INESCAPABLE FREEDOM

(The Meaning of Interpretation)

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The Theology and Ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr
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This paper is an attempt to present H. Richard Niebuhr's concept of freedom and to offer several critiques for discussion of his notion of The Responsible Self. The paradoxical title of the paper demonstrates the dilemma through which we must plod, and the subtitle gives us some clearer vision of how Niebuhr conceives of freedom.

THE SETTING FOR FREEDOM

As the title of this paper suggests, Niebuhr's concept of freedom is inescapable not simply as an idea for ethical discourse, but as a fact of life. Man is "not free not to choose."[2] Man lives within values and powers, beings and relationships over which he can only exercise the freedom of choosing. The inescapability of freedom is the reality that freedom is dependent upon the situation in which man finds himself. Man chooses because other choices have been made. Thus, in order for a man to respond to the context in which he lives he must continue to choose.

> "Before we choose to live we have been chosen into existence, and have been determined to love life as a value. We have not chosen human existence, but have been elected members of humanity. We did not choose to be rational rather than instinctive beings; we reason because we must. We have not chosen the time and place of our present, but have been selected to stand at this post at this

[1] H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 149.

[2] H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1951), 249.

> hour of watch or of battle. We have not chosen to be social beings, immeasurably dependent on our fellows, nor have we chosen our culture; we have come to consciousness in a society and among established human works. Of these, life, humanity, reason, society, and culture are not only powers but also values, goods to which we have been attached by a necessary love. We are not able, it is true, to live with any of them in unfreedom. Even to live requires consent; we continue to be human only by continued choices; we are not rational without espousing reason, social without commitment to our neighbors; we cannot be 'all there' in the here and now without trying to be. But there has always been a choice prior to our own, and we live in dependence on it as we make our lesser choices among the things that are good for life, reason, and society."[3]

Choices are not made only in dependency on the past over which we have no power, but also in anticipation of the future, the consequences of our decisions over which we have no power. "We choose and are subject to many choices that are not our own."[4]

It is necessary to understand the implications of having been "thrown into existence," having a basis upon which to interpret the place in which we stand, to better grapple with this dependent freedom. On the surface it would appear that man is subject to his lot and is free only in so far as he plays the cards dealt to him. I would suggest at this point that this is what Niebuhr hesitates to do though he does not have much freedom to do otherwise. At the same time that he emphasizes the sovereignty of God he wishes to leave open the possibility of dealing honestly with man's experience, giving man some power.

Niebuhr says, "I believe that man exists and moves and has his being in God; that his fundamental relation is to God."[5] In his lecture, "The Gospel for a Time of Fears," he asserts that man is always up against God. All things are under God's control. God

[3] Ibid., 250.

[4] Ibid., 251.

[5] Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 44.

is always compresent.[6] "We are in God's hands, but we are not only in his hands, we are under his demands."[7] God's absoluteness is qualified by dialogue between God and man: God making His demands and man responding in the encounter. David Soper points out that "When God's sovereignty is reduced to law and divine-human fellowship to dogma, the dialogue between God and man is dissolved into incompatable doctrine."[8]

Niebuhr expresses the time-full experience of this encounter with "compresence"which he defines as the instances where ". . . we are most aware of our existence in the moment, in the now, when we are radically acted upon by something from without, when we are under the necessity of meeting a challenge with an action of our own, as is the case in every important decision."[9] In the lecture referred to he illustrates the human response to God's compresence:

> "One thing I know: that in every present moment I am under his (God's) rule and his command, and the question is not really which one of any two things am I going to do - - the real question is, how am I going to do the thing that I am going to do? It makes no difference, ultimately, whether I be a teacher or a preacher - - this is not the more important question of my life. The important question of my life is whether I am going to be obedient to God in the present moment of my life as a teacher or as a preacher."[10]

This encounter is also historical. Niebuhr speaks of this encounter as "fate," that history which we cannot escape, that which constitutes the "thus-ness and so-ness" of one's life. He says, "The radical action by which I am and by which I am present with

[6] H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Gospel for a Time of Fears", Sixth Annual Lecture Series, (Washington: Howard University, 1950), 12, 14.

[7] Ibid., 16.

[8] David W. Soper, Major Voices in American Theology, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 179.

[9] Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 94.

