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Love Through Justice in Niebuhrian Thought

Giselle Loucks

Senior Inquiry

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Lee, Dan

It is not a rare occurrence to hear that love is the main principle of Christianity. And certainly that is justified. After all, when asked what is the greatest commandment, didn't Christ respond that loving God with all one's mind, heart, soul, and body along with loving thy neighbor as thyself?¹ But what does that mean and how does it play into how Christians interact with the world around them? I plan to use Reinhold Niebuhr, a celebrated theologian of the 20th century, to investigate this very question. Specifically, Niebuhr's development of thought is of particular interest as it begins with an attitude that concerns the limitations of humans due to their inherent nature, especially that of groups. One subject that held a firm grip in his mind was how to build a just society. I will examine his view on love in Christianity but particularly in relation to justice. While he formulated his thinking, he changed course a few times; he abandoned Capitalism for Socialism. Between this time he took up pacifism to later disavow it all together. These shifts in his thought reflect his rejection of the notion that the love of Christ can be used to maneuver through political and economic life is possible.

Who is Niebuhr?

Reinhold Niebuhr was a Christian theologian of the 20th century. He is known for his Christian realism and his polemics against idealism and complacency. But he may be even more well known for his passion for justice. In his youth, it was always expected of him to follow in his father's footsteps as a pastor and he did so after completing divinity school. At the age of 20 he began to fulfil a role as pastor in his father's place at his home congregation of St. John's in Lincoln.² He spent his Sundays preaching there until he attended Eden Theological Seminary.

¹ New International Bible. Matthew 22:36-40

² FOX. p. 19

After which he received his M.A. from Yale, he then began his position at a new church. It would be at this time there that would begin his career as a political commentator.³ he could be characterized as a Modernist Liberal; he downplayed the supernatural and divinity, theology became ethics and the like. He was very much a man of his time. He believed that love would be the answer to any problem. That is because, as he believed, the problem rested with the individual and so, if love was the guiding principle of one's life, then naturally problems would cease to be. Afterall, aren't we most considerate and caring to those we love?

If people love first, then they will behave in a just manner and therefore, society will be transformed into a just society by transformed individuals. A simple view but a common one especially in our current social context. With this narrative coincides nicely with the work of the church. Appeals to love and brotherhood will be efficacious and if the effects of those appeals is weak, then more appeals must be made.⁴ For example, someone who lives an extravagant lifestyle of wealth, should relinquish their wealth for the poor. Economics systems do not contribute to injustices. While this view would change later in life, it is interesting to note how the whole of a just society relies solely on the individual. If the *individual* is just then society will follow suit. The entire concept relies on parts, not the whole product. This concept does make sense, afterall, isn't society just a collection of people? A book becomes a book when papers are bound within it's covers. A machine cannot run without the bolts and metal wires so how can a just society run without just people?

The ultimate ideology that is running underneath the theory is that all the individual needs to be just is an education. To clarify, if an individual requires appeals to goodness in order

³ Nathan, Scott Jr. *The Legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975. p.x

⁴ White, Ronald C., and Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976) p. xi

to be good or act justly, then naturally an education is needed. How else will they be just? From this we can at least gather that human nature is not irredeemably evil. If they were then education would not serve anymore purpose than teaching a shark simply addition. It does not change the nature of the beast, it just makes it smarter. Education for humans is to aid in the transformation of that person and thus the society in which he lives. D.B. Robertson, author of *Reinhold Niebuhr Love and Justice: Selections from the shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* creates a bullet point list of the views Niebuhr held in his youth. Here I will list them as I found them useful for portraying the main ideas in Niebuhr's theology.

1. That Civilization is becoming gradually more moral and that it is a sin to challenge whether the inevitability or the efficacy of gradualness.
2. That the character of individuals rather than social systems and arrangements is the guarantee of justice in society.
3. That appeals to love, justice, good will, and brotherhood are bound to be efficacious in the end. If they have not been so to date we must have more appeals to love, justice, good will, and brotherhood.
4. That the goodness makes for happiness and that the increase knowledge of this fact will overcome human selfishness and greed.⁵

Each of these bullets is an example of beliefs that can greatly affect the way in which a Christian may engage in the social sphere. If one believes that civilization is becoming more moral through education and that the ills of society are due to the individual, then the ills of society can be drawn to morally ignorant individuals. Thus, a natural criticism of this, something Niebuhr

⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, ed. D.B. Robertson. *Love and Justice Selection from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1957. P.13

himself would comment, is that it essentially takes society as its own functioning creature off the hook. It is ignorant of the limitations of humans. It seems to Niebuhr, and myself, that the above bullet points are somewhat naive. I plan to use Niebuhr's personal history to explain why.

