

H. Richard Niebuhr is one theologian who argues very much as I do. Although his argument is expressed or implied in most of his major writings, one of the more impressive, as well as succinct, statements of it is in a little essay, entitled "Life is Worth Living" (in *The Intercollegian and Far Horizons*, LVII, 1 [October, 1939]: 3-4, 22).

Niebuhr argues there that the three profound questions typically asked by youth prove, upon careful examination, to be such that "their very statement implies a faith given with life itself, without which the life which asks them would be impossible" (3). Thus, for example, the great skeptical question with respect to knowledge, "How do I know that I am not living in a dream, that there is any reality outside my consciousness? . . . contains an implicit confession of faith in the reality of the person to whom it is addressed or in the objects which are asked to give proof of their being" (3). The professed skeptic "affirms in his act what he denies with his words. When he eats, drinks, walks on the solid earth, picks up his pen, he confesses his belief in a real world about which his mind can be sceptical but in which his mouth, stomach, feet and hands, the whole living self, must have faith" (3). Of course, such faith may be deceived in many ways. "Some of the things in which men believe turn out to be 'such stuff as dreams are made of'; the experience of illusion and deceit throws the mind into uncertainty" (3). "But the luxury of complete doubt is possible only for the wholly contemplative mind; so long as man engages in life he must take up again his faith in an external world and undertake to make distinctions between illusion and reality, between lie and truth. Animal faith has been chastened and made critical but life cannot live without it. No reason can take the place of this faith, but the faith can be made rational. To give up the faith itself is to give up life" (3 f.).

And so, too, with the other two questions pertaining respectively to conduct and belief concerning the ultimate meaning of life. "Why ought I to do what is 'right'? Is there any right or wrong? Is it not true that 'nothing's good or ill but thinking makes it so'?" To these questions about conduct, also, there are answers given implicitly in the very act of asking them. For those "who assert that all moral standards are relative still believe that it is right to speak the truth about the relativity of moral standards" (4). In this realm, too,

progress is "not from faith to reason but from faith to faith, from the uncritical faith in inherited standards to the mature faith which accepts the limitations of mind and will, does not ask for the luxury of self-righteous existence nor for the security given by the belief that the standard one employs is the ultimate heavenly measurement of right and wrong" (4).

As for the third question, "Is life worth living? What cause or being justifies all the pain and effort of living, the carrying on of the work of civilization, the continuance of the human species?" the answer, again, is implicit in the very asking of it. For "no one can ask it without asserting by implication that there is such a thing as worth, that some things are worthy, that life ought to be full of value. . . . The faith that life is worth living is given with life itself; it lies deeper than any reason. Reason cannot question it because reason works on the basis of its assumption" (4).

Niebuhr's argument strikes me as convincing, and his analysis of the basic faith by which we live into (1) "faith in reality"; (2) "faith in right"; and (3) "faith in meaning," while perhaps not exhaustive of "animal faith," provides important illustrations of what I speak of as the "basic beliefs" by which we live as human beings.