveys profound meaning at a deeper level of understanding. Niebuhr's argument rested mainly on these five specific cases.

Interwoven within the speaker's treatment of the five myths are other recognizable forms of support. There is a theological and historical exposition of the meaning of each myth, the speaker used refutation of the rationalists' position to bolster his own argument, and he demonstrated his thesis by showing in what specific ways the myths communicated important truth about life in spite of its apparently deceptive nature. The speaker's mixture of forms of support is seen in Niebuhr's treatment of the myth
of creation:

We are deceivers yet true, when we say that God created the world. Creation is a mythical idea which cannot be fully rationalized. It has therefore been an offense to the philosophers who, with the scientists, have substituted the idea of causality for it. They have sought to explain each subsequent event by a previous cause. Such an explanation of the world leads the more naive thinkers to a naturalism which regards the world as self-explanatory because every event can be derived from a previous one. The more sophisticated philosophers will at least, with Aristotle, seek for a first cause which gives an original impetus to the whole chain of causation. But such a first cause does not have a living relationship with the events of nature and history. It does not therefore account for the emergence of novelty in each new event. No few fact or event in history is an arbitrary novelty. It is always related to a previous event. But it is a great error to imagine that this relationship completely accounts for the new emergence. In both nature and history each new thing is only one of an infinite number of possibilities which might have emerged at that particular juncture. It is for this reason that, though we can trace a series of causes in retrospect, we can never predict the future with accuracy. There is a profound arbitrariness in every given fact, which rational theories of causation seek to obscure. Thus they regard a given form of animal life as rational because they can trace it historically to another form or relate it in terms of genus and species to other types of life. Yet none of these relationships, whether historical or schematic, can eliminate the profound arbitrariness of the givenness of things.

It is therefore true, to account for the meaningfulness of life in terms of the relation of every thing to a creative centre and source of meaning. But the truth of creation can be expressed only in terms which outrage reason. Involved in the idea of creation is the concept of making something out of nothing. The Shepherd of Hermas declares "First of all believe that God is one, who created and set in order all things and caused the universe to exist out of nothing." This was the constant reiteration of Christian belief, until in very modern times it was thought possible to substitute the idea of evolutionary causation for the idea of creation. The
idea of creation out of nothing is profoundly ultrarational; for human reason can deal only with the stuff of experience, and in experience the previous event and cause are seen, while the creative source of novelty is beyond experience.

The idea of creation relates the ground of existence to existence and is therefore mythical rather than rational. The fact that it is not a rational idea does not make it untrue or deceptive. But since it is not rational it is a temptation to deceptions. Every mythical idea contains a primitive deception and a more ultimate one. The primitive error is to regard the early form in which the myth is stated as authoritative. Thus the Christian religion is always tempted to insist that belief in creation also involves belief in an actual creative activity of six days. It is to this temptation that biblical literalism succumbs. But there is also a more ultimate source of error in the mythical statement of religious belief. That is to regard the relation of each fact and even in history to a Divine Creator as obviating the possibility of an organic relation to other facts and events according to a natural order. By this error, which Etienne Gilson calls "theologism," Christian theology is constantly tempted to deny the significance of the natural order, and to confuse the scientific analysis of its relationships. At the rise of modern thought Macbranche developed a doctrine of "occasionalism" which expressed this error of Christian theology in its most consistent form. But it has been a persistent error in Christian thought and one which arises naturally out (of) the mythical statement of the idea of creation. The error is analogous to that of certain types of art which completely falsify the natural relations of objects in order to express their ultimate significance. (pp. 7-10)

This lengthy quotation illustrates the way Niebuhr treated myths for the persuasion of his audience to his point of view. A careful study of this passage will reveal the elements mentioned above: an historical exposition of the understanding of the myth, a refutation of his opponents' position, and a statement of the relevance of myth for a better understanding of life.
In treating the Christian "myth of the atonement" Niebuhr first affirmed that this idea of reconciliation is "absurd" to the modern rationalist because he does not see man as needing forgiveness or reconciliation. The modern rationalist believes, according to Niebuhr, that life is not tragic but that man will overcome evil by the steady progress of developing civilization. Niebuhr then asserted that the atoning death of Christ affirms that life still has a tragic element but that there is victory and hope beyond tragedy. The speaker's refutation of the rationalists was sharply stated as he then compared the Christ of these modern sophisticates with the Christ of traditional Christianity:

Compared to this Christ who died for men's sins upon the cross, Jesus, the good man who tells all men to be good, is more solidly historical. But he's the bearer of no more than a pale truism. (p. 21)

In the treatment of this myth the familiar elements of exposition, refutation, and statement of its meaning again appear.

Other forms of support which appear in this speech include definition by comparison and contrast. In the second section the speaker explains what he means by saying that Christianity "transmutes ancient myths without rationalizing them" by comparing Christianity to Buddhism which is more rationalistic and more pessimistic on the one hand, and Spinozism which is more rationalistic and optimistic on the other. According to Niebuhr, Christianity is not so heady
and rationalistic as the other two world views, but is more realistic and yet more hopeful than either. In the third section the ethicist contrasts the Christian hope of the Second Coming with naturalistic utopianism which looks for a golden age on earth and with the hellenistic otherworldliness which escapes the responsibilities and suffering of this world. Niebuhr made these comparisons in order to show that Christianity is at once a more responsible and more hopeful view of life than either of the other two.

**Style.**

The written style of this speech is difficult reading for a person not knowledgeable in theology. Both in word choice and in sentence structure Niebuhr made little concession to his listener or his reader. He used words like "ultrarational" in the lengthy quote above without defining his terms. The difficulty of Niebuhr's style is again seen in his discussion of the "myth of Incarnation:"

The truth that the Word was made flesh outrages all the canons by which truth is usually judged. Yet it is the truth. The whole character of the Christian religion is involved in that affirmation. It asserts that God's word is relevant to human life. It declares that an event in history can be of such a character as to reveal the character of history itself; that without such a revelation the character of history cannot be known. It is not possible to arrive at an understanding of the meaning of life and history without such a revelation. No induction from empirical facts can yield a conclusion about ultimate meaning because every process of induction presupposes some canon and criterion of meaning. That is why metaphysical systems which pretend to arrive at ultimate conclusions about the meaning of life are either covert theologies which unconsciously rationalise some
revelation, accepted by faith; or they merely identify the world with God on the supposition that temporal events, fully understood in all their relationships, are transmuted from finiteness and contingency into an unconditioned totality; or they must find the existential world evil in its finiteness because it does not conform in its contingent, existential relationships to a rational idea of unity. (p. 15)

In his discussion of the Second Coming Niebuhr seems once again to lapse into the professor's technical jargon at the expense of effective communication with his audience:

Sectarian apocalypticism is closely related to modern proletarian radicalism, which is a secularised form of the latter. In both, the individualism of Christian orthodoxy is opposed with conceptions which place the corporate enterprises of mankind, as well as individuals, under an ultimate judgment and under ultimate possibilities of fulfilment. In these secular and apocalyptic illusions the end of time is a point in time beyond which there will be an unconditioned society. But there is truth in these illusions. (pp. 22, 23)

On the positive side the speaker's repeated use of the words, "we are deceivers, yet true," effectively showed the transition from idea to idea and also gave the speech a discernable theme and continuity.

Assessment of Effectiveness.

In several respects the speaker made effective use of speechcraft. The speaker's thesis was well thought out and repeatedly stated. Niebuhr made a serious effort to clarify his thesis by comparing the use of religious symbolism to the drawing of perspective in art. The analysis of the speaker's opponents' point of view was thorough and penetrating, his reasoning was strong throughout the speech and his thought progressed logically. Transitional elements
at several key points aided the listener in following the speaker's argument.

Less commendably, Niebuhr attempted to compress too much content into the speech, leaving his listeners more material than they could follow. Secondly, the speaker's preference for technical theological language made the speech difficult for the layman to understand. Even the well-educated intellectual in another field must have experienced difficulty in dealing with Niebuhr's style.

In conclusion, the speech may have been somewhat effective in the university chapels, but even there it would have been more powerful had the speaker translated his thought more carefully into terms generally understood by the whole academic community.

An Analysis of the Sermon, "Mystery And Meaning"

Historical Background.

Another sermon delivered on the university campuses was Niebuhr's "Mystery and Meaning."78 This sermon was delivered in the early 1940's and is printed in the book entitled Discerning the Signs of the Times. In Niebuhr's major work, published only a few years before, he had asserted that man is infected by "pride" as manifested in three forms: pride of power, pride of knowledge, and pride

During the thirties he had asserted that Christianity 
"transvalued" man's lust for domination by showing man's 
esential need for love in the world. In his sermon, 
"Deceivers, Yet True," the professor had attempted to show 
how intellectually proud moderns were apt to miss the 
deeper meaning of Christianity because they were "deceived" 
by mythological forms of language. Now, a decade later, 
Niebuhr made another statement to those whose minds were 
closed to religion because they were intellectually proud. 
As a young man fresh out of seminary, Niebuhr had once been 
confident that he had all of the answers for life. After 
difficult experiences as a pastor in Detroit, as witness to 
the tragedy of the first War, as participant in the diffi­
cult years of the Depression and America's impotent economy 
his earlier optimism failed him and Niebuhr could no longer 
boast of his intellectual grasp on life. In this sermon 
the speaker addressed both religious and secular idealists 
who seemed too confident of their answers for the world's 
problems.

Thesis.

In "Mystery and Meaning" the Union professor presented 
a two-sided thesis: life has mystery, and, with the help 
of the Christian faith, it can also have meaning. In the 
early part of the speech Niebuhr clearly states his thesis:

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79Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I (New 
York: Scribner's, 1943) p. 188.
A genuine Christian faith must move between those who claim to know so much about the natural world that it ceases to point to any mystery beyond itself and those who claim to know so much about the mystery of the "unseen" world that all reverence for its secret and hidden character is dissipated. A genuine faith must recognize the fact that it is through the dark glass that we see; though by faith we do penetrate sufficiently to the heart of the mystery not to be overwhelmed by it. A genuine faith resolves the mystery of life by the mystery of God. It recognizes that no aspect of life or existence explains itself, even after all known causes and consequences have been traced. All known existence points beyond itself. To realize that it points beyond itself to God is to assert that the mystery of life does not dissolve life into meaninglessness. Faith in God is faith in some ultimate unity of life, in some final comprehensive purpose which holds all the various, and frequently contradictory, realms of coherence and meaning together. (p. 154)

Line of Reasoning.

The speaker's line of reasoning developed as follows:

(1) Testimonies of real faith are often confused by those who pretend to know too much about life. These overconfident people are of two types: those who are irreligious and will admit no mystery in life, and those who are religious dogmatists and pretend fully to understand all of life's mysteries. (2) A genuine faith is one which resolves the mystery of life by accepting the mystery of God. (3) Since the thirteenth century both of western man's two competing faiths, religion and science, have claimed too much for their respective understandings of life. For all of their differences, science and religion have this intellectual pretentiousness in common. (4) The truth is that we "see through a glass darkly" in many areas of life: the
natural world, our self-understanding, the source of evil in the world, and the struggle with the incompleteness of life. (5) In the Pauline confession Christianity admits both the mystery and meaning of life. Consequently, according to the Christian faith, life must be approached in trust and not by reason alone.

Arrangement.

In presenting the Christian world view as the answer for intellectual arrogance, Niebuhr followed basically a problem-solution or logical pattern of arrangement. In method of arrangement this logical treatment of the theme corresponds almost exactly to the arrangement used in the sermon, "Deceivers, Yet True," studied above: the statement of the problem which includes Niebuhr's statement on his thesis, the clarification of his thesis, a study of specific cases in which his premise is born out, and a restatement of the thesis and the summary. Within the third main section itself Niebuhr used a distributive pattern of arrangement as he explained four particular mysteries with which the Christian faith deals.

In this logical arrangement Niebuhr expected his university audience to be able to follow his line of reasoning. He assumed that his hearers could grasp the paradox stated in the introduction rapidly enough to move on to an analysis of that paradox and finally to consider Christianity as the best method of dealing with it. The speaker made few concessions to his audience. He quoted from Soren Kierkegaard
and Blaise Pascal without identifying these thinkers for his hearers. However, transitional elements are found as the speaker moved from one case study to the next. Twice he used the words of the text to indicate that he was moving to the next specific instance, "We see through a glass darkly when...." Another movement was indicated by the words, "The source of evil in us is almost as mysterious as...." The hearer was expected to be alert to the speaker's movement to grasp these rather subtle transitions.

This sermon contained no formal introduction, but proceeded from the quotation of the text directly into the speaker's first main point. Niebuhr presented a well developed conclusion at the end of the sermon. In this conclusion the speaker reminded his audience of the main concern expressed in the sermon: that Christianity is understood as admitting the mystery "which surrounds its conception of meaning." He signalled his listeners that he was concluding his discussion with the words: "Yet in conclusion it must be emphasized that our faith can not be identified with poetic forms of religion which worship mystery without any conception of meaning." (p. 171) In the final paragraph of the speech Niebuhr restated his thesis by explaining the connection between reason and faith in Christian belief:

According to the Christian faith there is a light which shineth in darkness; and the darkness is not able to comprehend it. Reason does not light that light; but faith is able to pierce the darkness and apprehend it. (p. 173)
Forms of Support.

The main argument of this speech rests upon Niebuhr's use of four specific instances in the third, fourth, and fifth sections of the speech. After asserting that the authentic Christian faith more adequately deals with life's mysteries than either secular or religious idealism, he gave four examples. First, the speaker referred to the unexplained mysteries of the natural world, asserting that behind the discoverable causes and consequences in the natural order are still unexplained mysteries. Specifically, said Niebuhr, two mysteries appear in any study of the chain of causation: the mystery of the initial cause, and the mystery of the arbitrariness of any particular set of effects. Secondly, Niebuhr pointed to the mystery of human nature: that man has both possibility and limitation, that he is both animal and more than the other animals, that man's creativity is ambiguous in that he has capacity to create both good and evil. A third mystery in life is the source of evil in the world. While some people lay blame on evil institutions and others would explain the problem by dogmatic religious formulae, there still remains a mystery in that man has great capacity for good and yet fails to fulfill his real potential. The final case studied by Niebuhr is the mystery of the incompleteness of life. While many modern people believe that history itself is the answer and that Utopia is an historical possibility, the serious study of history shows that this hope is futile.
Man's collective achievements are less impressive than his individual achievements. The problem of death remains a frustration, leaving life with a sense of incompleteness. The Union professor asserted that the Christian faith deals more adequately with this mystery by affirming that God's forgiveness atones for all that evil men do, and that the final completion of human life remains not with man and within history but with God and beyond history. In the face of these insoluble mysteries in the sixth and final section of the speech, Niebuhr reasserted his main thesis: that the Christian faith both recognizes the meaningfulness of life and also remains conscious of the penumbra of mystery. Christianity is content to leave the ultimate mysteries of life with a personal God who holds the ultimate answers within himself. The conclusion of the speech follows naturally after this and is built directly upon the four specific instances mentioned above.

Secondary forms of support found in this speech are exposition and refutation. At several points in the speech Niebuhr explained the historical perspective from which he spoke: he explained how the Old Testament prophets, especially Isaiah, saw mystery; he explained the presumptuous intellectual pride of science and religion which dates back to the thirteenth century. He explained the difference between the Christian's experience of suffering and the non-Christian's experience of suffering in these words:
In another context St. Paul declares: "We are perplexed, but not unto despair." One might well divide the world into those who are not perplexed, those who are perplexed unto despair, and those who are perplexed but not unto despair. (p. 169)

After this sentence the speaker explained each of these three categories in more detail. Mixed throughout Niebuhr's discussion of mystery there is a refutation of other points of view which differ from his own. In the passage quoted above regarding those who know too much about life, the speaker made a critical assessment of the philosophy of the intellectually proud. In discussing the mystery of evil Niebuhr listed three common explanations, admitted that they have some merit, and then attempted to show that the Biblical myth of the serpent in the garden is yet a more profound understanding.

In this last point the speaker employed another form of support, the quotation of authorities. Niebuhr quotes Soren Kierkegaard and Blaise Pascal as authorities in support of his assertions that man is wiser when he admits the mystery of evil in the world.

In addition to the logical forms of support used in this speech Niebuhr used emotional appeals early in the discussion to relate to his college audience. He identified two groups of people who could not allow mystery in life: the religious and the irreligious. The irreligious denied that there is mystery beyond the reach of science, the religious were too dogmatic about their understanding
of mystery. With ironic humor the speaker mentioned religious dogmatists:

They have no sense of mystery about the problem of immortality. They know the geography of heaven and hell, the furniture of one and the temperature of the other. (p. 154)

Style.

Reinhold Niebuhr has sometimes been called a dialectical thinker or a theologian of paradox because he saw life as complex and dynamic and he attempted to allow for that complexity in the expression of his ideas. He often sets one idea over against another and in so doing points to this complexity. Stylistically, the balanced thought as it appears in a sentence or in a paragraph is quite common in Niebuhr's writing and in his speaking. The first sentence of this sermon is an attempt to catch the audience's attention by such a paradoxical statement: "The testimonies of religious faith are confused more greatly by those who claim to know too much about the mystery of life than by those who claim to know too little." (p. 152) Toward the end of the first section of the speech Niebuhr uses the same techniques as he sets out the dialectical relationship between "mystery and meaning:"

The sense of both mystery and meaning is perhaps most succinctly expressed in the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, where, practically in the same breath, the prophet declares on the one hand, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the savior," and on the other, insists that God has made Himself known: "I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: the Lord speak righteousness,
I declare things that are right." This double emphasis is a perfect symbolic expression both of the meaning which faith discerns and of the penumbra of mystery which it recognizes around the core of meaning. The essential character of God, in His relations to the world, is known. He is the Creator, Judge, and Saviour of men. Yet He does not fully disclose Himself, and His thoughts are too high to be comprehended by human thought. (p. 156)

Niebuhr's ability to compress complex ideas into a few words is also clearly seen in this passage where he again pointed up the paradox of man's nature: "The finiteness of human life, contrasted with the limitless quality of the human spirit, presents us with a profound mystery. We are an enigma to ourselves." (p. 161)

Twice in this speech Niebuhr used suggestive metaphors to carry his meaning. When criticizing the thought of Thomas Aquinas, Niebuhr compared the Catholic theologian's system of thought to a building, although at the end he mixed his metaphor:

Granted its foundation of presuppositions, every beam and joist in the intellectual structure is reared with perfect logical consistency. But the foundation is insecure. It is a foundation of faith in which the timeless affirmations of the Christian belief are compounded with detailed knowledge characteristic of a pre-scientific age. An age of science challenged this whole foundation of presupposition and seemed to invalidate the whole structure. (p. 158)

Niebuhr used another metaphor to critique common explanations of evil when these seemed to take away man's freedom of choice.

These explanations of man's self-love are plausible enough as far as they go. But they are wrong if
they assume that the peculiar amphibious situation of man, being partly immersed in the time process and partly transcending it, must inevitably and necessarily tempt him to an inordinate self love. (p. 165)

At one point in this sermon the speaker used gentle irony to show that the mystery of man's nature denies a simple view of man as merely another animal:

We may be only slightly more inventive than the most astute monkey. But there is, as far as we know, no Weltschmerz in the soul of any monkey, no anxiety about what he is and ought to be, and no visitation from a divine accuser who "besets him behind and before" and from whose spirit he can not flee. There is among animals no uneasy conscience and no ambition which tends to transgress all natural bounds and become the source of the highest nobility of spirit and the most demonic madness. (p. 162)

Assessment of Effectiveness.

As Niebuhr set out to challenge the easy solutions for life which many students and professors held by the expedient of discarding the element of mystery, he used a number of effective rhetorical techniques. He developed his ideas according to the problem-solution order using specific instances to refute the "too simple" view of life held by his opponents. He supplied his own alternative at the end of the speech: an admission of both mystery and meaning in life which live together within the Christian faith. The style of the speech was rather formal with a frequent use of the balanced and paradoxical sentence to stress the complexity of life as Niebuhr understood it. If the audience was sufficiently interested and informed to stay abreast of the speaker's line of thought, the speech was probably
effective.

**Summary**

As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., correctly observed, the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr must be studied in view of current events and popular attitudes of the day. The events which prompted the speeches studied in this chapter were the Depression with its attending economic crisis in America, the quiet revolution on the American campus, and the question of America's intervention in foreign wars. The speeches analyzed in this chapter were the products of Niebuhr's own struggle with these difficult issues.

In the sermon "The Transvaluation of Values" Niebuhr challenged his college audiences to question accepted values of power, wealth, and learning in favor of the Christian value system in which service to others is advocated. This sermon reflected the Depression atmosphere in which Niebuhr spoke for American socialists in sharp criticism of American capitalism and American values in general. In the sermon "The Ark and the Temple," Niebuhr confronted those who advocated pacifism on high moral grounds. He attempted to demonstrate from Scripture and from history that responsible citizens can never remain uninvolved and pure in the face of the real problems of life. America must recognize the eternal and absolute values by which it continually monitors its working policies, but immediate decisions must also be made which must involve some degree of guilt. The Christian religion allows one to live and function under
this kind of conflict because it proclaims that all of life is ultimately under the grace of God. The sermon "Deceivers, Yet True," was Niebuhr's attempt to stir a new curiosity about Christianity among its "intellectual despisers" on campus by a careful analysis of religious myth. The speaker intended to show his listeners that they had prematurely judged the Christian faith as "primitive superstition." In the mid-forties Niebuhr again addressed the problem of intellectual arrogance in the sermon, "Mystery and Meaning." The speaker affirmed the need for humility in the face of life's great mysteries, concluding that Christianity provides an authentic way of dealing with mystery.

Viewing the rhetorical techniques of the sermons as a group, the following generalizations may be made: the speaker's thesis is clearly stated early in the discourses, the speeches follow a logical pattern of arrangement, either of the problem-solution order or a method of residues. Clear transitions sometimes marked the movement from one major idea to the next, but little concession is made to the audience otherwise in matters of arrangement. Major forms of support included the speaker's own exposition of biblical and historical materials and his argument based upon examples and specific instance. The speaker's style is often clouded by technical, theological language, yet here and there the listener is struck by a forceful, provocative sentence which would stick in the memory. Since
the speaker thought in complex terms he expressed himself repeatedly in sentences which showed the balancing of ideas and the paradoxical nature of his ideas.

On the whole Niebuhr's audiences in American eastern university chapels probably found his speeches refreshingly original in thought and intellectually stimulating. At the same time Niebuhr's speeches were understood only with a great amount of mental effort on the part of his listeners.
Chapter IV
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF FOUR SERMONS DELIVERED BY REINHOLD NIEBUHR IN THE 1940's AND 1950's

Historical Background
During the forties and fifties Reinhold Niebuhr was especially concerned about America's role in foreign affairs. His concerns centered around America's responsibility in three areas: (1) in war and in post war settlements, (2) in the Cold War and atomic diplomacy, and (3) the search for world peace and world government. The speeches studied in this chapter are representative of Niebuhr's responses to those challenges.