The Root is Much Deeper

For biographical information, Niebuhr easily filled his father's place in his home congregation as a pastor after his father's death. It was always expected of him to be a pastor, even as a young child and he himself never questioned this path. However, he began to question some previous beliefs he held once he began to notice how tired and worn down his congregants were on Sundays. Seeing the plight of his congregants became one of the most impactful times in Niebuhr's life. During his time he serving as a pastor to Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit, who's congregants mainly worked for the Ford Motor Company, his view on Capitalism changed drastically. What chided him was how a company and a magnificent American such as Ford, could actually contribute to the suffering of the people while still being the hero of Capitalist America.

In the 1920s Niebuhr found himself directly against what he considered American complacency and materialism. He argued that Americans did not concern themselves with anything but luxury and an easy-going life⁶ which was evident in their roaring partying of the 20s. Niebuhr began to take aim at Henry Ford, claiming that the beloved philanthropist was an example of the problems with Capitalism. This shift may seem subtle, so I will detail it briefly. While earlier the wrongs of the world could be pinpointed down to the flaws of the individuals,

⁶ Fox, p. 88

Niebuhr began to believe that possibly, the issue was with the social structures. The problem with Philanthropist like Ford is that they are praised for their generous nature, however Niebuhr calculated that what was considered moral was actually a cover for maintaining wealth and privilege. This concept is interesting display in the construction of narratives. Ford Motors contributed to the endless tiredness and fatigue of his workers and yet his name is known as a father of the car industry, an American hero.

While Ford claimed that the best protection for a worker was not a pension or unemployment benefits but a fair wage, his employees were being underpaid. The week, already shortened to five days, eventually shortened further to four, and for some even further to three or two. So to connect those two dots, the workers were underpaid for their five day work week and then they lost working days which naturally lowered their pay even more. This wasn't a benefit to the workers because there was a decrease in sales in the advent of competition.⁷

Before this paper continues, it must be stated that this paper does not exist to vilify the name of Henry Ford. It works to establish the critical thinking that Niebuhr used when articulating current events and how it lined up with his theology. The contradiction between the two could not be ignored. The evidence was obvious, there was a system in place that carried over the simple individual yet affected him nonetheless.

An article authored by Niebuhr titled, "*Is Stewardship Ethical?*" argued that Ford represented America, well meaning, in that he did not realize his own hypocrisy, but was actually complacent in regard to the well being of the people. Niebuhr attacked Ford's offer to hire young boys in order to keep them off the streets and out of trouble while the employees he already had

⁷ Niebuhr, p. 98-105

represented fifty percent of the beneficiaries receiving aid from charities. Ford's decision to do so could be credited as actually being generous and worthy of the American title, yet this decision is suspicious in how it also economically is beneficial to Ford Motors. While the fact that these boys are down and out, with a recruitment of young, strong labor, what follows is only the natural eviction of the older, weaker workers. This comes as to keep all the original workers would cause the worker pool to expand and so would the payment total.

In Ford's case the workers in Ford Motor Company were losing money, as they were not meeting the minimum of 5\$ a day. Ford even claimed that his workers had more money than before. However, due to Niebuhr's involvement in the Detroit Interracial Committee, he had access to unpublished surveys from Ford workers that showed that this was untrue⁸. Worse still, were the layoffs and replacement of older workers with their younger counterparts. Yet Ford was being praised for his commitment and consideration for his workers. Infact, after Niebuhr's article "*How Philanthropic is Henry Ford?*" was published in the *Christian Century*, he received many responses that criticized him. Capitalism, Niebuhr thought, was a vehicle for the wealthy at the expense of the working class. The criticism that Niebuhr received serves a sordid example of what happens when you question a god, in this case, the god of American Capitalism.