[10] Niebuhr, "The Gospel for a Time of Fears," 14.

this body, this mind, this emotional equipment, this religion, is not identifiable with any of the finite actions that constitute the particular elements in physical, mental, and personal existence."[11] Referring to his own place in history Niebuhr relates,

> "To be a Christian is simply a part of my fate . . . But I call myself a Christian more because I have both accepted this fateful fact and because I identify myself with what I understand to be the cause of Jesus Christ. That cause I designate simply as the reconciliation of God to man. . . . Jesus Christ is for me . . . the one who lived and died and rose again for this cause of bringing God to man and man to God and so also of reconciling men to each other and to the world. The establishment of this friendship is to me the big problem in human existence. Because through Jesus Christ - his fate - as well as by him - that is, his ministry - this has become evident to me; because in him I see the prospect of my own reconciliation; because I have been challenged to make this cause my own - therefore I call myself a Christian."[12]

However, Niebuhr suggests that there is a better way to conceive of one's historical situation rather than by the idea of fate. As one sees himself in relationship with other selves it is more apparent that he is being lived rather than that he merely is. One cannot say that he is "thrown into existence" at some point and then required to maintain himself by his own power. "I live but do not have the power to live."[13] The radical action whereby one asserts selfhood is an act of faith. Faith is defined as "the attitude of the self in its existence toward all the existences that surround it, as beings to be relied upon or to be suspected."[14]

If one pursues faith which is evident and experienced in radical monotheism, faith in the One beyond the many, this radical faith results in the assertion that ". . . Being is God, or, better,

[11] Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 112

[12] Ibid., 43-44

[13] Ibid., 114.

[14] Ibid., 118.

that the principle of being, the source of all things and the power by which they exist, is good, as good for them and good to them. It is relied upon to give and conserve worth to all the issues from it. What otherwise, in distrust and suspicion, is regarded as fate or destiny or blind will or chance is now trusted. It is God."[15]

Faithlessness relies upon chance, "undependable chance," to account for man's presence in a certain place and time. Decision making on this basis is a kind of arbitrary freedom which in the long run means virtually nothing. When choices are made in faithfulness, "reasoning faithfulness," ". . . it seems clear . . . that even more than life and reason it is a power and a value for which we have been chosen. It is a good we must consent to and receive and hold fast; it is not something that we originate and choose in independent freedom."[16]

In this introductory portion of the paper I have sought to set the stage upon which we find the role of freedom. Though a sovereign God is qualified in his actions toward man by the dialogue in the encounter and there is the act of faith which is trust in and loyalty to the One beyond the many the stage is highly deterministic. The power and the freedom appear to be that of God's and not man's.

Niebuhr says, "We can choose among many alternatives, but the power to choose self-existence or self-extinction is not ours."[17] This freedom which he offers is freedom in dependency upon being lived rather than the freedom of living itself.

[15] H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943), 38.

[16] Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, 251-252.

[17] Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 115.

Is there such a thing in Niebuhr as freedom? Niebuhr defines the notion of freedom as the interpretation one makes of another's action upon the self. "Our freedom presupposes and anticipates action not subject to our control."[18] What Niebuhr wants to evade, as cited later, is a mechanistic determinism. However, due to the fact that man is in society and society is in man, man is in time and time is in man, and God is the center of all value and sovereign over all things the only possibility for Niebuhr to posit freedom at the point of one's interpretation of another's action upon the self. The resultant action of the self is then the self's action; thus, it is free.

It is now important to elaborate the scheme of what it means to be a responsible self to see where in this scheme "interpretation" fits; for therein lies freedom.

THE MEANING OF INTERPRETATION

In Niebuhr's concept of responsibility there are four elements,[19] one of which is "interpretation" wherein lies a man's freedom. The first element is response. All action is response to action upon the self. This element by itself is not responsible action, but responsive (a distinction to be noted because all men answer to actions upon them, but not necessarily in a constructive manner which would be responsible action).

The second element is interpretation. A reaction is not a self action unless it is accompanied and infused with interpretation.

[18] Ibid., 173.

[19] Ibid., 61-65.

Interpretation is the identifying, comparing, analyzing, and relating of events in which the self participates so that actions are understood and have meaning. Interpretation sets events into larger wholes.

The third element is accountability. Actions are responsible in so far as actions upon us are interpreted and also as we interpret answers to our answers. This means one stays with the action in which he is involved and accepts either suffering or enjoying the consequences.

The fourth element is social solidarity. The self recognizes the continuity of selves in which responses are made. The self is not isolated. In fact, the self cannot be isolated from the rest of society and still be a self. Denial of this is ultimately a denial of selfhood. (We shall come back to this later.)