The growing power and ruthlessness of Adolf Hitler converted Niebuhr from the pacifist position he held in the early thirties to a position of "realism" about the need for American military intervention to forestall the threat of Nazi victory in Europe. In 1941 Niebuhr founded Christianity and Crisis as an answer to the pacifism of The Christian Century. The editorial position of the periodical was that while all men on both sides of the struggle were tainted with sin and stood in need of repentance, yet relatively speaking, in this conflict with Hitler, one side was right and the other side was wrong. In the April issue of that first year Niebuhr wrote the
lead article entitled "A Negotiated Peace" in which he criticized his fellow liberal protestants for their naive idealism. Some had called for any kind of peace to prevent war with Hitler, and others suggested that the Pope or another religious leader should call a world conference for the resolution of international problems. Niebuhr affirmed that the momentum of the German dictatorship was so great that it would never be stopped short of a military defeat. Niebuhr's understanding of Hitler was based upon his understanding of human nature:

We do not understand Hitler because we do not understand ourselves and fail to realize to what degree men achieve justice against our interests, not merely by appealing to our consciences, but by resisting our pretensions. If we understood the stubbornness of sin in all men, including ourselves, we would realize more perfectly why the collective egotism which Hitler embodies is not to be beguiled at a conference table, and why Hitler would regard any effort to bring him to a conference as merely proof of the weakness and irresolution of the foe.... There is something rather ironic in the fact that we must be on our guard, lest those who regard the peace of the Kingdom of God as a simple alternative to the difficult justice and precarious peace of the world, deliver us into a peace of slavery....

While Niebuhr agreed to the need for armed resistance against the Nazi threat he also warned of the potentially destructive mass emotions of hatred, fear, and national egocentricity. In 1942 Niebuhr wrote his fellow preachers

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1Niebuhr, "A Negotiated Peace," Christianity and Crisis, 1, 7 April 1941, p. 2.
that they should apply the word of God to bring sanity to a people who were continually tempted by these destructive emotions.

This gospel can be preached in war-time if a distinction is made between the meanings of the word love. In one sense it means a feeling of strong personal attachment. In that sense it can scarcely be entertained toward the Nazis who bombed sleeping Rotterdam or the Japanese who raped the women of Nanking. In another sense it means desire for, and earnest effort to promote, the welfare of another. In that sense it is possible to love one's enemies even when engaged in conflict with them. It is certainly possible to include the effort to defeat tyrannical governments within the limits of this goodwill, since we know that such a defeat is a precondition of a just international community, which must in the end benefit them as well as us. If the spirit of goodwill can be maintained, peace when it comes, will not be a root of bitterness but will be like the tree in Revelation, the leaves of which are "for the healing of the nations."²

The Federal Council of Churches as early as 1942 began work on producing guidelines for a lasting peace once the conflict was over. The report became a powerful influence in post-war thinking. William Warren Sweet judged the preamble of the report, called the Six Pillars of Peace, of equal influence with Wilson's Fourteen Points after World War I.³

In an interview with Henry Beckett of the New York Post in 1943, Niebuhr gave his analysis of the Nazi phenomen-


The problem of Germany after the war is a serious one. The Germans are not congenitally bad, they are politically inept. The tragedy of the German people is that they have had a culture profound as regards the ultimate things in life, but inept in practical politics.

Through music, philosophy and pure science they have illuminated the ultimate. In politics they have been politically immature. They had no middle class revolution, made no great advance as did Britain in Cromwell's time. Feudalism continued and the German petty princes and military tradition. [sic]

The Germans must be disarmed, of course, but that will not be enough. They must be related to a healthy European economy. And how can Germany as a nation expiate the awful guilt of this war? Only by establishing a political and economic life which is a synthesis of the virtues of the west.4

In 1945 Niebuhr noted the differences in mood at the conclusion of the second war with the celebration at the end of World War I. The celebration in 1945 was more subdued because the war just ending was the costliest war ever, because Europe was left in political and economic chaos, and because Americans were less idealistic about the future than they were in 1918. Niebuhr listed the tasks facing the Allied powers at the end of the war: (1) To administer a completely prostrate nation, (2) To prevent starvation in the destroyed cities of Germany and Japan, (3) To eradicate Nazis even in the prisons, and (4) To take positive measures to prevent such tragic wars in the future.

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future. Niebuhr said these tasks were so great and so complex they would not be done quickly or well, and so they must be done with a great amount of humility.\(^5\)

After returning from a tour of Germany in 1947 Niebuhr wrote Assistant Secretary of State W. A. Benton encouraging more cultural exchange between the two countries. He believed this was absolutely necessary if the American purposes in the post-war years were not to be misunderstood. Most of the conceptions the Germans had of America, lamented Niebuhr, were drawn merely from the movies, "a tremendously fruitful source of confusion about the character of American life."\(^6\)

The historian Dewey W. Grantham explained the importance of America's relationship with Russia during the war years for their later struggles in the Cold War.

The immediate origins of the momentous struggle that developed between the United States and the U.S.S.R. lay in the wartime relations between the Russians and Americans and British, in the way the war changed the earlier balance of power in Europe and Asia, and in the fact that the United States and the Soviet Union had emerged as the two most powerful nations on earth.\(^7\)

Niebuhr sensed the shift in the balance of power as early as 1942 and warned his fellow Americans that the Russians

\(^5\)Niebuhr, "Soberness in Victory," Christianity and Crisis, 5, 28 May 1945, pp. 1, 2.

\(^6\)Letter to W. A. Benton, April 28, 1947, Papers of Reinhold Niebuhr, Library of Congress, Box No. 2.

must be included in post-war settlements. He said that American's misgiving about Russian atheism, socialized property, and the Soviet dictatorship notwithstanding, America's ally in war must also be a partner in the making of peace.

The defects of Russian domestic politics do not alter this function of Russia in post-war reconstruction at all (helping to provide deterrent to nations tempted to imperial exploitation.) It is in fact important to recognize that the quality of balance and harmony achieved by a community of nations is not absolutely determined by the internal structure of the various nations involved in the community. That is why it is idle to speak of a union of only democratic nations after the war. Geographic and other considerations are more important than internal structure, however desirable it may be in the long run to achieve a common level of democratic culture in all nations involved in such a community.8

The following year Niebuhr wrote a lengthy two-part essay for The Nation which he entitled, "Russia and the West." Again he affirmed that post-war settlements would necessarily have to be compromises between the vested interests of Russia, Great Britain, and the United States. By historical analogy Niebuhr suggested the attitude the U.S. and Britain should take toward expansive Russian communism.

The relations between the Communist and the democratic world after the war will be somewhat analogous to the relations between Catholicism and Protestantism after the Thirty Years' War. That war, it will be remembered, proved that neither of these divisions of Christendom could establish

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8Niebuhr, "Russia's Partnership in War and Peace," Christianity and Crisis, 2, 23 February 1942, p. 2.
its supremacy over Europe. The Peace of Westphalia solved the problem by a whole series of compromises which conformed to the "logic of facts" but not to any other logic. The analogy is not complete because democracy and communism have not been at war with each other but have collaborated in defeating a common foe; it is, nevertheless, a valid one.9

Niebuhr further elaborated on his thesis by recalling that the Peace of Westphalia outlawed the Jesuit order, which was the political and international instrument of the Counter-Reformation. Toward the end of the second article Niebuhr warned that Russia's justified national interests would become odious to the rest of the world when masked in a "preted devoted to some mythical international working class," and that post-war cooperation would partly be dependent upon Russia's willingness to withdraw its subversive activities in other nations. Niebuhr conjectured that Stalin and the Russian leaders would never understand this situation in the West well enough to withdraw voluntarily from the West so that "we may have to demand something analogous to the banishment of the Jesuits in the Peace of Westphalia."10 Niebuhr's realism about the need for toughmindedness with the Russians and America's willingness to enforce restraints in the interest of international peace may be considered one of the sources of what came to be America's official position as developed

9Niebuhr, "Russia and the West," (Part I) The Nation, 156, 16 January 1943, p. 83

10Niebuhr, "Russia and the West," (Part II) The Nation, 156, 23 January 1943, p. 125
by George F. Kennan. Kennan later referred to himself as one of a generation of Niebuhr's ideological children.\textsuperscript{11} Dewey Grantham described the contents of a cable Kennan sent as Foreign Service officer in Moscow to the State Department in February, 1947, which became the framework of the official national policy of "containment."

In explaining Soviet behavior, he expressed the increasingly strong feeling among American leaders that it was futile to seek further agreements with the Russians. The Soviet leaders, Kennan warned, had a neurotic view of world affairs. And they have learned to seek security only in patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power, never in compacts and compromises with it. Yet Soviet power was "neither schematic nor adventuristic," Kennan contended. "It does not take unnecessary risks. For this reason it can easily withdraw--and usually does--when strong resistance is encountered at any point."

The main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union, Kennan later wrote in a famous article published in \textit{Foreign Affairs}, "must be that of a long-term, patient, but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." This would increase "the strains under which Soviet policy must operate," force the Kremlin to show more "moderation and circumspection," and promote tendencies which "must eventually find their outlet in either a break-up or a gradual mellowing of Soviet power."\textsuperscript{12}

Once again, during the years of the Second World War Niebuhr showed that his thought was not so much dictated by a consistent political and economic doctrine as formulated in response to events and situations as they developed. Niebuhr's thought, however, contains some con-


\textsuperscript{12} Grantham, p. 19.
sistency within his religious understanding of history and human nature. Early in the war he advocated the use of force in turning back the threat of Nazism. At the same time he admonished his fellow ministers to help limit the destructive emotions of fear, hatred, and egocentric patriotism in favor of a genuine concern for the enemy's welfare. On the one hand he warned that Russia must be included in the post-war settlements as an equal partner and on the other hand that Western leaders must be tough-minded enough with the Soviets to limit the subversive activities of communists in western nations.

The Cold War and Atomic Diplomacy

At Yalta, in February, 1945, Winston Churchill declared that the assembled world leaders had world peace more within grasp "than at any time in history." The Prime Minister proclaimed that it would be "a great tragedy if they, through inertia or carelessness, let it slip from their grasp. History would never forgive them if they did." Yet even within the Yalta accords were the seeds of future tension between nations. In the Western view Yalta was to mean free elections and parliamentary governments in Eastern Europe, while the Russians saw the agreements as recognition of their claims for governments "friendly" to the Soviet Union. The dispute which developed in the following months increased East-West tensions so much that Churchill declared in the spring of 1946 "an iron curtain
has descended across Europe," and the tragedy he had feared had occurred. Europe was divided into hostile halves, the western half under American influence. In the years following the war political crisis followed political crisis: the Greek civil war in 1947, the Communist takeover in Czeckoslovakia and the Berlin blockage in 1948 added fuel to existing mistrust on both sides. Bernard Baruch commented in April, 1947, that "we are in the midst of a cold war," and the phrase became the accepted apellation for the tensions of the post-war years.\(^\text{13}\) In 1949 two events precipitated a crisis in American confidence about world affairs: the collapse of Nationalist China and the successful testing of an atomic bomb by the Russians. These events touched off a chain reaction of public opinion against the American government by conservatives who accused the Roosevelt and Truman governments of inefficiency, disloyalty, and ineptitude in international affairs.

These events also triggered in the minds of some Americans a new hysteria about communist subversion in America. As a result of these developments many socialists in America began disassociating themselves with Russian communism during this period. Two years before, in 1947, the Fellowship of Socialist Christians changed its name to Frontier Fellowship. "We continue to be socialists," Niebuhr explained, "in the sense that we believe that the

\(^{13}\text{Gar Alperovitz, Cold War Essays (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1966) pp. 7,8.}\)
capitalist form of society stands under divine judgment and that there is no justice in modern technical society without a completely pragmatic attitude toward the institution of property." He carefully distinguished his position from doctrinaire Communism, noting that "the most dangerous error is the centralization of both economic and political power in the hands of a communist oligarchy." ¹⁴

Both during the early years of the cold war and in the views of later historians the origins of this international tension have been variously explained. The revisionist historian Gar Alperovitz explains the development of the cold war by pointing to Truman's failure to measure up to his predecessor's expertise in international relations. This short-coming prompted the rash and unnecessary use of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima, the "get tough policy" of containment toward the Russians. American leaders were insensitive to Russian needs which could have been used in making settlements without alienation and the risk of war. ¹⁵

Another view of post-war tensions is expressed by the more orthodox historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who finds the criticism of the revisionists unrealistic about the Russian leaders:


¹⁵Alperovitz, pp. 35-47.
Stalin and his associates, whatever Roosevelt or Truman did or failed to do, were bound to regard the United States as the enemy not because of this deed or that, but because of the primordial fact that America was the leading capitalist power and thus, by Leninist syllogism, unappeasably hostile, driven by the logic of its system to oppose, encircle, and destroy Soviet Russia. Nothing the United States could have done in 1944–1945 would have abolished this mistrust, required and sanctified as it was by the Marxist gospel....

Twenty years before Schlesinger and Alperovitz rendered their judgments Niebuhr gave his prescription for a successful American policy. Niebuhr's view included elements reflected later by both points of view: American leaders should be both flexible in negotiating with the Russians and toughminded in the containment of Communism. He continually wrote and spoke about the mixture of realism and humility America's leaders needed to cope with the Cold War problems.

While Niebuhr continued his admonitions toward toughmindedness about the containment of Russian communist influence in the West, he called more and more for flexibility in negotiations. From the early forties Niebuhr had questioned the inflexibility of American leaders toward Russia, as early as 1943 wrote of "the ridiculous politics of our State Department" in its attempt to contain and

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eliminate the influence of Russia in Eastern Europe.17 In 1944 Niebuhr warned that the failure of America and Britain to find workable compromises with the Soviet Union after the war might eventually lead to World War II. While idealists were already dreaming of world government in which war would be outlawed Niebuhr contended that the real issue was whether the great powers could reach enough common agreement to avoid yet another war. The key to any successful global government, Niebuhr said, would be the willingness of the three great powers to delegate authority to an international ruling body. This action would require an abridgement of national sovereignties. Niebuhr pointed to areas of common interest which could be used as common ground from which to seek a global alliance, if not world government: the war experience as Allies, the necessity of cooperation in the liquidation of the war and the task of rehabilitation of disabled countries, and the defeat of a common foe. In view of this available common ground Niebuhr lamented the fact that the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. seemed already caught up in a vicious circle of "countermeasures" as the tensions mounted. The importance of wartime cooperation between America and Russia for post-war reorganization of Europe and Asia meant these nations must not proceed independently, each trying to capture and dominate its own "sphere of influence" in Europe. Niebuhr

17Niebuhr, "Russia and the West," (Part II) p. 125.
concluded his statement by explaining how each nation's pursuit of its own interests without regard to the others would set the stage for another war.

It must be observed in conclusion that however vexatious may be the problems arising from the plans of various nations for strategic security, they are subordinate to the main issue. Russia's desire for a strong strategic frontier, Britain's hope of drawing some of the Low Countries into its Commonwealth system, and America's interest in a big navy and in naval and aerial bases are all in the same category. It is inevitable that all nations should seek for some provisional unilateral security. But if there is no over-all agreement among them, their plans will turn into schemes for merely unilateral security.

All of them must become increasingly, counsels of despair, because they are plans for the relative security of this or that nation in the event of another war. None of them will be plans for the security of the world against the peril of war.18

The use of the atomic bomb and the implications of America's terrible weapon for international relations was an especially vital concern for Niebuhr and for many other American intellectuals and leaders during the late forties. Many intellectuals confessed a sense of foreboding as America introduced the new weapon. Albert Einstein warned that "a new atomic war might be expected to wipe out two-thirds of mankind." Secretary of War Henry Stimson said, "It is wholly clear that we must never have another war. This is the lesson men and leaders everywhere must learn, and I believe when they learn it they will find a lasting

peace. There is no other way." In the years following the end of the war the American people seemed to grow more apprehensive about the possibility of another war. In August of 1945 public opinion was split practically even on the question, "Will the U.S. have another war in the next 25 years?" By 1947 nearly three-fourths of those polled expressed doubts about the possibility of living a quarter century without war. The devastation at Hiroshima and Nagasaki had created a psychological and moral crisis.19

Niebuhr accepted the government's official rationale for using the bomb in Japan while objecting to the use of the bomb as a "trump card" at the bargaining table with the Russians after the war. In 1945 Niebuhr wrote in Christianity and Crisis that the atomic issue was much more complex than many idealists, both secular and religious, would allow. Some idealists were suggesting that the awful secret be "locked up" and kept indefinitely the responsibility of the United States alone. Niebuhr explained that only a small fraction of the process of production was a secret and that good scientists all over the world would be piecing the puzzle together within months. Other idealists suggested that the alternatives were simple: either outlaw the bomb or outlaw war. Niebuhr listed several problems with any attempt to outlaw the bomb outright: past experience of outlawing weapons of war proved that such schemes

were ineffective, rigorous inspection systems would be required, outlawing the bomb would give a decided advantage to the United States as the only atomic power, and outlawing weapons is meaningful only at the outbreak of a war anyway. The second alternative of outlawing war seemed equally problematic to Niebuhr. The international cooperation required to outlaw war was becoming less and less a possibility as the chasm of misunderstanding between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. widened. Niebuhr then asked what could be done. He suggested that American leaders try to formulate a policy regarding the atomic bomb which would allay rather than aggravate Soviet fears of annihilation. He proposed that Americans might consider the gracious gesture of sharing their "secret." Since it was only a matter of a few months before the secret would be discovered in foreign labs the risks in sharing the secret might well be worth the gains in international good will. At the same time Niebuhr admitted that deteriorating relations between the two countries made the risk difficult to take. In this discussion of atomic diplomacy Niebuhr applied two of the main tenets of his Christian social ethics: that man's efforts for good are always tainted with some evil, and that the scientific method cannot solve complex problems in human relationships.

...It may be worth noting incidentally that the humility and moral sensitiveness of the scientists who developed the bomb, proves that the atomic bomb heralds the end of one age and the beginning of another in more than one sense.
For this humility proves that the era in which science assumed that all of its discoveries were automatically beneficient to mankind, is past. The scientists are beginning to understand how all the achievements of a technical age can contain potentialities of evil as well as of good; and that sometimes the evil is more obvious and immediate than the good. The question which confronts us, is whether we can either abolish war so that this new dimension of destructiveness in warfare will not prove the undoing of civilization absolutely; or whether we can abolish the use of the bomb so that we may at least confine the destructiveness of warfare to the proportions existing before the invention of the bomb.\(^{20}\)

Niebuhr ended his article by affirming that no solution would prove effective "if some method of bridging the gulf between Russia and the West is not found."

Reinhold Niebuhr was only one of many religious, educational, and government leaders who were hopeful that the atomic threat would bring a religious and moral renaissance in American life. As Harvard's President James B. Conant predicted, the shock of the first atomic bomb blast prompted a re-assertion of religious values in American life. Albert Einstein spoke of the need to harness the deep emotional power of religion to control the use of such weapons. A special committee was appointed by the Federal Council of Churches to study the issue and make recommendations and Niebuhr was a member of the committee. According to the report printed in the *New York Times* the committee refused to blame the scientific community with the destruct-

tiveness of the bomb; it called rather for increased social conscience about the use of such weapons. President Conant was disappointed with the committee's work because he read it as a naive and idealistic condemnation of America's use of the weapon. Niebuhr wrote Conant in regard to the committee's work, explaining that the Times' report had deleted several important paragraphs from the report and so had left entirely the wrong impression. The committee objected to the surprise nature of the bombing, they felt that such a weapon should first have been demonstrated in an uninhabited area, and that the Japanese should have been given clear warning and opportunity for surrender. Niebuhr did not object to the use of the bomb per se:

I myself consistently took the position that, failing in achieving a Japanese surrender, the bomb would have had to be used to save the lives of thousands of American soldiers who would otherwise have perished on the beaches of Japan.

Niebuhr then repeated his familiar theme that America could not remain both morally pure and socially responsible in time of war:

I should like to make an additional point about the expression of guilt. During the war I had a letter from a Captain of our Army which landed in Normandy, in which he observed how the people rejoiced in their liberation and mourned over their destroyed homes, and added how much evil we must do in order to do good. This, I think, is a very succinct statement of the human situation.21

21Letter to James B. Conant, March 12, 1946, Papers of Reinhold Niebuhr, Library of Congress, Box No. 3.
The Search for World Peace and World Government.

Even in the midst of mounting tensions between Russia and the United States there was considerable optimism among American idealists about the possibility of achieving a lasting peace through world governing bodies. Early in 1945, when all of the great and many of the small nations sent representatives to San Francisco to sign the charter creating the United Nations, Protestant churches in America rejoiced and considered the charter and the Organization great vehicles for world peace. The Federal Council of Churches enthusiastically endorsed the development as a "hopeful procedure whereby governments can peacefully adjust their disputes and advance their common interests."

Although Niebuhr was influential in the Council at the time, he was somewhat less enthusiastic about the new organization for peace; his central concern was that the victorious powers had seemed to dominate the proceedings.

In 1946 Niebuhr wrote about the "myth of world government," saying that world government was neither a present reality nor in sight in the near future and that the American idealists were celebrating prematurely. In the letter to President Conant mentioned above Niebuhr added at the end: "I am taking the liberty of sending you a blast of mine at the world government people, appearing in this week's The Nation, with which I think you will on the whole agree." In the article Niebuhr explained that real community, whether national or international, cannot be created
by constitutional means as many seemed to assume in celebrat­ing the United Nations' Charter. Niebuhr claimed that popular propaganda had obscured the fact that any effective international governing body must have real authority granted it by the various nations. Such delegation of authority had not taken place and probably would not occur since it would mean a significant abridgement of the national sovereignty of each nation. Each nation's need jealously to guard its sovereign rights could already be seen in the veto power provisions granted the major powers in the U.N. Charter.

To illustrate his premise that cooperation is not created by constitutional means Niebuhr gave examples from American history. If harmony is guaranteed by legal fiat, why did the American constitution not prevent the Civil War? Exposing a second problem, Niebuhr explained that many natural bonds enhance national unity which are absent when nations come together. In contrast with the common experience of national life were the many differences which separated nations and cultures and made world government extremely difficult: ethnic differences, language differences, geographic differences, and differences in national history and experience.

The point of Niebuhr's article was not simply to offer negative criticism of the "world government people," however. He called for more "realistic" thinking about international cooperation on the basis of the real incen-
tives which were already shared by many nations: economic interdependence, common moral responsibilities, and the fear of mutual destruction. Niebuhr observed that the nations did not have compelling elements of international "togetherness" and that the police power required to enforce such cooperation would amount to tyranny. Niebuhr concluded that idealists should become more realistic and the cynics should become more responsible about the several small steps which could be taken to enhance the prospects of world peace and international cooperation:

These simple lessons must be spelled out to American idealists, not to induce a mood of defeatism, but to get them to direct the impulses of their idealism to real rather than imaginary objectives. Many creative acts are required of America that are more difficult, though most immediate and modest, than espousal of world government. Will the British loan agreement pass? If it does not, America will have proved that it does not know how to relate its wealth to an impoverished world. Shall we find a way of transferring our dangerous knowledge of the atomic bomb to some kind of world judicatory? If not, we shall have proved that we know how to resent, but not to allay, the world's fear of our power.