He writes for the *Christian Century*:

In our day of Enlightenment, it is possible for a man to amass billions and be praised at the same time for the astuteness of his business mind and the generosity of his impulses, even though the groans of his workers may be heard above the din of his machines.⁹

⁸ Fox, p. 95

⁹ Robertson, p. 108

Ford gained a fortune from his enterprise on the backs of workers who were dealing with questionable circumstances. He was seen as a “demigod”¹⁰ by many who didn’t find any flaws with this situation. Niebuhr pondered whether it was moral for a person to have so much more wealth, even when their wealth was earned through honest means, than others. He concluded that a system that allowed a small minority to enjoy such extravagant wealth was flawed.

This is a major shift from what came before. Now, rather than a morally questionable man, who simultaneously was painted as moral, being a flawed individual who contributed to societal woes, the mere existence of Ford Motors was only possible because of an unjust society. Rather than unjust individuals making an unjust society, an unjust society made unjust individuals.

This however, only opened the door to criticize from his fellow protestants after drawing a connection between protestantism and capitalism; they too were complacent. Yet, the problem wasn’t solely the Protestant work ethic but the church’s lack of attention to the ethical concerns of an industrial nation. He writes in his notebook: If the church could only achieve schism on ethical issues! They would represent life and reality”.¹¹ The church cannot hold the moral guidelight for society if it does not stand justly in issues that are relevant to the people. As the industrial age continues, the clergy must preach a gospel that challenges instead of calling for quietism. This is the only way for the gospel to have “truth and power.”¹²

The church preaching that the rich should be less selfish and empty their pockets would not suffice. Especially when that lesson in it of itself does not acknowledge how the rich became

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Leaves From The Notebook of A Tamed Cynic* (Cleveland, The World Publishing Company. 1964) p. 96

¹² Robertson, p. 97

so rich and why there are so many poor. To unpack Niebuhr's writing, what he calls for is not lessons on how to help the poor, but how to call out the rich. His opposition to Ford was the beginning to his step towards socialism as he "became a Socialist in this reaction"¹³ which is not too different from the many students in modern day colleges who claim to support Socialism as they have come to oppose Capitalism.

In his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), he argued that the "true" proletariat was not a capitalist, but a socialist. Like himself, they may have become ones from a reaction. It certainly makes sense that a poorly treated worker would have a poor opinion of the system that allowed it. He remarks that some ideals do not come from someone's imagination, but experience. This is certainly true. In fact, modern Socialism is born from Capitalism.¹⁴ Ford showed him "all that was wrong with American capitalism"¹⁵.

Response

As written above, when Niebuhr saw the issue of Ford Motor Company, he took to writing in magazines such as the *Christian Century* but he also became the first chairman of the Mayor's Commission on Racial Relations and invited those who work in labour to come give talks at his church. While his church did have workers from the Motor Company, the church had grown to the point that it also contained some millionaires, as well as many in the middle class.¹⁶

¹³Whiteman, Alden. "Reinhold Niebuhr Is Dead; Protestant Theologian, 78." *The New York Times*, June 2, 1971. Accessed December 4, 2018.

¹⁴ Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2001) p.160-61

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Fackre, Gabriel. *The Promise of Reinhold Niebuhr*. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970. p.17-18

Can the preaching within the church be enough to end injustices like what was occurring for the Ford workers? Probably not. It has its value in the formulation of the individual, however, many individuals can be called moral yet contribute to an unjust society. Most people consider themselves moral. Their inherent kindness then justifies their use of cruelty for those who are the real “unjust” ones, that is anyone who opposes them. Most people generally wish for goodness to flow to all people. But goodness doesn’t flow to all people. They want world peace but have not created world peace.

Furthermore, Ford wasn’t an immoral person in needed to be educated on how to conduct himself in a loving and caring way. Niebuhr himself likely would agree; in Niebuhr’s words, Ford either was a very shrewd businessman or deluded.¹⁷ Take Niebuhr’s view on philanthropy. This practice of donating money to those in need. Yet, as he claims, it benefits those who do not oppose the donator. This is a bit difficult to swallow, but consider his view. If there are internal structures that create or contribute economic inequalities, then it seems reasonable to assume that the money being donated does not necessarily change this system but simply helps those who are economically disadvantaged accommodate. The recipients can only gratefully accept. However, an “act of justice” requires the actor to acknowledge accusations against them may be legitimate.¹⁸ that the By seeking a change, such as changing economic systems, one must accuse and/or be accused of contributing to a system that benefits some at the cost of other. What is humorous is that Niebuhr originally considered Capitalism to be just as poor as any other system. Again, all that was needed was love. This example shows the errors of reasoning that individuals alone are responsible for injustices.

