

Yet another point where Niebuhr's characteristic teaching closely converges with Bultmann's is his rejection of what he, too, regards as a false polemic against modernity. At the heart of this polemic is the charge that modernity has rejected all moral law in favor of unrestrained expression of self-interest. On this charge, as Catholic polemicists develop it, "the explicit egotism of Nazi politics is but the final product of a pragmatism which rejects the standards of universal law for the sake of laws of expediency. According to this thesis the secular world has undermined law and order by its moral cynicism."

Niebuhr's contention, on the contrary, is that "[o]n the whole this is a false polemic of Christianity against secularism, in which many Protestants have participated [*sc.* along with Catholics]. There is indeed a decadent cynical, relativist, and nihilistic fringe of secular culture. But on the whole modern culture is utopian, universalist, and moralistic. It believes in the possibility of establishing universal justice, and universal culture. . . . The most sophisticated moderns draw cynical conclusions from [the] taint of self-interest in all historic justice and declare that there is no justice. But the more naïve moderns are agreed with Catholicism in estimating the ability of man to define the eternal laws which govern society. Only the moderns would allow the scientists, rather than the church, to define the laws. And they believe that the knowledge of the law is sufficient to guarantee its fulfillment; while Catholicism takes human sin more seriously than that. It believes that only an infusion of grace will enable man to fulfill the law which transcends his own interests. . . . Not many moderns are Nazis who believe that there is no good but 'my' good. But there are many moderns, both Christian and secular, who believe it easy to define the good without corrupting the definition by 'my' interest; and to realize it without compounding it with self-interest" (*Essays in Applied Christianity*: 214 f.; cf. 227 f.: "Catholicism usually makes the mistake of regarding secularism as morally cynical, that is, as acknowledging no law except the good of each individual or nation. Actually only a very subordinate strain of secular thought is morally cynical. Nazism was the final fruit of that strain of thought. Most secular thought is morally sentimental. It believes in generally valid principles of justice; but it underestimates the recalcitrance of the human heart. It does not know that

though men may 'delight in the law of God after the inward man,' there is yet a 'law in their members which wars against the law that is in their mind'").

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