Niebuhr summarizes this concept by saying,

> "The idea or pattern of responsibility, then, may summarily and abstractly be defined as the idea of an agent's action as response to an action upon him in accordance with his interpretation of the latter action and with his expectation of response to his response; and all of this is in a continuing community of agents."[20]

Actions are preceded by interpretation both in teleological (man-the-maker) and deontological (man-the-citizen) responses. Teleologically, when two groups encounter one another (e.g. labor and management) they seek to interpret the goals of each other. Deontologically, when two groups encounter each other they will try to interpret the other's action in light of the other's laws.

Cathekontics (man-the-answerer) deals with what is fitting. Interpretation is essential.[21] As one interprets actions upon the self as actions which belong to a larger whole rather than an atom-

[20] Ibid., 65.

[21] Ibid., 60-61.

istic indident isolated from other events so one responds to the actions. The interpretation determines, "though in no mechanistic way,"[22] one's further actions. "We respond to these events in accordance with our interpretation. "Such interpretation, if need scarcely be added, is not simply an affair of our conscious, and rational, mind but also of the deep memories that are buried within us, of feelings and instructions that are only partly under our immediate control."[23]

There are two deterministic factors in man's interpretation: society and time. Where the teleologist becomes aware of self in relationship with objects first and others second and the deontologist is aware of self first in relationship with laws first and other selves second, the cathekontist comes to awareness in the presence of other selves. Man acknowledges his existence as a counterpart of other selves.[24] Niebuhr refers to George Herbert Mead who holds that"Self is a reflexive word and points to the reflexive fact. . . . (It becomes) an object to itself . . . through dialogue with others."[25] From the knowledge of self in society one knows oneself as a knower. Peter Berger supports the same view when he writes, "One cannot be human all by oneself and . . . one cannot hold on to any particular identity all by oneself."[26]

In this society there is history, particularly inner history since at this point we are speaking of values and meaning more than observed objective fact. In a sense there are two aspects to inner

[22] Ibid., 62.
[23] Ibid., 63.
[24] Ibid., 69-71.
[25] Ibid., 72.
[26] Peter L. Berger, Invitation to Sociology, (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., Anchor Books, 1963), 100.

history epistemologically. The first is called "constancy." One lives in relationships with Thou's that show constancy in their actions toward the self and also live in constant relationships with other Thou's and It's. By this experience the self is able to anticipate and predict the ways of other beings acting upon the self because this has happened in previous interactions.[27] Niebuhr would hold that this is one of the factors in determining that which is reasonable from that which is imagination.

> "We are not easily deceived by sensation but are fooled by a false imagination which interprets some sense-datum as part of a whole context to which it does not belong according to repeated, critical and common experience. . . . Reason does not dispense with imagination but seeks to employ apt images and patterns whereby an otherwise inscrutable sensation becomes a true symbol of a reality whose other aspects, as anticipated in the image, are available to common experience. The main sources of error in such knowledge of nature seem to be the use of false images, the purely reflective combination of images and patterns in the mind without constant reference to sensation in which mental expectations are fulfilled or denied, and such an absolute identification of images with things that all criticism of the former is made impossible and all response to the latter is channeled in customary ways."[28]

The second aspect of inner history is revelation. Revelation makes order and meaning understandable in one's personal history. Revelation affects interpretation in its three characteristics of giving meaning. "First of all, the revelatory moment is one which makes our past intelligible."[29] Second, "By reasoning on the basis of revelation the heart not only understands what it remembers but is enabled and driven to remember what it had forgotten."[30] "The third function of revelation with respect to the past

[27] Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 77-78.

[28] H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1941), 71.

[29] Ibid., 81.

[30] Ibid., 83.

we may call appropriation. When men enter into a new community they not only share the present life of their new companions but also adopt as their own the past history of their fellows."[31]

Thus, as society brings itself to bear upon the individual in which he becomes aware of himself so this society impresses upon the self a history and through this history a means of interpreting the past as well as future events.

In this context the triadic form of responses in which interpretation takes place should be outlined since it is this structure which determines the quality of responses. The first triad is "I-Thou-Nature." One does not interpret nature isolated from other selves. Nor does one interpret other selves in isolation from nature. The self is both dependent upon and independent of the Thou's and You's of communication. Defining in the social structure what he means by "independence," Niebuhr says,

> "I am independent of the society in my interpretation of, and my response to, natural events to the extent that I have a direct relation to these events and can compare the social reason or the dominant pattern of interpretation with my experiences. But no one is so independent of his social culture that he can meet and interpret the events we call nature without some of the words, categories, and relations supplied by his society."[32]

The second triad is "I-Thou-Cause." In this triad one comes to mature selfhood because he has committed himself to a cause (the act of faith). Cause cannot be interpreted apart from selves.[33]

The third triadic form is "I-Thou-Transcendent." When one relates to Thou's it is in a reference which points beyond itself to universals which encompass the group, e.g. God for the monothe-

[31] Ibid., 84.

