

16 College Street  
Hamilton, New York  
August 31, 1951

Dear Mr. Niebuhr:

As you know, I have been long persuaded that many of your published essays should be collected in book form for the benefit of the interested public which, for one reason or another, do not have access to the more technical journals. I first became interested in the project when I recognized the value which the articles had been to me in thinking through the significance of the Christian perspective after the events of the last war left me in a state of bewilderment concerning the meaning of human existence. My interest has increased during the three years I have taught undergraduate students in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Colgate. I have used eight or nine of your essays one way or another in several of my courses. Nothing I have found has been more helpful in enabling students, both within and without institutionalized Christianity, to understand what the Christian community is pointing to in the faith she confesses. Other instructors connected with Colgate have also used some of the essays with similar results. One essay, in a way, sets the tone of a whole core course in philosophy and religion, which is for all freshmen students. Furthermore, I have had occasion to use some of these materials in teaching laymen and clergymen in various church gatherings where the people, in general, bore witness that they spoke to their situation and asked for further such reading material. This is enough perhaps to suggest why I am interested in seeing these articles brought together in one place where they are available to the serious layman and clergyman in the churches and to the students and teachers in our colleges and universities.

I have not had the time since our last conversation to give careful thought to this project. But in order to get the wheels rolling and to provide a basis for reflection by any interested party, I have, drawing on my past experience in teaching the essays, reproduced them in mimeographed form and organized them in a tentative fashion. I am sending you three copies in case you wish others to look them over as a unit. The accompanying chart gives you a bird's-eye view of a possible structure for the book. What follows are but explanatory notes on the chart.

### I. The Structure of the Book

I am aware that there are almost countless ways to organize such a collection of essays and many factors enter into choosing one over another; for instance, the audience you wish to reach; the purpose you wish to accomplish; the over-all position of the author; the specific problems with which the particular essays deal; the present historical situation and one's understanding of it - and so on. I cannot now go into all of these. The tentative structure I suggest is grounded in my knowledge (limited, to be sure) of your position, but its primary basis is my experience in teaching the articles to undergraduate students. I mean that, with perhaps one or two exceptions, if I were using these essays presently as a text for a course with my students, I would approach them in the order in which they are placed and would supply the prologue, forwards, and epilogue in lectures.

## II. The Structure Essay

I feel that this proposed book should include a book within a book. For reasons that I'll mention later, I believe that you might write another essay in, say, six parts which would serve as the unifying factor and skeleton of the whole collection - with the aim, of course, of making, as far as possible, ONE out of many. This structure essay would be distributed throughout the book as the prologue, the forewards to each section, and the epilogue. Yet it would be a unity in itself. It would present the theme, the over-all perspective, and the particular essays would be enlargements upon different aspects of the theme.

The prologue, for instance, would be an introduction to the whole. Simply for purposes of stimulating thought, I suggest that it might be on your idea of "trialectic" - that man wrestles with "what is" and does so always in the context of a particular community, etc. In the first forward, you take up the matter of where the Christian community begins or feels it ought to begin, or the problem of God as seen from inside this community. And further point to the particular discussions of the problem in each of the essays following in this section. This would be repeated in each of the other three forwards concerning rebellion against God, responsibility before God, and unity in God - or call them what one will. Finally, the structure essay would be concluded in the epilogue drawing all into some focus. Perhaps this might be somewhat along the lines in which you concluded your Christian Ethics course in 1947 when you spoke of the broken but continuing hope in the divine activity and the responding community.

Now this structure essay is just an "idea" but one which I find difficult to forsake. There is, in my opinion, a "particular perspective" in all these articles. It needs to be brought out for the reader who may not have the training necessary to clearly grasp it. This approach is going to be "different" to most readers, not to say revolutionary, and they may well need a few trees notched to see the trail. Again, and this may be saying the same thing, these articles are not child's-play, they are difficult, and notes on what to expect and how the many are tied together are going to help. To be sure, we could say that children should not indulge in what is not child's-play, but I prefer that these essays are so presented that they reach as large a public as possible.

Such would be the structure essay. A unit, in a way, by itself, but divided up in such a fashion as to give a unity to the whole book.