These immediate steps toward achieving a higher degree of mutuality among nations may be too modest to guarantee peace. But they are in the right direction. It would be intolerable if we again presented the world with a case of American schizophrenia, allowing our idealists to dream up pure answers for difficult problems while our cynics make our name odious by the irresponsible exercise of our power.22

According to Reinhold Niebuhr utopian dreams of world government were rooted in a basic misunderstanding and oversimplification of human nature and its history. In 1947 he wrote an article for *The Nation* entitled "The Dilemma of Modern Man."23 Asserting that social and historical imperatives were easily defined but hard to achieve in the post-war years, Niebuhr explained that most Americans had too simple a trust in the power of democracy to solve all of the world's problems. There are two kinds of democrats according to Niebuhr: those who would sacrifice freedom for equalitarian and collectivist democracy, and those who would make no sacrifice of any freedom in the interest of justice. "In the international community this cleavage may result in a world conflict between two cohorts of world-savers holding contradictory views of democracy." In criticism of those who prescribed democracy for all of the world's ills, Niebuhr spoke of an "uncritical confidence in the organic relation between 'free enterprise' and democracy..." and affirmed that "this type of bigotry may do more damage to the world community and the cause of justice than any religious bigotry ever did."24

Niebuhr detailed two illusions which undergirded the idealists' easy confidence in "free enterprise" democracy


as a cure-all for the world's ills: the illusion that civilization's development continues in an unbroken upward line and that his progress is redemptive; and the illusion that the scientific method provides mankind with the final instrument for making right the world's evils. In an effort to expose the first illusion Niebuhr pointed to the atomic bomb's devastation of Hiroshima, observing that man does not always progress toward civilization but sometimes regresses toward chaos. Niebuhr said that the continuing development of technology should not be equated simply with progress.

The same instruments which extend the range of possible community also extend the range of man's impulse to domination over his fellows. Thus history pitches the drama of life on continually higher levels, but the essentials of the drama remain the same.25

Regarding the second illusion Niebuhr said that the cult of "scientific politics" overlooked some basic differences between natural science and the social sciences. First, the natural scientist stands outside of his subject matter with an objectivity impossible for the social scientist since he is also a part of his subject. Secondly, the natural sciences carefully circumscribe their field of inquiry and know "no temptation to weigh evidence or make hazardous judgments on such imponderables as human motives." Thirdly, it is not the method of "scientific" social scientists which is in question, but their ignorance of

their own "implicit or explicit metaphysical assumptions" which make every judgment of fact also a value judgment.

Toward the end of this article Niebuhr asserts a theme which occurs again and again in his post-war speeches: modern man must discover once again a faith which combines courage and humility, an "adequate faith" for the burdensome and complex issues of the post-war world:

A secular age imagined that it could exorcise fanaticism by disavowing religion. But an age which prides itself upon its scientific objectivity has actually sunk to new levels of cruelty, for the man who knows himself to be absolutely right through the benefit of science is as cruel as those who achieved this fanaticism by religious revelation. Not only Marxist fanatics are involved in the cruelties of our age, but democratic idealists also. The ancients were certainly no more merciless to their foes than we; no one has been so merciless to a vanquished foe as we since the Assyrians. We are pitiless because we do not know ourselves to be pitiable.26

Niebuhr found himself in conflict with religious idealists as much as with secular idealists. In 1948 Niebuhr attended the historic meeting of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam. With the war behind them, the ecumenical movement at last would come into its own. Niebuhr attended the Amsterdam conference with other such notables as Paul Tillich, Emil Brunner, and Karl Barth. In reaction to the optimism expressed by some of the participants, Niebuhr wrote the Religious News Service that he was "a little frightened" by the high hopes of some of

the delegates. He admitted that it was an historic occasion, but he doubted that it would produce complete unity among Protestants. "The processes of history are slower than that," observed Niebuhr. Even more frightening to Niebuhr was the fact that some delegates were expecting this new organization somehow to speak a magic word which would solve the problems between Russia and the West.27

A helpful distillation of Niebuhr's thought during the forties and fifties is the editor's lead article in the tenth anniversary issue of Christianity and Crisis.28 Niebuhr commented that the journal had been established a decade earlier to dispute the "too simple solution" many liberal Protestants held for the world's problems, particularly the problem of the facist threat to world peace. "One tyranny was vanquished; but another more plausible in its appeal and more terrible in turning dreams of justice into nightmares of cruelty has taken its place." Atomic weapons, Niebuhr observed, had become the immediate security and the ultimate insecurity of the world. Niebuhr believed the two most powerful deterrents to a Soviet attack were "our atomic weapons and their economic weakness." He warned that a relaxation of world tension by too much bargaining with the Russians presented great


risks for national security. "The more solid chance of avoiding war still lies in achieving such a preponderance of political, moral and military strength that the Soviets would not risk an attack." Niebuhr advised a middle path between the temptation to disavow responsibility as a world power and retreat into isolationism on the one hand and a "proud overestimate of our resources" for the achievement of world peace on the other.

Niebuhr's attention was now turning more toward Asia. Niebuhr warned his American readers not to equate their experience in Asia with their experience in Europe. Europeans saw American democracy as a natural alternative when they were disillusioned with Russian Communism. Niebuhr warned that only "an idolatrous conception of the perfection of American democracy and its appeals to other peoples" makes Americans assume that the people of Asia would prefer Western democracy to Communism. Niebuhr made observations in 1951 about the Western role in Asia which may seem prophetic a generation later.

The fact is that we labor under great moral handicaps in Asia. We are the white world; and a colored continent has not forgotten the long history of the white man's arrogance. Our boasted living standards do not recommend our civilization to poverty stricken Asia. On the contrary Asians frequently regard the disparity between our wealth and their poverty as proof of the Communist theory that capitalist exploitation is, alone, responsible for all inequalities of wealth and poverty. Even our genuine democratic freedoms offer no great attraction to Asia, which lacks both the spiritual and the socio-economic presuppositions for their achievement or enjoyment. It is barely
possible that the whole of Asia, with the possible exception of the island perimeter still related to the West, will be inundated by Communism. This does not mean that Communism would be good for Asia, as some Europeans seem to suggest. It merely means that neither we nor Asia had the resources of statesmanship to develop a viable economic and political system for the Asian world, which is absolutely safe against Communism. The widely held contemporary judgment that there is no middle ground between democracy and tyranny, has helped to lame our statesmanship in Asia....

We need not accept the inundation of Asia by Communism as inevitable; but we would certainly be foolish to seek to arrest it primarily by military power....29

Niebuhr asked what the Christian churches might do to contribute to the health and power of a free society, in a world poised precariously upon the brink of war, a world in which the whole of Asia might go Communist, and where many Americans had given in to hysterical fears of Communism. He answered first that the churches could not make a "direct" contribution: "The Christian faith is not true to itself when it tries to reduce its validity to utilitarian proportions." Niebuhr called on American Christians to reaffirm faith in a God who transcends all nations and circumstances. Niebuhr called for a spiritual awakening in America:

Our age has spawned idolatries of every kind of which the Communist idolatry is the worst; but American self-worship is not the least harmful. Emancipated from every reverence toward Him "Whose service is perfect freedom" the modern generation celebrated its brief hour of freedom and then capitulated to a

Niebuhr's answer for the mass hysteria demonstrated in McCarthyism was not merely a warning of the dangerous consequences of this idolatry. These "jitters," as Niebuhr called them, were "a part of the sickness of a whole culture which had forgotten that all human existence is insecure, that all human achievements are fragmentary and all human virtues ambiguous." In categories which many people of the time were using to condemn "atheistic Russia," Niebuhr probed American religiosity and called for a genuine faith more equal to the time:

A culture which has sought the meaning of human existence in simple historical fulfillment is naturally at its wit's end, when contemporary history offers nothing but calculated risks, disappointed hopes and stern duties without hope of immediate reward. No political exigency can restore the nonchalance of a faith which declares with St. Paul: "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." Yet without such a faith the trials and burdens, the catastrophes and tragedies of our age will be unbearable. The crowning irony of our age consists precisely in the fact that the tragic aspects of human existence, man's sin and death, having been denied by our philosophies, express themselves in more terrible terms than in any previous period of history. We thought we had conquered death by our conquest of nature and now we face death in an undeniably social (moral) dimension. We are in peril of destroying each other.31

30Niebuhr, "Ten Fateful Years," p. 3.
31Niebuhr, "Ten Fateful Years," p. 3.
In the face of this social and moral evil Niebuhr contended that neither sentimental Christianity which would speak only of love and conversion of mankind to Christianity, nor the secular idealism which would barter away the greatest treasure of western civilization to avoid atomic war could provide the answer. Niebuhr asserted that leaders must remain both flexible and toughminded, knowing that it is impossible to do good in the world without also doing evil, and dependent upon the grace of God for the ultimate judgment of right and wrong. Niebuhr believed the irony of the situation was clearly seen in the way the very weapons upon which America depended for the preservation of civilization would also destroy that civilization if ever they were used. Niebuhr's judgment was that Americans should continue to work with a realistic faith for the avoidance of war and the establishment of world peace.
Analysis of Speeches

Analysis of the Sermon, "Anger and Forgiveness"

Historical Background.

Even while the war against fascism was in progress, and long before the outcome was certain, Niebuhr expressed the hope that the Allies would not be vindictive in victory. In 1944 he wrote: "Ruthlessness toward the vanquished can no more give us security than vindictiveness toward bandits and pirates can achieve ordered government in those regions of land and sea where lack of civil authority invites lawless men to flourish." At the war's end Niebuhr spoke with compassion about the vanquished foe, and particularly about Germany:

The defeated enemy has been more completely destroyed than any nation in history, at least since the day when the Romans destroyed Carthage. That is partly because the nation was ruled by a tyranny which was able to hold a beaten nation in battle until almost the last ounce of life blood was drawn from it. The same tyranny has also been able to destroy every crystallization of new political life during its long and terrible reign; so that Germany is a political vacuum as well as an economic desert. It is still a question whether our obliteration bombing which has reduced the whole of western and central Germany to a rubble heap, was necessary for victory, though no less an authority than Von Runstedt has affirmed that precision bombing was indispensable to our victory. If it was necessary for victory we have another proof of the total character of total war.


During the forties Niebuhr spoke to the question of America's relations to the defeated nations in his sermon, "Anger and Forgiveness."  

**Thesis.**

In view of the destructiveness of the war Niebuhr now called for a tempering of righteous indignation in favor of compassion for the defeated and almost destroyed enemies. In the language of the biblical text, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil." Niebuhr asserted that anger, although necessary and appropriate as a response to the totalitarian threat to world peace, must have limits in terms of time. Anger had been appropriate during the war, but Niebuhr considered a continuing hostility toward the vanquished foe inappropriate and immoral. The time now had come for forgiveness, for rebuilding what had been torn down, for healing the rifts between nations in the hope of world peace.

**Line of Reasoning.**

Niebuhr's line of argument in this speech may be traced as follows: (1) Anger is ambiguous in that it may produce either good or evil. (2) The Christian use of anger is preferable to the Stoic doctrine of detachment.

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34 Reinhold Niebuhr, *Discerning the Signs of the Times* (New York: Scribners, 1946) pp. 21-38. References to the texts of the four speeches analyzed in this chapter will be indicated by the appropriate page numbers in parentheses after each reference.
because the latter lacks social responsibility. (3) The cure for the adverse effect of anger is not detachment but the recognition that anger is always subject to distortion by pride and self-interest. (4) While anger serves a necessary function in setting wrongs right, it can also poison future relationships between persons and nations if carried so long that it hardens into hatred. (5) There is a need for forgiveness now that justice has been meted out upon Japan and Germany.

Arrangement.

The speech's logical pattern of development is not apparent upon first reading. Niebuhr's ideas do not develop in a straight line, one idea building upon another, with each idea discussed only once in the speech. The listener rather has the impression of being led up a spiral staircase to the summit of the speaker's viewpoint. This speech has a single idea to which the speaker returns again and again each time elaborating his thesis further. Niebuhr carefully crafted this speech psychologically, moving from generally accepted observations of secondary importance to a generally unaccepted application of primary importance. Five distinct cycles of discussion about "anger and forgiveness" may be distinguished in this speech, each cycle containing both a positive statement about the value of anger and a negative statement about the destructiveness of anger nurtured into long-standing hatred.
In the first cycle Niebuhr stated his basic understanding of the tension which exists between anger and forgiveness:

Anger is the root of both righteousness and sin. We are aroused to anger when men take advantage of us or of those for whom we are concerned; when they violate the dignity of man; or when they commit some other flagrant wrong. We are angry in the presence of injustice because we are emotional as well as rational creatures; and we react in the wholeness of our character to evil. Only a perversely detached person can view the commitment of a wrong without anger; and only a morally callous and indifferent person contemplates evil-doing without emotion.

Yet anger is also the root of much evil. Our emotions are more personal and less detached than our reason. We are inclined to be very unfair when we are angry. If we repay the hurt in anger, we usually repay with very heavy interest. One of the first problems of primitive society was to place some restraints upon vengeance. These restraints gradually grew into the juridical procedure of modern society, in which the community as such assumes responsibility both for restraining the victim and punishing the criminal. It has long been recognized that justice is not served when men are "judges in their own case." The total community has a more detached perspective upon the disputes between citizens and upon the wrong which one may do the other than have the parties to the dispute. Thus we have found a social method of eliminating some of the evil which flows from anger. Yet we continue to face the residual problem of being angry without sinning. (pp. 21, 22)

In this section the speaker began his discussion in the most general terms, that of societies in general and their quest for justice. He spoke generally of the injustices which occur when people are allowed to "take the law into their own hands." In the second cycle Niebuhr further elaborated two philosophies about destructive anger.
He was interested in showing that the Christian way of dealing with anger is better than the Stoic attitude of detachment which is often prescribed as the cure for destructive anger. This Stoic view is inferior to the Christian view because it equates anger with sin and would re-write the text to read: "Be not angry so that you may not sin." The speaker warned that such detachment also cuts the nerve of human compassion and other socially valuable emotions. Instead of detachment Niebuhr advocated the control of anger by an honesty in which one admits his own self-interest and pride. This second cycle was summarized as the speaker restated his thesis: "We ought to be angry when wrong is done; but we must learn the difficult art of being angry without sinning." (p. 24) In the third cycle Niebuhr added an application of his thesis to international relations, especially in the aftermath of war. There is a time when righteous anger must be expressed in the face of exploitative and abusive totalitarian nations. But when correction is made and the foe is vanquished it is necessary for the victors graciously to admit their own imperfections and self-interests in order to begin the slow process of reconciliation.

In returning to his thesis for the fourth time, Niebuhr stated his idea in terms of social morality and psychology. The advice to "hate evil and love the evil doer" is neither morally responsible nor psychologically possible. Just as punishment for the criminal is necessary
both for prevention of future crimes and for the correction of the criminal, so exploiting nations must be stopped. A genuine anger toward both the aggressors and their aggression is necessary if the evil is to be stopped. On the other hand, there should be limits to correction and the corrective value of punishment should not be overrated. Niebuhr warned that unless both parties in a quarrel are able to forgive they can be destroyed in a "vicious circle of hatred." (p. 33) In this carefully prepared context Niebuhr called for forgiveness of Japan and Germany. In the fifth restatement of his thesis the speaker mentioned the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation for America's world image. America is seen as a just nation if it stands for decency and goodness even to the point of war, but we must not try to trade forever on the prestige we have gained as the champions of justice in the world. As Niebuhr approached the end of his speech he restated his point one final time, making the last point his climax: limitation of human anger is a necessity to prevent men from assuming the place of God as the judge of all men.

The wrath of the righteous man against injustice is an engine of virtue in a given moment. But if it is unduly prolonged and proudly seeks to clothe itself in the garments of divine justice, its very pretensions become the source of a new injustice. Man is a creature of the day and hour. Since he also has the capacity to transcend days and hours and look into the past for lessons and into the future for promises and perils, it is neither possible nor right to limit him to the day and hour. Yet the biblical injunction, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," just as the warning, "Take therefore no
thought for the morrow," are[sic] essentially right, though not literally observable. They are warnings to men not to forget the limited character of their insight into the future, and the partial character of their justice, and the short-range virtue of their anger. (p. 37)

A careful study of this speech reveals that the speaker used an intricate and complex pattern of arrangement. The main thesis, the need for both anger and forgiveness in correcting social injustice, gains strength as the speaker moves along stating and restating his point with fresh elaboration each time until the total effect is a well developed and persuasive statement of his main point.

This speech is psychologically well planned for the post-war audience which may not have been eager to forgive where Germany and Japan were concerned. Beginning with more acceptable general observations about his subject, the speaker proceeded by defining and contrasting his view with the Stoic view of detachment. He was careful every step of the way to admit the need for righteous indignation in correction of social injustice. The speaker's appeal for mercy on Japan and Germany was well concealed until he had mentioned the Christian tradition of compassion and the short term effectiveness of anger for rehabilitation purposes. This specific application came well down into the body of the speech, in the third main section. Almost immediately after making the appeal he added the emotional appeal of a description of the devastation suffered by the vanquished nations. Niebuhr
concluded his speech with a reminder that all nations are self-interested and that it is not becoming of any nation self-righteously to hold other nations in disdain by an anger which has hardened into hatred.

Forms of Support.

To establish his points Niebuhr used a wide variety of supporting materials in this speech. Characteristically he drew upon his own understanding of many subjects in order to clarify, explain, illustrate and support his thesis. In the beginning he explained the ambiguous nature of anger: it is both good and evil. In the second section he gave an exposition of the Christian and Stoic ways of dealing with anger, quoting and explaining the views of Epictetus in the process. In this section he also observed that victors often forget their own selfishness and consequently become harsh and overbearing toward the vanquished. A familiar Niebuhrian thesis was explained: that nations are constitutionally self-righteous. In the third part of the speech Niebuhr analyzed the problem of international justice by comparing punishment of the offending nations with the punishment of a criminal. As in most of Niebuhr's speeches, the speaker depended for persuasion largely upon his own ethical appeal as an authority in the field.

For the sake of both clarification and argument Niebuhr used several illustrations and examples in this speech. Early in the discussion the speaker illustrated
the problem of long range anger by contrasting the way children and adults deal with anger: children are more capable of "forgiving and forgetting." Throughout the speech Niebuhr used several examples from history to show the destructiveness of anger kept too long. He reminded his audience that the vanquished has a longer memory than the victor by mentioning the lasting hatred of the British in Ireland and of America's South for the North after Sherman's "march to the sea." In refuting the Stoic idea of detachment Niebuhr used an example from recent history when he said that many Christians prior to the war mistook Stoic detachment for Christian charity when an authentic Christian faith would rather have called them to militant righteous indignation against the offending nations.

At several points in the speech the speaker anticipates the objections of his listeners and refutes their arguments beforehand. To those who found Epictetus' doctrine of detachment attractive Niebuhr said,

"When a person does ill by you," declared the Stoic saint, Epictetus, "or speaks ill of you, remember that he acts or speaks from a supposition of doing his duty...." Setting out from these principles, you will meekly bear a person who reviles you; for you will say upon every occasion, "It seemed so to him." One need only suggest such advice to, let us say, a Pole in a German concentration camp to realize that there is something wrong with it. It is very good advice in dealing with all sorts of disputes and conflicts in which both disputants are equally honest and well-intentioned. In such cases it is valuable to try to place oneself in the position of the other in order to mitigate the tendency of regarding any position, in conflict with one's own, as wrong. But when real evil is done such detach-
ment is immoral. The proper attitude toward evil is anger. (pp. 24, 25)

As he continued his critique of the philosophy of detachment Niebuhr argued from what is possible and what is impossible: detachment implies objectivity, but those who are aware of international injustices cannot be considered mere objective observers. They are participants and as such anger is the only appropriate response. (p. 25) To answer the admonition "hate the evil but not the evil doer" Niebuhr contended that this kind of fine distinction was neither socially responsible nor psychologically possible. It is precisely because evil and the evil doer cannot be separated that anger must be limited in duration: "let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

Niebuhr rarely appealed to his audience's emotions so directly as he did in this speech. By a description of the suffering already inflicted upon Germany and Japan he not only established himself as a compassionate man, but he also expressed his anger against those who would not forgive.

The injunction, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," achieves a special relevance in a war in which the immediate consequences of our wrath against immediate wrong have contrived a more terrible punishment than we could have consciously devised. The cities of Japan and Germany lie in ruins. Highly industrialized communities have been reduced to the simplicities and privations of primitive society. Mighty cities are mere heaps of rubble. If the wickedness of modern aggressor nations has been more terrible than previous violations of justice, so also is the punishment more terrible which total defeat in a total war entails.
This punishment may not incline the heart of the foe to repentance; but if it does not, no calculated increase of punishment will. The conferences of the victorious great powers, solemnly deciding to hold the victors completely in the chains of an indefinite occupation, and seeking by mere punishment both to turn the heart of the foe to repentance and to maim his power sufficiently to make him incapable of future wrong-doing, present us with the most pathetic symbols of the vainglory of man. How easily we assume the position of the Almighty, in both our sense of power and our sense of justice. How little we realize that the two objects of punishment — to maim the power of the foe and to turn his heart to repentance — are incompatible. If we accomplish the one, we can not achieve the other. How completely we fail to recognize that the sword of the victor is a very confusing symbol of the divine justice under which alone repentance is possible! But our effort to draw upon the prestige of that justice for untold years transmutes justice into injustice. If only we could understand the wisdom of not letting the sun go down upon our wrath. (pp. 34, 35)

Finally, the speaker used Scripture and references to biblical history as an important form of support for this speech. Repeatedly Niebuhr repeated the words of his text: "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath." At the end of his speech Niebuhr asserted that "one of the profoundest insights of the Hebraic prophets was their conception of the various nations of the world acting as the executors of divine judgment." By this assertion he presented the biblical view that no single nation should see itself as morally superior to other nations, secure in the belief that it alone is used of God to bring about justice on other nations. (pp. 36, 37)
The variety of forms of support used in this speech include analysis and exposition by the speaker, use of examples from daily life and history, refutation of anticipated arguments by his listeners, emotional appeals in description of conquered nations, and appeals to biblical authority.

Style.

Allowing for the fact that this speech was carefully prepared for print by the speaker after the speech was delivered certain observations may still be made concerning style. Niebuhr's style is marked in this speech by compactness and elegance, as is illustrated by the following passage:

One of the blessings of childhood is the shortness of the child's memory. When their elders do not interfere in the quarrels of their children, the latter usually follow the Scriptural injunction "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." But the memory of older people, and particularly the collective memory of nations, harbors anger over past wrongs to the point where it poisons all human relations. Consider, for instance, the Irish memory of the wrongs which England once committed as a source of hatred, even after England had done much to atone for past wrongs; or the memories in our own south of Sherman's march to the sea; or the bitter memories of all vanquished people. One of the tragic aspects of human history is the fact that the vanquished have longer memories than the victors. The victors could profitably have longer memories and the vanquished shorter ones. (p. 23)

Citing the destructive capabilities of anger Niebuhr used language which was both forceful and suggestive:

We are inclined to be very unfair when we are angry. If we repay hurt for hurt in anger, we
usually repay with very heavy interest.
(pp. 21, 22)

Perhaps it may be explained by the fact that this speech was prepared for print and meant to be read, but Niebuhr occasionally engaged in language which, while forceful, was academic in tone:

Nations are always judges in their own case. The pretensions of victors that they are impartial judges is one of the most fruitful egoistic corruptions of justice are obscured, except of course to the vindictiveness. If the vanquished react with cynicism to these pretensions, their natural response is immediately regarded as further proof of their congenital wickedness. (p. 27)

Assessment of Effectiveness.

"Anger and Forgiveness" is one of Niebuhr's most carefully designed speeches in terms of audience psychology. He moved from what was generally accepted to that which was not so generally accepted by gradually adding argument to argument until the call for mercy seemed irresistible. He clarified his position by contrasting Christian anger and forgiveness with the Stoic ideal of detachment. In refuting the arguments of idealists who would do away with anger completely as totally undesirable Niebuhr showed his own realism about the need for righteous indignation in the face of modern barbarism. He furnished his listeners with examples from daily life and from history to prove, illustrate, and clarify his point about anger and forgiveness. Niebuhr's speech was climaxed toward the end by strong emotional appeals as he described the tragic con-
ditions in war-devastated Japan and Germany. In terms of speechcraft this must have been a thought-provoking and effective speech.