[32] Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 81.

[33] Ibid., 83.

istice believer. In broader terms, this is a response to a universal community which bears with it universal responsibility.[34]

The interpretation of events is dependent upon the society in which one knows the self as a knower.

The second deterministic factor in a man's interpretation apparatus is time. Man lives in "I-Now" relations as he does in "I-Thou" and "I-It" relationships. Man is a time-full self. The past and future are extensions in both directions from the present. Niebuhr says, ". . . the self existing always in a now is one that knows itself as having been and as going into existence and into encounter."[35] In encounter the self responds with interpretations that are also time-full. Responses are conditioned by a priori patterns. New occasions are assimilated to old encounters. This does not mean the interpreting self is highly conservative, but the new event is attached to the past because the interpretive equipment binds the events to the past.[36] One's interpretation is also based on reference to the future where it is "predictive or prophetic of nothing" or "pregnant with possibilities."[37]

It is within this deterministic framework of interpretation that Niebuhr sets freedom. For the teleologist freedom "appears . . . as the necessity of self-determination by final causes."[38] For the deontologist freedom is the rejection of material which does not fit his purposes. This is not so when the material is ourselves "in our individual and in our social nature." We must accept

34 Ibid., 84-85.
35 Ibid., 93.
36 Ibid., 96.
37 Ibid., 97.
38 Ibid., 51.

ourselves "for better or for worse." The only thing possible for man is to rule himself as being ruled, "and not much more."[39]

Niebuhr draws his notion of freedom from Spinoza for whom freedom from his passion and the tyranny of events over him exercised via the passions "is freedom gained through correct interpretation with the consequent changing of responses by the self to the events that go on within it and happen to it."[40]

Niebuhr introduces his discussion of this topic by saying,

> "The Responsive and responsible self is not a machine to be sure, but is it not ruled by tradition and memory on the one hand and on the other by an inescapable conviction about the death-dealing character of that total environment? . . . The question of freedom arises in this connection as the question of the self's ability in its present to change its past and future and to achieve or receive a new understanding of its ultimate historical context."[41]

If one is able to change his past and future and acquire a new understanding of the ultimate historical context then a reinterpretation can result and a new response which is fitting can occur.

There are two ways to change one's patterns of interpretation.[42] The first is by antitraditionalism, the old patterns of interpretation are put aside. This has been possible with nature, but not with persons and communities unless they are reduced to the levels of objects or non-interpreting reactors. This denies all possibility of dialogue with one's history.

The second way one can change one's pattern of interpretation is to reinterpret whereby one ". . . recalls, accepts, understands, and reorganizes the past instead of abandoning it."[43] This

[39] Ibid., 51-52.
[40] Ibid., 58.
[41] Ibid., 100-101.
[42] Ibid., 101-105.
[43] Ibid., 102.

is done by pursuing our social history. ". . . every age tends to study again in the light of its new present the past it has brought along with it."[44] This is a move toward freedom. One studies the past either as a nation or a religious history or through analytic psychology to reconstruct the past. The past must be affirmed as a part of the ongoing interaction so that that which is fitting can fit into a universal scheme.

We must also reconstruct the future since we respond not only in recalled ways, but also in predictable ways. The factor of constancy affects both the past and the future. "We administer our energies and resources in response to demands made upon us by our bodies in their interaction with their environments in anticipation always of future demands and of future certainties of physical decline and death."[45]

Niebuhr locates the free will "at the point where the agent commits himself to inquiry into the future, longer series of interactions and into the responses taking place in the larger society, or at the point when he commits himself to resolute questioning of the adequacy of his stereotyped, established interpretations."[46]

The power (freedom) that the responsible self has in response to the ultimate community and to the eternity which embraces time is that he is an interpreting agent in the here and now. In the lecture referred to earlier Niebuhr says regarding the preaching of the Gospel, "The important thing is that I should stand with my neighbor before the Word of God, help him to see that Word, interpret that Word to him, and have him in turn interpret to me. This

[44] Ibid., 102-103.
[45] Ibid., 105.
[46] Ibid., 106.

is often the situation in which we are (in communicating the Gospel). There are three of us in any situation where we communicate."[47]

This is the only way to conceive of man in his present: as an interpreting agent with radical faith. Biological and historical data do not give sufficient evidence to how I am I. Biological events do not touch the fact that "it is I who am in or with this body, that I have this body, that this is my body."[48] To historical actions in society Niebuhr says, "I respond with critical acceptance, correction, or rejection and try to think fitting thoughts in a living, changing social tradition of interaction among minds and of interaction between minds and objects."[49] But this does not interpret for me that it is the I who is thinking in the here and now.

