

BOOK NOTES

REINHOLD NIEBUHR: PROPHET TO POLITICIANS. By Ronald H. Stone. Abingdon Press, Nashville. 272 pp., \$8.

This is the best available introduction to the life and work of Reinhold Niebuhr. It is based upon a careful reading of Niebuhr's published works, upon the Niebuhr papers in the Library of Congress and upon personal interviews and study at Union Theological Seminary in New York. It combines biographical information with an analysis of Niebuhr's theological and social thought. It is at the same time appreciative and critical. The style is clear and readable.

The author avoids a schematic distortion of Niebuhr's work by discussing it according to its chronological development, a method that enables him to do justice to the variations and developments in Niebuhr's thinking through the years. Liberalism is the most apparent unifying theme in the study and the structure of the book is based upon four attitudes or positions that Niebuhr took toward liberalism. Niebuhr began his ministry as an heir of the Protestant theological heritage that had been modified by theological liberalism and by the social gospel. "His public career can best be organized around his disillusionment with liberalism, the Marxist critique of liberalism, the most severe theological critique of liberalism, and the rediscovery of liberalism by the pragmatist."

A careful reading of this book may save many young churchmen from repeating the failures, frustrations and tragedies of liberalism and the social gospel in the 1920s. A theology and a churchmanship without historical depth may be clever, but it always lacks wisdom. Those who have not read Niebuhr are likely to repeat, indeed the evidence is overwhelming that they are repeating, the mistakes of fifty years ago. As Michael Novak exclaims, "Early Niebuhr, where are you when we need you?"

The book is strongest when it deals with Niebuhr's political thought, which is evidently the prime interest of the author. It is not so strong when it deals with Niebuhr the theologian. Niebuhr's fascination with the "penumbra of mystery" that encompasses human existence is absent from this study. For this reason this particular book is a good study of Niebuhr's life and work which all ministers ought to read, but it is not a definitive study.

JOHN H. LEITH

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TIME INVADES THE CATHEDRAL: Tensions in the School of Hope. By Walter H. Capps. Fortress Press, Philadelphia. 152 pp., \$3.75.

Walter Capps offers a first-rate introduction for would-be students of the theology of hope. A genuinely illuminating

thinker in his own right, Capps earlier presented interpretations of Bloch, Moltmann, and Metz which passed in the student underground as "ponies" to the more difficult works of those theologians. Now this experiment in introducing the "school" of hope again to a wider American audience makes fine reading, good food for meditation as well as action.

The image Capps unabashedly lifts from Bloch—time invading the cathedral—incapsulates much of the force of the work itself. The primary verticality of the cathedral, formally representative of systematic and "permanent" theologies, now must be supplemented with time's horizontal qualities. In Capp's own words, "The cathedral within which men worship

YOU cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him to find it within himself.—GALILEO.

the God 'who will be' must of necessity become a vessel fitted for passage."

Capps emphasizes the interdependence of the theologians of hope and their mutual insights. But he also explores areas of their disagreement and the "tensions" in their sometimes competing theologies. His language remains comparatively simple and the structure of his argument is clear. The work proves eminently worthwhile for reading by folk of every persuasion.

LOUIS WEEKS

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