



The Postsecular Prophets

Christian Realism for Terrifying Times: A Trans-Atlantic Introduction

The “McWorld” Problem

- “The End of History,” Fukuyama and his infamous political prediction
- “The Death of God,” secularization theory and its infamous religious predictions
- Exclusive humanism and “A Secular Age”
- On airports and Big Macs: is neo-liberal capitalism producing globalist homogeneity?



Immanuel Kant's Democratic Peace Theory gets “Supersized”

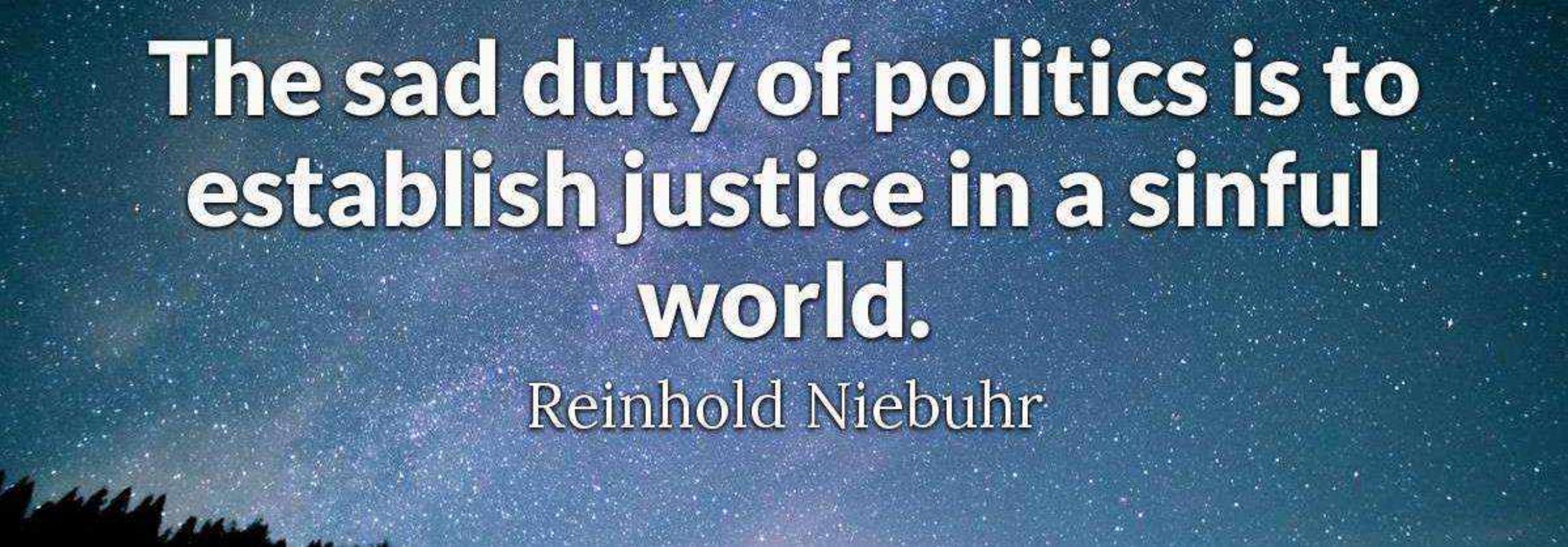


The “Jihad” Problem

- History: reports of its end have been greatly exaggerated
- Waves of populism, nationalism, and polarization are sweeping the world (nor is this primarily an “American-led” movement)
- *La revanche de Dieu*, the global resurgence of religion and the transformation of international relations
- “Modernization” clearly ≠ “Westernization”

The Postsecular Prophets: Christian Realism for Terrifying Times

1. Reinhold Niebuhr and the “American School”: Christian Realism for the Ascendant Superpower
2. Herbert Butterfield and the “English School”: Christian Realism at Empire’s End
3. Abraham Kuyper and the “Amsterdam School” : Christian Realism for the Middle Power
4. Postsecular Prophets? Some Preliminary Conclusions
5. A Few Suggestions for Enthusiasts



**The sad duty of politics is to
establish justice in a sinful
world.**

Reinhold Niebuhr

Reinhold Niebuhr and the “American School”