Radical faith is an ingredient for all knowing, especially the knowledge of oneself. It is this faith that qualifies "our interpretation of the radical act or agency by which we are selves, here and now."[50] It accompanies our encounters with others and conditions our responses.

Faith qualifies interpretation ins three ways.[51] First, faith asserts an integrity of the self as the self seeks to respond in the many roles which impinge upon it from all the events of life to the ultimate actions. This integrity is a result of responding to the One that is beyond the many,"and my response to every particular action takes the form of response also to the One who is active in it."[52] In Radical Monotheism and Western Culture

[47] Niebuhr, "The Gospel for a Time of Fears," 2.
[48] Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 110.
[49] Ibid., 110.
[50] Ibid., 118.
[51] Ibid., 121-125.
[52] Ibid., 123.

Niebuhr states, "This principle of personlike integrity is fundamental in a revelation that is an event which elicits the confidence of selves in their ultimate environment and calls upon them as free selves to decide for the universal cause."[53]

Second, faith asserts response in a universal community that transcends all other relations which has its center in the Transcendent One.

Third, faith asserts the goodness of creation. A man's values of good and evil affect his interpretation. ". . . should it happen that confidence is given to me in the power by which all things are and by which I am; should I learn in the depths of my existence to praise the creative source, than I shall understand and see that, whatever is, is good, affirmed by the power of being, supported by it, intended to be, good in relation to the ultimate center, no matter how unrighteous it is in relation to finite companions."[54]

The responsible self is an interpreting agent which "finds its unity in its explicit responsiveness to the deed by which it is a self, one I among all its roles, and in its responsiveness to one action in all the actions to which it is subjected."[55] Subjectively realized, "No matter how responsible I may be in my various roles as member of societies and holder of offices, I am not a whole, responsible self until I have faced up to this action, interpreted it, and given my answer."[56] Objectively stated, "The self which is one in itself responds to all actions upon it as ex-

[53] Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture, 47
[54] Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, 125.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

pressive of One intention or One context."[57]

The ultimate context in which the interpreting agent finds the self is this:

> "These two unities are inseparable from each other. I am one in my many-ness in myself and so responsible as self, as I face the One action in the actions of the many upon me.
>
> "Monotheistic idealism says: 'Remember God's plan for your life.' Monistic deontology commands: 'Obey God's law in all your obediences to finite rules.' Responsibility affirms: 'God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to all actions upon you as to respond to his action.'"[58]

FREEDOM: GOD'S ACTION AND/OR MAN'S EXPERIENCE?

The first question to be raised is whether freedom for Niebuhr is God's action and/or man's experience. In traditional Lutheran theology man's experience is basically ignored. Man is determined by God through His Word. Therefore, Martin Chemnitz says, ". . . you should not inquire whether you feel something, because his (God's) strength is made perfect in weakness; but by faith you must rest in God according to his promise, even though you feel nothing, yea even though you feel the very contrary."[59] This doctrine as it stands historically in Lutheranism belongs to the study of God rather than man because of what little it says about man. Beginning with man's power rather than God's is a more viable approach since those who have begun with God have left no room for human power.

Donald MacKenzie says in The Encyclopedia of Religion and

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 126.

[59] Martin Chemnitz, "Free Will," Trans. Herman A. Preus and Edmund Smits, The Doctrine of Man in Classical Lutheran Theology, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), 126.

Ethics:

> "The defect of Augustinianism and Calvinism is that they start from a knowledge of God's absoluteness above experience, deduce logically from this eternal decree, and so explain individual experience. We must start from experience, however, and, doing so, the problem is to reconcile God's absoluteness in grace with man's freedom. If we deny the latter, we deface man; if we deny the former, we are in a world which is a moral chaos, where ideals have no reality that can be depended on, where the holiest hope of man may never be satisfied."[60]

Does Niebuhr fall into the same trap with the classical Lutherans though he is attempting to reflect the experience of the individual? Despite his attempts to qualify God's sovereignty by placing emphasis on the encounter or dialogue between God and man does he contend that man is truly free as he is both faithful and faithless in the encounter? It seem man is free only in so far as he is trusting in and loyal to God, the One beyond the many.

