

war's end he recovered his Whiggish hopes and told his mother, "I believe democracy is on the march now, all along the line. The world's great age begins anew." The despotisms of the old order in Central and Eastern Europe had been overthrown and this held out the prospect of a "newer," a "bold adventure." He was soon to be disabused of his naiveté. His historical work became a refuge from the present and the future rather than the harbinger of a golden age. The Liberal Party died, the aristocracy was bled white on the battlefields of Europe, and democracy brought in its wake vulgarity and barbarism. The triumph of industrialism, which Macaulay had hailed, destroyed the landscape and the way of life which his grand-nephew loved. Plutocracy displaced aristocracy, to be in turn displaced by herd-socialism. Trevelyan found himself drifting to the right. It was too late to effect important change when he began voting Tory.

As his world darkened his success became evermore pronounced. He was by instinct a moral, a noble, and a good man. Faced with the death of his world, he sought through the foundation of the National Trust to save as much of it as possible. This courageous effort was, perhaps, more important and enduring than his historical writings. Museum-building and museum-keeping are, however, not exactly the work of a Whig believer in progress or a Whig dedicated to the future.



The Soundness of Reinhold Niebuhr

RUSSELL KIRK

Niebuhr and His Age: Reinhold Niebuhr's Prophetic Role in the Twentieth Century, by Charles C. Brown, *Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1993. 317 pp. \$34.95.*

A Reinhold Niebuhr Reader: Selected Essays, Articles, and Book Reviews, compiled and edited by Charles C. Brown, *Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1993. 173 pp. \$18.75 (paper).*

Thirty-two years ago, when I published in *Fortune* an article entitled "Can Protestantism Hold Its Own in a Modern America?" I let cheerfulness break in, concluding that the Protestant churches showed promise of renewed vigor. When recently I had opportunity to bring out that essay again, I found that I had been dead wrong, and so deleted it from a volume of my periodical contributions.

I had written my *Fortune* article while Reinhold Niebuhr still lived, though recently retired from his post at Union Theological Seminary. The Thirties, Forties, and Fifties—Niebuhr's age—had been an era of great religious writers and preachers of divers confessions: Bernard Iddings Bell, Lynn Harold Hough, Paul Tillich, Richard Niebuhr, Reinhold Niebuhr, and others touched upon in this book; also (not touched upon by Mr. Brown) of a good many talented Catholic theologians and apologists. The glory seems to have departed from Protestantism and Catholicism alike, here in these United States.

As Charles Brown puts the matter in his final chapter, "The Niebuhrian Legacy," less than a decade after Niebuhr's death "there were signs that American religious and political life was

losing the ballast Niebuhr had done much to impart. As early as the late 1960s radical social activists of the rising generation were attracted to new versions of the soft utopianism he had attacked. By the 1970s a resurgent fundamentalism and a ubiquitous secularism were growing in America at the expense of the Protestant middle he had helped to revitalize."

More's the pity: for Niebuhr was a scholar of much power of mind and character, strongly influenced by Edmund Burke during the latter part of his eminent career, a writer on world affairs whose views nearly paralleled those of Sir Herbert Butterfield, a defender of the Christian moral patrimony. He was the dominant spirit in the movement often called Neo-Orthodoxy, sustaining Christian creeds—although Brown does not employ that term, preferring "Christian realism." His equal for penetration of mind and vigor of influence is yet to appear among American Protestants.

This intellectual biography of Niebuhr is a work of painstaking accuracy; Brown spent a whole decade in preparing it. (One wishes that the publisher's typesetters had been equally painstaking.) It contains a useful chronology and a thorough "Review of Literature on Reinhold Niebuhr's Life and Thought," as appendices; also admirable notes and a full index. This study of Niebuhr's thought and courses of action is supplemented handsomely by the *Reader*, divided into sections on Theology, Social Philosophy, Events and Issues, Book Reviews, and Miscellany. Although Niebuhr is thought of by many as a theologian, Mr. Brown includes only four selections under the head "Theology," and even those four are concerned more with religion and culture (resembling, indeed, the writings of Christopher Dawson) than with the divine science proper. Niebuhr's essays and sermons were suffused with Christian doctrine, but they were concerned

with things here below, chiefly. Indeed they amounted to hard-hitting Christian realism, much as Augustine of Hippo understood Christian realism.