Augustine for the Ascendant Superpower

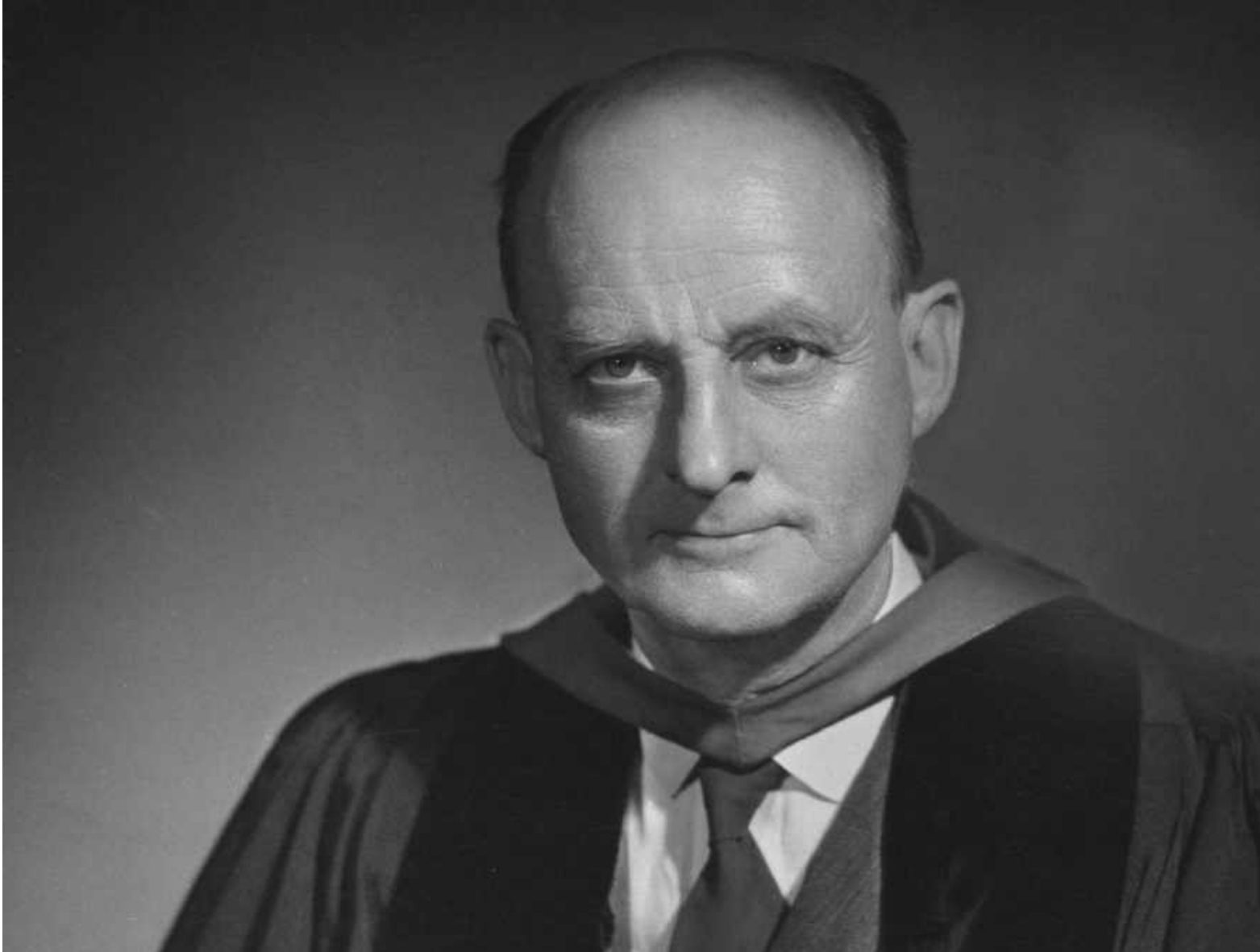
Reinhold Niebuhr

- *Does Civilization Need Religion?* (1927)
- *Christianity and Crisis* (1941)
- Against the pacifists, the “social gospel” and the belief in progress
- But hardly *for* the fundamentalists
- ‘The World After the War’: A Niebuhrian influence on John Foster Dulles, the FCC, and the United Nations?



The whole art of politics
consists in directing rationally
the irrationalities of men.

Reinhold Niebuhr



Reinhold Niebuhr

- Realism and Idealism are not *doctrines* but rather *dispositions*
- Realism, to be *realist*, must be rooted in an Augustinian anthropology (non-dualist, skeptical of the human heart).
- Egocentricity is the great danger, “this tendency of the self to make itself its own end or even to make itself the false center of whatever community it inhabits” (exclusive humanism).
- Egoism is not, for Niebuhr, a *solution* but *the problem*

Reinhold Niebuhr

- The solution to *egoism* is not primarily *fear*, as in the pagan realist quadrilateral (egoism, anarchy, groupism, power politics).
- The Augustinian solution is *love*.
- “Commonwealths are bound together by a common love, or collective interest” (Niebuhr).
- “higher” and “lower” political orders are determined by the more beatific or debased loves toward which it bends

**Man's capacity for justice
makes democracy
possible, but man's
inclination to injustice
makes democracy
necessary.**

Reinhold Niebuhr
American Theologian

QUOTEHD.COM

**THERE IS NO CURE FOR THE
PRIDE OF A VIRTUOUS
NATION BUT PURE
RELIGION.**

Reinhold Niebuhr

PICTUREQUOTES.COM

Reinhold Niebuhr

“A realism becomes morally cynical or nihilistic when it assumes that the universal characteristic in human behavior must also be regarded as normative. The biblical account of human behavior, on which Augustine bases his thought, can escape both illusion and cynicism because it recognizes that the corruption of human freedom may make a behavior pattern universal without making it normative.”

Reinhold Niebuhr

“Every earthly peace is good as far as it goes. But they will not have had it long for they used it not well while they had it.”

Augustine

AN AMERICAN CONSCIENCE

The REINHOLD NIEBUHR Story

A film by MARTIN DOBLMEIER

WHICH GOES BEYOND JUSTICE
AN BE TO... SHED ALONE; THEREFORE WE ARE SAVED BY LOVE
RIGHTNESS IS THE FINAL FORM OF LOVE
IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF HISTORY;... THE SAVED
TEXT OF HISTORY; THEREFORE WE...
NG WITH... TRUE OR BEAUTIFUL OR GOOD MAKES COMPLETE...
ING THAT IS WORTH DOING CAN BE ACHIEVED
BE SAVED BY HOPE
COMPLETE SENSE IN ANY IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF...
REINHOLD NIEBUHR... NOTHING WHICH...
GOING HARDSHIPS AS THE PATH...
ONE DAY AT A TIME
WHAT CANNOT BE ACCEPTED AND ACCEPTED...
TENDENCY TO CLAIM GOD...
OUR PART...
SOURCE OF ALL RELIGION...
HUMOUR...
Laughter is swallowed up...
BY FAITH...
ILL...
TH-MAKER TO KEEP ORDER...
THE COMFORT...

