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**“A CRITICAL STUDENT OF AUGUSTINE” – REINHOLD NIEBUHR’S
INTERPRETATION OF AUGUSTINE**

Doctoral School of International Relations and Political Science
Political Science Doctoral Program

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CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Ádám Darabos

2023 Budapest

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.”

Mt. 5:6

“For I do not do the good I want,
but the evil that I do not want is what I do.”

Romans 7:19

“I make no apology for being critical of what I love.

No one wants a love which is based on illusions
and there is no reason why we should not love a profession
and yet be critical of it.”

Reinhold Niebuhr

FOREWORD

After acquiring my B.A. in Political Science at Eötvös Lóránd University and during my M.A. studies in Political Science at the Corvinus University of Budapest, I was fortunate to be an intern at the Institute for Political Science, Academy of Sciences. The research group was called the *Paradox of Realism*. As a member who joined later than the “founders,” I was urged to choose – possibly a realist – author to investigate. While Tibor Mándi introduced me to Zoltán Gábor Szűcs, he inquired if he knew a potent theoretician for me who is interested in Christianity and politics. After five seconds of hesitation, he replied: “Let it be Reinhold Niebuhr.” First, I was shocked since I had never heard that name before (which indicates how Niebuhr is neglected in Hungary). Nevertheless, after a few months, I was deeply interested in dealing with Niebuhr and his writings. Fortunately, this feeling still prevails.

In the past six years, I have written several shorter and longer texts on Niebuhr, which are not worth mentioning.¹ My MA thesis focused broadly on Niebuhr and his Christian realism. A narrower topic was necessary for my dissertation, and so came Augustine. Months – or even years – after I chose the theme of Augustine’s role in Niebuhr’s

¹ Appendix 1. includes those writings which are not mentioned in the Bibliography.

political thought, I surprisingly realized that the first review (written by Zoltán Gábor Szűcs) referred to Niebuhr's relation to Augustine as a possible way to move forward. It seems that sometimes reviews influence us somewhat unconsciously than consciously.

Beyond Tibor Mándi and Zoltán Gábor Szűcs, I am greatly indebted to two political scientists. I am also profoundly thankful to András Körösenyi for trusting me to give me my first job as a research assistant at the Institute for Political Science, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Furthermore, I am incredibly grateful to Zoltán Balázs, my former and current supervisor, for his advice and for being a role model professionally and personally.

A more personal thankfulness is felt towards my friend Péter Szakács, a Roman Catholic priest, who read most of my writings on Niebuhr and corrected many of my grammatical, stylistic, and theological inaccuracies. I am also indebted to my wife, Luca, who put up with the fact that I am often in a different dimension (even with her). Finally, thanks to those who heard my prayers during the struggles with this dissertation, I believe the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and God as Holy Trinity. As always indicated, none of those above (especially the last three) are responsible for the mistakes of this dissertation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Reinhold Niebuhr has influenced the whole climate of thinking about man, ethics, and especially political ethics. People are influenced by Niebuhr who don’t even realize it,” said American Protestant social ethicist John C. Bennett in 1967 (Bennett, 1967, p. 200). Though the question of partiality arises in the case of Bennett, as he was a close colleague and friend of Niebuhr, it is evident that Niebuhr is considered as one of the most significant American theologians, philosophers, and political thinkers of the 20th century.² The well-known historian (and also a colleague of Niebuhr) Arthur M. Schlesinger called Niebuhr “the most influential American theologian of the 20th century” (Schlesinger, 2005). The “great realist” of international relations, Hans Morgenthau, addressed him as the “greatest living political philosopher of America” (Morgenthau, 1962, p. 109). Niebuhr’s legacy also prompts politicians in the United States, Democrats and Republicans, to claim he is on their side.³ Among others, Jimmy Carter, John McCain, and Hillary Clinton admitted the greatness of Niebuhr’s thoughts or borrowed insightful ideas from him. Furthermore, in a 2007 New York Times interview, Barack Obama said that “I love him. He’s one of my favorite philosophers” (Brooks, 2007).

First, as a protestant pastor, then as a university professor and scholar,⁴ and finally, as a public intellectual,⁵ was Niebuhr a central figure of his times in the United States.⁶ Though he was not unknown in Protestant ecclesiastic life, Niebuhr burst into the public sphere after the publication of *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (2001 [1932]), in which he suggested that individual man may be able to act following moral principles, “it is more difficult, if not impossible for human societies and social groups” (Niebuhr, 2001,

² For his influence in America, see the article of Hans J. Morgenthau (1962). Niebuhr also praised Morgenthau as the “most brilliant and authoritative political realist” (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 71).

³ Christianity Today (May 25, 2017).

⁴ For a reminiscence about Niebuhr as a university professor and a scholar, see Marion Pauck (2006), Ronald Stone (1992), and a review – which discusses Stone’s book as well – by Matthew Berke (1993).

⁵ For insight into Niebuhr as a public intellectual, see Graeme Smith (2014).

⁶ For a biography of Niebuhr, see Richard Fox (1985). Although Fox’s biography rightly received indignant criticism from Niebuhr’s family, friends, and followers for its psychologizing attitude and questionable arguments on picturing Niebuhr as an overheated ambitionist, it remains one of the most detailed and most thoroughly researched biographies.

p. xi).⁷ In the following decades, Niebuhr expressed his views in the columns of – overwhelmingly Christian and leftist/socialist – newspapers and books concerning ethics, theology, international relations, and politics.

Niebuhr's political thought is frequently framed by the phrase Christian realism, which – like other terms – is, on the one hand, challenging to be defined while, on the other, has several definitions and conceptualizations given by the researchers. In short, Christian realism is generally treated as an approach, a perspective, or a way of thinking which focuses on human sinfulness/selfishness, political and social realities while it aims to achieve Christian social goal(s), usually justice.⁸ The practical historical relevance of Christian realism occurs most visibly in fighting against the extreme forms of idealism and realism. It was critical of liberal Protestantism, political and religious utopias (e.g., communism), but it was also against the crude use of power as it emerged in the cases of wars or the brutal coercion of the working classes.

In the past half-century, the American social sciences have been eager to research Reinhold Niebuhr's ideas; the secondary literature could fill libraries on Niebuhr. Like Niebuhr's interest, the literature on his thought is extensive. At least four disciplines are interested in Niebuhr: (social) ethics, theology, political thought, and international relations theory. Among these four, international relations is probably the most fertile, considering the number of scientific articles. From the beginning of the 2000s, for more than a decade, the literature about Niebuhr has been significantly growing. The upheaval resulted from the "war on terror," the reoccurrence of realism, and the already mentioned Obama quote in 2007. Asking Obama about what Niebuhr tells him, leaving his cautious and measured political utterance, the politician lively replied: "I take away the compelling idea that there is a serious evil in the world, and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief we can eliminate those things. But we shouldn't use that as an excuse for cynicism and inaction. I take away... the sense we have to make these efforts knowing they are hard, and not swinging from naïve idealism to bitter realism" (Brooks, 2007). One year later, after the presidential election, the

⁷ Niebuhr used the term *man* inclusively, meaning that *all* human beings are included. Consequently, the dissertation uses it in the same manner.

⁸ For well-elaborated definitions and conceptualizations of Christian realism, see Shinn (1982), Lovin (1995), Patterson (2003), and Paispais (2020). A short elaboration on Christian realism will be given in a later section (sub-chapter 2.2).

journalists and the researchers began to address the relationship between Niebuhr and the new president, Obama. For years, the ambition was to demonstrate the effects of Reinhold Niebuhr's thoughts on Obama's views, ideas, politics, and policies.⁹ Although this kind of investigation was not expected from the beginning of Donald Trump's presidency, Niebuhr still attracts considerable research interest.

Beyond the articles that directly tackle the question of Niebuhr and Obama, there is, of course, "Niebuhr studies." Although the most relevant biographies are not from the last two decades (e.g., Bingham, 1961; Pauck, 1975; Fox, 1985; Stone, 1992), there are still several new monographs on specific aspects of Niebuhr's thought. The authoritative sources include Martin Halliwell's *The Constant Dialogue: Reinhold Niebuhr and American Intellectual Culture*, Lovin's *Reinhold Niebuhr* (2007), Charles Lemert's *Why Niebuhr Matters* (2011), Daniel Rice's *Reinhold Niebuhr and His Circle of Influence* (2013), and the *Oxford Handbook of Reinhold Niebuhr* (from now: *Oxford Handbook*) edited by Lovin and Joshua Mauldin (2021), which summarizes Niebuhr's life and thought most comprehensively. Most of these writings are descriptive and analyze Niebuhr's social ethics, theology, political thought, and intellectual legacy.

Only one path will be distinguished from the uncountable journal articles on Niebuhr. The fruitful topic that interests the researchers is what Niebuhr could say for us in the 21st century. Is his theology, social ethics, political thought, or Christian realism still applicable to today's social and political life? If yes, should we take the descriptive or the normative part of it, or maybe both, as in the original? In his article titled *Christian Realism for the Twenty-First Century*, Lovin (2009) argues that although time has revealed the limitations of the original formulation of Christian realism, the theological principles of judgment and responsibility still provide the possibility of an adequate interpretation of global politics in this era. In one of his other writings, a review essay titled *Reinhold Niebuhr in Contemporary Scholarship*, Lovin (2003) emphasizes the dispute that focused on Niebuhr's theological legacy. On the one hand, Stanley Hauerwas (2001) argues that resulting from his close connection to William James's pragmatism, Niebuhr's theology is too thin, while on the other hand, Langdon Gilkey

⁹ For magazine articles about the policy decisions of Obama based on Niebuhr, see, for instance, J. Bew (2016) and Jeremy Blake (2010). For scientific articles about Niebuhr and Obama, see, for example, Liam Julian (2009), William Felice (2010-2011), Holder-Josephson (2013), and Rhodes-Hlavacik, (2015).

(2001) appreciates Niebuhr's theology, which should be interpreted in the light of his view of history (Lovin, 2008). Considering Niebuhr's role in the 21st century, other scholars have also written exciting articles, including Andrew Bacevich (2015), Liane Hartnett & Lucian Ashworth (2020).

In short, most current works on Niebuhr's ideas deal with either what Niebuhr thought or its contemporary consequences. In other words, the content, relevance, and influence of Niebuhr's thoughts are primarily investigated. This has distracted the attention from the "sources" of Niebuhr, namely, what kind of influences, especially theoretical influences, affected him while shaping his political thought. Which authors engaged Niebuhr? Which authors did he turn to for inspiration? How did he interpret them? How did these authors influence his theological, social, and political thinking?

The literature has begun to discuss the contemporary influences on Niebuhr focusing on the relationship between Niebuhr and his contemporaries, including John Dewey, Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, H. Richard Niebuhr, Joshua Heschel, and others (see Rice 2013; Part II. of Lovin-Mauldin 2021). Nevertheless, this did not occur (or at least not consistently) with those theoretical influences who were not contemporaries but whom Niebuhr read, interpreted, and inspired from: for instance – if Kroner's (1961) account is taken into consideration – (Saint) Paul, (Saint) Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Blaise Pascal, and Søren Kierkegaard. The relation of these authors to Niebuhr appears only tangentially in the literature of the last two decades (probably even in general). Tangentially means that – except for some instances, which will be referred to in the literature review focusing on the "chosen figure" – they are either not mentioned, or the discussion is casual and unsystematic.

This objection is valid even in the case of (Saint) Augustine (354-430), who – based on the relevant literature (e.g., Kroner, 1961; Lemert, 2011; Tsonchev, 2018; Lovin-Mauldin, 2021), Niebuhr's intellectual autobiography (Niebuhr, 1961 [1956]), and his wife's, Ursula's Niebuhr¹⁰ statements (Niebuhr, 1991), has had a significant influence

¹⁰ Ursula Mary Keppel-Compton (later Ursula M. Niebuhr) (1907-1997) was born in Southampton, England. After graduating from the University of London in theology and history, she – as the "English fellow" – was the first woman to receive a scholarship to the Union Theological Seminary, New York. There she met Reinhold, and they married in 1931. Ursula was a well-learned theologian. She was also a lecturer and one of the founders and leaders of the Department of Religion at Barnard College. Ursula

on his thought. In a private letter, Niebuhr called himself a “critical student of Augustine” (Niebuhr, 1991, p, 379). In short, a gap concerning the theoretical influences that affected Niebuhr’s thought can be found, which is also valid in Augustine’s case. This dissertation aims to fill a theoretical gap through a systematic elaboration and evaluation of Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows: as an introduction, two crucial concepts, namely *political realism* and *Christian realism*, will be summarized to put Niebuhr into context (chapter 2). After that, a literature review will provide insight into the theoretical works that take the relation of Augustine and Niebuhr seriously (chapter 3). Drawing on the conclusions of the former chapters, the research question, the scope, the method, and the structure (chapter 4), and then the dissertation’s challenges and limitations will be set (chapter 5). Finally, in the central part of the dissertation (chapter 6), Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine will be elaborated and evaluated based on a chronological overview of Niebuhr’s life and works (especially his books). In the end, a conclusion will be drawn in the last part of the dissertation (chapter 7).