## III. The Sections of the Book

In the chart I have the book divided into four definite sections each preceded by a forward. I see the book as a conversation carried on within the context of the Christian community upon certain problems which arise out of the readers' struggle with "life" in this community today. Again, I have many doubts about my organization, particularly about Part IV and only somewhat less about Part II. Anyway, some comments need to be made in connection with each section.

### Part One

This section deals with the problem of God. The article on "Value Theory and Theology" I have placed first because it deals with the theory of religion.

This is an important work but it has the drawback of being particularly difficult and is for students less "arousing" than say the following essay. For this reason I questioned its coming first but not enough to change its position now. The foreward to this section could help here. The "Nature and Existence of God" is second; it does something to its readers. It is the article that all freshmen at Colgate read. The third essay in this section, "Utilitarian Christianity" has caused no difficulty. It is forceful and speaks to our times. I find that it enables readers to understand how we continually in practice make the end a means, or God something less than God. In my opinion, it ought to be included in the collection somewhere - maybe in Part II or III. Yet I have placed it here because it deals with what I call, somewhat after Wesley, practical monotheism.

#### Part Two

After dealing with the beginning point of the Christian community in Part I, the next section turns to the fact that we don't begin there, or the rebellion of man. The first essay on "Man the Sinner" lays out the problem and is a good starting point. "The Disorder in the Church of God" belongs in this section, but whether it should come next I am not sure. You already raised objections to the next essay, "Towards the Independence of the Church", and I can understand your feelings for it has been published as a major part of a book and no doubt some of the ideas you would no longer own. Yet a good portion of your present position is embodied there and the book is out of print. I feel that your analysis of capitalism, humanism, and nationalism as faiths is superior and concretely points to present idolatries. Perhaps you might wish to "doctor" it a bit. The final paper in this section on "Towards a New Otherworldliness" is the most difficult of all for me to place. I put it where it is because it deals with bondage to one world and today to secularism. Maybe it should be in Part I. I have not taught the article and found that it demanded the most careful reading on my part. I like it nonetheless and think it should be included, though not too close to the beginning of the book.

#### Part Three

This section is perhaps the most significant of the collection but, for a clear understanding, needs to build on the previous articles. I have placed "The Ego-Alter Dialectic and the Conscience" first because it seems to fit more into the type of essay beginning each of the other sections. Yet it might be better to begin with "Responsibility of the Church for Society", which is an excellently conceived and compelling work - the core of Part III. "Evangelical and Protestant Ethics" is one of the best of the whole collection and belongs here after the one just mentioned. In the chart, I have put the Christian Century discussions on God and the War together. This includes "War as the Judgment of God" and "War as Crucifixion", plus the article that appeared as a rebuttal to Professor Aldrich entitled "Is God in the War?". This last may not be usable as it is, but the ideas in it do not occur in the others so ought, in my opinion, be preserved. Perhaps rewriting or editing is demanded. This series on war is a forceful way to bring this section to an end.

#### Part Four

This last section puzzles me no little. Maybe it ought not to be a separate division. If so, both articles should be preserved for the book - the first

put in Section III and the second, in Section I. I still am inclined toward the separate section on unity because this task is indeed given today and also because your thought might well be characterized as ecumenical in the richest sense of that word.

#### IV. Miscellaneous Remarks

I have collected here all of the articles you have written that I know about except the one on "The Attack on the Social Gospel". There may be others for I have not made any exhaustive search since we talked. If there are others published, some of those may be added to the collection or replace some. I would appreciate knowing of any others, even though they would not fit into this project. Again, you may have unpublished essays which would be suitable to this grouping. Or, if you will forgive my mentioning it for the third time, perhaps a chapter or so of your manuscript on "God the Many, God the Void, God the Empty, God the Friend" would be usable. (I don't know just why that fascinates me so.)

In conclusion, may I repeat that this structure, arrangement, title, etc. are merely intended to be suggestive. If I can know myself, my sole concern is to see these essays put into a form where they can be of service to as many people as possible. The decision as to how, when, where, plus all writing, I feel should be up to you. The naked enthusiasm for this project that these pages reflect, I unashamedly confess and I feel that it is shared by many others who know of the existence of these papers.

I trust these contemplations will in some way prove helpful to you. If I can be of any service as you work on it, I'd be pleased.

Faithfully yours,