“The American School”

For Niebuhr, commonwealths constituted by common loves were the units of the international system. Fear, anarchy, and groupism were not the normative features, but simply common characteristics of the widescale pluralism of broken hearts, societies, and institutions of a world rent by sin.



The task of the historian is to
understand the peoples of the
past better than they
understand themselves.

Herbert Butterfield

Herbert Butterfield (1900-1979)

“The Whig Interpretation of History” at the Twilight of Superpower

Herbert Butterfield

- *Diplomatic Investigations* and the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics
- “I value every one of the fifty-two miles that separate Cambridge from Westminster”
- *The Statecraft of Machiavelli, Christianity Diplomacy and War, International Conflict in the Twentieth Century*
- *The Whig Interpretation of History*

LIBRARY OF MODERN THINKERS

HERBERT BUTTERFIELD

HISTORY, PROVIDENCE, AND SKEPTICAL POLITICS

Kenneth B. McIntyre

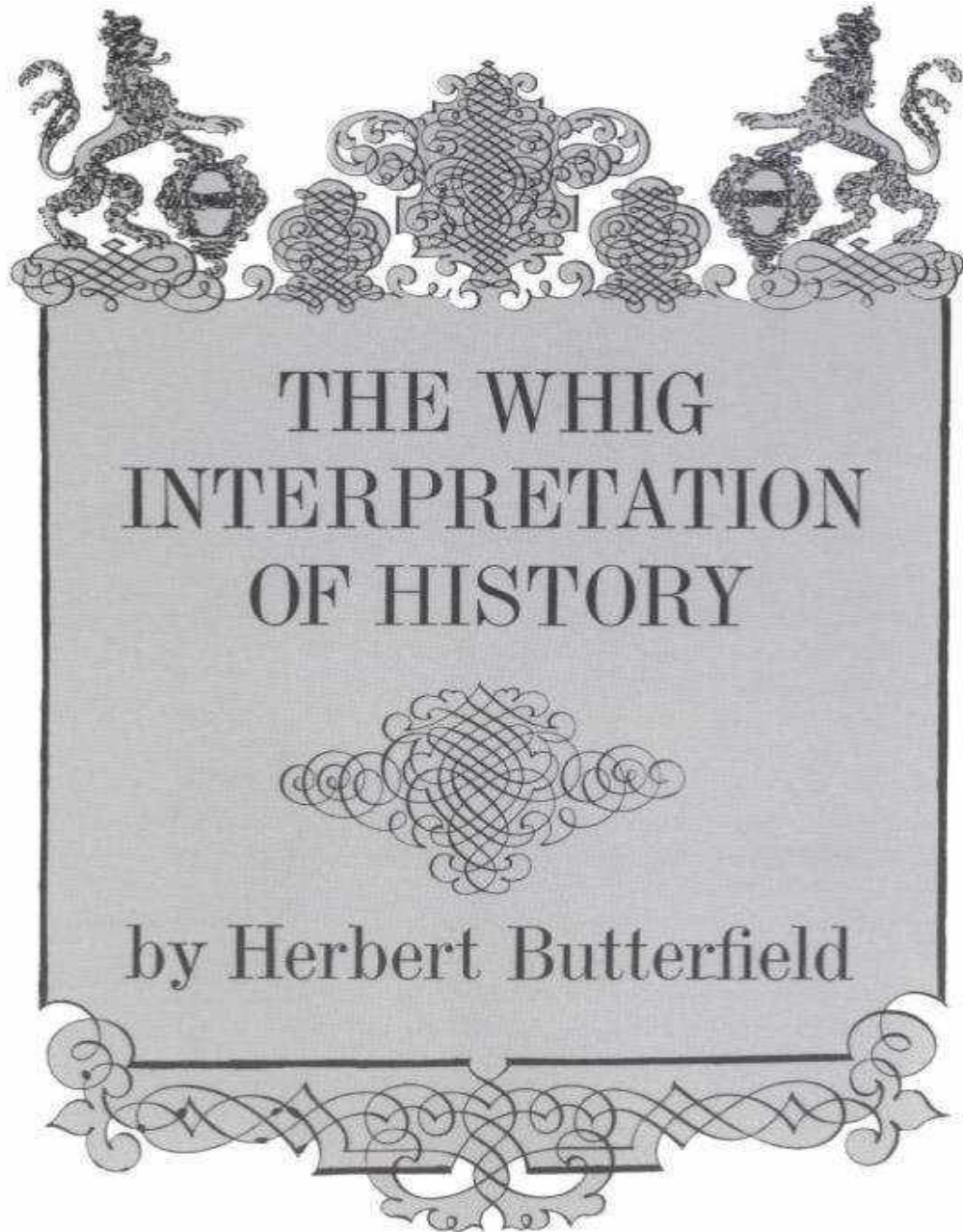


**THE GREATEST OBSTACLE TO THE
UNDERSTANDING OF THE HISTORY OF
SCIENCE IS OUR INABILITY TO UNLOAD OUR
MINDS OF MODERN VIEWS ABOUT THE
NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE.**
- HERBERT BUTTERFIELD -

LIBQUOTES.COM

The “Herbert Butterfield Problem”

The Whig Interpretation of History, in which modern-day moral values “intrude on historiography” and construct a kind of “drama of good versus evil” was “the worst kind of history.”