¹⁷ Robertson, p.102

¹⁸ Ibid. p.26

The Uses of Coercion

Like many others after World War I, Niebuhr began to embrace pacifism. During the first World War, he felt as though he could not support pacifism due to his German roots. Because of the American morale and patriotic spirit, to ride the cool winds of Pacifism would bring into question his nationality. He desperately wanted to prove himself a patriotic American, even to the point of feeling as though he could not “associate with the pacifist” and then remarks “perhaps if I were not of German blood I could”.¹⁹

He likely was sympathetic to pacifism before he joined, considering this psychological state. He was moving in a more political direction during the war and eventually became a professor at Union Theological Seminary. It was during this time he began to read Karl Marx. Before this time, he was not entirely sure what to do with his anti-Capitalist inklings but now had a avenue to pursue: radical politics.²⁰ After the massive amount of bloodshed and unprecedented deaths in the Great War, many began to adhere to a stance against international conflict. Niebuhr declared his pacifism in 1923 and remained one until the mid 1930s. He chose to leave due to the Fellowship of Reconciliation (F.O.R), which he joined shortly after becoming a pacifist, due to, what he felt, was a lack of agreement on the use of coercion. The use of coercion would develop an important and very necessary part of a creating a just society.

While there is a wide variety of thought within pacifism, however he defines it as an idealist who can be characterized by their intense critical, and even skeptical view of the use of

¹⁹ Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Leaves From The Notebook Of A Tamed Cynic* (Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian, 1957) p. 32.

²⁰ Fackre, Gabriel. *The Promise of Reinhold Niebuhr*. New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970.

physical force for the purpose of solving problems.²¹ Niebuhr felt that the desire for disarmament was naïve. This may seem harsh, as the concept is so good and appeals to many people in its value of peace. To understand Niebuhr's position, we must understand what is needed for Pacifism to even be applicable in an American context. The idea he criticized was that if nations take a chance and disarm, then other nations too will disarm. Disarming would be the beginning to peace. It is a venture into international trust.

This whole thread is obviously naïve. The ultimate problem with this idea, Niebuhr writes in his article piece, *A Critique of Pacifism* (1927), is that there is something missing, something of extreme importance: human nature. Earlier, when he believed that social change could come solely from educating individuals of their sinful nature, he believed that people were good but merely ignorant. Natural imperfections could be remedied. However, after the Henry Ford fiasco, his view changed. Human nature is inherently sinful, not evil, but selfish and proud. The sin cannot be rooted out. It exist in the future just as much as in the past.²² Due to this, human relations are always a tightrope between trust and mistrust, fear and confidence.²³

There are two triggers that can upend this balance however, a tragic incident which incites fear or a new minority, typically a religious minority with the "imagination" that what you give to others, you will receive. To clarify, this get-what-we-give imagination is not the typical "reap what you sow" adage, but what we imagine others to be, they will become. If people are believed to be untrustworthy, then they will indeed be untrustworthy, but if we believe them to be worthy of our trust, then they will become trustworthy people. This

²¹ Ibid. p. 247.

²² Scott, p.46

²³ Robertson, 241

imagination could be used to cause great social change, however, it is rare and while unlikely to occur, is even more unlikely to reach a high enough level of potency that it could take effect.

The key ingredient that is missing from the disarmament debate is a new attitude, specifically, an ethical attitude towards other groups and individuals²⁴. The individual has his own sense of morality that is apart from the group's, whether that group be national, race, class, etc. For various reasons the individual's view of the group's ethical behavior may be obscured: indulgence, and the inability to see how nations that are geographically far away, but are tied economically, view the U.S.²⁵ He continues further to claim that a nation with advantages over other peoples cannot afford to trust. He cites America's disproportionately lavish living standards compared to the rest of the world in the 20s as an example of privilege.