Beyond the formerly mentioned theoretical relevance, Eric Gregory’s argument on how influential Niebuhr’s reading was to other authors or even politicians further affirms the necessity to investigate Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine seriously. He argues:

“Niebuhr’s influence in associating Augustine with political realism should not be underestimated. For many citizens, at least in American churches and universities, Niebuhr is the standard route into political Augustinianism. In fact, given the relative neglect of Augustinianism in twentieth century Catholic social thought, it is not too much to claim that Niebuhr’s Augustine has become the Augustine of both protestant and Catholic political imagination. The authority of Niebuhr’s Augustine continues to be invoked whenever policies appear to indulge in the illusions of utopianism” (Gregory, 2008, p. 82).

was a coauthor several times in Reinhold’s works. For Reinhold’s note on the coauthorship and Ursula’s influence on him, see Niebuhr, 1965, pp. 28-29.

A crucial question remains unanswered: above the already mentioned theoretical relevance (and a Hungarian practical one¹¹), why Augustine and Niebuhr? And why now?¹² Both Niebuhr and Augustine were skeptical about the moral capabilities and perfectibility of individuals and human communities (such as nations). Their thought can be utilized against sentimentalism (an extreme form of idealism) and political utopias, which are irrelevant or ineffective in fostering political action. However, their political thought – which partly contained their theological and ethical ideas – did not turn into cynicism (an extreme form of realism), which either demoralizes or immobilizes political action. Moreover, despite their pessimism, they formulated normative expectations toward citizens on Christian ethical grounds. By understanding this kind of political thought, it is possible to participate in politics with the will to implement moral values (like love or justice) in society while not forgetting that people are fallible and politics is not just about morality but also order and power. This way of thinking is robust but does not lead to extremities, which, just as now, has always been the enemy of liberal democracies.

¹¹ The practical relevance of this dissertation is that it might serve as an instrument to deliver Reinhold Niebuhr's thoughts to the sphere of the Hungarian social sciences. Despite his vast legacy, Niebuhr's thought in Hungary is relatively abandoned or unknown. Serious attempts to investigate Niebuhr's ideas have happened only in Protestant circles. For instance, István Bogárdi Szabó's article (1998) is the most satisfactory summary of Niebuhr's political thought in Hungarian. Zsolt Papp wrote five articles ((2010; 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2014) and his dissertation (2019) on Niebuhr's social ethics, while István Pásztori-Kupán (2009a, 2009b) examined his ethics and theology, more specifically his debates with Karl Barth. Péter Gaál-Szabó (2013) wrote an article on Niebuhr's Christian realism and Martin Luther King's Philosophy of Coercion. Besides some international relations lectures in universities, Niebuhr's realism is mentioned concerning political realism (e.g., Szűcs, 2014; Molnár, 2016) or articles, books, and dissertations on American conservatism (e.g., Békés, 2011; Egedy, 2012; 2014). Besides other favors, Niebuhr's political realism might serve as a valuable addition to the Hungarian realist dialogues (e.g., Szűcs Zoltán Gábor & Gyulai Attila [eds.] [2016] or Láncki [2015]).

¹² These questions were asked similarly by Jean Bethke Elshtain and John Patrick Diggins. Elshtain's article was named „Why Augustine? Why Now?” (Elshtain, 2003b), while Diggins's book was titled “Why Niebuhr Now?” (Diggins, 2012).

2. PLACING NIEBUHR INTO CONTEXT – THE QUESTION OF REALISMS

In order to put Niebuhr into context, two crucial concepts, *political realism* and *Christian realism* will be introduced first. Niebuhr's thought and 20th-century Augustinianism orbit around these concepts; hence a necessary lead must be provided.

2.1. Political realism

Political realism is an influential way of thinking in political thought. Though it has a long history, it has retaken a distinguished place in political philosophy and public debates in the last decade. Numerous factors explain the reoccurring prosperity of realist thinking.

One of the most critical factors is the appearance of the contemporary (mainly) Anglo-Saxon political philosophers (e.g., Bernard Williams, Raymond Geuss, Matt Sleat, Mark Philp, Richard Bellamy) frequently labeled as political realists. While criticizing their essential anti-thesis, the „moralist” John Rawls, they formulated new positions and theoretically fruitful arguments in the political realist literature.

Everyday social, economic, political, and cultural factors also contributed to the resurgence of political realism. Although 9/11 renewed realism in American international relations theory, the real spark (or the symbolic event) was probably the 2008 global financial crisis which is also interpreted as a moral crisis and led to a social crisis. The crisis made it clear that the “end of history” and the linear progress of the liberal order and global capitalism are illusions. This realization seems even more valid from the first half of the 2020s, considering COVID-19 and the Russian-Ukrainian War. The diagnosis of these recent events in the framework of political realism also often led to the approval of the realist arguments. Furthermore, political actors (especially from the new right) also like to interpret themselves as “realists” as opposed to “idealist” or “moralist” global elites/liberals/leftists/intellectuals, which means that politics itself further fostered the usage of the term.

Still, it is easy to face difficulties if someone wishes to define political realism. The reason for that is simple; several contesting and conflicting ideas exist considering the definition of political realism; here, only those two approaches will be described which

are relevant to this research. Before doing this, it can be clarified that political realism is not identical to *Realpolitik*. According to political realist Matt Sleat, *Realpolitik* can be understood as a “reduction of politics to violence by making the de jure right to rule equivalent to the de facto ability to do so” (Sleat, 2014, p. 315). The “might is right” slogan fits well with this position. In short, political realism tries to keep a distance from *Realpolitik*. Though its representatives often want to ensure more autonomy for politics, they do not treat politics as an amoral sphere. Sleat claims that in the case of legitimacy, political realists intend to take a position between *Realpolitik* and moralism (Sleat, 2014). After mentioning what political realism is not, let us turn to the question of what political realism is.

First, political realism can be treated as a tradition in the history of political thought. According to political scientist Alisson McQueen, this is “a tradition that is focused on power and interest, suspicious of moralizing, and attentive to the limits of political action” (McQueen, 2018, pp. 6-7). Thucydides, St. Augustine, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber, and Carl Schmitt are treated as significant figures in the political realist tradition. At the same time, the author mentions Edward H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, Kenneth Waltz, and John Mearsheimer as representatives of realism in international relations (McQueen, 2018, p. 7.). This definition of realism is obviously a broad one; if two random representatives (e.g., Augustine and Nietzsche) were compared, several differences would be found. Nevertheless, in the three key characteristics, they would undoubtedly resemble.

Second, in the discipline of international relations, one of the first realist schools was the so-called “classical realism,” whose representatives are mid-twentieth century American authors who turned against the idealism of their era; their three leading figures were Edward H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and Reinhold Niebuhr. These authors heavily focused on international relations, especially 20th-century America’s foreign policy. Duncan Bell argues that classical realism “can be seen, in part, as an attempt to

employ their [the realist's]¹³ insights to try and understand the horrors of twentieth century (international) politics” (Bell, 2008, pp. 1-2).¹⁴

If this pattern is applied to Augustine, it can be argued that the ancient philosopher was a suitable source of inspiration for the modern realists: he pointed out the sinfulness of human nature and the desire for power, he accepted the use of political power and violence, he defined the conditions for waging a just war (which provided the basis for just war theories), he criticized Cicero for his naivety in treating the Roman Republic a compact of justice, and he described certain phenomena (e.g., the security dilemma)¹⁵ that seems to be plausible for 20th-century international events – summarizes philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain, the well-known critic of realists’ interpretation of Augustine (Elshtain, 1995, pp. 19-23).

Niebuhr was undoubtedly considered a realist. Nevertheless, his realism has many aspects. From *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, he emphasized the difference in moral performance between human individuals and collectives, especially social classes and nations (Niebuhr, 2001). In *Reflections to the End of An Era*, he praised Marxist political strategy, its quest for social justice, and its ability to capture factors of self-interest and power behind the idealism of the capitalistic system (Niebuhr, 1934). In *Christianity and Power Politics*, Niebuhr fought against the realists’ opponents: the utopians, simple moralists, and the foolish pacifist (Niebuhr, 1940). *The Nature and Destiny of Man* contained his deep criticism of rationalists and began to synthesize his ideas on the sinfulness of human beings (Niebuhr, 1964 [1941;1943]). *Christian Realism and Political Problems* is famous for appreciating Augustine’s political realism (Niebuhr, 1953). In short, Niebuhr’s realism has many facets, and he is rightly called a realist even if the elements which balance this realism (e.g., the law of love, the criticism of excessive realism, the normativity regarding social justice) are less emphasized.

¹³ Bell mentions Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Marx, Nietzsche, and Weber as the most notable representatives of realism (Bell, 2008, p. 1).

¹⁴ Obviously, these categorizations are not mutually exclusive; the “classical realists” share similar views with the representatives of the realist tradition. For instance, Niebuhr could be treated as much a representative of the realist tradition as a classical realist.

¹⁵ It is called a security dilemma when an international political actor (typically a state), by increasing its own security, provokes a reaction from another international political actor (typically a state or states) that ultimately reduces its own security.

Beyond the fact that his position changed over time, understanding Niebuhr's realism and Christian realism is further complicated because he does not write consistently about these concepts. In his early years, the balancing attitude between realism and idealism is more prevalent (Niebuhr, 1928; 1932). Later, realism is endorsed as a perspective superior to idealism (Niebuhr, 1953). Nevertheless, the representatives of realism and Christian realism can also fall into traps if they do not balance their views adequately (Niebuhr, 1953).

Nevertheless, the crux of the matter at Niebuhr is as follows: realism is the ability to understand reality properly. When Bennett emphasizes that Niebuhr's early period leads us to understand his latter commitments and developed thought, he also calls attention to the fact that "we have proof of his early commitment to social justice and of the early presence of that searching honesty and what was later called realism especially in his self-criticism and in his criticism of the Church" (Bennett in Niebuhr, 1977). In this case, the emphasis on "searching honesty" expression should be stressed. It is possible to describe Niebuhr's realisms in several ways, creating distinctions from other definitions. Many have (rightly) done that. Still, in the end, Bennett's words are probably the best guides: it is the ability to understand reality properly for which "searching honesty" is necessary. This might seem simplistic, and it may be simplistic. Still, when an era full of optimistic illusions and utopian dreams prevents seeing the essence of human nature or certain elements (e.g., the nature of politics) in the historical reality, probably no other ability is more essential.

It should be added that another concept, namely *pragmatism*, can also describe Niebuhr's attitude toward political and social questions. For Niebuhr, the prime American pragmatist, William James, was a reference point. James appears in the Niebuhrian corpus occasionally, but the relation originates from Niebuhr's university years since both his B. D. (*The Validity of Certainty in Religious Knowledge*) and M. A. theses (*The Contribution of Christianity to the Doctrine of Immortality*) included James' pragmatism. Stone argues that "Niebuhr's realistic pragmatism, apparent in both theses, was dependent on William James and especially on Professor Macintosh" (Stone, 1992, pp. 17-18). Fox called Niebuhr a "thoroughgoing Jamesian pragmatist" (Fox, 1985, p.

84), while Paispais uses the expression “Niebuhr’s realist pragmatism” (Pasipais, 2016, p. 1616).

Furthermore, one of the most polemical writings on Niebuhr’s theology, Stanley Hauerwas’ *With the Grain of The Universe*, deals with Niebuhr in relation to James.¹⁶ Even if Niebuhr’s pragmatism can be criticized, it does not end in relativism. As Jude Bingham writes, “he believes there is truth, but that ‘we must never confuse our fragmentary apprehension of the truth with the truth itself’ (Bingham, 1961, p. 31). Indeed, if Niebuhr is saved by pragmatism, one of the reasons for that is his moral realism, a crucial characteristic of his thought, which also occurs in Christian realism.