Herbert Butterfield

- Leopold van Ranke: “nothing in the world can ever be regarded as existing merely for the sake of something else”
- “all generations are equidistant from God”
- Our ancestors are more than *useful* they are our *neighbors*, and God has specific commands about how to treat neighbors (including the bearing of ‘false witness’)

Herbert Butterfield

Was Butterfield just another empirical-positivist as his critics claimed?

Assailing the Whiggish interpretation for being “value laden” in favor of positivist history?

“The past is a foreign country”

This is the most difficult task for the diplomat.

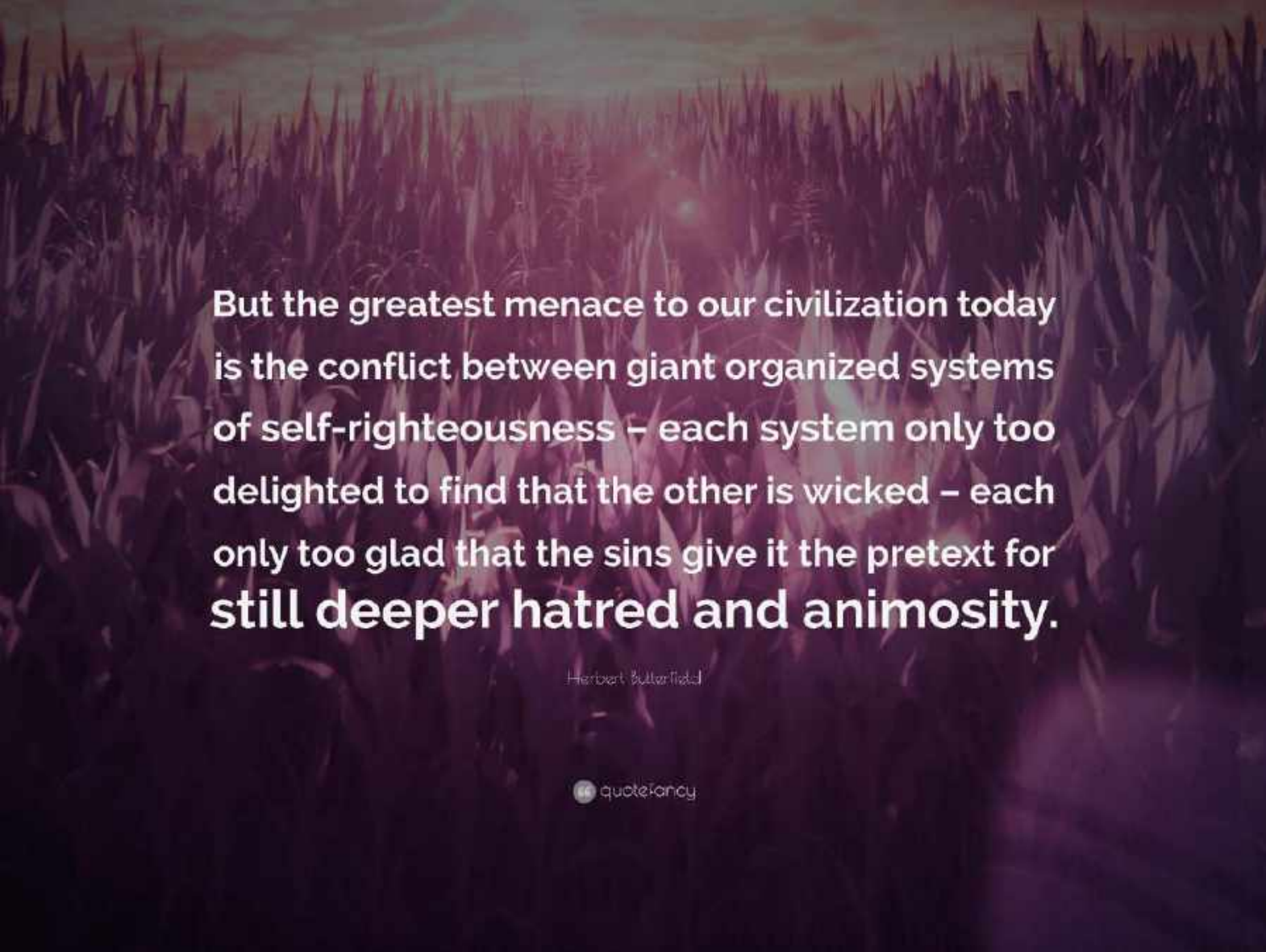
“This preoccupation with transcending the historian’s cultural and ideological perspective – with putting oneself in the place of others through a mighty exercise of sympathetic imagination, understanding, a suspension of judgment, and ultimately Christian love – would bear fruit later in Butterfield’s analyses of diplomacy and his prescriptions to statesmen.”

Albert M. Coll, *The Wisdom of Statecraft*



If history can do anything it is to remind
us that all our judgments are merely
relative to time and circumstance.