Take, for instance, this passage from Niebuhr's essay "A Faith for History's Greatest Crisis," written in 1942—the first selection of a theological character, originally published in *Fortune*. "Almost every version of modern culture has some futile and fatuous scheme for lifting men from selfish purposes as painlessly as possible. The simplest idea of all is that which underlies the laissez faire social philosophies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to these philosophies all conflicting interests in human society, and all competing egoistic drives, would result in harmony rather than conflict if they were only left alone....The only difficulty with the idea is that it is not true. The one element of truth in it is that there are indeed certain automatic harmonies in the economic process, and it is wise to maintain them."

In this, as in much else, Niebuhr knew wherof he spoke. For thirteen years, beginning in 1915, he was pastor of Bethel Evangelical Church, in what was then a fashionable fringe of Detroit. In those days a social radical, Niebuhr set his face against the harsh industrial discipline of mass-production in Detroit, as exemplified by the infernal glow of the coke ovens at Henry Ford's Rouge plant. In considerable part, Niebuhr's stern and rather prophetic reproaches upon the industrialists of Detroit have been justified by the passage of the years. The congregation of Bethel Church is wholly black now, and next door to that handsome church building (erected during Niebuhr's pastorate) hulks the ruin of a burnt-out apartment house. The city has sunk to the condition of what William Cobbett would have called a "hell-hole."

Yet it is not for radicalism that Niebuhr looms large in American social thought of the twentieth century. Brown traces

clearly Niebuhr's theological insights on life and history. The Christian realist knew Communism for a virulent adversary of any tolerable civil social order. Brown's Chapter 8, "Christian Faith and the Social Order," shows the intelligently conservative side of Niebuhr.

To many American Protestants, Niebuhr restored an understanding of the truth of the dogma of Original Sin, as expressed in the myth of Adam's fall. Yet in the defense of other Christian dogmata, was he indeed so strong-hearted and strong-minded as he generally is taken to have been? Niebuhr is said to have told Waldo Frank, "I do not believe in personal immortality," St. Paul notwithstanding—a remark not mentioned by Brown—and indeed this reviewer's reading of Niebuhr's books leads me to that impersonal conclusion, which would have been indignantly rejected by Niebuhr's contemporary Unamuno. Niebuhr knew, with Chesterton, that all life is an allegory, and that we can understand it only in parable. Many truths can be expressed only in myth. Yet what of the Debatable Land between myth and historic reality? It would be very interesting to have Niebuhr's judgment on the recent studies of the Shroud of Turin. But of the mystical and the miraculous, there is little in Brown's book, nor was there much in Niebuhr's life.

Conceivably, after much hard experience of consequences, Protestant churches may turn away from present follies that would have vexed Niebuhr. They may find in *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Vol. I, 1941; Vol. II, 1943),—most comically, on one page of this book, printed *The Nature and Density of Man*, though there's truth in misprints, too—in *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (1944), and other of Niebuhr's books, an understanding of the human condition in our present time of discontents somewhat comparable to Augustine's when the Roman order col-

lapsed. "In our own Western history the crisis in which we stand is the third of a series," Niebuhr wrote in 1942. "The first was the fall of the Roman Empire. The second was the decay of feudalism and the rise of our own bourgeois democratic society." All of us are whirled about in the crisis, grimmer still, at the close of this century.

For survival in that crisis, the writings of Niebuhr remain most worthy of consultation; and to apprehend Niebuhr's significance, Charles Brown is an honest guide.

A Christian Genius JOHN-PETER PHAM

Scientist and Catholic: An Essay on Pierre Duhem, by Stanley L. Jaki, *Front Royal, Va.: Christendom Press, 1991. 279 pp. \$7.96 (paper).*

Father Stanley L. Jaki's extensive studies of the relationship between science and theology and philosophy have earned him some of the highest honors which can be accorded a scholar in his field, including the Templeton Prize for 1987 and his appointment by Pope John Paul II to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. Yet in summarizing his work during a speech at his Academy investiture, Jaki acknowledged that:

In all that research, my guiding light has been Pierre Duhem, easily the greatest among French geniuses around 1900, a genius in theoretical dynamics, the conceptual analysis of physical theories and in the discovery of an unsuspected phase—medieval physics—of the history of science.

Not even this high praise has resulted in bringing greater attention to the work of a man who has been scandalously