2.2. Christian realism

In the long realist tradition, Niebuhr is only a representative. Nevertheless, he is treated as the most significant figure in Christian realism. Several authors use the term as a synonym for Niebuhr’s thoughts or equate Niebuhr’s followers with Christian realists. Lovin clearly underlines that “Reinhold Niebuhr was the most important voice of this movement” (Lovin, 1995, p. 2), but he rightly highlights that Christian realism also belongs to other scholars.

Narrowing Christian realism to Niebuhr ignores those who contributed to the occurrence of it. Douglas Clyde Macintosh and Walter Marshall Horton, Niebuhr’s professors at Yale, wrote about “religious realism” and “realist theology” before Christian realism. Though their perception was more theological than political, the two academics closely related to the realist movement in the 1930s and Niebuhr. An even better example is Bennett, who, contrary to Niebuhr (who never dealt with the concept systematically), wrote a book entitled *Christian Realism* (Bennett, 1941).¹⁷ Contemporary philosophers and political thinkers like the late Elshtain and Lovin also belong to the Christian realists. Even if Christian realism can be interpreted in different ways, starting the conceptual clarification with Niebuhr is beneficial.

According to Fox, Niebuhrian Christian realism is a negative rather than a positive approach; it does not assign predetermined positions to political situations. All it

¹⁶ For a short chapter in which Hauerwas maintains his criticism while sharing his appreciation of Niebuhr, the thinker, and the man, see Hauerwas, 2021.

¹⁷ For a summary of Bennett’s monography, titled *Christian realism*, see Darabos 2022a.

expects from his followers is to represent a middle way between the two spiritual traps – utopianism and resignation, sentimentalism and cynicism (Fox, 1985: 277). Fox’s definition also points out that Niebuhr’s Christian realism is dialectical. Most of the time, it was formulated in opposition to something such as the idealism of liberal Christianity, the inaction of selfish pacifists, the moral insensitivity of certain realists, or the rationalism and optimism of liberal social philosophers.

Although Niebuhr tends to point out the strengths and weaknesses of certain waves of thought (for instance, liberalism, naturalism, communism, conservatism, Christian orthodoxy, or liberal Christianity), he often associates authors with them. In terms of liberal social philosophers, he considered John Dewey a symbolic figure.¹⁸ Rice argues that Niebuhr’s choice of targeting Dewey in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* was logical because he was “America’s pre-eminent philosopher and most prominent voice of social liberalism in the United States” (Rice, 2021, p. 144). Rice also quotes the famous pragmatist philosopher, a contemporary of Niebuhr who studied under Dewey, Sidney Hook, who claims that, for Niebuhr, “John Dewey serves as a Pelagius to his Augustine” (quotes Rice, 2021, p. 145). Furthermore, while acknowledging their merits, he criticized Walter Rauschenbusch for his excessive optimism,¹⁹ Karl Barth for his passive Christian pacifism, Paul Tillich for his abstract Christian theology, and Emil Brunner for his excessive pessimism. Among currently less-known Christian liberal opponents of Niebuhr, Shailer Mathews, Francis Peabody, or E. Stanley Jones could be mentioned (Niebuhr, 1935).

Obviously, it happened that in intellectual debates, Niebuhr marginalized or misinterpreted the opponents’ point of view, making the target easier to attack and presenting his own insights more convincing. Fox also affirms this: “like most debaters Niebuhr was not making a close study of his opponent’s thought; he was constructing an ideal-type opponent who was easy to take down” (Fox, 1985, pp. 136-137). In the case of Dewey, Niebuhr later admitted that in his early period, he criticized him too harshly and, to the detriment of presenting similar insights, he emphasized Dewey’s

¹⁸ At this time, Niebuhr launched a conflict in the liberal tradition he was also part of.

¹⁹ Though it was mainly the product of his Rauschenbusch Memorial Lectures, thus the acknowledgments might seem a little artificial, in the preface of *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, published in 1935, Niebuhr calls Rauschenbusch “not only the real founder of social Christianity but also its most brilliant and generally satisfying exponent to the present day” (Niebuhr, 1935).

divergent opinions (Rice, 2013: 76.).²⁰ Niebuhr's method of making historic generalizations which might have been unfair to his opponents is confirmed by Stone (1992, p. 78).²¹ Niebuhr's first overwhelming success was winning an inter-school debate contest when he was 19 years old. For his entire life, he remained to be and became a more and more superior debater. This is incorporated into his works, resulting in the fact that Niebuhrian Christian realism can be framed as a product of this debating attitude, as Fox does.

Roger Shinn (1982) uses a different approach to conceptualize Christian realism. He explains Christian realism by deriving meaning from the "parts" or words of the phrase. The ethics of the perspective is *Christian*, taking biblical ideas and traditional doctrines seriously: the uniqueness of biblical revelation, the sinfulness of man and society, God's judgmental and redemptive activity, belief in justification by divine grace, and the distinguished quality of love. Meanwhile, realism is a critique of naive idealism and utopianism, as well as a confrontation with the brutal facts and power struggles of our reality. Christian realism is, at best, not an artificial amalgamation of the two; realism should be followed in applying Christianity and Christianity in using realism – writes Shinn (1982).

One of the most well-known scholars of Christian realism, Lovin, claims that "Christian Realism is a combination of different 'realisms' – political, moral and theological" (Lovin, 1995, p. 28). In addition, he provides a short history of Christian realism in which the recognition of reality is combined with an emphasis on responsibility and in which Augustine was a leading figure (Lovin, 2008, pp. 43-83).

Researchers, therefore, approach Christian realism in different ways. Still, in Niebuhr's case, it is ultimately about implementing social justice that requires an adequate understanding of human nature and political and social reality. Related characteristics can, of course, be discovered with certain ideologies: conservatism due to anthropological pessimism and anti-utopianism; socialism, and Marxism because of the

²⁰ Daniel Rice is a definitive author on Niebuhr's relationship with his contemporaries, including Dewey (Rice 2013; Rice 2021) and Tillich (Rice, 2013).

²¹ One of Niebuhr's former students from the 1940s, Hargie Likins, later a professor of education at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, wrote as an answer to the questionnaires sent back to Stone: "A number of us commented on his tendency to pick the weakest point in an individual's thought, then demolish it brilliantly and grin like a little kid. I especially remember him doing so with Freud" (quotes Stone, 1992, p. 78).

incessant focus on equality and social justice. The emphasis on Christian concepts such as love, sin, guilt, and mercy might cause familiarity with Christian socialism. His vindication for democracy based on Christian principles and a more proximate social equality resembles Christian democracy. However, the identification is misleading because Christian realism does not have a comprehensive world, social and political view, or guidelines valid for specific political and social situations. In short, it is not an ideology. The literature also describes it as an approach, a perspective. As Stone points out, Niebuhr was pragmatic and refused any kind of ideological thinking (Stone, 1992, p. 205). As the anti-ideological pragmatism bursts out from Niebuhr:

“The healthiest Western nations have preserved their economic and political health by following neither the conservative nor the Marxist dogma, but by adopting an empirical wisdom which separates what is true from what is false in each” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 50).

The fundamental elements of Christian realism, namely political realism, theological realism, moral realism, and the call for Christian social justice, are primarily apprehended positively in the literature, but it is not free from criticism. A part of these criticisms targets Christian realism or Niebuhr directly, while others focus more on the followers of Christian realism. The main problem with Christian realism mostly occurs when one or more fundamental elements are overemphasized.²² In short, the excessive emphasis on power and interest (hence the political realism part of Christian realism) can easily obscure moral factors in politics. The excessive emphasis on human sinfulness (hence the theological realism part of Christian realism), can lead to defeatism and cynicism. The excessive emphasis on Christian revelation and the truth of God (hence the moral realism part of Christian realism) may result in limited recipients, especially among secular circles. Finally, the excessive emphasis on Christian social justice (hence the normative part of Christian realism) might result in ignoring the Christian idea of love as a basic principle.

Niebuhr knew these perils, faced them, and tried to provide solutions for them. He considered moral factors in politics, emphasized the creativity of human life, tried to validate most of his ideas on historical reality, and placed the concept of love as a

²² In this respect, Eugene McCarragher’s (2021) lecture offers a thought-provoking introduction to the criticism of Christian realism.

balancing principle of justice. It does not mean that Christian realism is without weaknesses. The fact that the followers of Christian realism miss the balance stems from the fact that it is a balancing perspective. No matter how hard Niebuhr tried to ground his principles in Christian truth, due to his pragmatism, it could never be as stable as certain other theories, such as natural law theories. Nevertheless, it has superiority over natural law theories in different aspects. It knows that reason is a servant of interest, humans are morally ambiguous and historical reality is contingent. In short, no “big theory” can be made. The next question is how Augustine is connected to the father of modern Christian realism, Reinhold Niebuhr.

3. NIEBUHR AND AUGUSTINE – A LITERATURE REVIEW

A narrower scope should be applied after putting Niebuhr into context in relation to realisms. Here, the relevant topic-related pieces of the secondary literature will be summarized.

The English-language secondary literature knows the existence of the relationship between Niebuhr and Augustine. Uncountable scientific books and articles mention the links between the two Christian scholars. Some authors enumerate the similar thoughts of the two thinkers, the following are the most common: both could be treated as Christian realists, they profess the sinfulness of human nature, and they are skeptical of the moral capacity, progress, and perfectibility of individuals and collectives. Other researchers point out an Augustinian influence in Niebuhr's thought regarding the nature of man, sin, history, and realism. These statements are usually mixed in the literature or even in a single article.

To a large extent, the arguments of these articles are either simplistic or echo the conclusions of other articles. Hence, only those that focus directly and seriously on the question will be considered. Practically, this means that the tremendous number of writings that only mention the relation of Niebuhr and Augustine but do not investigate it seriously will be left out.

Mainly two approaches are applied to explore the links between Augustine and Niebuhr. The first focuses on the continuation of Augustine's thought in Niebuhr's. It discusses Niebuhr in the tradition of Augustinianism; hence it can be referred to as Niebuhr's Augustinianism. The second investigates Niebuhr and tries to find the role of Augustine in his thought. Although two relevant books from the literature of political Augustinianism will constitute a sub-chapter (3.2), the literature review – due to the scope of the dissertation – focuses mainly on the Niebuhrian literature, especially Augustine's role in Niebuhr's theological, political (sub-chapter 3.1) and, to a lesser extent, international relations thought (sub-chapter 3.2). At the end of the reviews, a conclusion will be drawn that justifies the proposed research's validity and usefulness.

3.1. Augustine's role in Niebuhr's theological and political thought

A few summaries deal with Augustine's role in Niebuhr's theological and political thought. These articles constitute a framework for the dissertation. This means they deserve to be investigated more profoundly and commented on more extensively.

Richard Kroner's²³ article titled *The Historical Roots of Niebuhr's Thought* (1961) is probably the most exquisite overview in the research area, which deals with the theoretical influences on Niebuhr. At the beginning of his writing, Kroner rightly suggests that the historical roots of Niebuhr's thought are ubiquitous as he writes that "there is hardly any great figure or any important school or movement of the past that has not affected his mind at least to a certain degree and that has not left some traces on his thought" (Kroner, 2001, p. 254). Kroner explains that Niebuhr was influenced by his era's leading political, social, scientific, and literary events besides the past two thousand years of theological doctrines. Based on this, Kroner claims that "it is therefore extremely difficult to single out of this enormous range certain special thinkers or ideas and to identify them specifically as the historical roots of his own doctrines" (ibid.). Kroner is right that it is a challenging task, but at the same time, he wishes to provide insights into those roots.

His narrative is the following: he mentions plenty of events, books, and authors who have influenced Niebuhr's thought, but at the same time – besides the Bible and the Greek antiquity – he highlights some specific philosophers, namely (Saint) Paul, (Saint) Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Blaise Pascal, and Søren Kierkegaard. Although the focus of Kroner's article is too broad to elaborate on the similarities and the influence of Augustine in detail, he stresses several significant elements. First, he highlights the similar character and role of the two famous Christian scholars: both were Christian philosophers of the human primary and systematic theologians only secondarily (though Niebuhr was reluctant to call himself even a theologian).²⁴ Second,

²³Richard Kroner was a professor, friend, and colleague of Niebuhr who fled from Kiel in 1942. His Gifford Lectures at St. Andrews in 1939-40 was titled *The Primacy of Faith* (Stone, 1992, p. 131).