Herbert Butterfield



But the greatest menace to our civilization today is the conflict between giant organized systems of self-righteousness – each system only too delighted to find that the other is wicked – each only too glad that the sins give it the pretext for **still deeper hatred and animosity.**

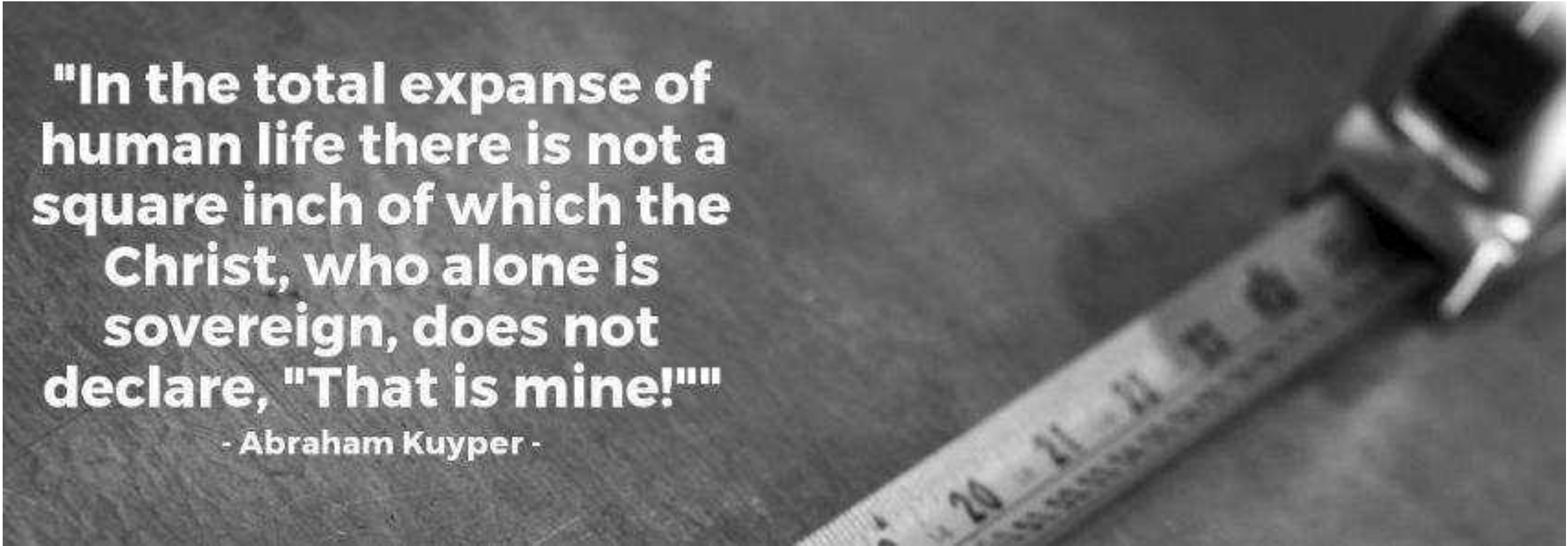
Herbert Butterfield

quoteancy

Herbert Butterfield

The problem of fear amidst worldview pluralism

The *other* is always an object of fear, even if we have no rational justification, because of a basic Hobbesian dilemma intrinsic in anarchy.



**"In the total expanse of
human life there is not a
square inch of which the
Christ, who alone is
sovereign, does not
declare, "That is mine!""**

