

Another point at which I find a striking convergence between Niebuhr's thinking and my own is our understandings of secularism.

Niebuhr argues that "bourgeois secularism" expresses itself in "two varieties," or "forms," "In one of its forms bourgeois secularism is itself a covert religion [which believes that it has ultimate answers to life's ultimate problems]. In the other (and more sophisticated) form it represents a sceptical awareness of the relativity of all perspectives and the finiteness of all human knowledge." If secularism in its first more naive form is itself a "covert"—and, as I should add, self-contradictory—religion, in its second more sophisticated form "it stands on the abyss of moral nihilism and threatens the whole of life with a sense of meaninglessness" (*The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*: 131, 133).

But, clearly, this is substantially the same distinction I make between "two types of 'secularism,'" i.e., a "soft secularism" that assumes a basic confidence in the meaning of life (cf. Niebuhr's believes that it has ultimate answers to life's ultimate problems) only to deny that there is any transcendent ground of this meaning; and a "hard secularism" that makes no such assumption about the meaning of life and therefore is, in effect, nihilism.

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