²⁴ Niebuhr's objection to treating him as a theologian frequently occurs in his remarks (e.g., Niebuhr, 1961, 1967). On the one hand, as raised before, he did not attend doctoral studies in theology, he was not a systematic theologian, and placed among his intellectual fellows (e.g., H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Karl Barth), he was less learned in theology. On the other hand, he received an M.A. degree at Yale Divinity School, was a preacher for a lifetime, and was a professor of Christian ethics and philosophy of religion for more than thirty years with a deep interest in theology, not to mention he was a Gifford

as Kroner stresses, similarities could be found in the two historical-cultural eras: just like the Church father, Niebuhr also lived in an era that was on the edge of frightening social, political, cultural, and spiritual upheavals. Nonetheless, Niebuhr also felt the same; the idea that the Western world is in crisis dominated his thought.

Regarding the similarities of their thoughts, Kroner emphasizes that Niebuhr was following the Augustinian notion that the political and social realities are characterized mainly by uneasy armistices between the contending forces. Although – due to the vast division between God and earthly life – it is partly limited, the Christian idea of love should be exercised. Kroner points to the fact that Niebuhr praised Augustine’s views on sin and how he wrote about the distance and relevance between the divine and the profane. Moreover, he underlines Niebuhr’s debt to Augustine because the ancient theologian pointed to the essential character of the “image of God” in humans (Kroner, 1961, pp. 187-188).

Although most of Kroner’s arguments are accurate, at least three criticisms could be easily articulated. First, he inaccurately writes that Niebuhr – just like Augustine – wished to implement the ethics of Jesus to social problems. Although when he was younger, Niebuhr believed in the possibility of changing society through religion (e.g., Niebuhr, 1927), following his first theological book entitled *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (1935), he forcefully advertised that the ethic of Jesus (or ethic of love) is not directly implementable to the social and political reality.²⁵

Second, Kroner suggests that Niebuhr’s thought was dominated by the Augustinian idea that – though sinful – the state is an instrument in the hands of God. It is not far from Niebuhr’s thought to treat the state – just like any other human institution – as sinful conduct. Still, unlike Augustine, Niebuhr did not detect the will of God behind these human institutions. Moreover, he usually condemned Augustine, Luther, and Hobbes

lecturer where the original idea was to “promote and diffuse the study of Natural Theology in the widest sense of the term—in other terms, the knowledge of God (Gifford Lectures Website). Considering these together, it might be that some labels (e.g., “social ethicist” or “circuit rider of academic field” [Niebuhr 1965]) fit better. However, it is nonsense to question that he was also a theologian. One is easily tempted to feel that it was exaggerated modesty from him, both in a positive and negative sense.

²⁵ Already in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, this attitude is anticipated when he writes: „There are constitutional limitations in the genius of religion which will always make it more fruitful in purifying individual life and adding wholesomeness to the more intimate social relations such as the family, than in the problems of the more complex and political relations of modern society (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 63).

for – by overemphasizing its authority – making the state from an instrument to control sin to the source of sin (Niebuhr, 1935; 1965).

The third criticism is from Niebuhr himself, who – at the end of the book, in the chapter of *Reply to The Interpretation and Criticism, by Reinhold Niebuhr* – concludes: “In regard to Professor Kroner’s sympathetic account of the movement of my thought, I have only a slight amendment to suggest, and that is that I was first influenced not so much by the Reformers as by the study of St. Augustine” (Niebuhr, 1984 [1961], pp. 436-437). Nevertheless, not Kroner’s inaccuracy but the shortness of the article and its Augustinian part is the most decisive reason that an in-depth analysis of the two Christian scholars is missing. As an exciting and relevant side note, it could be mentioned that Niebuhr’s wife, Ursula, also highlighted Luther, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Augustine as important and defining authors in Niebuhr’s thought and work. Ursula – in parallel to the conclusion of her husband – also mentions that among the thinkers who shaped the Western tradition, “Saint Augustine was probably his favorite” (Niebuhr, 1991, p. 3).

One of the theoretically rich pieces of literature in the field is Tsoncho Tsonchev’s writing titled *The Cristian Realist Perspective: The Political Theology of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr* (2018). Although the author focuses on the realism of the three great Christian scholars (Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Reinhold Niebuhr) – based on his qualification in religious studies – his analysis is grounded more in theology than political thought. He analyzes the three prominent Christian scholars to present their Christian realism. By doing this, he wishes to justify the existence of a Christian realist perspective that can be treated as a historically contingent but partly independent phenomenon. Tsonchev’s study provides a decent and accurate summary of the field, but his writing lacks a critical attitude.

Moreover, his definitions and conceptualizations of Christian realism are a bit vague and flexible; it is understood as – among others, all at once – a philosophy of life, a political theology, a religiously inspired wisdom, a theological and philosophical perspective, an apology of Christian faith and way of life. He also claims that “Cristian realism is a twentieth-century interpretation of political realities, international and domestic, based largely on the fifth-century insights of Saint Augustine” (Tsonchev,

2018, p. 1). Interestingly, this way of connecting Augustine closely to Christian realism is rare in the history of thought literature. Tsonchev's study is extended to Augustine and Niebuhr; in several cases, he mentions that they had similar ideas, for instance, in their theory of sin (Tsonchev, 2018, p. 76) or their criticism against the so-called pacifists (Tsonchev, 2018, p. 98). Still, Tsonchev writes about the three scholars separately, and his conclusion focuses on giving an extensive summary rather than comparing the three scholars. This structure and probably the different aim is why a deep comparison between Niebuhr and Augustine is lacking.

In recent years, Vassilios Paispays published two exciting and insightful articles on the topic (Paispays, 2016; 2020). Though both contain arguments on Augustine and his relation to Niebuhr, the more "Augustinian" will be shortly summarized. In his article titled *Overcoming 'Gnosticism'? Realism as political theology*, Paispays' two basic arguments are the following: (1) "the creative ambivalence between Augustinian ontological monism and ethical dualism [...] characterizes the work of the two of the most prominent realist thinkers, Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr," (2) "in responding [...] to the 'Gnostic challenge in terms that recognized the dialectical tension between ontological monism and ethical dualism, realists should be seen as direct heirs of Augustine's ambivalent orthodoxy rather than Schmitt's peculiar, semi-'Gnostic' Catholicism" (Paispays, 2016, p. 1605). By the latter, Paispays admittedly challenges the position of Nicholas Guilhot, who argued for the Schmidtian influence on international relations theory (Guilhot, 2010).

In his article, Paispays skillfully presents Augustine's efforts to avoid the dualism of Manichean Gnosticism and the optimism of Pelagian voluntarism. He also sheds light on the analogous developments of the 20th century. Even though some parts of his broader arguments about Augustine will be recalled later, considering this dissertation, obviously, the Niebuhrian part is relevant. This part of the article begins with Niebuhr's view on original sin and its relation to the Augustinian concept. Paispays rightly argues that Niebuhr did not entirely accept Augustine's notion of original sin and after understanding the absurdities of original sin (how can it occur that man is not essentially evil, but sin is almost inevitable, and how can man maintain responsibility if the evil is almost unavoidable), he opted for Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety. In this

way, “Niebuhr [...] remains faithful to the Augustinian tradition with a twist that seeks to dissociate it from traces of ‘Gnostic’ or neo-orthodox otherworldliness” (Paispays, 2016, p. 1613). Furthermore, the author rightly stresses that both Augustine and Niebuhr’s concept of sin necessitated the freedom of human beings. He concludes that Niebuhr’s pragmatism

“should be approached through theological underpinnings as fidelity to Augustine’s dialectical paradox of the original sin: a constant oscillation and tension between an essentializing ‘Gnosticism’, on the one hand, which denies individual responsibility for evil, and Pelagian optimism, on the other, which thinks of moral action as unencumbered by the circumstances within which it is born and which condition it” (Paispays, 2016, p. 1618).

This conclusion is not just creative but also theoretically correct. There is no contradiction in the arguments of this dissertation and Paispays’ article. Nevertheless, Paispays focuses on a current debate which is on the question of original sin. The dissertation aims to include a broader perspective and does not address Niebuhr’s Augustinianism but his interpretation of Augustine.

Obviously, a few more articles or book chapters refer to Augustine’s role in Niebuhr’s theological and political thought. For instance, in his article, *Christian Realism and Augustinian Liberalism (?)*, Peter Iver Kaufman evaluates Augustine and his relation to Christian realism (Kaufman, 2017).²⁶ Moreover, Charles Lemert’s biography on Niebuhr, *Why Niebuhr Matters?*, also devotes a part to Augustine’s relevance in Niebuhr’s thought (Charles, 2011, pp. 126-141). These works should be mentioned, and some arguments – especially Charles’ – will be utilized later. Still, none offers a comprehensive account of Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine.

²⁶ Kaufman criticizes how Christian realists use Augustine’s ontology, ecclesiology, and soteriology while fighting their opponents (e.g., secularists or “moralizers”). He argues that these kinds of Christian realism – what is, in theory, partly based on Augustine’s thought – are not Augustinian (Kaufman, 2017). Though Niebuhr is mentioned in the article several times, the author’s primary opponent is not him but his followers, current Christian realists like Lovin. Kaufman’s article is related to the dissertation topic but is not suitable for answering the role of Augustine in Reinhold Niebuhr’s political thought.

3.2. Niebuhr as a part of the Augustinian tradition

Augustinianism has a broad literature, even limited to political Augustinianism. Certain authors directly analyze Niebuhr as a part of the “tradition” of Augustinianism; here, Eric Gregory’s and Michael J. S. Bruno’s understanding will be shortly presented (Gregory, 2008; Bruno, 2014). These works approach the same topics from the opposite side. Until this point, the signs of Augustine were sought in Niebuhr’s literature; now, the signs of Niebuhr are traced in Augustine’s literature.

“By the end of World War II he was what he would remain, an Augustinian liberal,” argues Stone about Niebuhr (Stone, 1992, p. xiii). At first glance, the phrase “Augustinian liberal” might cause confusion, considering the controversy between Augustine and liberalism. Eric Gregory, in his seminal book entitled *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (2008), quite rightly points out that “Augustine was not a liberal. He was not even a proto-liberal;” certain views of Augustine, significantly which limit the freedom of citizens, could not be accepted by liberals” (Gregory, 2008, p. 1). Still, Gregory maintains that “liberal readings dominated the renaissance of Augustinianism in the twentieth century” (Gregory, 2008, p. 75), and he also argues “the continuing debate over modern liberalism has to a large extent consisted in variations on Augustinian themes and antiphonal responses to them. It would not be a great exaggeration to see these debates as a series of footnotes to Augustine” (Gregory, 2008, p. 1).

As an introduction and to set the framework before indulging into constructing his perspective, Gregory differentiates three kinds of Augustinian liberalism: “Augustinian realism (as Reinhold Niebuhr and his followers), Augustinian proceduralism (as in John Rawls and his followers), and civic liberalism (as in Martin Luther King Jr. and his followers)” (Gregory, 2008, p. 1). *Augustinian realists*, as the dominant strand of Augustinian liberalism, base their arguments on Augustine’s eschatology and doctrine of sin and end up viewing social life as a dark realm full of sins, imperfections, and fragilities; their prime virtue is hope. The *Augustinian proceduralists* link Augustinianism with Rawlsian liberalism, and their dominant virtue is justice. The third group tries to instill ideas from *Augustine’s civic virtue* while they examine a broader political theory and theology. Thus, the dominant virtue for Augustinian liberals is love

(Gregory, 2008, p. 81). It does not mean there are no standard features in political Augustinianisms as “affirmation of secularity and a keynote accent on the limits and corruptibility of politics” (Gregory, 2008, p. 20), but their differences are also remarkable.

Niebuhr is mentioned numerous times throughout Gregory’s book,²⁷ but he is obviously discussed longer at the realists as their leading figure. As mentioned in the introduction of the dissertation, Gregory rightly argues that “Niebuhr’s influence in associating Augustine with political realism should not be underestimated. For many citizens, at least in American churches and universities, Niebuhr is the standard route into political Augustinianism” (Gregory, 2008, p. 82). Gregory’s understanding of Niebuhr is so accurate that even if he primarily focuses on Augustine, he could be seen as a Niebuhr scholar. Probably the most visible mark of it is that, even if he places Niebuhr among the realists, he captures that Niebuhr had a “recessive voice” in relation to Augustinian realism (Gregory, 2008, p. 82). Thus, the categorization of Niebuhr as a realist interpreter of Augustine, by maintaining the argument that this interpretation was balanced by other factors (justice, love, equality), is correct. Unfortunately, the more extended examination of Niebuhr’s Augustinism is missing since the author considers Robert Markus more appropriate to characterize the school.