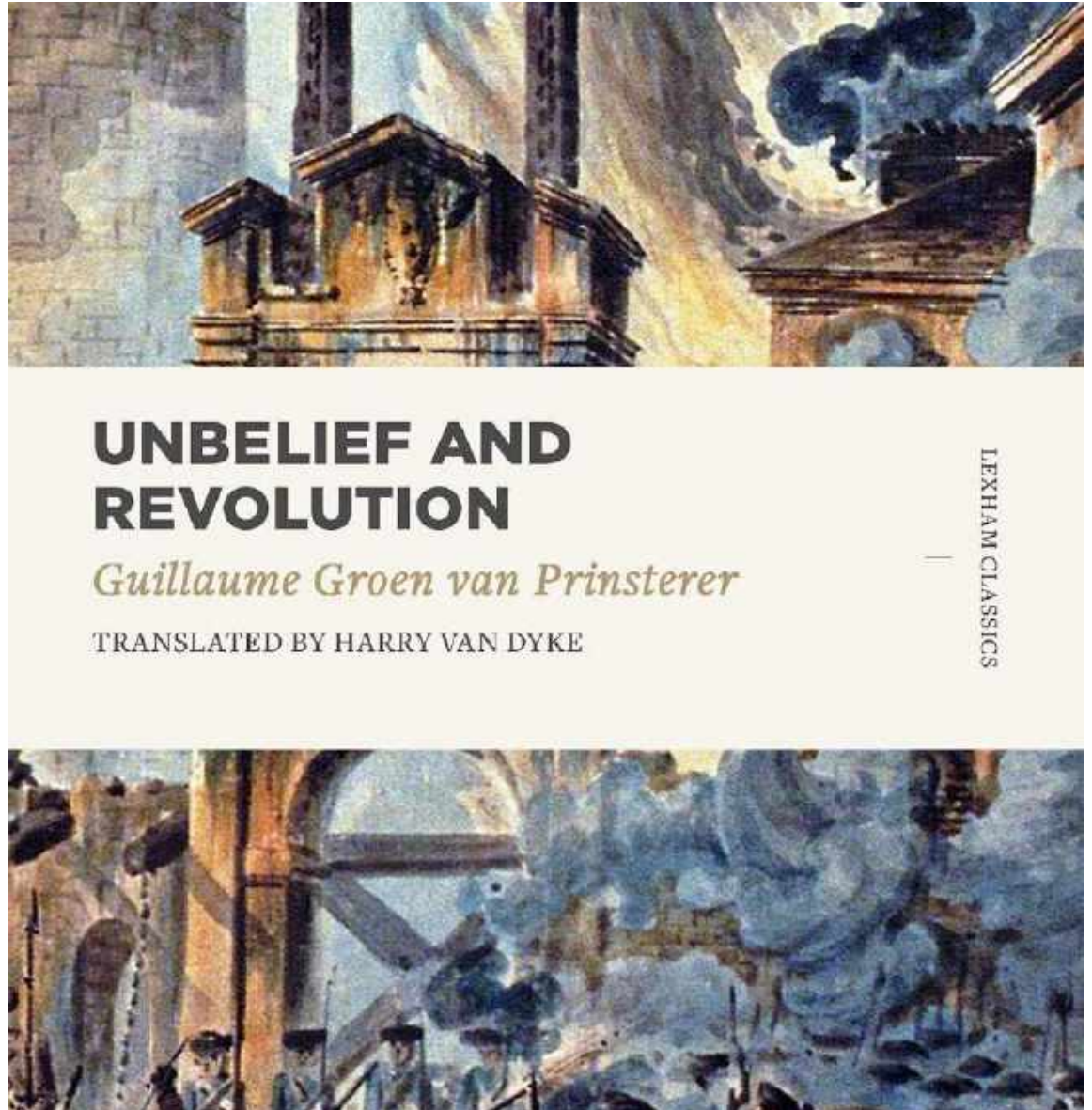
- Abraham Kuyper -

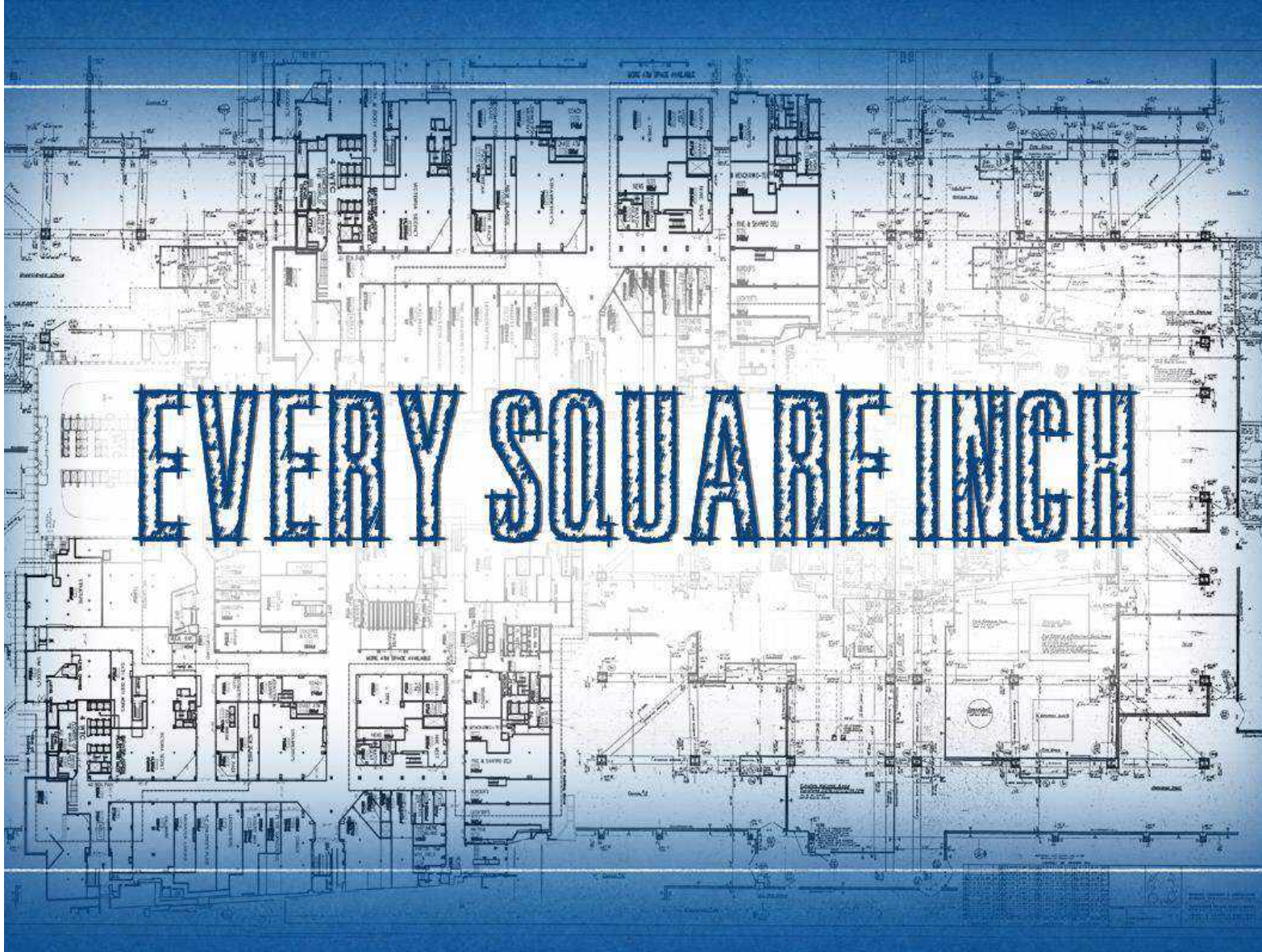
Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