Analysis of the Speech, "An Adequate Faith For the World Crisis"

Historical Background

By 1947 many Americans were experiencing a crisis of faith in America's future. Since the end of the war American fears were continually heightened as the cold war tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union increased. Soviet Russia was the obvious and most serious threat to American security and fears centered around the uneven and unpredictable international relationships and the rapidly changing balance of military power between these two great nations.

Reinhold Niebuhr was invited to speak about the individual's role in this international situation at the Sixteenth Annual Forum sponsored by the New York Herald Tribune and conducted at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. Niebuhr spoke on Tuesday, October 21, 1947. The occasion, theme, and agenda were detailed in the introduction to the speech as it appeared in Representative American Speeches.35

35"An Adequate Faith for the World Crisis," by Reinhold Niebuhr, Representative American Speeches, A. Craig Baird, ed. (New York: Wilson Co., 1948) pp. 227-234. References in this analysis to the editor's introduction and to the speech text itself will be indicated by the appropriate page number in parentheses after each quotation.
The Forum theme was "Modern Man: Slave or Sovereign?" Four sessions were held on October 20, 21, and 22. The theme of the second session was "Spiritual Contributions to the Strength of Man." Harriet Hiett was chairman; Ralph Linton talked on "Why Men Believe"; Chaim Weizmann, "Judaism"; Barbara Ward, "Catholicism"; John Foster Dulles, "Protestantism"; Bidhan Chandra Roy, "Non-Violence for Modern Man"; Charles Morris, "Testimony of American Youth." Dr. Niebuhr was the closing speaker. (p. 227)

Niebuhr evidently chose to speak on the topic "An Adequate Faith for the World Crisis" because he believed most modern Americans of the time misunderstood the crisis and miscalculated the kind of faith required to live productive lives during these days of crisis.

Thesis.

Niebuhr asserted that the crisis was much broader than most Americans believed, and he discussed the problem in three dimensions: the threat to democratic civilization, the threat to all civilization, and the spiritual threat to persons as they tried to cope with the distressing situation. America has traditionally looked out upon the world with a self-interested pride of power, of independence, and of high idealism. Now the situation demanded that Americans develop "a more adequate faith." This more adequate faith would seek, not simply to preserve democratic civilization, but to make democratic civilizations just and worthy of survival. This faith would broaden the concerns of its self-interest to admit the interests of other nations and participate in international affairs as equal partners without superior wisdom and without precon-
ceived answers for all the world's problems. To reduce the personal spiritual crisis, this more adequate faith would combine realistic vigilance without giving in to hysteria, meanwhile allowing the individual peace of mind to work for the improvement of the world situation.

**Line of Reasoning.**

The development of Niebuhr's thought in this speech may be traced as follows: (1) There are three dimensions of the current world crisis: the threat to western democracy, the threat of a world without an international community, and the threat to personal peace inherent in the perplexing world situation. (2) The most obvious of these is the first, but the most serious problem is the last. (3) In all three dimensions something more than the conventional policies based on faith in democracy is needed; there is a need for a "more adequate faith." (4) To face the threat to western democracy we need the kind of humility and patient courage needed to make our cause just and therefore secure about itself. (5) If the nations are to make any progress toward solving the problem of international community they must learn a kind of humility which will repent of self-interest and venture out beyond old national traditions to seek new world community. (6) Americans and all Westerners must abandon utopian dreams and learn to work for slow, piecemeal progress while remaining vigilant to the dangers of war. In the face of the current crisis those who are most productive
will avoid the opposite perils of hysteria and complacency in favor of this more realistic "adequate" faith. (7) What is really needed is not a "universal culture" but a "religious forbearance of our fellow men."

Arrangement.

The arrangement of this speech includes more than one pattern of logical arrangement. Niebuhr approached his audience with a well-prepared psychological strategem: he led his listeners from the more obvious and less complex threat to national security to the less obvious and more complex danger to individual spiritual survival. The dominant pattern of arrangement was distributive as the speaker discussed each danger in turn. Within the discussion of the three threats to mankind Niebuhr used the problem-solution order: the speaker explained three problems and gave three solutions.

Unlike most of Niebuhr's speeches "An Adequate Faith for the World's Crisis" begins with an introduction which is discrete from the rest of the speech. The transitional elements of this speech are also more visible than in most of Niebuhr's speeches. The first main transition from the introduction to the body of the discussion is the least clear:

Perhaps it may seem foolish to speak of moral or religious resources for overcoming the peril of the first dimension. We face a truculent and ruthless foe, who is probably not as intent upon world dominion as some people imagine but who is certainly driven by peculiar dogmas and by a probable inferiority complex to defend
himself against fancied or real enemies by rejecting every offer of cooperation and by stirring up as much confusion in the world community as possible. (p. 229)

The second main section of the speech was introduced by a transition which seems equally involved but clearer:

But even if the world's hope has not been frustrated by the irrelevancies and the truculence which the Communist creed has introduced into our situation, we still would have been in a world crisis. For there is another dimension of the crisis. A technical civilization has produced a potential world community, but not an actual one. (p. 230)

In the transition to the third main point the speaker first reviewed his first two points and then proceeded to his final idea.

The first and second level of the world crisis -- the peril in which a democratic civilization stands and in which civilization as such stands -- engage the minds of our generation. These perils are obvious and immediate. I would like to suggest, however, that there is a third level or dimension of the crisis which is not so obvious but which may be more important than the others. It is the crisis in our culture caused by the fact that the faith of modern man has not prepared him for the tragedies which he experiences and does not help him to interpret his urgent tasks as meaningful. (p. 231)

A rhetorical technique Niebuhr used to remind his audience of his theme in the second and third main sections of the speech was the recurring word "adequate" which gave a parallel structure to his thought: "an adequate faith," "a religion adequate," "an adequate faith." (pp. 231, 233).

Forms of Support.

From the first of this speech Niebuhr assumed that his audience agreed with him that there was a crisis
resulting from the post-war tensions and the threat of the international Communist movement. He did not attempt to establish this point but proceeded enthymematically to discuss the "dimensions" of the crisis.

This entire speech depended for its support upon the authority of Niebuhr as an analyst of the world situation. Underlying the speaker's analysis was his ethical appeal: the speaking situation presented the Union professor and other specialists who were invited as authorities in their own fields to address the complex international problems of the day.

As an authority speaking in his chosen area of expertise Niebuhr relied basically upon his own analysis of the world situation in the perspective of the history of western culture and Christian thought. An example of Niebuhr's analysis is this paragraph:

Our culture has been dominated by one idea: that history would solve all our problems. We hoped the historical growth and development would eliminate methods of force and bring all politics under the dominion of reason; that it would bring victory to democracy everywhere and eliminate tyranny; that it would abolish poverty and injustice; and that it would move inevitably toward a parliament of mankind and a federation of the world. These are false hopes. (pp. 231, 232)

In this entire speech there was no quotation from other authorities and only a single short quotation of Scripture. The audience was asked to accept Niebuhr's argument as outlined above upon the basis of his ethical appeal and integrity as a specialist knowledgeable about world affairs
and Christian social ethics.

**Style.**

This speech contains an elegance of thought and a cogency of expression which shows that Niebuhr must have polished the manuscript for publication. For example, a paragraph asserting the need for a new realism reads:

An adequate faith for a day of crisis will contain what modern men have completely dismissed, namely, a tragic sense of life and a recognition of the Cross as the final center of life's meaning. The Scripture describes the works of the night, as those of sleep and drunkenness: "They that sleep in the night and they that be drunken are drunken in the night." Let us who are of the day watch and be sober. We cannot afford either the sleep of complacency or the drunkenness of hysteria. We must watch and be sober. But this watchfulness and sobriety is the fruit of a profounder sense of the meaning of our existence, than any of the credos which have recently guided us. A much more modest estimate of human power and of human virtue might bring us nearer and quicker to the goal of a tolerable peace and a sufferable world order for all nations. (p. 233)

Already mentioned above is the stylistic technique Niebuhr used in repeating phrases in order to keep his theme before his audience. Not only did he repeat the phrase "an adequate faith," but also in the passage explaining the disillusionment of modern man about the hopes of progress, twice he introduced ideas by the words, "We are driven to despair because..."

...We are driven to despair because the last war did not result in a stable peace, because we falsely thought that every task had to be justified by some completely new tomorrow. But no tomorrow is ever completely new. We must learn all over again to exploit the qualitative meaning of our duties and tasks today without too much regard for what tomorrow
may bring forth.

We are driven to despair because we cannot build out of hand the kind of stable world we desire, having discovered that recalcitrant forces in history stand against our will and our purposes. We must again acquire a faith which finds meaning in human life, even though no person or generation ever has the power to complete the ideal meaning of life.... (p. 232)

The language and the sparsity of historical and theological allusion provide a less academic tone in this speech than most of Niebuhr's university speeches. However, when the speech is taken on its own without comparison with Niebuhr's university sermons it presents challenge enough even for an educated audience, as the editor of Representative American Speeches comments:

The address was probably by no means easy to listen to -- even for his highly intelligent audience. It calls for rereading and thoughtful review. Its language is comparatively abstract and academic. It is, however, an address of high ability, "representative" of one type of public discourse. (p. 228)

Assessment of Effectiveness.

With the information made available in Representative American Speeches the speaking situation of this speech can be viewed more precisely than some of the others in this study in terms of audience adaptation and probable effectiveness. This speech is also the only one analyzed here which was prepared in manuscript form for publication in a speech journal. The unique feature of this speech is the condensation of the speaker's statement into only seven pages of the printed text, less than one-half of the
space usually required for the other printed speeches studied here. This truncation of thought and language probably was a barrier to effective communication since both Niebuhr's analysis and his answer could have been better understood with more elaboration.

The speech was prepared with careful attention to the psychology of educating an audience to unfamiliar and complex ideas: Niebuhr moved from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the more complex. In this speech Niebuhr is seen as an expert nationally acclaimed for his analysis of the international scene. The speaker's reputation as a veteran political analyst and social ethicist was the basis of his persuasiveness with his audience. His listeners were asked to believe in Niebuhr's message because of what he had experienced, what he knew, and who he was.

In the view of this writer the speech was probably not effective as a vehicle for the communication of Niebuhr's message. The complexity of Niebuhr's thought, both in the analysis of the problem and in the prescription of the solution, was too great to be communicated effectively in so short a statement as he made on this occasion. The language and tone of the speech were probably too academic for the public forum in which he spoke.
Analysis of A Sermon Delivered At Harvard Chapel

Historical Background.

On April 24, 1955, Reinhold Niebuhr preached at the Harvard chapel using Matthew 5:20 as his text: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." The occasion was a Sunday morning worship service which included in the Order of Worship the following elements: congregational hymn and Scripture reading as a call to worship, prayer for God's Blessing concluding with the congregational recitation of the Lord's Prayer, congregational Hymn, responsive reading of a psalm, choir offering in Latin, Old Testament lesson, another hymn in Latin, announcement of an organ recital the following week, reading from the New Testament, antiphonal reading and hymn by the leader of worship and the choir, the pastoral prayer, congregational hymn, the sermon by Niebuhr, a congregational hymn. The entire service

36 This analysis is based upon a tape of the sermon made available through the courtesy of Harvard Library and transcribed by the writer. Since the tape of the sermon was undated and the Harvard Librarians could not supply the date the writer has assigned this date to the sermon through the following process of deduction: During the service an announcement was made of an organ recital which would be given in the chapel the following Sunday, "May 1." During the general historical period indicated in this sermon only two years had Sundays falling on May 1: 1949 and 1955. Since the tape indicated that the sermon was preached after Niebuhr's stroke in 1952 the writer assumes the date of the sermon is April 24, 1955.
lasted fifty-four minutes and Niebuhr's sermon was twenty-three minutes in length. Audience feedback was clearly audible throughout the sermon. Niebuhr's wit brought laughter several times from what seems to have been a large audience. During the course of his sermon Niebuhr made repeated comments about the speaking situation. He recalled that he was speaking to "an academic congregation and recalled a previous occasion when he had preached at "this university."

In the course of his remarks Niebuhr also referred to the broader historical context of the times. "Think of our situation now. We're fighting a terrible foe... We wrestle him for our liberty and for our life...." When Niebuhr preached this sermon American nerves had been rubbed raw by the demagoguery of McCarthyism and the exaggerated fears of the Second Red Scare. In this sermon Niebuhr is speaking to the self-understanding of Americans and particularly of those future American leaders who came to worship at Harvard chapel. While the text referred originally to the self-righteous religious fundamentalism of Jesus' day, Niebuhr applied the text to the political fundamentalism of his own day. Much as the Pharisees displayed a self-righteous arrogance, their modern day political counterparts seemed determined blindly to see American relations with Russia only "in black and white." If Niebuhr's analysis was correct the root problem was their understanding of themselves. If the next generation
of American leaders was as simplistic and as self-righteous as some of their fathers a productive relationship with Russia, perhaps even the avoidance of war, would be impossible.

**Thesis.**

Niebuhr wanted to convince his listeners that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," and consequently they should be less arrogant in their judgments of others and of other nations. As "good" people pursue the praiseworthy goals of goodness, self-realization and happiness they invariably infringe upon the rights of others and so become guilty while they are pursuing goodness. Since every person's life is a mixture of good and evil it is also true that every nation's life has that same mixture. This means that America must continue its struggle with Russia for justice in the world, yet with a humility born of the knowledge of its own faults.

Niebuhr's paradoxical thesis is well summed up in the prayer he offered at the end of the sermon:

> Grant us, O Lord, fearlessly to contend against evil. But to know also that the taint of evil against which we contend is in us also that we may not be wanting in either courage or charity. Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, Amen.

**Line of Reasoning.**

The speaker's circuitous route to his main point may be traced as follows: (1) While the meticulous legalism of the ancient Scribes and Pharisees seems irrelevant
actually suffered from two misunderstandings of good and evil that still plague us as modern people. (2) The first mistake was that they "sought goodness too directly" as a "duty" and supposed that it was available in that way. The truth is that goodness, happiness, and self-realization are all the by-products of life when one loses himself in a cause greater than himself. (3) The second misunderstanding is related to the first. The Pharisees also believed they could easily distinguish between good and evil, and between good people and evil people. The result was that they became self-righteous and arrogant. We also become self-righteous and arrogant when we make such simple judgments about the United States and Russia today. (4) The remedy for these two grave errors is the Christian gospel which allows for the ambiguities and the complexities of human existence and calls for a final solution only in the mercy of a forgiving God.

Arrangement.

The first hearing of this speech seems to indicate that the speaker used a distributive pattern of arrangement. Near the beginning of the speech Niebuhr said that he would discuss two errors of the Pharisees and of modern Americans. Within the discussion of the first "error" Niebuhr named three "dear prizes" of life: goodness, happiness, and self-realization and he discussed each of these at some length. However, upon more careful analysis it becomes clear that the logical order of problem-
solution forms the basic structure of this speech. In the first two sections of the speech Niebuhr discussed the "two grave errors" and in the last part of the speech he presented the Christian gospel as the corrective for these misunderstandings.

Since this is one of only two speeches analyzed directly from recordings of Niebuhr's speaking, questions must be asked here regarding audience adaptation in arrangement. Early in his speech the speaker gave his audience an indication of his chosen direction without disclosing the controversial application he would make at the end:

If the meticulous legalism were their only weakness this would be irrelevant. But as a matter of fact the meticulous legalism was merely the product of two very grave errors to which we are all tempted, and about which I want to speak. The one error was to seek goodness too directly, and the other was to make too absolutely the distinction between good and evil.

At the beginning of each of the main sections the audience was signalled about the transition of thought. Niebuhr announced his first main section with the words, "They sought goodness too directly...." and the second by "They made too sharp a distinction between good and evil." The professor introduced the solution to these problems in the third main section of the speech with the transitional words, "Now all of this may seem to be heretical...."

Transitions within the main sections were not as clear. In the first section he listed the three "prizes
of life: goodness, self-realization, and happiness." In the discussion of these he may have confused his listeners in that he proceeded by equating "goodness" with "self-realization," discussing them together while he omitted any further reference to "happiness."

Even upon the first hearing the introduction, discussion, and conclusion are easily recognized. In this speech Niebuhr included an unusually clear and distinct section of "application" at the end of his speech when the insights of his discussion are brought to bear in the current international situation:

Think of our situation now. We're fighting a very terrible foe. We wrestle him for our liberty and for our life, but certainly we will be less than human if while we're wrestling with him we do not recognize that we're wrestling with him on the abyss of mutual annihilation, and that the ambiguity of all human existence between the righteous and the unrighteous has thus been brought dramatically home to us, all simple secularists and all simple moralists alike.

The speaker did not clearly mark off his concluding statement by any obvious transitional statement. A sense of completion was achieved by a sentence which grew naturally out of the discussion of his last main point: "No, life has caught up with us and we know now what we always ought to have known: that nothing but the infinite mercy is adequate to the infinite pathos of human existence." His main thesis was then presented to the audience in his concluding prayer as mentioned above.
Forms of Support.

The forms of support found in this speech in the order of their frequency of use are: the speaker's own analysis, quotation of authorities, examples from daily life, references to the speaker's personal experience, and refutation.

From the beginning of the speech to the end the speaker relied heavily upon his own understanding of his subject. The familiar pattern is assertion followed by his own explanation of the subject. In the introduction Niebuhr presented the quotation of Jesus about the legalism of the scribes and Pharisees to state that behind the historical situation of the text lay two basic errors. From his own understanding of the subject Niebuhr explained that these errors are "seeking goodness too directly" and "making too absolutely the distinction between good and evil." This analysis is Niebuhr's own, and the audience was asked to accept his exposition of the text at face value. In the first main section Niebuhr asserted that "there is guilt in responsibility" and then supported and illustrated his point by an analysis of the current dilemma regarding the prospect of atomic war with all of the responsibility and compromise involved in international diplomacy.

Later in the same section Niebuhr affirmed that "goodness, self-realization, and happiness cannot be had directly but are the by-products of life." He supported this assertion with another assertion based upon his own
understanding of life: those who grasp for life too directly destroy themselves.

In the second main section Niebuhr contended that life is a "bewildering complexity of love and self-love of creativity and destructiveness and that we can't draw a sharp line between them." To clarify his meaning the speaker gave his own exposition of Christ's parables of the Pharisee and the Publican and the wheat and the tares. To illustrate his assertion that life is a mixture of good and evil Niebuhr mentioned America's reluctant entrance into the Second World War as a mixture of good and evil. Niebuhr then applied his point by examination of the current relationship between the United States and Russia, showing how easy it is for Americans to become superior in their comparative judgments about themselves and Russians.

In the concluding remarks of the speech Niebuhr called for Christian humility on the basis of his understanding of the current world situation:

This is a very desperate foe. We wrestle him for our liberty and for our life, but certainly we will be less than human if while we're wrestling him we do not recognize that we're wrestling with him on the abyss of mutual annihilation, and that the ambiguity of all human existence between the righteous and the unrighteous man has thus been brought dramatically home to us, all simple secularists and all simple moralists alike....

Less prominent forms of support include quotations from notable thinkers and writers. Niebuhr quoted from George Allwell's essay on Mahatma Ghandi, and from
Archibald MacLeish to prove that responsible living always involves some guilt. At one point Niebuhr referred to Ralph Waldo Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance and then made a critical assessment of it. In all of these cases the authors quotes were used both to illustrate and to prove the speaker's point. The main thesis seemed to rest upon the speaker's own authority with his audience. At one point Niebuhr used a quotation from Christ to clinch his argument that fulfillment in life comes from investment of self outside one's own selfish interests: "whosoever seeketh to gain his life will lose it, and whosoever loses his life will find it."

In accommodation to his college audience, Niebuhr used examples from daily life to support and clarify his point. In the first section he asserted that one must invest himself outside himself to find fulfillment and illustrated his point by reference to his listeners' involvement in higher education: that duty and ambition were legitimate immediate incentives for achieving, but that true scholarship would flourish only when duty turned a labor of love. To establish the same point Niebuhr mentioned the process of courtship and marriage. Niebuhr then applied the insight concerning self-transcendence a third time by pointing to the situation in recent American history when the nation was pulled out of its own self-centeredness to participate in the Second World War. Once in this sermon Niebuhr appealed for proof
to his own personal experience. He related to his younger listeners how his generation had been fascinated with Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance.

This reference to Emerson was a minor but significant form of support in this speech. Niebuhr anticipated and refuted his opponent's argument by mentioning his early fascination with Emerson's assertion that devotion to Christ as an exceptional source of wisdom was odious to the thinking person. Emerson taught instead a gospel of self-reliance. In answering this kind of thinking, Niebuhr said:

Now I want to ask you in this wintry twentieth century what has become of Emerson’s self-reliant man? Everything has conspired, history has conspired to prove to us, if we are reluctant to admit it, that all of human life is involved in precisely the ambiguities that the gospel asserts and that in God's sight no man living is justified.

Less obvious in his printed sermons, one element of Niebuhr's speaking which becomes apparent on the tape recording is his sense of humor. This use of humor may be considered an enhancement of the speaker's ethical appeal and consequently an important positive factor in persuasion. In the reference to courtship and marriage mentioned above Niebuhr said:

The marvelous and wonderful thing about man is that no I can be an I without an encounter with a Thou. We are ourselves as we see ourselves in others, as we are made secure by the love of others, and as we forget ourselves in our concern for others. This is how we grow into real selfhood. When young men and young women in the morning of their life [sic] become
conscious, as indeed they have been conscious for some time, that God has created heterosexual man and woman and that a man is not complete in himself without a woman and a woman is not complete in herself without [sic] a man. (sic) We might calculate about this thing in rather prudential terms. And the young man might say, "Well, I think I've got to get married, and who can I find to marry." But ultimately this will not do. It is a wonderful thing that wanting of sufficient amount of grace to break the egocentricity of calculated prudence, nature has provided us with a kind of madness. (Laughter) We could not marry without this madness, the madness which transfers the center of the self from itself to another person. Thank God that happy marriages do not depend upon this original madness altogether because it is of short shrift (Laughter) and grace had [sic] to be added. (Laughter)

In discussing Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares Niebuhr said, "Now this parable is an offense to all simple moralists, and to all agriculturalists, and to all horticulturalists. (Laughter) Why should we not make a distinction between the weeds and the wheat...between the good and the evil, does not our life depend upon excluding the criminal from our societies...?"

When Niebuhr came to the main point of his speech, the answer Christianity provides for life, he communicated his point to his Harvard audience with the use of humor:

Now all of this may seem to be heretical. It is a part of the modern situation, I think, that it seems to be heretical. I remind you that it is a very orthodox doctrine, not that I commend it to an academic congregation by calling it orthodox. (Laughter) I remember preaching a sermon in this chapel years ago when one of the professors came to me after a while and said, "That was a very orthodox sermon." And I bridled at this and I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I mean I agree with it." (Laughter) Well now, we are willing to accept this definition of orthodoxy, but I think that the Christian belief is basically
that there was one time in history, one drama of history where all the obscurities of life were fully revealed in one person of history....

Style.