A question formed, how can a nation who holds onto great advantages be worthy of trust? How can a nation unconcerned with others trust others? A relationship between the strong and weak is not redemptive if the strong will not lower themselves, in this case lower the disproportion of privilege.²⁶ If love is expressed in trust, but not sacrifice then it is "futile".²⁷ Further, there are those who questions the motives of America's desire for peace. "Shrewd observers" claim that a nation as well off as the U.S. would naturally want to avoid any conflict. Those with more don't want anyone to rock the boat.²⁸

Returning to the concept of coercion, Niebuhr later titled an article, *Why I left the F.O.R.* in 1934. The problem with the F. O. R. was that he felt that they weren't radical enough, by his estimate, less than half of the organization held the view that coercion was acceptable either in

²⁴ Robertson, p. 243

²⁵ Ibid. p.255

²⁶ Ibid. p.247

²⁷ Ibid. p.245

²⁸ Ibid. p. 241-247

total or under certain situations. But coercion is a natural part of life he argues and is present in economics and politics. Actually Niebuhr's position, although he does advocate against international conflict, is not of Pacifism. The only thing that could allow him to be considered one is that he, at the time, argued conflict, claiming that to engage in it is "suicide".²⁹ In reality, a term that would better describe him is pragmatic. Injustice is a problem that needs to be solved pragmatically. Capitalism is the breeder of injustice, so naturally, it needs to be weeded out. He was confident that it would eventually die in time however.³⁰

While this has not happened in America as of yet, the view of Capitalism has become more negative in recent years.³¹ With the change in modern America, Niebuhr's views of necessary coercion have actually been adopted in some senses. Unknowingly, the opinions among young, specifically college educated young, hold protesting, boycotting, etc as reasonable activities against what they deem as evidence of a faulty system, however this expands the realm of economics into ventures of race, gender, sex, etc.

His view in his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932) argued that coercion and even violence are necessary forces in achieving justice. Revolution was the way to justice for the proletariat. Simply put, if the system isn't changing, *make* it change. As harsh as this sounds, it could be said, that Martin Luther King Jr did this in his civil rights activities. Protesting, boycotting, speaking out, all of these were to force an unwilling party into acting in a more desirable way. While the word "coerce" may seem strange when accompanied by such a

²⁹ Ibid. 256

³⁰ Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2001) p.142

³¹ Gallup 2018. Newport, Frank. "Democrats More Positive About Socialism Than Capitalism".

positively perceived character such as MLK, coercion as Niebuhr writes as much more to do with the spirit of change than by hurt. Although it cannot be hidden that he advocated for violence in certain cases, specifically in *Moral Man*.

Moral Man had massive backlash, not only because it shocked and dismayed many pacifist but also because it attacked the idea of civilization gradually realizing the Kingdom of God: “The dream of perpetual peace and brotherhood for human society is one which will never be fully realized”.³² The reason is simple, the rich will never voluntarily empty their pockets. Appeals may cause some individuals to, but when groups are formed they develop a new conscious which can not be influenced to depart from their collective selfishness.³³ Appeals to brotherhood and goodness are not likely to take effect in the context of large groups because the strong are not willing to release their privilege. This is the problem with the disarmament issue and the idea of appealing to the goodness of individuals and expecting an eventual result: groups always hold themselves to a less moral standard than the individual.³⁴

Socialism

Niebuhr naturally gravitated towards the Socialist party, and joined in 1929, after he rejected Capitalism as an oppressive system. The party served as a means to express his newer more radical views on power. It was around this time that he was quickly leaving his earlier more liberal views behind. No more would he think that “the character of individuals rather than social systems...is the guarantee of justice in society”³⁵. No more would he think that love was the

³² Niebuhr. p.

³³ Nature and Destiny of Man p. 208

³⁴ Niebuhr p.9

³⁵ Ibid, p.12

answer to solving political issues. There was personal purity and then there was an ethical collective group, society, and transforming the individual would not suffice to transform the whole.

The belief is akin to the composition logical fallacy. Thousands of moral individuals does not necessarily make the group moral as a whole. There needs to be action to disrupt the system that allowed such injustices to form. *Moral Man* addressed those thoughts. The highly controversial book was negatively received by his peers and rivals alike. Even his brother, Richard,³⁶ was displeased with it. After communicating with his brother through letters, Niebuhr began to move economics and politics back and work on theology. Richard accused Reinhold of being too romantic about human nature and even too hard on ideals. *Moral Man* was militant and left even those with little hope and a dislike for ideals wishing for a more upbeat take on the subject. While the spirit may be down trodden, that does not make him wrong.

After discussing it further with Richard however, Reinhold decided to take a step back from his political and economic theories and delve deeper into theology. It was during this time that he began to distance himself with the Socialist party. He was disappointed that it, he felt, was still in its infancy and began to lose hope for it.