Calvinism vs. Modernity in a Middle Power Low Country

Abraham Kuyper

- Kuyper, the modern preacher, meets Pietje Baltus
- Recovering Calvinism: the anti-thesis, human rationality, and exclusive humanism
- Groen van Prinsterer's "anti-revolutionary" history
- Calvinism *against* modernism, but *for* pluralism





Abraham Kuyper

Worldviews, worldviews
everywhere

There is no neutral politics.
All human culture, just as with
human hearts, are either
directed *toward* or *away* from
God.

All stand on either the rock of
faith, or the sand of rival gods.

Abraham Kuyper

Religion and the history of
peoples and nations

Augustine inspired
historiography: what do we
love?

The *organic* nation





The best, the only,
the absolutely certain proof
of the truth of Christianity
is that unless its truth is presupposed,
there is no proof of anything.
Christianity is proved
as being the very foundation
of the idea of proof itself.

- *Cornelius Van Til* -



Abraham Kuyper

The problem of pluralism:
can politics bridge this
divide?

But how do we bridge
worldviews?

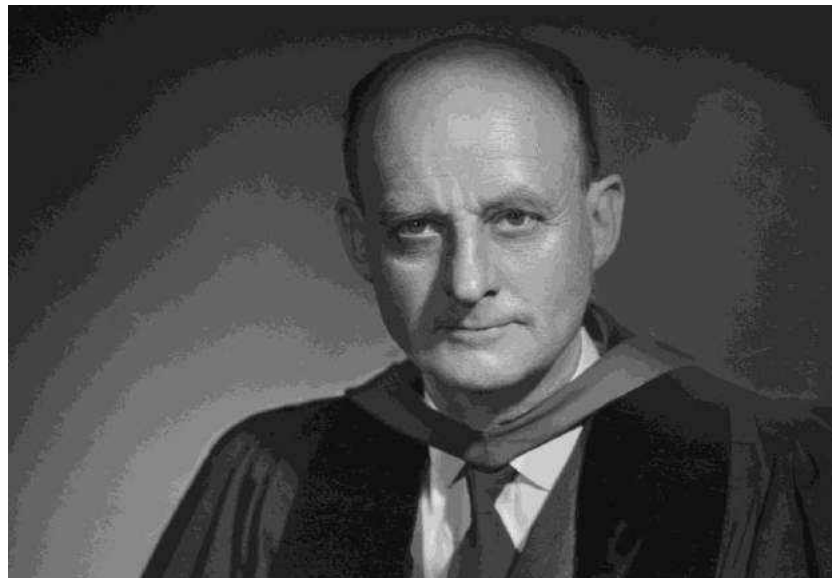
The challenge of a
presuppositional apologetic

Common grace and the
Imago Dei



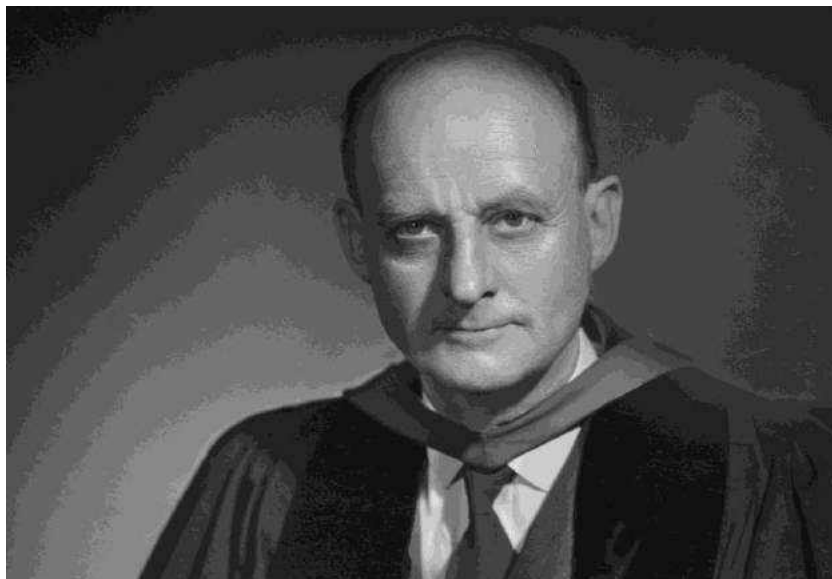
Postsecular Prophets?