The word choice Niebuhr used in this speech shows that the speaker was capable of eloquence and power. Speaking of man's fragmentary wisdom and love in comparison with the love of Christ on the Cross Niebuhr said, "And there's a religious dimension from the standpoint of which the cross finds all men, not the unrighteous but all men -- the righteous and the unrighteous, ambiguous in their righteousness, fragmentary in their wisdom, and pathetic in their pretentions." In another place he asserted that true goodness is possible only when the person "breaks the chains of the prison house of self-concern." Elaborating the same point the speaker said, "And if we grasp after self-realization too desperately, too immediately, and too prematurely we destroy ourself [sic]. Self-realization is secured by the self going out from itself indeterminately in its creativities and in its loves." Speaking of America's reluctance to enter World War II Niebuhr said that "we shivered on the brink of this decision, of this responsibility for a decade..., and it is significant that we didn't have the sense of duty to make this decision. We were, as it were, taken by the scruff of our neck [sic] and thrown as a nation into this world situation...." After referring to America's early love affair
with Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance Niebuhr asked, "But now, I want to ask you in this wintry twentieth century what has become of Emerson's self-reliant man?"

Within the speech itself Niebuhr expressed his appreciation of eloquence. In the following passage he proclaimed his admiration for both the perceptiveness and the eloquence of Winston Churchill:

This is the situation, that we're living in a period where the attitude of Jesus himself and the truth of the gospel has been validated by our own experience in a way that Mr. Churchill has expressed so eloquently, "We are living," he says, "in a day when security is a child of terror, and survival the twin brother of annihilation." These are the paradoxes of our existence, they've always been there, they've been heightened to worldwide proportions so as to affect all of us. No, life has caught up with us and we know now what we always ought to have known: that nothing but the infinite mercy is adequate to the infinite pathos of human existence.

In the rush of his words Niebuhr made grammatical errors, particularly in matching the number of nouns and verbs. After reminding the audience that they attend college primarily to realize their intellectual potentialities he said, "How do we do this? Well, you know better than I how we do this but immediately both the whip of ambition and the whip of duty forces us to master the things we ought to master in order to realize the potentialities that are within us...." Delivery.

This speech was delivered in the mid-fifties after Niebuhr had suffered a stroke which had left him partially
paralyzed. Although not so serious as to obstruct communication, the speaker's impairment was noticeable in slurred and mispronounced words and perhaps even in the verbalized pauses which seemed to indicate some slight slowing of his ability to verbalize his ideas as quickly as he would have wished. These pauses notwithstanding, Niebuhr often delivered his ideas in bursts of rapid delivery, flooding his audience with torrents of complex and involved analysis at a rate almost too rapid to comprehend. The pitch of Niebuhr's voice ranged from higher levels to an almost guttural low growl at times. His accent bore marks of both his early German home and his long years spent in New York, and he pronounced words in unexpected ways. For example, he used the short "i" for the initial sound in "isolationism," and he accented the first syllable of "prestige" and then rapidly blended it with the next two words in the phrase "the prestige of goodness."

In spite of Niebuhr's partial impairment adjectives such as "vital," "dynamic," and "energetic" could appropriately be used to describe his delivery.

Assessment of Effectiveness.

This speech seems representative of the speaker at his best. Characteristically, Niebuhr's thought was not simple and straightforward; he made listeners work to follow the circuitous path of his reasoning. His thesis was arresting and timely in view of the historical context. Niebuhr supported his argument with a wide variety of
forms of support: his own expertise, the quotation of other authorities, examples from history, references to current situation, personal experiences, and references to the scripture text.

This sermon seems to have been an especially effective effort in communication for Niebuhr in terms of audience reaction. His audience participated with him sympathetically in the discussion of his topic, their laughter seemed to indicate that they were enjoying his speech immensely. Niebuhr related to his college audience by making reference to their academic pursuits, by anecdotes about his experiences at their university, by reference to courtship and marriage, and by references to their youth.

The speaker's delivery was marred by the residual effects of his stroke. His style was for the most part conversational with patches of eloquence. The effectiveness of the communication may have been reduced by the use of a few technical terms, by Niebuhr's habit of packing an inordinate amount of material into a single paragraph, and by his rapid rate.

In spite of these characteristic flaws in Niebuhr's speaking, the tape of this speech still conveys the magnetism of Niebuhr's personality, the penetration of his intellect, the quickness of his wit, and the earnestness of his purpose. In spite of all of its weaknesses this was a most effective effort in communication.
Analysis of the Sermon, "Advent In A Nuclear Age"

Historical Background.

Reinhold Niebuhr preached the sermon "Advent in a Nuclear Age," in the chapels of American universities in the late fifties. More than a decade had passed since the beginning of the Cold War and a long series of events had kept relations tense between Russia and the United States. During the late forties Americans had witnessed in dismay the Berlin blockade, the fall of Nationalist China, and the Russian explosion of an atomic bomb to mention only three especially distressing events. The Korean War frustrated Americans between 1950 and 1952. When Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected in 1952 the war soon came to an end, but Americans heard the Secretary of State speaking of "Brinkmanship," the art of facing up to the Russians while carefully avoiding war. By 1954 America experienced the second "Red Scare," hysteria set off by the fear of Communist subversion of our national institutions and led by a demagogue from Wisconsin named Joseph McCarthy. In 1956 the Hungarian revolt was brutally put down when 200,000 Soviet soldiers and hundreds of Russian tanks occupied that country.

37This analysis is based upon tape recording of the sermon and a transcript prepared by the writer. The tape was discovered in the tape library of the Presbyterian Seminary, Austin, Texas, by Wayne Dockery, a friend who sent this writer a copy of the recording.
The net results of these events even among concerned and informed Americans were frayed nerves and a loss of perspective regarding relations to the Soviet Union. Americans were frightened and weary of being frightened. Many Americans were tired of the fine distribution and subtle nuances of international diplomacy and had begun to speak in simplistic and absolute terms of America as a "good, Christian" nation in contrast with "atheistic Russia." Others found it easier to escape into enjoyment of America's post-war prosperity and a new world filled with gadgets and labor-saving devices. Niebuhr feared that this loss of perspective would at best damage the possibilities for productive future relations with Russia and at worst increase the danger of nuclear war.

Thesis.

Niebuhr must have chosen the title of his sermon to point up the irony of his main thesis, and this irony was emphasized even more if the speaker was speaking during the season of Advent. In this sermon Niebuhr seemed to say that if Advent symbolizes for the Jew and the Christian the "coming of the Lord" and the fulfillment of ultimate hopes this is a dream not to be realized in the nuclear age. Both great world powers have fallen far short of their noblest dreams. By contrast to the Communist utopia an authentic Christian messianism is not utopian but realistic in that it takes into account the tragedy of life and is willing to work for piecemeal progress in an
imperfect world. The immediate tasks to which Americans and Russians are called are no less significant, if they are less sublime than the erection of their utopias. In face of the threat of nuclear war Americans have a double responsibility: to preserve the treasures of Western civilization and to build bridges of understanding in the hope of peaceful co-existence with Russia. These tasks will require patience, steadfastness, courage, and a true sense of perspective. This perspective is available in an adequate understanding of the Christian faith. Niebuhr's thesis is stated in the final sentence of the speech: "In other words, I believe that the Christian gospel demands of us both responsible loyalty and a sense of humility which breeds the charity without which we never can live, but certainly can't live in a nuclear age."

**Line of Reasoning.**

The speaker's line of reasoning in this speech is clearly and easily followed: (1) The Advent (Messianic) hope of the Old Testament was for the coming of a Messiah who would be a Warrior-King mighty in battle, who can vindicate the cause of the oppressed, an administrator of perfect and imaginative justice, and the herald of the redemption of all of creation. In short, the Messianic hope of the Old Testament looked for a time when all that was wrong with the world would be set right by the Advent of the Coming One. (2) Christian messianism adds another dimension. In the person of Jesus Christ one does not see
the conquering hero, the judge who vindicates the poor and the abused and guarantees justice in the present. Rather he is one who died upon a cross and "gave his life a ransom for many." The word of the Cross means that hope is never completely fulfilled in human history as we know it but at the end of history. In short, life is tragic and there is no utopia possible in history. (3) This may seem irrelevant because today we are the heirs of two great competing views of history. On the one hand is the western idea of "progress": that history ultimately solves the problems of history. On the other hand, we confront dialectical materialism which sees life in terms of the inevitable conflict of the classes resulting finally in the achievement of the golden age of Communism. Both of these creeds are too simple and too utopian. Life never resolves itself so neatly as these schemes suggest. (4) However, we are not absolved from responsibility because the problems are complex. On the one hand the dangers of the Communist movement are real and significant, and Americans have a responsibility to guard and preserve what is valuable in Western civilization; on the other hand, Americans have a responsibility to build bridges of understanding with Russia. This second responsibility is so great that all Americans should see this quest for cooperation as a "second job."
Arrangement.

The arrangement of this speech follows the problem-solution order in a logical pattern. First the speaker presents the biblical understanding of the messianic hope as a background for the discussion of the problem. Next, Niebuhr gave an historical exposition of the problem presented by the fact that the two great philosophies of history in the world are too simple and utopian in expectation. Because they are less realistic than the biblical understanding of history each pretends to have superiority over the other and dogmatically pursues its own answer for the problems of history. The problem is the threat to world peace created by these competing ideologies.

After explaining the problem the speaker offers his solution: both the United States and Russia need to understand that no form of government is as ideal as it sees itself and that more realism would promote more cooperation between the super powers. Of Niebuhr's speeches studied here, this speech is the clearest example of the problem-solution order of arrangement.

Niebuhr's transitions in this speech were subtle and easily missed. Three times the speaker used the temporal-logical transitional term, "now." "Now I want to interpret this truth as best I can without being polemical against Judaism," he said in moving from one idea to the next in the first main section of the speech. Introducing the second main section of the speech Niebuhr said, "Now
that is the basis of the Christian faith..." After discussing the problems both East and West had in realizing their ideals the speaker introduced the final main section with the words, "Now I don't think that this situation ought in any way to absolve us of responsibility..." For the most part the transitional elements of the speech were obscure, depending more upon the logical movement of ideas than upon obvious verbal signposts.

The introduction, body, and conclusion of the speech are not obvious to the listener. The conclusion of the speech comes without any transitional signal but it does effectively sum up the speaker's point and drive home the need for the kind of change in viewpoint he advocated.

A scientific friend of mine, who has a Danish Lutheran background, told me this summer, "Don't you think that one place where Christians and secular idealists could agree and that is that if nuclear dilemma isn't the ultimate judgment that Christians are talking about -- it is certainly a penultimate judgment" -- and so penultimate that it must strike us all with humility and say, "this is our second job." [sic]

I believe that the Christian gospel demands of us both responsible loyalty and a sense of humility which breeds the charity without which we never can live -- but we certainly can't live in a nuclear age.

**Forms of Support.**

Niebuhr employed a full array of forms of support for this speech. The major forms of support were biblical exposition, quotation of authorities, references to current events, and the speaker's own exposition of the history of ideas. Niebuhr's exposition of biblical ideas ran through-
out the speech. Niebuhr spent almost half of the speech explaining the messianic hope as expressed in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The following passage shows how Niebuhr mixed biblical exposition, historical and biological references, and personal reflection:

What is the logic of these messianic expectations? In the presence of some of my Old Testament colleagues I'll hazard the opinion that the genius of these messianic expectations are [sic] that they are the inevitable by-products of a prophetic religion that relates God and history and lays the foundation for the whole of what we call our western spirituality, that does not flee history into eternity; that relates God to history but finds difficulty about the patches of meaninglessness and horrible injustices of the historical, the great drama of history. And I suppose this prophet Isaiah, the first Isaiah, didn't even anticipate the greater problem that came in the exilic and post-exilic period where they had to accept the punishment from the great empires around them as the punishment of God, though the second Isaiah said they were deviled for all their sins. This is the agony of relating history to the divine. But from a Christian standpoint we would have to say what is the relevance of this? And I must confess that as a young man of high school and at college I always heard these Advent texts and asked myself the question: "What is the relevance of these things, have they anything to do with the world we're living in?" (Though that was a world where there weren't as yet the memory of two world wars, but anybody who knew anything knew that history was full of terrible evils.) But the second and more important question that I raised myself, and it wasn't answered until I went to theological school: "What do these messianic expectations have to do with Jesus, called the Christ, who died on a cross? -- who wasn't the triumphant Messiah, who didn't slay the wicked, but who gave his life a ransom for many?

And that brings me to the second text of the New Testament which involves Christ's own radical reinterpretation of the messianic expectation and lays the very foundation of the Christian faith
and in a sense the whole Christian interpretation of life and history. This Jesus, according to the faith of the church, was the Messiah partly because he wasn't quite the Messiah that was expected. He died on a cross and he said that the Messiah would suffer many things and that he would give his life a ransom for many. This is to say that history ends in terms of its meaning and has a new beginning in this great drama of the life of our Lord. Now I believe this interpretation to be essentially true, and all the legends that are supposed to validate the so-called divinity of Christ are, for my part, a hindrance to my faith rather than a help because I feel that this is the point after the human situation and the relationship of the divine judgment and mercy to us is fully revealed...this is the truth.

It was mainly upon the basis of Niebuhr's understanding of Christian messianism that he argued his case for a more realistic view of international relations. Near the end of his last section Niebuhr made a brief reference to Jesus' parable of Dives and Lazarus but without any exposition.

This speech is unusual for Niebuhr in the large number of references to other authorities. Niebuhr quoted Augustine's *City of God* in support of the idea that history contains a mixture of both good and evil until the end of time. He quoted Martin Luther and John Knox to the effect that the Catholic church had had too simple a view of evil as that which was opposed to the Church. Niebuhr ended his speech by quoting the comment by an unnamed scientific friend who affirmed that control of the nuclear situation was of utmost importance. In the following passage Niebuhr used a quotation from Martin Buber to challenge the Christians in his audience to make their faith a
blessing to others:

Now I want to interpret this truth as best I can without being polemical against Judaism. I'm always frightened when I get letters from fanatic Christians who accuse the Jews of having willfully not accepted Jesus as the Messiah. I won't go into that, I simply say that Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher-theologian, has said for me the final word about the difference between the prophetic hope and the Christian faith. And he puts it like this: "For the Christian the Jew is a stubborn fellow who is still waiting for the Messiah; and for the Jew the Christian is the heedless fellow who declares that in an unredeemed world redemption has somehow or other taken place." Now I like this "somehow or other" coming from a Jew from whom many Christians have profited because it challenges us. We have to prove that this "somehow or other" means something, not by theological argument, but by the quality of our witness.

In the final section of the speech Niebuhr analyzed current events and the current world situation to illustrate and apply his thesis. He began by admitting that Communism was a real threat to world peace and that it was unforgettable how Hungary had been "suppressed brutally just a little while ago." Niebuhr suggested more humility, not as a policy decision for the question of whether the United States would protect Berlin, but as a general religious frame of thinking by which such specific policies might be decided. In view of the fact that every nation has its own problems realizing its best ideals, and in light of American claims to be the protector of individual liberties, Niebuhr mentioned "this irrelevant debate between Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kruschev in the modern kitchen of the American Exposition about whether our gadgets for the kitchen are better than theirs or whether they were as
numerous or whether they were only available to rich people."

In the writing and speaking of Niebuhr one finds several references to Abraham Lincoln whom he once called "America's best theologian." (By this Niebuhr meant that Lincoln embodied that rare balance of idealism and realism which is based upon a Christian view of life and is so necessary in effective statesmanship.) Historical allusion was used both for clarification and for proof as Niebuhr spoke of the woodcutter from Illinois:

Because on the one hand, we have to guard what is true in our civilization as Abraham Lincoln tried to guard what was true in the federal union and we have to oppose injustices as Abraham Lincoln opposed the injustices of slavery. You never can get rid of these proximate standards and responsibilities whether they be to family or to nation or particularly to civilization or to the treasures of Christendom which are involved in this civilization.

Niebuhr also supported his argument in less significant ways by refutation of his opponents' arguments, by references to mail he received regarding the Jews' rejection of Christ, and by adding biographical perspective.

The tape recording of this speech shows the favorable response of the audience when Niebuhr used humor. Niebuhr's humor must have enhanced the speaker's ethical appeal and augmented the logical proofs he used to support his case. In discussing the relationship between nature and history Niebuhr said:

Nature has to be redeemed, what is left out of account, of course, is that history has a curious
relationship to nature because it accentuates the "tooth and claw" of natural animosity. And none of the animals have invented a nuclear bomb. Bertrand Russell...uh...Bernard Shaw (I'm sorry to mix these two men) (Laughter)...Bernard Shaw said some place "I'm never impressed by the courage of the lion tamer because a lion won't kill if he isn't hungry," which is a questionable affirmation (Laughter) but the second is not questionable, "he doesn't kill anything that he doesn't want to eat." There is a curious relationship between the evils of nature and the evils of history which are partly illumined, partly obscured by these messianic expectations.

When Niebuhr employed humor it was typically a brief, seemingly incidental aside rather than a planned appeal for laughter. In criticizing the evangelicals for their simplistic conception of conversion the speaker said:

And the sectaries and the evangelicals have said, "Ah, but you are too defeatist about this in emphasizing that nobody is good. We're going to confront people with Christ in such a way that there will be a radical transformation of their life." And I wouldn't be without this witness, but I still look at history and I think that this radical transformation hasn't been quite as radical as many of the Christians thought that it was. I said we really aren't good. About individuals that's questionable, but there certainly aren't good as white men. Who can deny this, that the white man's arrogance has been a crime against God and against our fellow men through history and now pops up in a day when the colored people become conscious. I don't want to say anything self-righteous as a Northerner against the South, except to say (and this is probably self-righteous anyway) (Laughter), that the place where color prejudice is most pronounced is a place where they've had conversion after conversion after conversion.

It is obvious from this comment and from the reaction he received that he was speaking to other Northerners in the fifties. Subsequent history may have made such a generalization more than a little questionable. This writer's
judgment is that Niebuhr's principle prejudices were as a northerner against the South, as a liberal against fundamentalists and as an intellectual against those who were simplistic in their thinking.

**Style and Delivery.**

Since this speech was transcribed directly from the tape of the delivered message several passages have been quoted at length in this analysis to give the reader the flavor of Niebuhr's actual oral style. The speaker shows himself capable of forceful and suggestive metaphor when he comments that the morality of some nations "reminds us of a stampeding herd of cattle." One of the most noticeable features of Niebuhr's oral style was his tendency to pack several ideas into a single sentence.

Of course, we are grateful for the many good people that we come in contact with, the gracious people who treat us with charity. But on the whole these gracious people are humble people who do not make pretensions about themselves. That's why I won't use these texts as a polemic against the Jews because it might well be that Jews are humble and the Christian is proud -- and we can't argue about this thing, we must bear witness to it.

In the following extended quotations the reader's attention is called to several characteristic features of Niebuhr's oral style: the clustering of ideas in a short space, the intellectual demands he makes upon his audience both in terms of language and ideas, and, toward the end, Niebuhr's love for the balanced, paradoxical sentence:

Because this was too optimistic there was another alternative, and much more directly
derived from messianism including Christian messianism, and, thank God, there was always a Christian messianism which is partly utopian and partly expressed the responsibility of men to produce more justice. And on the basis of this Christian, sectarian messianism grew in the seventeenth century in England and the eighteenth century in France and finally, in Russia another and much, seemingly much more plausible interpretation of the great drama of history. It was this, that the evil came from the fact that some men were powerful, and on the whole in the nineteenth century the powerful men were the rich men. But thank God, and this was the secular idea of providence, that by the providence of the dialectic processes of history the rich would become richer and less numerous and the poor would become poorer and more numerous and then, finally in the climax of history, everything would be set right. Now this happened to be irrelevant to all, anything that we had in western history, really irrelevant. But it fitted the situation of a belated feudal monarchial agrarian civilization that broke down at the end of the first world war and so we got Communism. And on the basis of this new Communist radical hope we now confront a great world power that is constructed, a great power system, on the basis of utopian illusions. What strange things history brings forth under the providence, and one might say, the forbearance of God.

Niebuhr often turned words back upon themselves to make a more forceful impression upon the listener. "The New Testament," he declares, "...within terms of this Christ-revelation has a new eschatology which declares that evil and good grow to the end of history and that history is no solution for any problems of history." In another place he admits that a previous insight of his had since become irrelevant: "How many of our truths become untrue and if they don't become untruths they become irrelevant, essentially irrelevant." About the American standard of
living in comparison with the rest of the world he com-
mented, "We are more comfortable than anybody else in the
world and there must be something in our faith that makes
us uncomfortable about our comfort."

This speech was delivered after Niebuhr's stroke, and
the residual effects of halting, slurred speech were still
apparent. The most surprising feature of Niebuhr's speak-
ing was his occasional error in grammar, usually in the
agreement of noun and verb. "And none of the animals have
invented a nuclear bomb." At one point he corrected him-
self: "And I wouldn't be without this witness, but I still
look at history and I think that this radical transforma-
tion hasn't been quite as radical as many of the Christians
thought it were, was." A few times Niebuhr's speech prob-
lem became intrusive: "Nevertheless, if you put it just in
these terms you won't come to terms with the real Christian
solution of this, not that, uh, ah, Christian, uh let me
say that I don't wanta deal with the political, technical
details whether we ought to protect Berlin and Germany...."
The speaker began his speech at a slow rate even to the
point of being tedious and then increased both in rate and
force as he warmed to his subject and to his audience.

Since the analysis of this speech is one of the two
based upon the transcription of the speaker in action sev-
eral observations regarding word choice and sentence
structure are appropriate. In comparison with speeches
printed in Niebuhr's books of sermons this text shows
significant differences in style. Niebuhr was more conversational in word choice and frequently used contractions as he spoke. These qualities of verbal style never appeared in his printed sermons. Syntax is also different in this delivered speech: Niebuhr's thought seemed often to carry him beyond the concern for making complete and grammatically correct sentences; one encounters run-on sentences, broken sentences, sentences interrupted with several parenthetical remarks and sometimes uncompleted sentences. In view of these differences between the speaker's oral and written style in his published sermons it becomes obvious that Niebuhr made significant changes in editing and polishing his speeches for publication.

Assessment of Effectiveness.

In "Advent in a Nuclear Age" Niebuhr presented a sermon with both strong and weak points. His thesis was relevant to the times and his ideas probably had a bracing effect upon his listeners. He combined references to authorities, his own analyses of biblical themes and the world situation, personal experiences, and logical argumentation to produce a persuasive argument.

Some flaws marked the speech: the speaker's rate in some places was so rapid as to render his words almost indistinguishable, there were grammatical errors, his vocabulary in some places was highly technical and academic, and in some places he packed too many ideas into a single sentence or paragraph. Judgment of the general
effectiveness of Niebuhr as a speaker from this single speech is a precarious enterprise since Niebuhr was obviously impaired to some extent by the stroke he suffered several years previous to this speech and by his general poor health.

The availability of the tape of this sermon is valuable for the study of Niebuhr's style and delivery. While Niebuhr's thought was always complex and demanding, his oral style was conversational even to the point of broken sentences and syntactical incorrectness.

The provocative ideas the speaker presented to challenge his young listeners to sober, responsible, and patient citizenship were probably persuasive in spite of the obvious shortcomings of this speech. I believe the speaker was effective in delivering his message.
Summary

Comparison of Niebuhr's speeches in the forties and fifties with those he delivered in the thirties is revealing both in terms of the speaker and the changing situation. Niebuhr's biographer has observed that the war years and post-war years were the most frenzied years of his life. A comparison of his speeches during the two periods confirms that observation. In the fourth and fifth decades of the century Niebuhr's attention was drawn more and more toward international events and particularly America's relationship with Russia. The speeches of this later period as a whole are less profound theologically and more pragmatic in terms of political philosophy. Some of these speeches were less carefully constructed than the earlier speeches studied in chapter three.