The only minor note that needs to be critically addressed in Gregory’s account of Niebuhr is the general conclusion that hope is the dominant value for Augustinian realists. It is not intended to question that this statement generally fits the realists, but it also seems that the conclusion is derived mainly from Robert Markus’s thought. To justify his arguments about Niebuhr, Gregory quotes a fragment from *The Nature and Destiny of Man*:

“Thus wisdom about our destiny is dependent upon the humble recognition of the limits of our knowledge and our power. Our most reliable understanding is the fruit of ‘grace’ in which faith completes our ignorance without pretending to possess its certainties as knowledge; and in which contrition mitigates our pride without destroying our hope” (quotes Gregory, 2008, p. 93).

²⁷ For instance, Gregory defends Niebuhr from the exaggerated arguments of Milbank and Hauerwas.

Although the citation is not only on hope, it places hope on a high level (Gregory, 2008, p. 93). Hope is indeed an indispensable element in Niebuhr's thought, especially in his mature thought. His religious writings, such as his compilation of sermons, *Beyond Tragedy* and *Discerning the Signs of the Times*, also confirm it (Niebuhr, 1937; 1946). The first sentence of his famous lines in *The Irony of American History* could even be decisive: "Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope" (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 63). The problem occurs when it becomes clear that Niebuhr continues his lines:

"[N]othing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foes as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 63).

This perfectly presents that for Niebuhr, hope was not the only transcendent value that saves man from the fragility and finiteness of human life. Gregory correctly explains that hope was a value for Niebuhr, but it does not mean that it was his dominant virtue. Based on Niebuhr's books, especially from *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Niebuhr, 1935), it would be hard to deny that either *love*, *justice*, or both were Niebuhr's most dominant values.

The second relevant book is Michael Bruno's *Political Augustinianism* (Bruno, 2014). As the subtitle (*Modern Interpretations of Augustine's Political Thought*) indicates, this work gathers modern interpretations of Augustine's political thought. From the twenty-five short writings, Niebuhr is the first in the Anglo-American field. In the introduction, Bruno emphasizes that, together with Paul Ramsey, Niebuhr viewed "Augustine in a realist blend, and dominated the American school of interpretation for decades" (Bruno, 2014, p. 64). Altogether Bruno correctly emphasizes certain aspects of Niebuhr's thought, including his rejection of the natural law, his quest for responsibility, and his ideas of sin. Using Niebuhr's most famous writing on Augustine, titled *Augustine's Political Realism* (Niebuhr, 1953), is also a fine decision. Furthermore, the summary of

this writing is also more or less correct, just like the discussion on the differences between Niebuhr's perception of sin, and original sin, compared to Augustine's.

The first problem occurs when it becomes clear that even if he adds a few other writings, Bruno almost exclusively bases his argument on *Augustine's Political Realism*. Neither Niebuhr's Augustinianism nor his interpretation of Augustine (which is not succinctly separated by Bruno) can be derived only from *Augustine's Political Realism*. For instance, Niebuhr discusses Augustine's theory of grace and the idea of the image of God in man in *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1964). Bruno seems to be aware of the essentiality of *The Nature and Destiny of Man* as he cites it, but his argument is limited to original sin. Lemert's nuanced argument that Augustine's understanding of history was crucial to Niebuhr (Lemert, 2014) cannot occur at Bruno since that is not part of *Augustine's Political Realism*. It is present in *Beyond Tragedy* (Niebuhr, 1937), *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Niebuhr, 1964), *Faith and History* (1949), and Niebuhr's review of Charles Norris Cochrane's book (Niebuhr, 1941). This lack of broader scope results in the fact that chronology is not apparent in Bruno's account; the changes which occurred both in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine and Niebuhr's Augustinianism are obscured.

Furthermore, Bruno argues that Niebuhr takes the term "anxiety" from Augustine (Bruno, 2014, p. 68). Based on Niebuhr's book, no justification can be found for that argument. Niebuhr discusses Augustine mainly at the sin of pride and the sin as sensuality (Niebuhr, 1964a) and not at anxiety, the situation in which the sin arises. Obviously, it cannot be excluded that in shorter writings, Niebuhr referred to what Bruno assumes (even if he does not cite any of those writings). Still, anxiety at Niebuhr is related more to Kierkegaard (as was argued by Paispais). Niebuhr argues that "[m]odern psychoanalysts might learn much about the basic character of anxiety and its relation to human freedom from the greatest of Christian psychologists, Soren Kierkegaard, who devoted a profound study to this problem: *Der Begriff der Angst*" (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 44).

Even if there are other minor mistakes,²⁸ there is no reason to enlist them. In short, Bruno's account of Niebuhr is a valuable article since it can place Niebuhr's figure in the grand tradition of Augustinianism. This was probably Bruno's ambition, which the article fulfills; none could summarize twenty-five Augustinians perfectly. Nevertheless, the lack of extensive knowledge in Niebuhr's thought leads to the fact that a more profound investigation is necessary.

3.3. Theory of international relations

Niebuhr's thinking focuses at least as much on the field of international relations as on political science or theology. It is no coincidence that many researchers consider him an essential representative of international relations theory and its realist schools. Merkley rightly notes that, given the predilection of nations for guilt, the analysis of international relations was a perfect field for Niebuhr (Merkley, 1975, p. 117). As Niebuhr expresses in *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*: „[T]hus the international situation is a perfect picture of human finitude and tragic revelation of the consequences of sinful dishonesty which accompany every effort to transcend it” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 130).

Probably the theory of international relations pays the most attention to the similar thoughts of Augustine and Niebuhr; several scientific articles have been written on the topic. Though a theoretical interest can be discovered often in these articles, most of them focus on the current uses of the two Christian scholars. Ajibola G. Ilesanmi (2015) investigates the adaptations of Niebuhr's and Jean Bethke Elshtains' just war theory to be able to formulate a Christian-based normative stance towards the insurgence of Boko Haram in Nigeria. The theoretical ground of Ilesanmi's article is based on the arguments of Keith Pavlischek (2008), who compared classical (meaning, partly Augustinian) just war thought with the Niebuhrian Christian realism. Pavlischek concluded that the latter does not just differ from the former, but – mainly since it rejects natural law thinking and is based on liberal theology – it is unable to provide a stable stance concerning pacifism, the right to go to war (*ius ad Bellum*), and the norms of warfare (*ius in Bello*). Kevin Carnahan's dissertation regarding Paul Ramsey's and Reinhold Niebuhr's thought on the moral framework for just war thought also touches

²⁸ For instance, based on *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, it was the Pauline conception of grace and not the Lutheran which Niebuhr was a proponent, as Bruno suggests (2014, p. 77).

on the question; Carnahan chooses the Vietnam War as a case, and he also analyzes how Niebuhr was connected to Augustine both theologically and in the aspect of just war theory. Unfortunately, his focus is more on the dialogue between Ramsey and Niebuhr than on the connection between Augustine and Niebuhr (Carnahan, 2007).

Turning to the Augustinian influences on Niebuhr in international relations, Luca G. Castellin (2014) emphasizes how essential the rediscovery of the Augustinian thought by Niebuhr in international relations theory was. Castellin turns the attention to the well-known expression of Roger Epp (1991), who called the rise of the Christian realists in the middle of the 20th century an “Augustinian moment.” Epp referred to the fact that the ancient father of the Church had a massive influence on the theological anthropology and eschatology of the Christian realists. Charles A. Jones (2003) wrote that the renewed interest in Augustine in international relations was the most unequivocal in Niebuhr’s works. Michael Loriaux depicted this notion perfectly, claiming that Niebuhr “is the bridge that spans the centuries separating Augustine from the modern realist” (Loriaux, 1992, p. 406). To sum it up, in the theory of international relations, it is possible to discover a thread that connects Augustine and Niebuhr concerning similar thoughts and influences. Furthermore, it is confirmed that Niebuhr had a crucial role in reintroducing Augustine to international relations. Still, most of these publications focus solely on ideas related to international relations without evaluating the theological or ethical thoughts of the two Christian scholars. Carnahan’s writing is an exception, but – as mentioned above – his focus is generally not on Augustine.

3.4. Conclusion

To sum up, Niebuhrian secondary literature considers Augustine’s role serious in Niebuhr’s theological, political, and international relations thought. The two reviewed books on political Augustinianism also illustrated that Niebuhr is a decisive figure in that tradition. Nevertheless, it also became clear that the relationship between Niebuhr and Augustine is not investigated in-depth.

The fact that there is no authoritative source on the relationship between Augustine and Niebuhr further confirms the necessity of a systematic investigation. If researchers would like to familiarize themselves with Niebuhr’s life, they will most likely read

Fox's (1985) or Bingham's (1961) account of Niebuhr. A researcher who deals with Niebuhrian Christian realism cannot avoid citing Lovin's (1995) monograph, while Chrystal (1984) is an acknowledged expert in Niebuhr's early life. These authors' writings are most commonly present in the bibliography of journal articles and books; they constitute the heart of specific questions.

Nevertheless, in Augustine's case, no standard reference point exists in the Niebuhrian literature. It can be rightly argued that, as a primary source, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (1953) and its chapter on *Augustine's Political Realism* are the most cited elements. Still, it is from Niebuhr himself and is not a secondary source. Many researchers seem to consider Niebuhr's relation to Augustine as evidence. Indeed, the link between them is evident, but how it worked is not. Is the evidence valuable and stable enough if there is no scientific foundation to confirm the *mechanics* of the evidence?

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4. RESEARCH QUESTION, SCOPE, METHOD, AND STRUCTURE

The introduction and the overviewed literature demonstrated that although there is a consensus that Augustine had a vital role in Niebuhr's theological, social, and political thought, the question is not elaborated systematically and profoundly. Even though the (assumed) similarities and differences are more or less present in the literature (which would also need a more thorough investigation), Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine almost entirely lacks. Focusing on this aspect can lead us to understand the relationship between Augustine and Niebuhr better. It is also helpful and necessary to formulate a complex account of the links between Niebuhr and Augustine. The theoretical fruitfulness of the other two approaches (i.e., finding similarities and influences) is not doubted. Furthermore, these are not entirely separable; if someone begins to delve into one of the three aspects, the other two will infiltrate to a certain extent (as will be seen in the dissertation). Nonetheless, a guiding principle or route of analysis should be chosen, which is Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine here.

Therefore, this dissertation aims to fill a theoretical gap through a systematic elaboration and evaluation of Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine. Put into question; it is as follows: how did Niebuhr interpret Augustine?

The central chapter of the dissertation (chapter 6) – by overviewing Niebuhr's scholarly work – will present how Niebuhr interpreted Augustine and his ideas. The focus will be on the content and context of Niebuhr's thoughts on Augustine and his ideas, the different characteristics of Niebuhr's theoretical phases, the reasons for changes, and the overall picture. The main body of the research is based on primary sources from Niebuhr; nineteen books were processed, most of which are monographs or compilations of essays and sermons.²⁹ The arguments were supplemented with secondary sources and other selections from Niebuhr's shorter writings.³⁰

²⁹ These were the following (the dates refer to the bibliographical entries and indicate the versions used): *Young Reinhold Niebuhr* edited by W. G. Chrystal (1977), *Does Civilization Need Religion?* (1928), *From the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (1957), *Contribution of Religion to Social Work* (1932), *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (2001), *Reflections to and End of an Era* (1934), *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (1935), *Beyond Tragedy* (1937), *Christianity and Power Politics* (1940), *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1964), *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (2001), *Discerning the Signs of the Times* (1946), *Faith and History* (1949), *Irony of American History* (2008), *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (1953), *The Self and the Dramas of History* (1955), *Pious and Secular America*

At first glance, it could be rightly proposed that processing all of Niebuhr's book is unnecessary; it would have been enough if the Augustinian parts were collected and interpreted together with the conclusions of the relevant secondary literature. Nevertheless, it would have been a mechanic method. To understand Augustine's role in Niebuhr's political thought, not only the Augustinian references but Niebuhr's general line of thought, including its changes and reflections on its historical environment, should be detailed. It can also help to avoid simplistic generalizations since – just like Augustine's – Niebuhr's thought changed over time. He is a moving target who wrote a tremendous amount of works, occasionally without serious efforts to synthesize; thus, contrasting views or even contradictions might occur.