Pure Disinterestedness

³⁶ His brother's name is "Helmut Richard Niebuhr" but chose to be referred to by his middle name "Richard" after becoming a professor at Yale. Therefore, I too choose to refer to him as "Richard" instead of "Helmut": Fox, p. 144.

There is a claim today among some Christians that in order to follow the ways of Christ one must love like Christ. To be selfless and accepting of the others will necessarily lead to the Kingdom of God on earth where love and justice flourish. But what does it even mean to love like Jesus? How is that determined, measured, reproduced? Is this Christian or merely a simplified morality of extreme kindness? Most importantly, does this require the pursuit of political, social, or economic justice or make an optimistic assumption that justice will follow love? It is most likely that to those in alignment with the center view on the individual would conclude that change develops on a lower scale, one to one, with no emphasis on changing the social order.

Here I would like to insert Niebuhr. As seen through his experience in Detroit and with pacifism, there is a sort of naïveté. His experience in Detroit teaches that injustices do not solely stem from unethical individuals who exact immorality on the weak, but in social structures. Power differences aid this. His disavowal of pacifism taught that there are times when social structures must be challenged and changed through coercion. The main problem Niebuhr has with the Love ethic is that it is misunderstood. He explains:

It certainly offers no basis for a social ethic that deals responsibly with a growing society. Those of us who believe in the complete reorganization of modern society are not wrong in using the ideal of Jesus as a vantage point from which to condemn the present social order, but I think we are in error when we try to draw from the teachings of Jesus to attain to any modicum of justice.³⁷

His estimation is that Jesus did not leave us a social ethic but an individual ethic. One by which we can use in interpersonal relationships at best. His focus was on the individual, not on society as a whole: “the ethic of Jesus does not provide for the responsibilities of politics and

³⁷ Ibid. 33

economics”³⁸. What Christ demanded was “pure disinterestedness”, which is to be unbiased in regards to the self. One must forgive their trespassers³⁹, carry the load double what was asked⁴⁰. “Evil is not to be resisted”.⁴¹ Solving economic injustices is not only not in the gospels but against it as it requires demanding of rights and coercion.⁴² While considering the personal ethic, one will not eliminate injustice but to a smaller extent reduce it. Education, can still, even minorly, reduce it but society will never reach the Kingdom of God on earth through it.

Infact, an earthly Kingdom can never be reached due to the insatiable desire for power and inherent selfishness. What can be taken away from this? If Christ was not focused on societal change, specifically political and economic changes, but the individual then what does His Love mean? If Christ demanded change of the individual then what does that make of Niebuhr’s stance on societal change? Simply put, Christ didn’t give a guide on running the government or economic system but we have to make decisions on these topics. It is not enough to suggest that because Christ worked on an individual level that we must too. For a matter of fact, our cannot run our society this way. As a theologian, Niebuhr’s view on society may be seen as directly against the narrative of Christ but in reality, he seeks to create a society that in fact leads to the Kingdom of God.

The Love of Christ, may not be a guideline for running society, however, it does lend some valuable possibilities. First, though sinners, it is through this Love that we can judge ourselves and our conduct. While impossible to meet the standards completely, it is by knowing Christ’s love that Christians are inspired to love as they are loved to the best of their ability. It is

³⁸ Ibid.. 33

³⁹ Matthew 6:12

⁴⁰ Matthew 5:41

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 31

⁴² Ibid. 34

through this love that Christians understand God. Niebuhr has the right idea when he claims that the law of love is the highest but does not nullify justice. We cannot act with perfect love because sinfulness will rear its head again and again. But, The revelation of Christ as God changes Human history, not by transforming human possibility, but by revealing the love trumps law. But this love cannot free itself from human nature.⁴³ Because humans cannot emulate the purely selfless love of Christ to each other, it is through scrutinizing the power and privilege of others that humans can try to achieve that love. “Justice is the rational of Love”⁴⁴ in that it has rules, regulations, and procedures. Love is the abstract and emotional. The love that is required to create a just society requires more than any individual, let alone group, can give.

⁴³ Fox, p.12

⁴⁴Wright, Jenny. *Justice Between Fairness and Love? Christian Ethics in Dialogue with Rawls and Niebuhr* in *International Journal of Public Theology* 6. South Africa: University of Stellenbosch (2012) p.322

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