All four of the speeches studied in this chapter had to do with international affairs. In "Anger and Forgiveness" Niebuhr encouraged his college audiences to temper their righteous indignation toward the defeated fascist nations in the interest of healing the wounds of the war and beginning the process of reconciliation among nations. In "An Adequate Faith for the World Crisis" Niebuhr explained that the threat facing Americans was not simply the threat of Soviet Russia's military might but ultimately the threat to their own inner spiritual lives. In the sermon at Harvard Chapel Niebuhr attacked the simple-minded self-righteousness which made many Americans feel superior to
the Russians. In "Advent in a Nuclear Age" Niebuhr asserted that Christian messianism was a realistic faith, not a utopianism which renders the believer unable to contribute in menial and practical ways to the building of world peace.

In presenting these ideas the speaker used a variety of rhetorical techniques. Niebuhr's primary form of support was his ethical appeal as an authority in Christian social ethics as this discipline applied to international relations. These were the years of Niebuhr's greatest influence and so he carried in his own person his most persuasive argument. As in the speeches studied before, Niebuhr made logical statements of his themes and used, in addition to his ethical appeals, other forms of support including the quotation of authorities, examples, current events, references to literature, and the refutation of his opponents' arguments. In "Anger and Forgiveness" Niebuhr climaxed his speech with strong emotional appeals in describing the devastation of Germany and Japan at the war's end. In several of these speeches Niebuhr planned his case with sophisticated psychological insight: moving from the accepted to the unaccepted idea, from the known to the unknown, from the popular to the unpopular idea.

These four speeches were probably effective in varying degrees. Least effective was "An Adequate Faith for the World Crisis" because Niebuhr tried to condense his complex analysis and prescription too much for his audience
clearly to understand his meaning. "Anger and Forgiveness" was effective because even before the war was over Niebuhr was out ahead of his contemporaries outlining the moral responsibilities of the post-war era, because the speech was planned well psychologically, because he carefully built his case until his main thesis was almost impossible to deny, and because he used emotional appeals effectively. "Advent in a Nuclear Age" was moderately effective. Niebuhr delivered this speech in his declining years when his failing health imposed obvious limitations upon his power and eloquence. His premise was strong and his thoughts were provocative and his listeners were probably made to reconsider their utopianism because of this speech. The most effective speech of this group was the Harvard Chapel Speech of 1955. In this speech Niebuhr combined humor, emotion, and logical argument as he identified again and again with his college audience. His premise was clear and forcefully communicated.
Chapter V

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF TWO SPEECHES DELIVERED AT UNION SEMINARY

Historical Background

Reinhold Niebuhr delivered the two speeches studied in this chapter at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1953 and 1957. While Niebuhr had many outside interests and his influence ranged far beyond the walls of Union Seminary, he remained deeply committed to the theological education of those who came to the Seminary to prepare for the ministry. This chapter presents an historical background against which to view these speeches and then a rhetorical analysis of the speeches.

The Climate of National Thought

Seminary graduates during the decade of the fifties entered a world in which the crosscurrents of political, intellectual, social, and theological thought were strong and potentially dangerous to the minister's spiritual survival. Social and political ferment in the country centered around the issues of national security and social justice. The fears of nuclear war with Russia and the hysterical reaction of some national political and religious leaders had fanned the insecurities of millions of Americans into a near paranoid state. In spite of a growing post-war economy and widespread prosperity the nation
lacked inner peace and security. As detailed in the last two chapters, Niebuhr's voice was heard again and again during this time as he encouraged American leaders to take a sane, balanced view of international affairs in the interest of establishing a peaceful co-existence with Russia.

Matching questions about international relations was a growing concern among many liberally minded citizens about the civil rights of American minorities. The war experience and post-war demobilization had focused attention as never before upon the inequities of opportunity for racial minorities in American society. Public awareness of the problems developed slowly until the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka case in 1954, in which the Supreme Court struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine of public educational facilities. While President Eisenhower and other national leaders were not promoting massive social and legal reform, the President did order federal troops into Little Rock to enforce the Court's order in 1957.1 Socially conscious citizens like those enrolled at Union Seminary in New York watched these events and became more and more convinced of the need for major reforms.

Liberal Protestantism.

Ironically this time of crisis found protestant Christianity in America experiencing its own identity crisis. Merle Curti commented that "Protestantism seemed to be drifting with a broken rudder." In the early post-war years liberal Protestants had no issue to take the place of the prohibitionist crusade, the great missionary adventure, and the fight for international peace. Pacifism was now considered more utopian than ever, and many church leaders abandoned this issue. The loss of a sense of direction was blamed upon various causes: sectarian rivalries, the churches' failure to win and hold urban immigrant groups, undue concessions to the modern spirit of science and relativism. Curti explained the unique role that Niebuhr played during these days:

Reinhold Niebuhr, a leading figure in Protestantism...insisted on the need for confidence in the validity of Gospel truth for every age; however much man progresses on many levels, his basic needs remain the same, and these, in Niebuhr's belief, only true religion and faith can fulfill. In the fragmentary state of modern society, with its many tensions and intimidating insecurities, he urged that man needs the religious experience in a very special sense. The growing prestige of Niebuhr, whom some called "the Protestant pope," was one evidence of the growth of a new orthodoxy.

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3 Curti, pp. 774-775.
Seminary Education.

Seminary education reflected the state of confusion reigning in the churches. A decade after the war was over Reinhold Niebuhr's brother, H. Richard Niebuhr of Yale, published the book, The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry. Niebuhr's book was the result of his work as Director of The Study of Theological Education in the United States and Canada, a survey of graduate schools of religion commissioned by the American Association of Theological Schools. In this book Niebuhr called for a re-thinking of the aims and methods of American theological education. He concluded from the survey that the church, the seminary, and the ministers were equally confused about the call, the role, and the ultimate aim of the minister in modern society. Ministers were torn by conflicting calls for their attention and time within and without the church. Churches seemed poorly organized and poorly administered. Young ministers were leaving seminaries unprepared for the frustrations of church administration. Richard Niebuhr reported the frustration of one minister:

The seminary prepared me for preaching and taught me the difference between preaching and public speaking; it helped me to become a pastoral counselor and not simply a counselor; it prepared me for the work of Christian education; but it gave me no preparation to administer a church; what I learned about church administration was a nontheological smattering of successful business.

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practices.\textsuperscript{5}

Implicit in this young minister's comment and explicit in the analysis of Richard Niebuhr was the criticism that the seminary had failed to prepare young ministers to lead and administer the church as a uniquely religious organization toward religious ends by religious means. Niebuhr suggested that a new vision of the minister's role was emerging in the mid-fifties: the minister as "pastroal director." This new role description would continue to include all of the traditional roles of the minister: pastoral, preaching, teaching, sacramental. But a new emphasis would be added: the minister as a man who could deal effectively with the church as an organization. For the purposes of this study the description of the situation in the fifties is more important than Niebuhr's own prescription because it shows the unsettled state of affairs in the liberal Protestant seminaries in general, and probably at Union Seminary in New York.

Reinhold Niebuhr was conscious of the confusion in the Protestant church and in society in the fifties. He encouraged seminarians to count the cost carefully before accepting the challenges of the modern ministry. He explained the risks awaiting those who would be servants of the church and of society; but he also explained his concern for the ministers' own emotional and spiritual survival as

\textsuperscript{5}H. Richard Niebuhr, p. 84.
they ventured forth into work so ill-defined and hazardous.

Niebuhr had experienced the challenges, the disappointments, the dangers, and the frustrations of the ministry in his ministry in Detroit. He learned how demanding and how varied were the roles the minister was called upon to fill. As explained in the second chapter of this study, Niebuhr developed his own ideal of an effective speaker. These qualities were essential for ministry: moral courage, intellectual industry and honesty, an analytical mind, and a self-knowledge of one's own need of the grace to which he bears witness. In the sermons studied in this chapter Niebuhr made references to his early experience in Detroit, warning his young colleagues against letting the work of the prophet and reformer outweigh the less dramatic work of pastoral ministry. Niebuhr's understanding of the minister's work was further developed over the years as he taught at the seminary, and as ministers returned to Union to report their experiences.

In 1953, the same year he preached the first sermon analyzed in this chapter, Niebuhr wrote an article for the Christian Century entitled, "The Christian Witness in a Secular Age." In this article Niebuhr discussed the challenges facing the Christian church as it tried to

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6 Chapter II, pp. 28-32.
7 Chapter II, pp. 44, 45.
serve in a secular world. He explained the meaning of his word "secular" in the first sentence:

The most obvious fact in the spiritual climate of our age to which the preaching of the Christian gospel must adjust itself, is that a world view, usually defined as scientific, is discredited in its interpretation of the human situation by contemporary events.9

Niebuhr explained that this scientific world view had misunderstood human nature in assigning to the process of history the ideas of "inevitable progress" which were valid in evolutionary theories about nature. Niebuhr considered the "perfectability of man" a false premise upon which to base a view of human relations. Niebuhr affirmed that the Christian faith was relevant in the secular world, but that it was still faith and that the only "proof" the Church could offer the world of the validity of its gospel was the quality of its life. The development of this witness of lifestyle was the church's main mission:

...the only effective witness of the truth of Christ is a life in which the anxieties and fears of life have been overcome, including the fear of death; in which the prison of self-love, of preoccupation with the self, its interests and securities, has been broken so that the self can live in "love, joy and peace." That is, be so free of anxieties as to enter creatively into the lives of others.10

Niebuhr then asserted that no such clear witness of the church existed. Niebuhr's criticism of the Christian church supplies important background for understanding his


speeches at Union. He criticized the church on three counts. First, that the evangelistic wing of protestantism had attempted to contribute to the welfare of society by selecting out the "true saints." Niebuhr affirmed that the "new man" in Christ is also the "old man" in that he displays along with the "fruits of the Spirit" many of the old characteristics of pride and self-interest. In addition to this proud sectarian spirit, evangelistic Christianity proposed solutions which were far too simple for the complex problems of modern societies. Niebuhr accused evangelistic Christians of ignoring the many factors involved in the perplexing problems facing modern man. He charged also that the emphasis on individual salvation was not relevant to the modern problem of powerful "collectives."

It is ironic that in the 19th century individualism presented human history as the gradual emancipation of the individual from the group, while we are today bound to collective destiny (to the question, for instance, whether there will or will not be an atomic war) more than any of our fathers.  

In addition to the problem of evangelistic sectarianism Niebuhr discussed the "hazard of conventionality." According to his analysis most churches were tied firmly to the status quo for reasons of security in spite of the grace orientation of the gospel they preached. Niebuhr saw this conventionality as the result of two causes: the fear of freedom and the responsibility for finding creative

answers to life's problems, and the uneasy conscience of
the church for a failure of nerve where social reform was
needed. In regard to the last cause, Niebuhr asserted
that a stress on evangelism, on strict sexual morality,
and on a new adherence to Sabbath laws were attempts on the
part of the church to salve a conscience about the problems
of racial injustice.

Frantic observance of Sabbath laws and prudery
in sex standards were the obvious by-products
of the efforts of men of uneasy conscience to
ease them by doing many little things, in which
their pride was not challenged, rather than the
big things in which their racial self-esteem must
be "crucified."12

The third indictment Niebuhr leveled at the church had to
do with the church's own view of religion. He charged
that the churches were using religion for their own selfish
ends rather than standing under the judgment of religion
in regard to such matters as racial equality:

Religion, in short, including the Christian
religion, can be used as an instrument of
the self and therefore as the servant of evil.
Christians were lulled asleep about the dread
possibility in recent decades because the
obvious forms of evil, the nazi and communist
tyrranies, were obviously heretical or pagan.
Therefore we were tempted to believe that the
acknowledgment of Christian truth was a pro-
tection against evil. We were not prepared to
admit what is taking place in South Africa now
(and in less flagrant forms in our own country)--
that is, that the pride of race justifies itself
in biblical and pious terms, and becomes the more
dangerous for sanctifying pride and inhumanity in
ultimate or religious terms.13

Contained inside the Christian church was a "church within the church" composed of those who do not use their religion for selfish ends but who recognize the call of their faith for true service to mankind. But none should be presumptuous enough to name those who compose this "church within the church."

Niebuhr concluded the article by explaining his view of the challenges and mission of the church in the fifties:

The effort of the "modern" church to prove the truth of the gospel by reducing it to the limits regarded as "respectable" by modern men only resulted in a competition with secular moralism, in which each sought to outdo the other in sentimentality. The effort, on the other hand, to prove the truth of the gospel by pointing to a superior Christian virtue can easily result in a frantic respectability in comparison with secular forms of goodness which show genuine marks of freedom and grace. There remains therefore only such a witness as will be equally severe upon the pride and pretension of both Christians and pagans; it will testify that the destructive nature of such pride and pretension will be unsurpassed by any form of human evil which may appear in life and in history, knowing that there is a power whose judgment and mercy will triumph over all the vain delusions of men.

There is a purely rational, though negative, refutation of modern secularism. That consists in pointing out that the drama of human life and history is obviously enacted on a larger stage and in a high dimension, and contains more beauty and terror, than can be measured in the systems with which various philosophies try to measure and interpret life. Every contemporary experience attests the inadequacies of these interpretations. But here is no rational proof that men encounter a divine judgment and mercy in this higher dimension. That is a truth of faith: and it is validated by a witness of lives which have been obviously remade by the power of God's judgment and forgiveness.14

In this article Niebuhr explained in some detail his analysis of the situation into which seminarians would venture to serve in the fifties. While scientism had failed to provide the moral guidance and power for social reform, the church had abdicated its position of moral influence in favor of "respectability" with the masses. Ministers would face the challenge of inspiring a true Christian lifestyle, of breaking through the comfortable barriers of conventionality and the selfishness which used religion as a vehicle for personal gain. Niebuhr would refer to these challenges, hazards, and opportunities in both of the speeches he delivered at Union Seminary in the fifties.

Niebuhr's Relationship With the Students.

A unique feature of the two speeches studied in this chapter is the personal relationship which existed between the speaker and his audience. In both speeches Niebuhr was speaking mainly to those who had sat in his classes in social ethics and with whom he had engaged in small group discussions and in personal interviews. Both at Union and on other university campuses Niebuhr visited he made a special point of spending time with the students whenever possible. In his analysis of Niebuhr's speaking, Paul Scherer quoted an unnamed college administrator who appreciated Niebuhr's availability to the students:

In his visits to our college he has, more often than otherwise, supplemented his sermons by a succession of informal conferences with groups of students or single individuals. His modesty
and humility and utter unselfishness in these
time-consuming meetings are matters of common
knowledge. They have cost him heavily in his
margins of time and strength.15

Later in the same essay Scherer referred to the close­
ness of Niebuhr with the students at Union: "Few of his
published sermons convey the intimate and pastoral note
which marks many of those delivered at Union Seminary:
they are set out on too broad a canvas for that."16

In June Bingham's biography several references are
made to Niebuhr's relationship with his students.

As he strides in or out of the classroom building
-- his everyday brown shoes have heavy rubber soles,
and he walks like an ex-athlete -- he is constantly
being buttonholed by a colleague or a student.
Often this person, like a scrape of debris swept
in to the wake of a speeding train, finds himself
accompanying Niebuhr in some direction he had no
previous intention of going.17

The Niebuhrs' apartment in New York was a favorite place
for the students' "At Homes:" times for informal visits
with the professor and his wife. An interview with
Niebuhr published in 1943 mentioned that the Niebuhrs each
week had "about 60 students and friends drop in...for dis­
cussion."18 "Niebuhr's ill health forced cancellation of

15Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, eds.,
Reinhold Niebuhr, His Religious, Social, and Political

16Kegley and Bretall, p. 301.

17June Bingham, Courage to Change (New York:

18"Niebuhr -- The Grim Crusader," The New York Post,
20 April 1943, p. 39.
the traditional 'at Homes' for students. But as soon as possible these were resumed; where formerly it had been Beer in the Evening, now it was Tea in the Afternoon."\(^\text{19}\)

The one-to-one encounter between Niebuhr and a student in private conference was often a significant experience for the latter:

The expressions on the faces of students emerging from Niebuhr's office are therefore likely to range from that of Parsifal when he first caught sight of the Holy Grail, to that of a bull when he first catches sight of the red cape. But most of them look relieved: the step coming out is lighter than going in, they are prone to engage the first person they see in conversation, almost as if they were spilling over with all that they were stimulated to think or feel.\(^\text{20}\)

Summary

Reinhold Niebuhr addressed his audience at Union Seminary during troubled times in 1953 and 1967. The nation was insecure about its relations with Russia and becoming painfully aware of the problem of racial injustice at home. The Protestant church seemed weakened by lack of direction and a failure of nerve. The seminaries, the ministers, and the church were in the throws of an identity crisis. Niebuhr's analysis of the situation was that the churches had been too simplistic and too self-righteous in its exclusivism, too conventional to meet the challenges of social reform, and too self-centered to hear the call of

\(^{19}\)Bingham, p. 26.

\(^{20}\)Bingham, p. 28.
their own faith for reform.

Niebuhr spoke out of a deep concern for the national situation and the conviction that the Christian gospel could contribute to improvement if the church would witness to the faith by a courageous and unselfish lifestyle. From his own early experience as a minister in Detroit, from his experience as an educator of ministers for three decades, and out of his understanding of his audience Niebuhr issued the call for those courageous enough to accept the challenges of the Christian ministry in a secular world.
An Analysis of Niebuhr's "Conference On the Ministry" Speech

**Historical Background.**

After Reinhold Niebuhr spoke at Yale University in 1951 *Time Magazine* reprinted the summary of his remarks which had appeared in the university newspaper. This summary captures well the message Niebuhr delivered to young people in America's universities during the fifties, and especially his message to young ministerial students like those who heard him at the Conference on the Ministry at Union Seminary in 1953.

Man, turning away from Christ, has reached the "dubious conclusion that history will emancipate him from all evil." But there is no salvation through history, no escape from it, either. Determinism is not the answer, nor is Hegelian theory that man improves on his journey through history, no matter what action he takes. "Christianity moves in all history, but it has a dimension above history... We Christians must accept the fact that we are in this age. We have to work out our lives' history in this period... We must make decisions."

Contrary to what many Christians believe, history is not the mere increase of love among men. "The anti-Christ grows with Christ," and where faith is strongest temptation is also at its height. The anti-Christ is Communism, "because it has the pretension of being God." Escaping it, Christian man must work out his own salvation; history will not save him. The course of the Christian is hard and perilous -- but it is a true course.21

This last sentence expresses the call to mature and sober thinking Niebuhr issued in the Conference on the Ministry.

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Speech delivered at Union Seminary.\textsuperscript{22}

Thesis.

Niebuhr's message for the seminarians and ministers who heard this speech was that the modern ministry is fraught with many dangers and that one should count the cost before entering this calling. The risks were further defined into two areas: the challenge of keeping a vital and honest personal faith while living in a proud and self-reliant culture, and the intellectual challenge of bearing witness to the gospel among those who have adopted scientism as their new faith. Niebuhr's purpose in the speech, as he explained in the introduction, was to provide a "Gideon's test" for his young audience by which the stouthearted would be attracted to the ministry and the fainthearted would be discouraged and turned away.

Line of Reasoning.

The movement of Niebuhr's thought in this speech can be traced as follows: (1) No specific call is necessary for one entering the ministry.

This decision is made upon the basis of the needs one sees in his society and the assessment of his own gifts to

\textsuperscript{22}The text of this speech was discovered as a typed transcript in the Papers of Reinhold Niebuhr, Library of Congress, Box 20. The seminary's name was typed at the top of the first page. The title read: "Speech Given By Professor Reinhold Niebuhr at The Conference on the Ministry, March 29, 1953." Quotations from this speech in this analysis will be cited according to the page number of this manuscript in parenthesis after each quotation.
meet those needs. (2) But one must have a sure grip upon his faith in order to survive and serve effectively as a minister in today's world. He must be a humble person who does not pretend to understand all of the mysteries of life, but who deeply believes what the Christian faith says about revelation, the personal God of scriptures, man's need to face his own pride in repentance. He must admit his own need for grace as one human being living among many who have spiritual needs. (3) If this is an authentic analysis of the Christian faith two basic problems will confront the minister. The minister is challenged to keep a vital Christian faith in a world where he is tempted to dilute his Christian witness. A second challenge is that of giving witness to the Christian faith in an intellectual climate saturated with scientism. (4) Of these two hazards the second is the immediate problem for students, the first challenge comes later in the ministry itself. (5) He who chooses this hazardous calling needs a vital faith to face life and win victory over the challenges of the modern ministry.

Arrangement.

Niebuhr's speech to the seminarians contained a recognizable introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction contained gracious remarks about the conference and the previous speakers and a statement of the speaker's aim in speaking. The main body of the speech contained the line of reasoning mentioned above. The
short conclusion contained reference to the limits of time for further discussion, restated the challenges of the ministry and wished his listeners well.

This speech has a clear movement of thought because the transitional elements are easily followed. Niebuhr began his speech by referring to the occasion itself, expressing regret that he had been absent when the other speakers addressed the conference. After inviting his listeners to think about the challenges and dangers of the ministry, he made the transition from the introduction to his first main point in these words:

Let me explain as only my personal testimony what I think the Christian faith implies, and is; in order to lay the foundation for my analysis of the difficulties of maintaining, preserving, expounding and expanding it as Christian ministers. (p. 1)

In this transitional sentence Niebuhr succinctly previewed the first section of his speech and explained something of the logic of his developing thought. After explaining what he believed to be the basic Christian faith, Niebuhr made a logical transition which introduced his ideas arranged in a distributive pattern in the discussion which would follow:

Now if this sketchy analysis should be near to a true analysis of the gospel upon which the Christian Church is founded, we have two difficulties: the practical difficulty and the theoretical difficulty; practicality of maintaining and the uniqueness of the truth that is in this gospel against the claims of the world, and intellectually to maintain it against the legitimate preoccupations of a scientific age. (p. 4)
After outlining the Christian faith in the previous section the speaker with these words led the hearer to consider two of the difficulties arising from the ministry as Niebuhr saw it. Such meticulous care to have his listener with him every step of the way is not characteristic of Niebuhr. Even in movement from major point to sub-point Niebuhr used a transitional sentence: "Let us consider first the practical difficulties...." After a thorough discussion of the practical difficulties of the ministry Niebuhr introduced the other side of his concern with these words: "These are the practical difficulties of preaching to other men and to myself, and mediating the grace and judgment of Christ. They must be in the center of the picture. But I want to say a word also about the intellectual difficulties of preaching." (p. 7) Niebuhr concluded his speech by mentioning his limitations of time and by challenging his listeners.

Now we can't go any farther into this difficult problem. I only mention it because if you should make up your mind to enter the ministry, you will face all the practical and real problems later, but meanwhile you will go through this vast expanse of a scientific culture with its own pretensions, and to guard the vitality and the uniqueness of your faith is therefore your most difficult [sic] and your first problem. I hope that you will be able to solve it somewhat in the same affirmation of faith with which Pascal solved it in a day which was just as difficult or even more difficult than ours. (p. 9)

In this speech the pattern of arrangement is primarily logical. In the first main section Niebuhr explained the
faith which the ministers were to espouse and then, with a logical transition, said that this kind of faith would cause certain problems. The speech proceeded logically from a description of the ministry to the problems resulting from that ministry. However, in discussing the problems Niebuhr used a distributive order because the speaker did not connect the practical and intellectual problems in any logical way.

Forms of Support.