Six theoretical phases constitute the structure of the central chapter (chapter 6). These phases mostly overlap with the general line of Niebuhr's life and scholarship, but minor changes due to the specific topic might occur. The titles of six chapters are intended to capsule Niebuhr's stance towards Augustine in that era. In order to make the text easier to read and review, the titles of analyzed books will further structure the document. The first three theoretical phases will slightly differ from the last three. The first three will provide a more general overview of Niebuhr's thought, especially those topics that will be connected later to Augustine or can help to evaluate Augustine's role in Niebuhr's thought. Naturally, the references which are related to Augustine will be analyzed thoroughly. The last three phase will focus more on Augustinian references as their number and relevance significantly increases compared to the first three. The references might be so frequent that certain generalizations need to be made. Nevertheless, here, only a few comments will be made on the general outline of Niebuhr's thought, and more focus will be on his interpretation of Augustine.

It should also be observed that Niebuhr, based on his views or other authors' interpretations, might have misinterpreted Augustine. It could also happen for his use but unintentionally as well. Besides the leading ambition to understand Niebuhr's

(1958a), *The Structures of Nations and Empires* (1959), *Man's Nature and His Communities* (1965). The only book not used as a source in this dissertation is *Nation so Conceived* since Niebuhr did not write it alone but with Alan Heimert.

³⁰ For instance, *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics*, edited by Harry R. Davis and Robert C. Good (Niebuhr, 1960), *Love and Justice* edited by D. B. Robertson (Niebuhr, 1967), and *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr* edited by Ursula Niebuhr (Niebuhr, 1986).

interpretation of Augustine, the theoretical validity of certain vital parts of Niebuhr's interpretations of Augustine will also be investigated by shedding light on his possible misinterpretations and theoretical fallacies (and their reasons). These insights will be shared when Niebuhr was the most critical of Augustine (phases 2 and 3).

Compared to other pieces of secondary literature, an added value of this dissertation might be that, above the references to Augustine, it also considers what Niebuhr has read or could have read about Augustine. If Niebuhr is read carefully, it is also visible that his interpretation of Augustine was influenced by other scholars' arguments, including historians, theologians, and philosophers. Ultimately, his interpretation of Augustine was original and creative based on a deep knowledge of Augustine; nevertheless, it was influenced by others.

Regarding the scope, it is crucial to underline that this dissertation mainly focuses on Niebuhr, not Augustine. Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine is understood primarily through Niebuhr's writings. Practically it will result in the fact that this dissertation will not investigate Augustine's thoughts as much as Niebuhr's.

Regarding the sources, it must be highlighted that the dissertation focuses mainly on Niebuhr's books. It does not mean that other sources, like newspaper articles, journal articles, interviews, sermons, or other sources, are excluded, but they are auxiliary compared to the books. Fortunately, serious differences between Niebuhr's longer and shorter writings in content cannot be detected, so it will not affect the possibility of generalizations in the conclusions. It should also be added that many of his books are collections of shorter writings or preachings, and more were previously published as journal articles. For instance, *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* is an edition of diary entries, *Beyond Tragedy* and *Discerning the Signs of the Times* are compilations of sermons, *Christianity and Power Politics*, *Pious and Secular America*, *Man's Nature and Communities* are selected essays. At the same time, most of the other writings (e.g., *The Contribution of Religion to Social Work*, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, *Faith and History*, *The Irony of American History*) are edited and extended forms of lectures. Nevertheless, a more

focused investigation of Niebuhr's shorter writings can be a possible extension of later research.³¹

³¹ *Reinhold Niebuhr papers* are available to a greater extent at the Library of Congress and the Union Theological Seminary. For a bibliography on Niebuhr, see Robertson 1979.

5. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

It should not be forgotten that one and a half thousand years separate the two Christian scholars, which means that the historical, social, economic, and cultural environment radically differs. Still, as several researchers highlight, there are crucial similarities between the two eras. As proposed above, Kroner reminds us of the resemblance of the cultural situation when he writes about Augustine's age as follows: "Like him, we live at the edge of tremendous upheavals – social, political, cultural, and spiritual. Like him, we face a degeneration of a splendid epoch which has enriched mankind by an enormous progress in scientific knowledge" (Kroner, 2001, p. 263). In this regard, Stone writes, referring to the Cold War: "Augustine fit: a civilization had just been racked by a civil war, and it faced another resolute foe" (Stone, 1992, p. 204).

Moreover, there are similar roles/positions that Niebuhr and Augustine took; for instance, neither is treated as a systematic theologian, but both were preachers and acknowledged as remarkably influential theologians, philosophers, and apologists. Also, both were ecclesiastic and favored using dialectic narratives. While Augustine defended the Christian faith against, among others, the Donatists, Arians, Pelagians, and Manichaeans, Niebuhr fought against, among others, the secular idealists, secular realists, religious idealists, naturalists, materialists, and rationalists. One of Niebuhr's followers wrote that Niebuhr "characteristically works out his own position through a constantly critical intellectual dialogue with other thinkers of the past and the present" (quotes: Bingham, 1961, p. 100).³² Although Niebuhr shied away from placing himself alongside the two gigantic theologians when he compared Barth to Tertullian and Tillich to Origen, here admittedly competed for Augustine (Fox, 1985, p. 257). These similarities in the historical environment might help to understand the parallels in the history of thought.

The dissertation deliberately avoids the tremendously demanding task of investigating the topic of Christian realism in depth. It does not mean that the term will not appear in the text, but this phenomenon will not be in the center of the dissertation. Niebuhr did not spend much time with definitions, and it is not accidental that he was reluctant to

³² Bogárdi Szabó also adds that Niebuhr, just like Augustine, fought continuously against Christianity's internal and external enemies (Bogárdi Szabó, 1998).

treat “Christian realism” as a proper term (Lovin, 1995. p. 2). Partly based on Lovin (2008), Tsonchev also asserts that Christian realism is a “very complex set of ideas that do not conform easily to a short and simple definition. It is a Christian philosophy of history, a system of principles and ideas “related in a complex whole” (Tsonchev, 2018). Suppose the statement and this kind of broad definition – not unusual in this literature – is accepted. In that case, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish what part of Niebuhr’s thought belongs to Christian realism and what does not. A dissertation on Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine must devote a few paragraphs to Christian realism (and it will), but the focus is on Augustine, not Christian realism.

Another limitation of this study is that even if it concerns ideas related to political realism, it focuses only on Niebuhrian and Augustinian political realism. Thus, the dissertation does not intend to connect the Niebuhrian and Augustinian political realism with other kinds of political realism. Neither the so-called international relations’ “classical realism” of Edward H. Carr and Hans Morgenthau nor the current group of Anglo-Saxon realist philosophers (e.g., Bernard Williams, Raymond Geuss, Matt Sleat, Mark Philp, Richard Bellamy).

Even though the dissertation overviews Niebuhr’s thought, it could not extend to certain parts of his life, including, for instance, his role as a preacher and a pastor, his journalism, his social activism, or his political life. Niebuhr was a journalist with more than 500 magazine articles, which he has written for religious and secular magazines – among others – to *Christian Century*, *Christianity and Crisis*, *World Tomorrow*, *Radical Religion*, *The New Leader*, *The Nation*, and *Evangelical Herald*.³³ Niebuhr was also a member – and often the leader or founder – of several social organizations (e.g., Fellowship of Social Christians, Americans for Democratic Action, International Rescue Committee, Delta Cooperative Farm) as well as a member of the Socialist Party of America (and later Union for Democratic Action) who ran for Congress in 1930 and 1932. He was under FBI surveillance for his socialist leanings but also on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1948. In 1964 he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. These questions – among many others – must be left out of this dissertation.

³³ For a full list, see Bingham, 1961, p. 10-11.

As a last theoretical issue, it could be raised that too much emphasis on the role of Augustine in Niebuhr's political thought can be given. This is an obvious concomitant of this dissertation which distracts the attention from other formative authors in Niebuhr's life, such as the prophets (especially Amos), Jesus, St. Paul, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Blaise Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, William James, Karl Marx, Ernst Troeltsch, or his contemporaries, H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Abraham Joshua Heschel. It is difficult, if not impossible, to do justice to all the influences that affected Niebuhr – as Kroner rightly insists – and the excessive focus on Augustine will make this impossible. The most this dissertation can aim to do is not to overemphasize the role of Augustine and to balance the view by mentioning some parallel influences. To achieve the latter, the role of the prophets will be thoroughly emphasized.

6. NIEBUHR'S INTERPRETATION OF AUGUSTINE

6.1. Introduction

As suggested above, a systematic elaboration of Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine is missing from the scientific literature. Wishing to provide a substantive addition to the literature, the Augustine references in Niebuhr's books will be analyzed in order to understand Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine clearly. A thorough investigation of this aspect will lead to a more complex understanding of this relationship.

Niebuhr's attitude towards Augustine and his thought can be labeled contradictory; significant differences can be seen between the theoretical phases. Despite several overlaps in their interest, Christian background, and apologetic role, Niebuhr did not treat Augustine as a unique or instrumental author until his mid-forties. Naturally, this can also be attributed to the fact that Niebuhr started his scholarship late. Nonetheless, based on his books, his first area of interest was far from Augustine, and even if he occasionally emphasized Augustine's valuable ideas, most of the time, he was severely descriptive or critical of Augustine due to his theological and social ethical fallacies. Nonetheless, from the middle of the 1930s, Niebuhr began to appreciate Augustine, parallel to the progress in knowing more about him. In short, the "paradoxes" of Niebuhr's view on Augustine include the facts that he began to study Augustine late, yet he studied him for a long time; he held specific arguments for decades on Augustine, yet his views changed a lot; he praised and learned from Augustine, yet he remained critical of him.

Though it is not evident what prompted Niebuhr to turn his attention to Augustine, it is said that his younger brother, Helmut Richard Niebuhr, who was a professor of theology at Yale and, also even by Reinhold, was said to be a more qualified theologian than his brother, encouraged Reinhold towards exploring Augustine's ideas (Fox, 1985, pp. 143-147). Although the contrasting views of the brothers were known before the public,³⁴

³⁴ Most commonly, it is recalled how the brothers – in the only published disagreement between them (Fox, 1985, p. 132) – debated the possible American answers for the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931. The debate evolved around (Christian) pacifism but exceeded broader ethical dilemmas and the question of God's role in history. In 1932 H. Richard wrote an article in *The Christian Century* titled *The Grace of Doing Nothing*, in which he advocated repentance, which many understood as inactivity. On the other hand, Reinhold, in the article *Must We Do Nothing?*, while finding an ethical ground, suggested that

their intimate relationship flourished in private conversations. For instance, in a letter to Ursula written on 16 October 1931, Reinhold, with a witty sense of humor, wrote: „At this point Helmut came up to the office and we have spent an hour talking over our academic jobs as well as the general state of the universe. He is a great comfort, that fellow and brother of mine, about as sensible as anyone I know.” (Niebuhr, 1991, p. 54). Later, it will be argued that even though the reasons are obviously multifold, H. Richard had a leading role in theological immersion, directly and indirectly prompting Reinhold to move toward Augustine.

In a few cases, Niebuhr reflects on his career and, among others, the ties between him and Augustine. In his intellectual autobiography, Niebuhr remembers the exploration of Augustine in the following way:

“the pressure of academic discipline and my companionship with the distinguished members of the Union faculty did serve to introduce me to the main outlines of Biblical faith and to the classical texts of Christian theology. I am, however surprised to note in retrospect how late I was in studying the thought of Augustine carefully. The matter is surprising because the thought of this theologian was to answer so many of my unanswered questions and to emancipate me finally from the notion that the Christian faith was in some way identical with the moral idealism of the past century” (Niebuhr, 1961, p. 9).