Christian Realism for Terrifying Times: Some Preliminary Conclusions



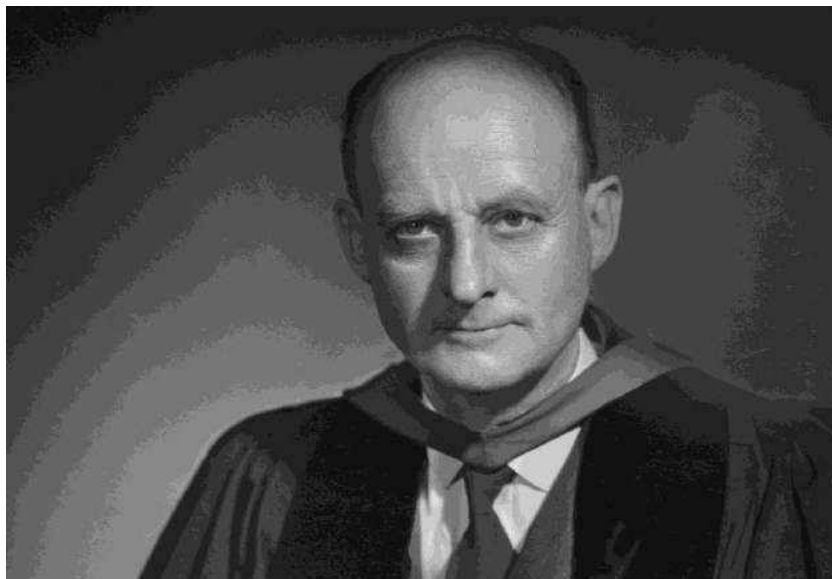
Postsecular Prophets?

- They were *against* modernism and so anticipated much of “postmodern” politics but could not be counted among them.
- Where late and postmodernism doubled down on exclusive humanism, these thinkers all rejected that basic tenet.



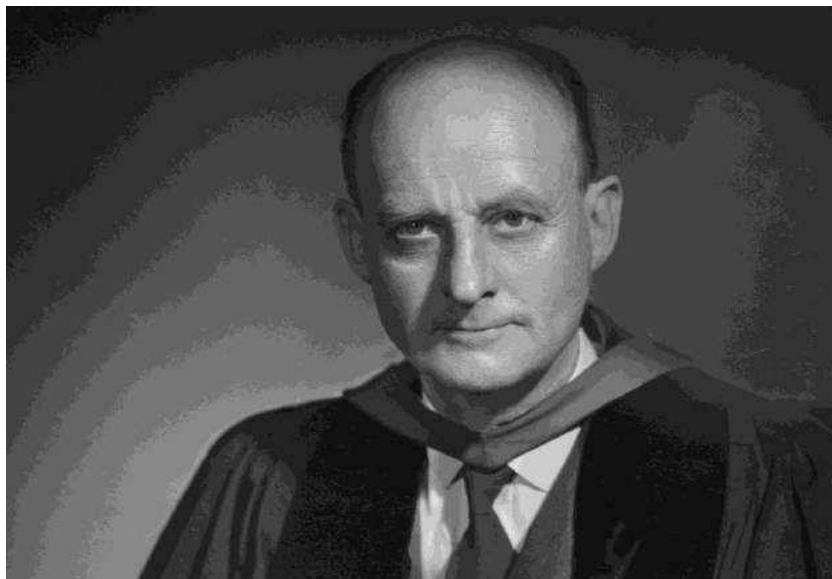
Postsecular Prophets?

- This also meant a rejection of historical materialism, “the race for calories and power” (and a rejection of utopianism or idealism).
- That rejection took *religious* form, Augustinian for each.
- What about Eurocentrism?



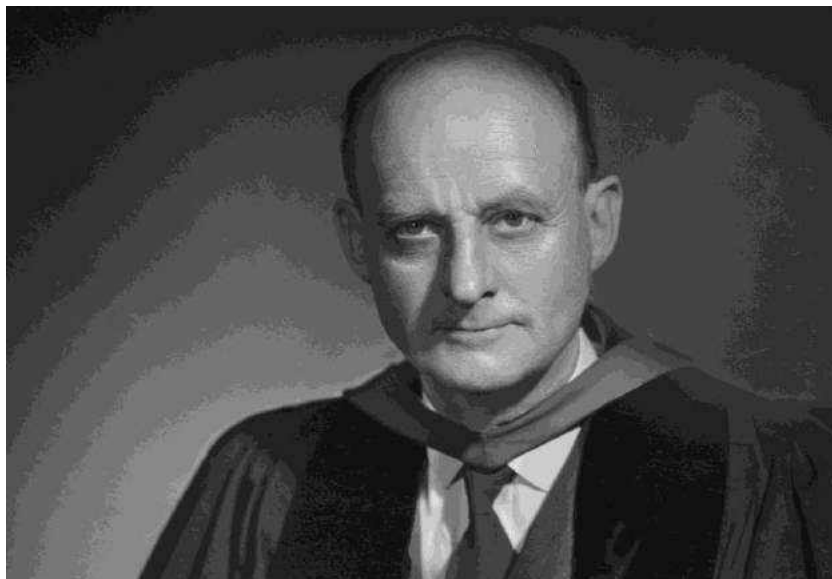
Postsecular Prophets?

- The problem of pluralism and ethics.
- It also creates the problem of sliding into only “elite” diplomacy. We cannot default to secular categories of *religion*.
- *But* it also anticipated the postsecular turn.



Postsecular Prophets?

- Niebuhr, Butterfield, and Kuyper give us a picture of Christian Realism in three rival geopolitical contexts, concrete manifestations of Niebuhr's *disposition*
- They each argue political societies are not rooted in groupist fear, but collective loves



Postsecular Prophets?

- Bridging systems of rival loves, and the fear those rivalries create, is the tremendously difficult task of the diplomat
- Such an international relations *is* a kind of anthropology, even a kind of theology



Christian Realism for Terrifying Times

A Few Suggestions for Enthusiasts