The most important support supplied for Niebuhr's argument in this speech is the speaker's own ethical appeal. He spoke on the challenges of the ministry after spending thirty-eight years of involvement in the ministry and in theological education. When Niebuhr warned the young people about the danger of dogmatism on the part of the minister he illustrated his point with an anecdote from his own early experience:

One of the hazards of the Christian ministry is the pretension of knowing more about God than anybody has a right to know -- to be a kind of pretender into the privacy of God. I remember one time when I was a young parson, I had a shocking experience with two Sunday School girls playing under the window of my study. One said, "Let's not make too much noise; we'll disturb Mr. Niebuhr." And the other little girl said, "Who is Mr. Niebuhr?" She answered, "Don't you know? He is the pastor of this church. Don't you know? He knows all about God." This was a really shocking thing to me that reminded me of the pretenses to which the ministry is prone. (p. 2)

This humorous story told at the speaker's own expense to clarify and support his call for modesty, probably en-
hanced Niebuhr's image with his audience and added force to his ethical appeal.

In one place Niebuhr exposed the struggle within his own heart when in his early years in the ministry he tried to decide when to be "prophetic" in his preaching and when to be "pastoral." In relating his own experiences to the young ministers Niebuhr struck one of these "intimate and pastoral" notes to which Scherer referred above.

This is why the ministry is such a dangerous calling; you realize that people really secretly desire that the ministry [sic] help them to ease an uneasy conscience. The know that they are not as good or as powerful as they pretend to be, and they would like to have somebody tell them that they are; and who would be more plausible for this task of deception than the preacher. It is very difficult to preach the gospel honestly. It means to preach the severity of God to the proud and the mercy of God to those of the broken hearted. To preach honestly and not to cut the corners, -- that is not easy to do. I remember how I used to be in agony after a sermon because, in analyzing it, I was conscious of the fact, on the one hand, I was trying to be, as we said in those days, a "prophetic voice." We talked a lot about the "prophetic voices" in my day. On the other hand, as I glanced over my congregation, I saw this fellow here and that fellow there, and I began to speculate with myself: Couldn't I put what I have to say just a little bit differently so that this fellow wouldn't be quite as offended as he will be if I put it bluntly. This is the way I would "temper the wind to the shorn sheep." If any minister thinks he is free of that temptation, he is going to fall into it. I confess with some asperity that we tried to be prophets. I think there was too much talk in my day about prophets. A prophet is not merely the mediator of God's judgment but also of his mercy.... (pp. 5, 6)

The rhetorical critic cannot overlook in this quotation the sensitivity Niebuhr had as a young speaker and young
minister for the needs of his audience. This warmth and sensitivity comes through more in these speeches at Union Seminary than in the printed sermons and the university sermons studied in chapters three and four.

Niebuhr's commentary upon the problems of the ministry was a product of his own experience, his own understanding of the role of the minister, and his own observation of ministers at work.

The first difficulty to be really Christian is to have a vital Christian faith and to maintain it. Perhaps I won't shock you too much if I say that there are some Christian ministers who perform an ordinarily acceptable job of Christian teaching who have no vital faith. Although, I think that the Christian teaching without faith, without the compulsion of faith, is a rather boring experience. I wonder sometimes whether the dullness of the pulpit (and the pulpit we must admit is often dull) whether the dullness of the pulpit is not due to the fact that the Christian ministers are engaged in Didache but not in Kerygma? That is, they teach, but they have no sense of the good news of the Gospel, of what the New Testament calls the Kerygma.

The Christian faith is difficult. (In one sense it's not difficult, because it's the gift of grace; whether you have it or do not have it. There's a mystery about whether we can make contact with Christ or whether we can't.) But it is difficult in all ages, and particularly in this age. (p. 1)

In the very nature of this address the speaker's main form of support was his own experience, his own stature, his own understanding of the topic of discussion. The speech depends for support upon the speaker's ethical appeal rather than upon logical or emotional appeals.

Niebuhr also referred to notable thinkers and world leaders in this speech to illustrate and prove his thesis.
Sometimes he quoted or referred to well known figures in order to make his own meaning clearer by contrast. In the introduction Niebuhr explained his basic aim in these words:

This is not because I want to emulate in the field of the church Winston Churchill's famous address in the field of state about "blood, sweat and tears," though I think it is significant that the nation responded to this challenge of the hazards and the difficulties. Perhaps what I wanted to do is to establish a kind of Gideon's test, that the stouthearted might be attracted to the ministry and the fainthearted be shooed away from it. (p. 1)

Niebuhr referred to two Greek philosophers in order to clarify the minister's role:

In order to understand Isaiah, Jeremiah, or any of the prophets, you have to understand in what age they spoke, because they spoke, as it were, a timeless truth in a particular situation embedded in history, as Plato and Aristotle did not. (p. 7)

In that same section of the speech Niebuhr contrasted his understanding of history and revelation with that of the philosopher Hegel.

I would present this intellectual problem as follows: The Christian gospel is a gospel of history and revelation, and revelation in history, not because it embodies, as Hegel thought, some crude picture thinking which some philosopher will refine. It is a gospel of history and revelation because that is the only way truth can be revealed as coming from an eternal selfhood to my selfhood. (p. 7)

Toward the end of his speech, in a discussion of the minister's challenge of relating the gospel in a scientific age, Niebuhr used one authority to refute another.

When men speak of conquering human nature by science, they show that they don't understand the real dimension of human nature, which to
use the words of Pascal, is responsible for both "the dignity of man and the misery of man." Incidentally, Pascal knew how to answer our problem. He was as good a scientist as Descartes was, and a great mathematician. What makes Pascal defy the rationalism -- the cartesian rationalism of his day? Because he had a sufficient hold on the Christian faith, he said that this rationalism wiped out all the significant points of incongruity between man and God, so that the paradox of man's sinfulness and man's dignity was obscured. Therefore, Pascal's criticism of the philosophers was that "they can tell me about man's dignity, and they drive me to pride, or about man's misery and they drive me to despair. Where, but in the simplicity of the gospel will I know about both the dignity and the misery of man?" Those were his words in the seventeenth century; (and they) apply to us. (p. 9)

At the end of the speech Niebuhr held up Pascal as a model in his achievement of keeping and proclaiming a vital faith: "I hope that you will be able to solve it in somewhat the same affirmation of faith with which Pascal solved it in a day which was just as difficult or even more difficult than ours." (p. 9)

Two minor forms of support found in this speech should be mentioned. Niebuhr made a passing allusion to church history. In discussing the paradox that a Christian is both a "new creature" and not a "new creature," Niebuhr asserted that this was the reason the Reformation taught grace not only as power for living but also as forgiveness. In reference to the current situation, Niebuhr said that many protestant leaders were so intimidated by scientism they were merely saying: "We don't mean anything more than what the sociologists mean when they say so and so!" (p. 8)
Early in the speech Niebuhr asserted that a large part of life is mystery which stands beyond the reach of man's knowledge. He rarely used poetry to illustrate and support his ideas but this speech was an exception to the rule.

The biblical faith begins with, or rather presupposes, a sense of mystery beyond the world of intelligibility. The world obviously has all kinds of structures, relationships, coherences, sequences and systems which can be analyzed by the intellect; but beyond which there is mystery. Somehow or other, God dwells in mystery. Remember the words of a modern poet:

I've ridden the winds
I've ridden the stars
I've ridden the force that flies the far Intents in the firmament, and each to each allies
And everywhere the thought may dare to Travel mine has trod
Only to stand at last on the strand Where just beyond lies God. (p. 2)

This brief survey of the speech reveals that Niebuhr supported and illustrated his argument principally with ethical appeals rooted in his own understanding of the ministry. Niebuhr also used authorities, sometimes to clarify his own point and sometimes to refute his opponents' arguments. Less important forms of support included references to church history, to the current religious situation, and to poetry.

Style.

From a study of the style of this speech text as it appears in single-spaced, typed manuscript in the collection of Niebuhr's papers it seems probable that the text is a transcription from the actual recording of Niebuhr's remarks. The contractions are left standing; Niebuhr always deleted
these marks of oral style before submitting manuscripts for print. There is other evidence that the manuscript was not read or changed in any way by the speaker after he delivered the speech. Spelling and punctuation errors seem to indicate that Niebuhr did not correct this manuscript. For example, in quoting Churchill's "blood, sweat, and tears" the quotation marks were missing from the manuscript. Spelling errors hardly characteristic of a theologian included the capitalization of "biblical" in the middle of a sentence, and the capitalization of "church" in the phrase, "Christian church" where the speaker obviously referred to the whole of American Protestantism and not merely to one denomination. Words were omitted from one sentence which left the reader to supply the meaning. Niebuhr's health had diminished considerably at the time of this speech because of his stroke the year before and it seems improbable that he would have spent his energy correcting a manuscript he did not intend to submit for publication. The manuscript probably stands very close to the actual oral style of Niebuhr's speech delivered on March 29, 1953.

Even considering the fact that his audience consisted of university and seminary students the speaker made great demands upon his listeners both in content and language, as the reader can see in this paragraph where Niebuhr discusses the element of mystery in the Christian faith.
So the mystery of creation is related to the mystery of God's disclosure in history. Mystery and disclosure do not exclude each other. One of the wonderful things about the prophet Isaiah is that he alternated in emphasizing the hiddenness of God -- "My thoughts are not your thoughts." -- and the disclosure of God -- "He has not spoken in a secret place but he has spoken intimately." From the New Testament standpoint, God has spoken in many places that are incandescent points in history where the mystery is revealed as meaning to us, in modern parlance, existentially....(p.2)

Niebuhr summarized the Christian faith and stated the central thrust of his own theology in words which must have been difficult for his listeners to grasp as they heard them only once in Niebuhr's rapid fire delivery:

Repentance is the basis for faith, because when I face the ultimate situation in the dialogue with God, I find that I'm making too much of a claim for myself. This is the perpetual human situation. We are all creatures who have this peculiarity: We are cast on the river of time. We are in the flux of events, and yet we transcend them partly, --we transcend them enough to know that we are in the flux and to be worried about it. So we pretend that we are not in it, that we have a mind which transcends, that we have a power or a virtue which can defy death. In other words, the basic sin which is discovered in the encounter with God in Christ is the sin of pretension and pride. I think I'm a good man. I pretend that I'm a virtuous man, and a wise man, until I confront God in Christ and then I know that I'm in the wrong before the standpoint of myself on the basis of my pride. So it is necessary that I die to my own self if I would truly live. The encounter with Christ is always an encounter which results in dying to live. (p. 3)

Several times in the speech Niebuhr used paradoxical sentences. When discussing exhibitionists in the pulpit Niebuhr conjectures that such a minister "might have gotten tempted when he became successful. One of the hazards about the ministry is that there are more temptations in
the success of it than in its failure." (p. 4) In the discussion of the mystery of the Christian faith Niebuhr used paradoxical language:

I can't think myself into the Christian faith. I can indeed think myself out of it, but I can't think myself into it. Why can't I? Well, the reason is that I have a mind, and with my mind I have to analyze the structural coherences of the world; but I am not primarily mind. You are not primarily mind, but a self; and the encounter between yourself and God involves not so much intellectual astuteness as it involves repentance and faith of the whole person. (p. 3)

In this instance Niebuhr paused to explain briefly the paradox. By the use of paradox Niebuhr not only attempted to challenge the thinking of his audience, he was also suggesting the ambiguity and complexity of the ministry itself. In other words, by his style Niebuhr emphasized the main point of his thesis.

On the whole Niebuhr's oral style in the text of this speech is characterized by a rush of complex ideas presented in language in one place conversational and in another place demanding in the use of balanced, paradoxical sentence structure.

**Estimate of Effectiveness.**

The speaker and his audience were well acquainted before this speech was delivered and consequently the speech was effective as communication. Niebuhr expressed his concern for the mental and spiritual survival and for the effectiveness of these young seminarians as they prepared to enter the ministry. He discussed the hazards
of the calling as he saw them and asked his listeners seriously to consider whether they were equal to the task.

The speaker arranged his speech by using a combination of logical and distributive patterns. The speech contained a recognizable introduction, body, and conclusion with greater than usual concern for transitional elements. Niebuhr's care for clear transitions kept the mixture of organizational patterns from obscuring the movement of his thought.

Niebuhr supported his thesis mainly by the strength of his own knowledge and experience of the Christian ministry. Other less important forms of support included quotations from world leaders, references to philosophers, refutation of his opponents' arguments, references to church history and in one instance the quotation of poetry.

The manuscript upon which this analysis is based was probably a verbatim transcription of the speech as Niebuhr delivered it. His language was conversational in the sense that the speaker had not polished it for publication. Problems in style and delivery included complex sentences, and passages overcrowded with ideas.

The speech was probably effective in spite of obvious faults in arrangement and language because of Niebuhr's use of clear transitions and because the students at Union Seminary knew Niebuhr better than most of his audiences knew him; they understood beforehand the categories and direction of his thinking. Most of all, the
speech was effective because the listeners could not have missed the speaker's genuine respect and concern for his audience.
Historical Background.

In the mid-fifties liberal protestants in America felt insecure. Americans were concerned about the Cold War with Russia and about the problems of racial injustice at home. The liberal protestant church, its seminaries, and its ministers were generally in a state of confusion as to the mission of the church in the world.

In 1957 Reinhold Niebuhr addressed the graduating class at Union Seminary. The young ministers who were about to leave the seminary for their first church assignments were probably more idealistic and more optimistic about the opportunity for significant service to the community than their elders were. The graduates to whom Niebuhr spoke were probably leaving their graduate school of theology full of facts about textual criticism, church history, and modern theology. They were anxious to apply their newly acquired homiletical skills and counseling techniques for the cure of the world's ills. They were more optimistic about their ability to reform human nature than they ever would be again.

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23A manuscript of the address was found in the Papers of Reinhold Niebuhr, Library of Congress, Box 20. The writer has a copy of the manuscript in his possession. The location of quotations from this manuscript will be cited in parentheses at the end of each quotation.
Reinhold Niebuhr wanted to discuss the possibilities and the pitfalls of the ministry with the graduates in order both to forestall their total disillusionment in the early years of their ministry and to reassure them that their contribution to the life of the community could be significant and personally rewarding.

**Thesis.**

Reinhold Niebuhr told the graduates that the ministry is both secure and insecure, offering both opportunities for valuable service and hazards to be avoided. The minister must resolve not to flee the complexity of his life either by giving way to mystical religion which disavows responsibility for earthly struggle or by the intoxication of religious fanaticism which pretends to have all of the answers for those problems. The speaker was not attempting to convince the young ministers that their calling was futile, he rather challenged them to accept the most difficult task of "building wisely" so that their work would stand the test of time.

**Line of Reasoning.**

Niebuhr's thought in this speech developed as follows:

(1) In this climactic hour the text speaks to us both of the security and the insecurity of the Christian ministry.

(2) The calling of the minister is secure in that God's ultimate revelation of grace is in Jesus Christ. In contrast with other world religions Christianity does not flee the
hard realities of life by mystical escape into "other-worldliness" or by a fanatical legalism. In the gospel of Christ the minister is given the grace of God which sets every human achievement in true perspective and which supplies forgiveness for the wounded human spirit. (3) The insecurity of the ministry is in the building which the minister himself must do. The twin perils of mysticism and fanaticism seriously threaten the minister's work. These hazards are even more dangerous in view of the important work the minister is called to do. The minister must try to serve the perennial needs of human beings: of youth growing to adulthood, of the old and dying, of all ages who struggle with their own human selfishness and sin. He must also minister to the special needs which arise from contemporary life and are unique to the present age: the search for real community in an industrial age, the call for justice while powerful special interests compete for power, and the need to help cultivate a public conscience about America's rightful role as a world leader in a nuclear age. (4) To build wisely in such a turbulent age is a hazardous undertaking, but you can achieve your purpose and survive if only "by the skin of your teeth."

Arrangement.

This speech is organized according to a logical pattern as Niebuhr follows the developing thought in the text. Niebuhr listed the scripture text above his introduction on the manuscript. The text was used as one of the scripture
readings of the hour, and reads as follows:

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble -- each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (RSV, I Corinthians 3:11-15)

Following the thought of his text Niebuhr's logic in this speech developed as follows: (1) The ministry is a perilous calling. (2) One may avoid the total loss of his work if he "builds wisely." (3) So let the minister take care how he builds.

In regard to the formal organizational elements of introduction, body, and conclusion the speech was carefully planned. In his introduction the speaker paid tribute to the students for their academic achievements and then stated the topic and the source of his lesson:

I want to speak to you in this climactic hour, in which long and arduous years of preparation for the Christian ministry come to a close for you, on the theme "The Security and Hazard of the Christian Ministry," upon the basis of the Scripture lesson of the evening. (p. 1)

At the end of his speech Niebuhr gave a clear restatement of his last point and then concluded by modernizing the metaphor of the text in saying, "you can be saved 'by the skin of your teeth.'" (p. 8)
This speech was unique in the number of transitional elements Niebuhr used. After speaking about the security of the minister in the gospel of Christ Niebuhr moved subtly into the second and central aspect of his discussion: the opportunities and hazards of the ministry. The transition of thought in the following lengthy quotation begins in the middle of the first paragraph and reaches completion at the end of the third paragraph.

The Gospel of Christ is succinctly expressed in the Cross of Christ. That Cross always represents two dimensions to the eyes of faith. It means on the one hand the perfect love, which is the final norm for this strange creature with such radical freedom, distinguishing him from other creatures, that no norm can be placed for that freedom but the realization of himself in the love of God and his fellows, even at the expense of his physical existence. The Cross of Christ stands on the very limit of human history and defines the perfect good which is not beyond our possibilities, as the history of martyrdom proves, but which is certainly not within the conventional possibilities of our existence. We have thus in Christ as our norm and law, a standard which challenges every achievement and prevents us from taking premature satisfaction in any of the virtues by which men count themselves righteous. But the Gospel of Christ is not primarily a norm for our freedom but a balm for the wound of our guilt. The central message of the Gospel is that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" and overcoming the hiatus between his divine holiness and our sinful nature. Morally the Gospel of Christ presents us with such indeterminate possibilities that the Christian faith is always threatened with the heresy of otherworldliness. But to capitulate to the search for perfection at the price of responsibility would be to build falsely on the foundation of Christ.

It would be equally false to invest some proximate good, some easily attainable virtue, with absolute sanctity. The long history of Christian legalism
and fanaticism proves that many have hazarded
 to build wrongly on the foundation of Christ
 and to escape the tension and the relaxation
 of the tension through the assurance of divine
 mercy, by the strenuous effort to establish
 human virtue, in either ordinary or extra-
 ordinary terms, as the way of salvation. But
 if we build truly on the foundation of Christ
 we escape the evils of both fanaticism and ir-
 responsibility.

To build on the foundation of Christ truly means
that we cannot engage in the world flight of Buddhism
or the fanaticism of Islam. The world flight of
the one is due to a disregard of the whole his-
torical order. The fanaticism of Islam is due
to the introduction of false absolutes into
history. Historical responsibility and fanati-
cism are frequently closely related. The one
is the by-product of the other. To call attention
to these dangers is to introduce the second word
of our topic into our thought. The security
is in the foundation. The hazard is in the
building upon that foundation. For as Paul insists
in our lesson, no one can guarantee the way we
build on the foundation; it may be "hay, wood
and stubble" or "silver, gold, and precious
stones." (pp. 2,3)

Niebuhr actually began the transition to his second
main thought toward the end of the first paragraph with
the words, "Morally the Gospel of Christ..." With these
words Niebuhr begins to introduce the idea that there is
also danger connected with the ministry of the gospel.
What is first implicit becomes explicit toward the end of
the third paragraph when he contrasts Buddhism and Islam
and then concludes: "To call attention to these dangers is
to introduce the second word of our topic into our thought.
The security is in the foundation. The hazard is in the
building upon the foundation." A much clearer transition
is employed by the speaker as he proceeds to explain what
he means by the hazards of the ministry:

I should like to analyze these hazards in terms of the two tasks which always confront us. The one is to minister to the perennial needs of men in the light of the gospel and the other is to minister to the peculiar needs of the people of this generation. (p. 4)

In this transition from a major heading to the sub-points the speaker previewed very clearly the discussion which follows. Even in moving to a point supporting a sub-point the speaker used a clear transition: "Among the perennial needs of people, whether young or old, is their need as sinners."

When Niebuhr proceeded to the second major category of human need, he reviewed what he had just said and introduced his next idea:

We must help people to face not only the perennial problems of human existence, the problems of growth, of death and sin, but to face the unique problems of our age. The 18th and 19th centuries were wrong in hoping that history would essentially change the perennial human situation. But within that situation history certainly presents us with some novel responsibilities and predicaments in every new age. (pp. 6,7)

The speaker then explained in more detail: "One of the new responsibilities is to preserve the dignity of man and the healing power of true community...." Niebuhr introduced the last of the unique problems of the nuclear age by signalling his audience that he was approaching the end of his discussion:

Finally, we cannot escape the problem as Christian ministers in America, the wealthiest and most powerful of modern nations, of mediating the Gospel to
the conscience of the nation, involved in all of its responsibilities....(pp. 7,8)

Except for the first obscure transition Niebuhr's movement from one idea to the next was clear in this speech. Forms of Support.

According to the above analysis of arrangement, the logical framework of the speech is supplied by the biblical text. Echoes of the text fill the speech and the listener realized Niebuhr's agreement with and dependence upon the thought of the text for his main idea.²⁴

Niebuhr's speech had an underlying appeal to reason by the logic inherent in his text. The logic of the text can be set out in a disjunctive syllogism as follows:

Either build wisely or lose your work and barely escape yourself
It is most difficult to build wisely
So you may lose your work and barely escape yourself.

A close examination of this syllogism shows that it stands the tests for logical consistency. The two alternatives in the major premise exhaust the alternatives if one accepts the word of the apostle. These two possibilities do not overlap. The minor premise denies the first alter-

²⁴Niebuhr's use of the biblical text in this address is typical of the speaker and is explained in a comment by Paul Scherer who taught homiletics at Union and heard Niebuhr preach many times: "There can be no question that Dr. Niebuhr's preaching is biblical preaching; not perhaps in the sense which that phrase commonly conveys, but in the sense that the content and burden of his utterance cannot possibly be understood in any other context than the Bible. He is of course a long sea mile away from being authoritarian in his view of Scripture; and yet Scripture, with an authority not imposed by intrinsic, lays upon him a living and compelling hand." (Keglev and Bretall, p. 327.)
native (or states the difficulty of its fulfillment) and so the conclusion affirms the second. The logical arrangement pattern of the speech was suggested by this disjunctive syllogism as implied in the text.

As in the other Union speech studied here, the ethical appeals of the speaker must have played a major part in supporting the speaker's argument. Those who first heard Niebuhr expound the paradoxical nature of Christian ethics in the classroom now heard him speak of the paradox of preaching, its rewards and its dangers. The ethical appeals of this speech became clear as the speaker unfolded his understanding of what "building wisely" meant in the mid-twentieth century. Only the framework of the speech is supplied by the text, the content is supplied by the speaker from his own understanding both of the ministry and of his audience. As in the other Union speech Niebuhr made personal references to his own ministry to enhance and illustrate his argument. In the following quotation the speaker combined ethical and emotional appeals:

If I have any regret about my early ministry, it was that I was so busy being what I thought to be a prophet of righteousness, that I was not sufficiently aware of the importance of the pastoral ministry to the maimed, the halt and the blind, in short to all people who had to resign themselves to the infirmities of the flesh and who must finally face the threat of extinction. (p. 5)

By admitting the failures of his own ministry Niebuhr spoke as a companion in a common struggle with the graduates and not as their superior. He showed a compassion
for people by stating his sympathy with those who suffer.