Beyond the fact that Niebuhr acknowledges the late discovery of Augustine, three notions are of critical importance. First, the fact that it surprises him. In the first three chapters, in addition to analyzing the few Augustine references, explanations will be given on why Niebuhr discovered Augustine late, why he was hostile towards him, and what changed this perspective. In this way, it will be easier to understand the context in which Augustine will play a more decisive role later. This is also a perfect opportunity for the dissertation to briefly overview Niebuhr's thinking and its parts related to Augustine.

the USA should confront Japan. H. Richard's concluding article was called *The Only Way into the Kingdom of God*. For the three texts compiled together, see the *Christian Century Reader* (Fey – Frakes, 1965, p. 216-231). For a concise debate summary, see John D. Barbour (1984).

The citation also suggests that Niebuhr appreciates Augustine for providing him with answers he did not previously acquire. It means that Niebuhr's thinking would have been different without Augustine; he brought a substantial change. Furthermore, Niebuhr attributes a concrete and relevant change in his thought to Augustine, namely the rejection of the identification of Christianity and moral idealism. Based on his books, it is just one crucial element Niebuhr owes Augustine.

Before the investigation begins, some notes must be made. First, it should always be kept in mind that Niebuhr was not an Augustine scholar. It means that Niebuhr did not intend to investigate or evaluate Augustine's whole thought systematically. If List and Valentini's article (2016) is considered, though Niebuhr cannot be treated as an analytical political theorist entirely, he is closer to that than an Augustine scholar. Analytic here is "meant to refer to an argument-based and issue-oriented, rather than thinker-based and exegetical,"³⁵ an approach that emphasizes logical rigor, terminological precision, and clear exposition" (List & Valentini, 2016). For mature Niebuhr, Augustine was a reference point and an inspiration; his arguments were instruments and resources to understand a phenomenon, combat an intellectual enemy, and/or construct a decent theoretical position.

The last remark is on how Niebuhr wrote his books. Once, Bennett argued that when Niebuhr began to write a book, he worked as if it would be a completely new theoretical work. He attributes the freshness of Niebuhr's books to this kind of approach. Without casting doubts on Bennett's argument, it should be added that it also resulted in Niebuhr's books being often repetitive, even if his views changed. Once he carved out an idea, he introduced it into his following writings without hesitation or any reference to the fact that he had already used it.³⁶ Furthermore, if he stuck to one of his ideas, he might have mentioned it in most books. It will be valid in the case of Augustine as well.

³⁵ In general, exegetical means explanatory or interpretative. Specifically, exegetical is related to exegesis, which is a critical explanation or interpretation of a text or a portion of a text, especially of the Bible.

³⁶ The first of the very few references to his own works occurs in his *ninth* book, the first volume of *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1964a). Only in his prefaces or his autobiographical reminiscences does Niebuhr reflect on the permanent elements or the changes in his thought.

As the author of the Maccabees 2 writes, “[s]o then, without any further comment I will begin my story. I would be foolish to write such a long introduction that the story itself would have to be cut short” (2 Macc 2;32).

6.2. A young protestant pastor and an old Orthodox Catholic (1913-1928)

6.2.1. Introduction

Niebuhr’s first theoretical phase consists of his university years as a student at the Yale Divinity School³⁷ and his thirteen years-long pastoral work at the Bethel Evangelical Church of Detroit. This period is also often denoted as the idealist or liberal phase of Niebuhr.³⁸ After graduating from Eden Theological Seminary in 1913, Niebuhr was ordained a minister of the German Evangelical Synod of North America. He was a practicing minister for five months until he left for the Yale Divinity School (Fox, 1985, p. 21). The sorrowful reason why Niebuhr needed to preach was to replace his father, who died in the same year. Decisive influences, such as the extensive early education and intention of becoming a minister, came from Gustav Niebuhr. A year later, Reinhold received B.D. at Yale, and an M.A. at Yale Graduate School in 1915.³⁹ Although his academic advisor Douglas Clyde Macintosh encouraged him to start doctoral studies, he, partly since he was bored with epistemology,⁴⁰ but most importantly because his mother and sister needed Reinhold’s help, and a feeling of pressure also occurred from his denomination, he decided to fulfill his pastoral duties (Niebuhr, 1961; Chrystal in Niebuhr 1977).

This period of Niebuhr’s life is the most under-researched in the scientific literature, which can easily be understood. First, Niebuhr focused on university, pastorship, and social activism, not on writing; hence fewer articles and books were published. Second,

³⁷ Before 1911 and after 1920, it was called Yale School of Religion (Julian, 2009).

³⁸ Obviously, liberalism is an incredibly polysemantic word. Without indulging in Niebuhr’s position towards liberalism, only one aspect will be emphasized, namely evangelical liberalism. As Stone rightly points out, it was “the dominant form of Christian theology at Union when Niebuhr arrived” (Stone, 1992, p. 130), and “this form of liberalism valued tolerance, freedom in thought, science, Christian social reform, and secular philosophies. It attempted to follow the direction of Albrecht Ritschl to work out from a center of biblical insights and traditional Christian formulations to engage new forms of thinking and organizing. (Stone, 1993, pp. 130-131).

³⁹ For a reflection on his years at Yale – including the liberal theological stance of the university – see the chapter *Yale-Eden* in Niebuhr 1977.

⁴⁰ In his autobiography, on the same page, Niebuhr also refers to “philosophical theories” as a cause of boredom (Niebuhr, 1961, p. 4).

during these years, he was not a famous and influential commentator of events that attracted attention. He also lacked the experience he later acquired; his writing's content and style are far less mature. Even within the fifteen-year-long period, substantial differences occur in this regard. Naturally, it does not mean that he did not write articles or that he did not intend to enrich his knowledge, but the lack of scholarly interest compared to the "later Niebuhr" – based on the three reasons – is evident. As an exciting addition, it can be mentioned that Niebuhr's pastoral income was so low at the beginning that – even though he craved reading – he could buy one book in five years (Davies, 1948, p. 18). Probably his income was so low that it was justified to problematize the unreasonably high salaries of certain preachers (Niebuhr, 1957).

For thirteen years, Niebuhr became a pastor of an explosively developing city. Detroit became almost synonymous with its automobile industry, led by Henry Ford. The two primary sources which contribute to the understanding of Niebuhr's perspectives are *Young Reinhold Niebuhr* (1977), edited by William G. Chrystal, and Niebuhr's subsequently edited diary, the *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tames Cynic* (1957 [1929]). The conclusion related to Augustine is disappointing in direct references in both writings: Niebuhr does not mention Augustine in any of them. Nevertheless, these shorter writings need to be reviewed mainly for the same reasons. Why? Because they present an essence of Niebuhr's personality and how idealist and realist arguments are mixed up in his early elaborations. In order to understand Niebuhr, and the question of realism, which is related to Augustine later, it is necessary to introduce these topics here. Lovin also confirms that "the call for 'religious realism' or 'realistic theology' originated with a small group that had ties to Yale Divinity School and included Reinhold Niebuhr, his brother, their teacher at Yale, D. C. Macintosh, Walter Marshall Horton, and others" (Lovin in Niebuhr, 1996). Hence, the origins matter.

In addition, Niebuhr's first published book will be investigated, titled *Does Civilization Need Religion?* (1928 [1927]). In the latter, the figure of Augustine will also enter the stage.

6.2.2. *Young Reinhold Niebuhr*

Young Reinhold Niebuhr is a collection gathered and edited by William G. Chrystal, a theologian and philosopher, one of the most authoritative researchers of Reinhold's

early life and the Niebuhr family.⁴¹ This compilation, after the foreword of John C. Bennett, consists of Niebuhr's thirty-five short articles from 1911 to 1931 (so from the ages of 18 to 39). This period mostly overlaps with the timeframe of this chapter. However, it slightly extends beyond it: a few articles were written before it when Niebuhr was a student of the Eden Theological Seminary (the student journal where he published was called *The Keryx*). Moreover, others were written after he moved to the Union Theological Seminary as a university teacher. *Young Reinhold Niebuhr* is the only work included in this dissertation as a separately analyzed collection, which is not a book Niebuhr published. The primary reason for this was that he wrote fewer books in his early years, and this collection can complete the missing parts of the picture.

In content, most of the writings reflect on educational and denominational questions. At the same time, it also touches on contemporary political and social questions, such as the question of participation in the First World War, the role of the USA in international relations, or his depressing travelogue in the Ruhr region under French occupation.⁴² Altogether the article he wrote on the last topic correctly justifies the common argument of researchers and Niebuhr himself (e.g., Niebuhr 1965) that the "early Niebuhr" was an idealist.

In 1923 summer, he writes short articles with the titles *Trip Through the Ruhr* and *The Despair of Europe*, in which he shows the misery of Germany, including its economic and social problems, its moral decline, and the seemingly irreconcilable conflicts, such as the hatred between the Germans and French. Still, in the almost hopeless situation, the young Niebuhr treats America as an object of hope which already indicates a kind of optimistic estimate of his country, even if he condemns his nation for its policy of isolation. Nonetheless, what makes Niebuhr an idealist here is that he discusses the question not just in political but in moral terms, making naïve suggestions, especially compared to his later realism. He confesses:

⁴¹ For a summary of the German Synod and Niebuhr's early life, see Chrystal's introduction in Niebuhr 1977. Since it is a Kindle Edition, which might cause confusion in citing pages if a direct quote occurs, the article(s) will be named in the main body of the dissertation.

⁴² Belgian troops were also among the occupiers, but – overall – it was more a French action (representing both the real and the symbolic antagonism between France and Germany), so it will be referred to as „French occupation.“ Niebuhr does not even mention the Belgians related to this case.

“Yet, finally Europe’s salvation must be achieved by more thoroughgoing forces than any political policy. Europe must learn to overcome its hate and learn the divine art of forgiveness. Europe must realize that the whole war was a satanic blasphemy against God and that nations must not only ask for forgiveness of each other but must ask God to forgive them. Europe must learn that you can only forgive an enemy by doing the foolish thing and trusting him beyond his deserts, whereupon, as every experience proves, he will justify your faith beyond its expectations. That is after all the whole Gospel of Jesus. The world does not believe it. The churches do not believe it. If they believed it sincerely and robustly they could save Europe and our whole civilization in general” (Niebuhr, 1977, w.p.).

This fragment presents how Niebuhr believed in the Christian religion’s (and the Gospel’s) reconciliatory force, which can occur even between nations. Even though he does not argue that nations will do accordingly, he does not rule out the idea that they will practice the art of forgiveness. In this respect, the possibility of nations asking forgiveness from each other is at least as absurd as the nations asking God to forgive them. Here, Niebuhr applies individual ethics to national entities and does not understand that the ‘foolishness’ of the Christian faith does not suffice for international relations, which are dominated rather by power than by love. It is also particularly striking what Niebuhr thinks would happen if these moral demands were met; he writes it “could save Europe and our whole civilization in general.” By this, he formulates a highly utopian picture against which he will fight for the rest of his life.

Other fragments could have been highlighted to avoid the charge of selective reading. For instance, a year later, he writes:

„I believe religion has a real function to perform in helping people to live with one another. Some people say, human nature is selfish and brutal beyond help, but I think they are wrong. I believe we can change human nature with all its brutal and selfish instincts, first by religion, second by education. Because it has unlimited resources, it can be developed into something much finer than our imagination can conceive” (Niebuhr, 1977. w. p.)

Niebuhr's reoccurring use of the term "brotherhood," a standard in the Social Gospel movement, is also suggestive. In 1928, in one of the most "un-Niebuhrian" titled articles, *Christianizing International Relations*, he underlines the necessity of love in social relations and prioritizes love over justice. (Niebuhr, 1977). Already in 1932, in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr will condemn even religious educators who treated love and education as proper instruments for solving social problems (Niebuhr, 2001); in this respect, he changed his perspective quite radically and rapidly. Though *Young Niebuhr* can and should be used as an instrument for many reasons, it is also suitable for shedding light on Niebuhr's initial idealism.