In the realm of man's experience Niebuhr is aware of the physical and social sciences which hold extremely deterministic views about man. He seeks his "out" by giving man a decision to choose. It would seem, however, that interpretation of another's action upon me is so highly conditioned by history, society and time that one cannot call this choice freedom. The only freedom would be that the self can select various alternatives for the purpose of interpretation, but these alternatives are limited by society and time in man.

Thus, it seems that freedom for Niebuhr is God's action or, from a naturalistic point of view, conformity to necessity without contingency.

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[60] Donald MacKenzie, "Freedom," Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol VI, 126.

INTERPRETATION: AN EXCURSUS IN ECSTASY?

This leads to the second question: Is Niebuhr's concept of interpretation really an unrealistic excursus in ecstasy? Peter Berger has coined this idea of ecstasy for freedom which he defines as that which "transforms one's awarensss of society in such a way that giveness becomes possibility."[61] He conceives of man stepping out of his situation to take a good look at it.

I am not suggesting that Niebuhr wants to practice exstasy, but is his concept of interpretation not an excursus in impossible action? Though he does not take the self out of the society and time in which the self interprets, is he not wishing that these facts of life will not be as deterministic as they are?

THE AGENT: FREE TO INTERPRET AND/OR RESPOND?

The third question to be raised is whether the human agent is more than an interpreter. It would seem that in Niebuhr's transformation ethic the agent could only be an interpreter. Yet, the question is whether this assumption is true, and if it is true, whether one has said enough.

In "The Responsibility of the Church for Society" Niebuhr says, "To be responsible is to be a self in the presence of other selves, to whom one is bound and to whom one is able to answer freely; responsibility includes stewardship or trusteeship over things that belong to the common life of the selves."[62] To whom

[61] Berger, op. cit., 136.

[62] H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Responsibility of the Church for Society," The Gospel, the Church and the World, Kenneth Scott Latourette, ed., (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), 114.

and for what a self is responsible are dependent upon each other. He then says, "What a man is responsible for depends in part at least on the being to whom he is accountable."[63] In terms of the Church he is trying to convey that the Church is responsible to God-in-Christ (the universal God) and Christ-in-God (the merciful God) for the social realm. The Church is responsible in three ways: as an apostle - to preach the Gospel; as a pastor - to have compassion on those in need; and as a social pioneer - to respond to God on behalf of the whole society."[64]

Though the responsive self is not necessarily a responsible self, the converse is true. The responsible self does respond within the categories of interpretation, accountability, and social solidarity. Thus, I would suggest that man-as-agent is more than an interpreter, and it is in this "more than" that a man finds himself free.

Niebuhr gets at this when he speaks of the Church's role as a pastor: the Church can affect a person's needy condition. I would have expected him to say in the category of the Church as a social pioneer more in terms of the Church opening up some new frontiers where the Church would affect change, but he doest not.

I would center the place of man's freedom in responsibility at that point where man can affect the responses of others by his own action. Man cannot be free over himself, but as he is a part of time and society impinging upon another he is free. This is not to discount the factors of interpretation because an act to be freely responsible must be committed after consideration of the consequences. However, this does not make an irresponsible act

[63] Ibid., 116

[64] Ibid., 126-132.

upon another self unfree. When the other is acted upon irresponsibly this other is denied the opportunity to act freely responsible upon another. Responsible freedom takes into account that the response of the other acted upon has the possibility of free responsibility toward another.

Niebuhr is opening the door to this type of freedom when he describes who a neighbor is.

> "He is the near one and the far one; the one beside the road I travel here and now; the one removed from me by distances in time and space, in convictions and loyalties. He is my friend, the one who has shown compassion toward me; and my enemy, who fights against me. . . . He is man and he is angel and he is animal and inorganic being, all that participates in being. That we ought to love these neighbors with rejoicing and with reverence, with gratitude and with loyalty is the demand we dimly recognize in our purer moments in science and religion, in art and politics. That we shall love them as we do not now, that is the hope which is too good to be true. That we are beloved by them and by God, that is the small faith, less than the mustard seed in size, which since the time of Abraham and of Jesus Christ remains alive, makes hope possible, encourages new desire and arouses men to anticipated attainments of future possibility."[65]

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[65] H. Richard Niebuhr, The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), 38-39.

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