The students at Union were by now familiar with their ethics professor's criticism of the American church's lack of involvement in the cause of racial equality. Probably no other quality of Niebuhr's personality was more inspiring to these students than his courage in bringing the established church into account for its "easy conscience" in regard to racial injustice in America.

The Christian church in America has done tolerably well in comparison with other churches in building integral religious communities in our cities. That is the achievement partly of American sectarianism and partly of the immigrant church. But there is something in this achievement which is not in accord with the foundation of Christ. Our churches are friendly, even to the point of being chummy. That is just the point; they are too chummy. They have mixed the natural community of race and class too much with the community of grace. Hence the grievous entanglement of our churches with racial pride in a day when the state leads the church in establishing racial brotherhood. If we want to build truly on the foundation we must mediate the Gospel judgment: "If ye love them which love ye what thanks have ye?" (p. 7)

Less important forms of support Niebuhr used in this speech include two references to current literature. In explaining and illustrating the dangers of escape from reality by either fanaticism or by mysticism Niebuhr referred to a novel by Arthur Koestler:

Years ago Arthur Koestler wrote an interesting little book entitled The Yogi and the Commissar. The Yogi was the symbol of world flight and the Commissar was the symbol of the fanaticism which is the inevitable fruit of the illusion that we can, from our standpoint, define and achieve history's ultimate good. Koestler did not even consider that the Gospel of Christ provides us with an alternative to both Yogi and the Commissar
because it sets the final good, not in eternity, but in history, though at the very rim of history, and it prevents us from regarding any human virtue or achievement as anything but fragmentary. (p. 3)

In this reference Niebuhr added his own analysis of the symbolism in Koestler's book in regard to the kinds of religions represented by the Yogi and the Commissar. He explained that the cause of religious fanaticism is the belief that life's ultimate good can be achieved easily with man's own power. In short, Niebuhr used the reference to literature to clarify and illustrate his own ideas.

In discussing the perennial problems young people face in growing up Niebuhr referred briefly to a study in psychology in order to refute the idea of the perfectability of man:

The process of growing up is not quite as easy for young people as Karen Horney seems to assume (in her Neurosis and Human Growth) for she thinks if neuroses do not interfere, there is a natural development of the potentialities of human nature. Actually the process of growth demands a combination of discipline and freedom, of law and of grace. (p. 4)

In this paragraph as so often in his speaking, Niebuhr introduced an authority in order to take issue, refute the statement and to show his idea in the sharp relief of contrast.

Style and Delivery.

The text for this speech was discovered among the Niebuhr papers at the Library of Congress, a double-spaced, eight-page manuscript, with the following attached note addressed to Ronald V. Perrin, Editor of the Union Seminary
Quarterly Review:

October 15th 1957

Dear Mr. Perrin:

Enclosed is the promised Commencement address which I have taken from the copy you sent me and smoothed out, for an extemporary talk needs a good deal of smoothing out. I hope you will find it satisfactory.

Sincerely yours,
Reinhold Niebuhr

Several points of interest regarding style emerge from this short note. First, Niebuhr evidently spoke "extemporaneously," without use of a full manuscript. If other sermon outlines of this period provide a reliable guide, Niebuhr spoke from a page, or at most a two-page phrase outline. In his note to Perrin, Niebuhr mentioned that the editor had supplied the full manuscript. The manuscript Niebuhr returned and which is used as the basis of this analysis is evidently the "smoothed out" version of a transcription Perrin supplied Niebuhr for revision. Niebuhr's concern for stylistic changes shows his understanding of the difference between oral and written style. This case makes it clear that all of the printed speeches studied here were carefully edited by Niebuhr himself before they were allowed to appear in print, removing from them many of the characteristic marks of oral style. For example, in comparing this manuscript with the manuscript from the other Union speech which was taken from a recording of the actual speech and left uncorrected, one sees
here such changes as the removal of all contractions, the absence of incomplete sentences and spelling errors.

The use of technical words found in this manuscript shows that Niebuhr was communicating with seminarians. Without training in theology, and particularly in Niebuhr's own thought forms the following paragraph is difficult to grasp:

It would be equally false to invest some proximate good, some easily attainable virtue with absolute sanctity. The long history of Christian legalism and fanaticism proves that many have hazarded to build wrongly on the foundation of Christ and to escape the tension and the relaxation of the tension through the assurance of divine mercy, by the strenuous effort to establish human virtue, in either ordinary or extraordinary terms, as the way of salvation. But if we build truly on the foundation of Christ we escape the evils of both fanaticism and irresponsibility. (p. 2)

Peculiarly Niebhurian terms were also used when the speaker admonished the young ministers concerning America's place in the world community:

Finally, we cannot escape the problem as Christian ministers in America, the wealthiest and most powerful of modern nations, of mediating the Gospel to the conscience of the nation, involved in all of its responsibilities. A pure individualism and pietism is certainly hay and straw in our day. So is a simple moralism which can not understand the responsibilities of a nation in a nuclear age, which can not make war without risking the physical fabric and the moral substance of our civilization and which can not simply disavow the terrible new instruments of war without risking capitulation to tyranny. (p. 8)

A stylistic mark of Niebuhr's oral communication retained in the edited manuscript is the familiar juxtaposition of
ideas in order to express complexity of thought and in order to catch the listener's attention. In discussing the two sides of the Christian ministry, the rewards and the risks, Niebuhr said: "The security is in the foundation. The hazard is in the building upon the foundation."

(3) One of Niebuhr's favorite observations about sin is that the "good" people are most at fault for evil in the world. "Not much evil is done by evil people. Most of the evil is done by good people, who do not know that they are not good." (p. 6)

Twice in this speech Niebuhr's word choice provided interest and color to his expression, as is the case in the use of the word "nonchalance" in this passage:

...if we center our life within ourself [sic] and not in God, if we do not learn that nonchalance which is able to confess "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die we die unto the Lord, and whether we live therefore or die we are the Lord's," our death and the death of our dear ones will strike us as stark tragedy... (p. 5)

In another place the speaker commented, "Our churches are friendly, even to the point of being chummy. That is just the point; they are too chummy." (p. 7) It was partly for the sake of audience adaptation and probably also for sake of interest that Niebuhr made the words of the text take an ironic and modern twist as he concluded his speech:

Let us change Paul's metaphor a little. He declares that it is hazardous to build on the foundation of Christ and that if you build wrongly you may be saved "But so as by fire." Let us merely say, you are not in peril of
your life. You are only in peril of your soul, but you can be saved "by the skin of your teeth." (p. 8)

**Estimate of Effectiveness.**

As the Union Seminary graduating class of 1957 came to their commencement exercises they heard an address by a speaker who knew them well and well understood the joys and the perplexities of the ministry. Without spreading a gloom of cynicism about the minister's calling, Niebuhr held out before his listeners a view of the challenges before them.

The speaker arranged his remarks according to the outline of the text which presented the two poles of his thought: the security and the insecurity of the minister's life. The transitional elements were clear and these made the speaker's thought easy to follow. Niebuhr supported his thesis by reference to the biblical text and by the force of his own image with his audience.

A comparison of the style of this speech with the first Union speech shows that the speaker made significant changes in wording, in sentence structure, and in the elements of impressiveness. Niebuhr evidently delivered the second speech extemporaneously with the use of only a few sketchy notes and relied upon the transcript of others for the preparation of this text for publication.

This speech was probably more effective than the other Union speech studied here in some ways and less effective in others. Even allowing for the improvements
in style as Niebuhr prepared the text of the first speech manuscript for publication, the line of reasoning is more easily followed in this speech, there is greater economy of expression, and the ideas were formulated with more precision than in the first speech. In terms of speechcraft the Commencement is the better speech. On the other hand, there was less personal testimony and the speaker gave less of himself to his listeners in this speech than in the Conference on the Ministry speech. What this Commencement speech gains in terms of polish it loses in terms of warmth when compared with the other speech.

Taken without reference to the former speech the Graduates who heard Niebuhr in 1957 must have found this speech both stimulating and sobering as they left the halls of Union Seminary to serve in their first churches.
Summary

Reinhold Niebuhr delivered the two speeches studied in this chapter during the fifties, a decade in which both the nation and the liberal Protestant church were in a state of turmoil. The national mind was troubled by the spectre of war with Russia and by a growing guilty conscience about racial injustice at home. The liberal Protestant church seemed anchored to the status quo so much that responsible moral leadership in these matters seemed impossible. The church, the seminaries, and the ministers lacked a sense of calling and mission, a clear methodology, and the confidence necessary to meet the demanding tasks ahead.

Young seminary students during this period were aware of the serious problems facing the nation both at home and abroad. They sensed the moral and spiritual needs of society and were willing to take up the mantle of leadership. Reinhold Niebuhr had great respect for this younger generation and consequently spoke words both of warning and reassurance to help them sustain a vibrant and effective faith during their ministry.

The comparison of two Union Seminary speeches with the eight studied in the other two chapters is instructive. Niebuhr's message and method were adapted in each case to the speaking situation, according to his relationship with his audience and to his subject. In the speeches studied in the two previous chapters the reader sees Niebuhr at
work as an oral communicator, doing the work of his own ministry as an advocate of "realism" in Christian social ethics. He spoke to university audiences and published some of these sermons for an even wider audience. His discussions were more profound, more scholarly but less personal and warm than these two seminary sermons. Most of the speeches analyzed in chapters three and four were prepared for a national readership. Here one sees Niebuhr at work once again informing and persuading, but at the same time he is reflecting on his own life in the ministry. A more intimate picture of the speaker appears in these speeches as Niebuhr makes himself vulnerable to the closer more intimate audience at Union. The reader sees in the speaker's words evidence of his own struggles and disappointments, the scars of many wounds and the joys of making his own contribution to the solution of the problems in society.

These two speeches at Union Seminary must have been among the most effective speeches Niebuhr ever made. They did not reach the larger reading public in the way the other speeches did, but they have made deep and lasting impressions upon the few hundred ministers who heard them.
Chapter VI

CONCLUSIONS

The questions regarding the issues to which Reinhold Niebuhr spoke, the ideas he proposed, and the rhetorical methods he used have been answered in the previous three chapters. The remaining question to be answered in this study is whether Reinhold Niebuhr was an effective oral communicator. The answer to this question must remain as paradoxical as Niebuhr's thought itself. If the question of effectiveness is asked in one way, Niebuhr cannot be judged an effective speaker; if the question is asked in another way, he was a most effective speaker.

Judging from the speechcraft of Niebuhr's speeches and the testimony of many who heard him his messages were often obscure and difficult to understand. The analyses of the ten speeches studied here reveal weaknesses in rhetoric, particularly in Niebuhr's lack of audience adaptation. The speaker refused to explain, to define, or to elaborate his ideas for his audience. He crowded much more content into his speeches than most effective public speakers would ask their audiences to digest. His language was often difficult and cluttered with technical words and phrases. Niebuhr's rapid-fire delivery allowed his listeners little time to process his complex and often paradoxical ideas.
The speaker's rhetorical deficiencies become all the more obvious in a comparison of Niebuhr with his long-time friend and colleague at Union Seminary, Paul Tillich. Tillich and Niebuhr, by common consensus, have been the two most influential theologians in American life in the twentieth century. A comparison of Tillich's *Systematic Theology* and Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man* shows that both thinkers were well informed, both had profound insights about life, and both presented fresh analyses of the human situation. Both of these works are difficult to understand; the average reader is almost immediately lost in language the authors seem to have invented for their own purposes. The difference in the two theologicans as communicators appears in their preaching. In Paul Tillich's books of sermons, *The Shaking of the Foundations* and *The New Being*, the reader finds short, clear, and easily understood Anglo-Saxon sentences. Tillich's adaptation to the general audience showed great flexibility while Niebuhr did not make these kinds of concessions in language and thought. As a result, Niebuhr's listeners, whether educated or uneducated, typically found his speaking difficult to understand. June Bingham quoted the reaction of an unlettered Scots lady who said after hearing one of Niebuhr's Gifford Lectures, "I dinna understand what he is saying, but I knew that somehow he was makin' God great." Similarly, A. Craig Baird judged the speech, "An Adequate Faith For The World Crisis," "by no
means easy to listen to -- even for his highly intelligent audience."

Apparently Niebuhr consciously chose not to accommodate to his audience; his lack of accommodation was not due to ignorance of the rhetorical principles involved. Niebuhr simplified his ideas and language when he chose to do so; the well known "Serenity Prayer" is an example of clear and easily understood expression of thought. Paul Scherer commented that Niebuhr refused to "giftwrap" his sermons for his audiences. The study of Niebuhr's speechcraft, augmented by the testimony of listeners who found his speaking difficult to understand, leads to the conclusion that Niebuhr was not an effective speaker.

The recital of Niebuhr's rhetorical faults and the comments of listeners about the complexity of his speeches do not settle the question of his effectiveness as a speaker, however. Throughout his career Niebuhr attracted crowds of people to hear him speak on university campuses, in urban churches and at political and civic meetings. In spite of the speaker's failures in audience adaptation, a considerable body of testimony remains to indicate that he was an effective speaker. Paul Scherer commented that by the late twenties Niebuhr had gained a reputation of a good speaker, "a preacher not to miss."

And from hearing him professors and students alike, doctors, lawyers, politicians, authors, editors, long unaccustomed to take seriously anything that emanated from the pulpit, began
to read his books and discuss his theology.¹

A church bulletin found among Niebuhr's papers carried the note: "The News is a receipt of an announcement that Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr has been added to the editorial staff of the World Tribune. Dr. Niebuhr will be remembered by the Community Church for his New Year's sermon in 1928.² In 1929 Niebuhr spoke at the Community Church, Boston, on the topic, "The Unhappy Intellectual." Later Gertrude S. Millow wrote Niebuhr expressing appreciation for the message and asking if it would be published. She related her own reaction and the congregation's to Niebuhr's speaking:

Though I do not approve of applause at our services, I confess that I was so carried away by your words that I joined with the rest for the first time ever! There is no one quite like you for originality of thought and gift of expression.³

According to Niebuhr's engagement calendar he spoke at Christ's Church Cathedral in St. Louis from February 21-25, 1935. One reporter filed this report of the sermon:

Penning up an editor in an unasked for contribution to his own paper is verbal TNT, but we take courage to tell you that Reinhold Niebuhr


talked all last week to a Saint Louis Christ Church Cathedral packed with people of all churches and classes. They even put money into the contribution plate, which is the real test of public attitude toward a noonday speaker. "No likee, no payee," says the noonday congregation in Saint Louis.

Queer chap, this Niebuhr. Fingers of an artist. Brow of an insurrectionary. The kind of jaw which Gibson draws on his hereos. No repose of manner and he doesn't care for any, thank you. Hands and face muscles sometimes the whole body in cyclonic mood. Words which flash as unerringly and swiftly as a surgeon's lancet among the dead and defunct organs of religion. Pruning away, grafting in, healing sick thought, skimming sect cataracts off dim spiritual eyes. Even the leading newspaper wrote in its editorial that "the world needed more truth tellers like Niebuhr!" Aye, this Niebuhr seemed to have a touch of the divine madness in a world gone back to madness for lack of the divine.4

This positive reaction was more than local opinion. In a discussion of national religious leaders in 1931, Time magazine remarked about Niebuhr, "He is an editor of World Tomorrow, a popular, dynamic orator."5

In 1940 Niebuhr spoke at a little chapel near Heath, Mass., where his friend and neighbor, Felix Frankfurter, was in attendance. "I like what you said, Reinie," commented the Chief Justice, "and I speak as a believing unbeliever."6

4Unidentified news clipping, Niebuhr's Papers, Library of Congress, Box 11.

5"Religion," Time, 34, 11 May 1931, p. 25.

June Bingham introduced her biography by describing her first impressions of Niebuhr when he spoke at an Americans for Democratic Action conference in Chicago in 1949. Niebuhr was the last speaker on the program at 10:00 P.M. in a room filled with stale air, cigarette smoke and tired delegates.

The speaker straightened his tie, ran a big-knuckled hand over his shiny pate, pulled his long nose further downward, and spoke out rapidly in a deep voice. By the end of one sentence, he had every person's full attention; by the end of one hour, he had several hundred people on their feet, clapping, stamping, shouting their approval.

Few speeches can have rivaled this one for profundity, for range, for electromagnetism. Listeners sat bolt upright, their fists clenched, as the speaker bombarded them with startling new ideas, startling interpretations of old ideas, dramatic challenges to their long-accepted presuppositions, and sudden explosive humor.

One minute the deep voice would boom out; the next it would drop to a whisper—and then boom again. The blue eyes would fly open as he presented a nugget of thought; then squint in diabolic conspiracy as he demolished it. Yet wait—a long index finger would rise—there may be a phoenix stirring in those ashes. With both arms in motion, like an orchestra conductor, he swept his listeners into the soaring of that phoenix, and the "unpredictable," "incongruous," and "ironic" results.

The suspense he built by these verbal, facial, and gestural dynamics became close to unbearable. And the depth of his own caring was so profound that the listener's racing intellect was finally accompanied by a racing pulse; the whole of the self was involved as well as the mind.7

7Bingham, pp. 3, 4.
Evidently those who heard Niebuhr in the academic atmosphere of the university campus had a similar reaction.

John C. Bennett explained the appeal Niebuhr had for the college audiences:

His preaching in colleges and universities for four decades has been one of the factors in his very pervasive influence. Students and professors who usually stayed away from chapel would flock to hear him. Also in this he and Paul Tillich have had the same experience. There are those who say that his sermons are all on one subject, the relation of sin and grace. But there is always something unique and unforgettable in each sermon, in his use of the text and its Biblical context. There are always new illustrations of sin, and sin is always combined in a different way with the finiteness, the tragedy, the irony, and also the goodness and the greatness of our existence; and as the years have passed, there has been more about grace.  

In 1936 Richard Niebuhr wrote his brother to congratulate him on his book of sermons, Beyond Tragedy. "I think your book is going well in the local stores. Your sermons have started a run on your literary productions. Several folks have asked about this year's sermons. Better save them up for another volume."  

Listeners' comments seldom identified the sermon by name, but in 1946 Christene C. Jewett, assistant librarian at Andover Harvard Theological Library wrote Niebuhr, "I enjoyed hearing your sermon, 'Humor and Faith' at the Harvard Memorial Church last fall. I was glad to see it

8 Harold R. Landon, Reinhold Niebuhr (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury, 1962) p. 59.

in print in your book, Discerning the Signs of the Times.\textsuperscript{10}

In 1951 Niebuhr gave a lecture series in the chapel at Yale. Time magazine borrowed the story from the Yale newspaper and added the comment:

A reporter from the Yale Daily News was sent to report the visiting speaker. This time it was not routine chapel assignment. The News reporter wrote: "An electrically tense audience packed itself in Battell Chapel last night to hear theologian Reinhold Niebuhr." The reporter did not exaggerate. For three successive nights Niebuhr, a lightning-fast speaker, held Yale undergraduates spell-bound and left behind a ferment of discussion.

To the audience in Battell Chapel, Niebuhr was no unheralded lecturer; Yale undergraduates knew him as one of Protestantism's top thinkers, a scholar whose writing often taxes the understanding. But there was no trouble understanding his preaching, for Dr. Niebuhr preached the old-time religion, without concession to the easy secularism of his time.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1960 Niebuhr gave the "annual sermon" at Harvard Chapel. An unprecedented crowd came so that five hundred people had to be turned away. Niebuhr's influence continued during the sixties. Ronald Stone records that shortly before Niebuhr's death in 1971 he was still expressing regret about not being able to do more to turn the nation away from the war in Viet Nam. He was cheered to learn that students who were going to prison in Washington, D.C., because of war protests, were trying to take volumes of his theology and social analysis into jail

\textsuperscript{10}Letter from Christene C. Jewett, (July 12, 1946) Niebuhr's Papers, Library of Congress, Box 11.

\textsuperscript{11}"Niebuhr At Yale," Time, 53, 19 February 1951, p. 59.
The perplexing question presented in comparing Niebuhr's faulty speechcraft with the positive audience reaction to his speaking is whether Niebuhr should not be considered an effective speaker despite the obvious weaknesses in his rhetoric. This question must be answered, not only in view of the audience reaction, but also in light of Niebuhr's unique personality, his own rhetorical philosophy, his own expressed aim in speaking, and the message he delivered.

Part of the reason for Niebuhr's continuing popularity must lie in the man's own unique personality. Niebuhr insisted that a speaker should be honest, courageous, mentally energetic and analytical rather than "heroic." These qualities were observed to a large degree in Niebuhr's own speaking. The single most convincing proof the speaker offered his audience was the force of his own personality, as the Scots lady sensed when she said that "somehow he was makin' God great."

In answering the question of Niebuhr's effectiveness, the speaker's view of his audience and his basic aim in speaking must also be considered. Niebuhr believed that he was speaking to the most influential future leaders in America when he spoke at institutions like Yale, Harvard, The University of Chicago, and Union Seminary. His mission was not simply to supply his listeners with pre-packaged
answers for the complex questions of modern life. Niebuhr wanted to challenge the presuppositions of his audience, particularly those about human nature, the processes of history, and the relevance of the Christian faith. Niebuhr's university speaking might be called a "rhetoric of equals," in the sense that he voiced for his audience the issues of life in their full complexity and entered into a kind of dialogue of thought with them in search of answers. Niebuhr had answers of his own and wanted his listeners to consider his answers seriously, but he did not want them to accept his answers in lieu of their own mental struggle with the problems of life.

Part of Niebuhr's effectiveness must be attributed to the message he delivered. Niebuhr's message was received as a "breath of fresh air" by many who heard him preach. He came to the university campuses to challenge Christianity's "intellectual despisers" with a restatement of the faith more profound and more relevant than the messages they had heard from America's Protestant pulpits. While fundamentalism seemed preoccupied with personal salvation and appeared oblivious to the larger social problems of the day, Liberal Protestantism seemed chained to a hollow idealism so unequal to the harsh realities of life that it fostered more despair than life. Niebuhr's "Christian realism" in social ethics was received by many as a fresh and exciting revelation of the power and relevance of the ancient faith they were ready to abandon.
Niebuhr spoke of hope "beyond tragedy" which enabled the believer to work for piecemeal progress even in the face of life's most frustrating complexities and temptations to cynicism. The clear alternative Niebuhr provided the "believing unbelievers" contributed to his continuing popularity as a speaker.

Measured by the audience reaction to Niebuhr's speaking, by his own philosophy of rhetoric, by his own aims in speaking and by the message he delivered, Niebuhr must be considered an effective speaker. In the judgment of this writer Niebuhr could have accommodated his audiences more than he did without sacrificing either the profundity of his ideas or the challenge he provided his listeners. Had he made more concessions to his audience Niebuhr could have added to his wide influence among America's intellectuals another whole realm of influence among the general public. Regarding Niebuhr, the advice cannot be given to the average reader which might be given regarding Paul Tillich: "If you do not understand his theological writings you may begin with his sermons, they are easier reading."

This study began with the observation of Newsweek magazine at the time of Niebuhr's death: "Like the late Paul Tillich and Karl Barth, the two other giants of twentieth century Protestant thought, Niebuhr was a powerful preacher as well as a subtle dialectician." The final
judgment of this analysis is that Reinhold Niebuhr was first of all a "subtle dialectician" and, within carefully defined limits, "a powerful preacher."
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Major Field: Speech

Title of Thesis: A Rhetorical Study of Selected Speeches by Reinhold Niebuhr (1930-1960)

Approved:

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EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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Date of Examination:

July 19, 1979