6.2.3. *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic – a personal account*

The second collection from the first theoretical phase is the *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* (1957 [1929]) (from now: *Leaves*) which was written from 1915 to 1928 and published first in 1929. It is also clear that many of the entries were composed by Niebuhr after he knew they would be public (Fox, 1985, p. 107). Again, an essential manuscript from Niebuhr; an easily consumable and exciting one since it is a personal account. A scientific investigation usually excludes subjective assessment. It also occurs often that an analysis of a particular phenomenon in the history of thought tends to focus more on the matter than the author itself.⁴³

Fortunately, the *Leaves* is a perfect source to get in touch with Niebuhr, a young protestant pastor full of dilemmas and frustrations at the beginning of his service. It would be a mistake to fall into the trap of applying a psychologizing attitude as one of the leading biographers of Niebuhr, Richard Fox (1985), did. Probably Stone, Niebuhr's last teaching assistant, was among the most furious with Fox's approach; he wrote: „The attempt to probe the inner life of Reinhold Niebuhr undertaken by Richard Fox is in my opinion largely a failure. [...] Fox did not know Niebuhr, and the ambitious, scheming, frightened figure he shows us, shaped by Freudian family conflicts, is inaccurate and largely irrelevant" (Stone, 1992, p. xiii). Without questioning the validity of Stone's indignation, it should be added that Niebuhr was an ambitious man. Above

⁴³ Chronologically, the *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic* could have been overviewed after the *Does Civilization Need Religion?* as was published later, in 1929. Nonetheless, the former mostly contained earlier writings, and in edition, style, and content are more familiar to the *Young Reinhold Niebuhr*.

his whole diary (Niebuhr, 1957), it is interesting how, in the last chapter of his last book, *Man's Nature and His Communities*, he writes about how Christianity obscured the merits of *vital man*, including that ambition can pull creativity and responsibility. He brings his childhood role model, Lincoln, and one of his exemplars, Churchill, but he could have added himself as an ambitious man (Niebuhr, 1965).

Thus, it would also be a fault to omit the fact that several entries reflect Niebuhr's uncertainties, his never-ending discontent, his hot temper, and his feeling of inferiority. The last was partly because he was from a small and weak denomination. In 1916, at the age of 24/25, regarding a denominational conflict – with a tone of being heavily hurt – he writes: “Perhaps if I belonged to a larger denomination, this wouldn't irk me so much. I suffer from an inferiority complex because of the very numerical weakness of my denomination” (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 26). One of his biographers, Paul Merkley, also underlines that Niebuhr's ambition was to establish a reputation in and outside the Church, mainly by writing; the scholar recalls what Niebuhr said years later “[t]here was nothing I wanted so little as anonymity” (Merkley, 1975, p. 16). Earlier, Niebuhr wrote to his former teacher that at Yale – without a college education – he feels himself to be a “mongrel among the thoroughbreds” (Bingham, 1961, p. 84). Naturally, the mid-western German origin, and thus the language handicap, also incorporated into this feeling; K. Healan Gaston argues that, like others from immigrant communities, Niebuhr “possessed a minority consciousness” (Gaston, 2021, p. 4).

The Leaves include these characteristics and how Niebuhr reacts to his fallibilities. Niebuhr acknowledges most of these traits and tries to mitigate their negative consequences. Naturally, certain situations that invoke these responses are typical for a young Protestant minister. This way, as Niebuhr refers to it in the introduction, his solutions can guide other ministers (Niebuhr 1957, p. 12).⁴⁴ Niebuhr's daughter, an acknowledged editor and publisher, Elisabeth Sifton, later underlined that several ministers informed her that the diary was indeed helpful for them (Sifton, 2015).

⁴⁴ Researchers must be cautious with prefaces written by the author later than the book's main body, for instance, when a new edition is published. Knowingly or not – the author might profess a subtle or open apology for his views held earlier or analyze the situation from a subsequent perspective. Niebuhr's preface from 1956 is a perfect example of it. Beyond expressing embarrassment, he uses the terms and ideas of the “mature Niebuhr.” Even though it can provide additional information, without a determined effort to prevent treating it as an organic part of the book, it can also frame the way of reading in a misleading direction.

This diary offers plenty of opportunities to investigate the early thought of Niebuhr. However, as this dissertation focuses on the role of Augustine in Niebuhr's political thought, only two related topics will be mentioned here. The first will be the decline of Western civilization, the role of Christianity, and one of its leading figures, the prophets. The second is the question of cynicism and sentimentalism, notions connected to realism and idealism, from a personal perspective.

6.2.4. *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic – the role of the prophet*

The pressing problems of modern civilization are far more present in Niebuhr's narrative than in *Young Niebuhr*. Based on his diary, Niebuhr's discontent was first directed mainly towards his denomination and educational questions and, to a lesser extent, towards pacifism in the First World War and the unsettled international relations after it. In 1920, he expressed that he began to explore ethical problems instead of constantly dealing with intellectual problems, and he also discovered the conflict between the Gospel and the World (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 45). In addition, from 1925, his attentiveness toward the injustices that affected the industrial workers began to strengthen.⁴⁵ It is also crucial to underline that Niebuhr does not view these problems as a less fortunate but natural concomitant of modern civilization that will be corrected easily or over time. The civilization is derailed; he does not conclude – as he will later do – that it is wrecked, but he continuously stresses its inherent injustices and hypocrisies. One of the problems is that people, including confessional Christians, wish to enjoy the newest inventions or the “machines” of the age, such as automobiles. While they profess to be faithful Christians, they ignore the toll paid: the sweat, blood, and low payment of the workers.

In analyzing the social-ethical importance of Churches, Niebuhr emphasizes the lack of social intelligence, a sense of reality, and the attitude of applying the truth of the Gospel to contemporary social problems. In short, the Christian religion and its different perspectives (liberalism and orthodoxy) seem unable to react to modern social realities. In 1925, he writes that “[i]t seems pathetic to me that liberalism has too little

⁴⁵ As it was referred to in 1923, Niebuhr already wrote about the inhuman condition of the German workers in the Ruhr region (Niebuhr, 1977). Still, based on his diary, the shift in the case of workers can be dated from 1925 when he reported his visit to the automobile factory. Slightly later, his attention will reach the race problems, especially the racism from which black people suffer.

appreciation of the tragedy of life to understand the cross and orthodoxy insists too much upon the absolute uniqueness of the sacrifice of Christ to make the preaching of the cross effective” (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 125). In conclusion, Niebuhr does not find a trodden path in the Church, and in making one – among many other issues – the role of the prophet gains importance in his thought.

Naturally, it was not the first time Niebuhr met with the prophets. In Eden Theological Seminary, his mentor and teacher Samuel D. Press introduced the seminarians to the life and thoughts of several prophets, including Amos. In his intellectual autobiography, Niebuhr gives prominence to Press’s creative influence on him (Niebuhr, 1961, p. 3). Stone also calls attention to this influence (Stone, 1992, pp. 9-10), but he further underlines that when Niebuhr taught Hebrew ethics at Union Theological Seminary, it “revolved around Amos,” for whom “justice was predominant, not love.” (Stone, 1992, pp. 58-59). Discussing Press as a teacher of Niebuhrs, Chrystal highlights that Press’ course on Amos stressed the relevance of the prophet’s texts, including his demand for social justice, to modern sociological problems (Chrystal, 1984, pp. 512-513).

In his diary, Niebuhr writes that he does not surprise that prophets are itinerants. Neither money nor the problem of criticizing his fellows in their own community cause problems for the prophets. The tension for those who care about these profane questions appears in Niebuhr’s conclusion when he writes that “[T]o speak the truth in love is a difficult and sometimes an almost impossible, achievement” (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 74). In the preface of the 1957 edition of *Leaves*, Niebuhr seems to recall the same question when he professes his regret that his objections were more emphasized than his compliments on Church issues. Nevertheless, he maintains: “I make no apology for being critical what I love. No one wants a love which is based upon illusions and there is no reason why we should not love a profession and yet be critical of it” (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 18). Furthermore, in *Man’s Nature and his Communities*, he finds the advantage of, among others, the prophets in having an external perspective that can guide the community into a better path when he writes: “[p]erhaps human selfhood in its collective form constitutionally is unable to imagine any higher value than the common value of its devotion. Hence the redemptive value of dissident individuals, the

prophet, the critic, and even the rebel, in a free community” (Niebuhr, 1965, pp. 111-112). Niebuhr became this kind of person throughout his life.

Although Niebuhr does not take the role of the prophet (it seems to be too radical for him at this time), he deals with the questions related to the prophets: courage, heroism, unconditional obedience to God, the necessity of martyrdom, being an outsider yet part of the Church (Niebuhr, 1957). This restrained argument contrasts with Fox’s, who is inclined to formulate radical arguments without sufficient support. The biographer writes that Niebuhr set out his role as a prophet. He bases his argument on an anonym article in 1922 written by Niebuhr, in which he proclaims the necessity of having prophets. He argues that Niebuhr consciously set his role out as a kind of prophet at Bethel that is ready “to challenge his flock to confront their personal and collective sins, but to assure them of God’s mercy in the face of their fumbling efforts and creaturely limitations” (Fox, 1985, p. 65). Although this conclusion could be as much a product of the Reformed tradition as the prophetic, the role of the prophet heavily interested Niebuhr in the early 1920s.

In this regard, it is necessary to consider the role of the Episcopal bishop, Charles D. Williams (1860-1923), one of the few examples Niebuhr regarded highly in these years. In 1924, Niebuhr wrote in the *Leaves*:

“How strangely a vital personality defies the facts of death. Nowhere have I seen a personality more luminous with the Christ spirit than in this bishop who was also a prophet. Here was a man who knew how to interpret the Christian religion so that it meant something in terms of industrial civilization (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 93).

Not just here, in 1924, Niebuhr calls him a prophet, but more than 40 years later, he remembers Williams as a definitive figure of his life. In *Man’s Nature and His Communities*, he writes that his “mentor and guide [...] was a lonely, dissenting, religious voice in the religious complacency of the city” (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 18). The Episcopal Williams appreciated Jewish activists who fought for social justice, just like the Jewish thought which revolved around this concept. In Niebuhr’s remembrance, the bishop said that “[I]n the weightier matters of social justice, [...] there are only two

Christians in Detroit, and they are both Jews” (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 18).⁴⁶ A year later, in an interview, he mentions Williams as his “father-in-God” and specifies Williams’s role in his thought. He concludes:

“Bishop Williams introduced me to the radical social ethic of Israel's prophets. Of course, I had studied the Old Testament before, but my experience now made it relevant. Amos and first Isaiah and the eighth-century prophets talked about a radical justice rather than sacrificial love. I was shocked by the fact that the rich Protestant churches, those which we called in, Detroit ‘the Woodward Avenue churches’ insistently talked about sacrificial love, and completely neglected the need of justice as a relevant norm of collective relationship” (Niebuhr, 1966).

Thus, the question of the prophet who calls for social justice is introduced to Niebuhr’s thought. Fox aptly summarizes Niebuhr’s relation to the role of the prophet:

“Many sober-minded observers, not just among his friends, insisted on calling him a prophet—a label that always embarrassed him. But he knew it was on target. He grappled endlessly with the paradox of cultivating a prophetic identity while avoiding pretentious pose. It was Amos he wished to follow. [...] Niebuhr shared Amos’ sense of crisis. He also shared Amos’ awareness of the risk of pride” (Fox, 1985, p. x).

Gaston also mentions that Niebuhr “used Weber’s prophet-priest distinction as early as 1920, although it remains unclear whether he took that distinction directly from Weber or from Troeltsch’s writings” (Gaston, 2021, p. 11). Niebuhr – partly thanks to his German origin and language knowledge – was familiar with several German historians and sociologists whom he usually read at Yale or in his early life in German before they were translated to English. He knew the major works of Troeltsch (*The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*) and Weber (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*), and he also refers to them in his books (Niebuhr, 1928, pp. 66, 103, 110, 235). It is also clear that Niebuhr differentiated the role of the prophet and the priest. Still, a more thorough analysis would be necessary to affirm how these ideas are connected to the German classics of sociology.

⁴⁶ Niebuhr recalls these memories in *Pious and Secular America* (Niebuhr, 1958a, pp. 90-91).

In conclusion, the Old Testament prophets became not just a reappearing figure in Niebuhr's thought (e.g., Niebuhr, 1928; 1935; 1937; 1946; 1958a; 1959; 1964; 1965) but also a crucial source of inspiration that rivals the Augustinian one. To be more precise, in the first three theoretical phases, prophetism attracts Niebuhr's mind more than Augustinianism. It will be mentioned that even if several characteristics he endorsed in Augustine can be treated as prophetic, the bishop of Hippo was far from being an archetype of the prophet. More divisive than cohesive elements are in this relationship. Moreover, the prophetic influence originated from his early period, in contrast to the Augustinian.

6.2.5. *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic – sentimentalism and cynicism*

Another crucial question at early Niebuhr is whether the roots of his later realism are prevalent. Several fragments could be cited which indicate the early realist sample. In order to save space for dealing with the concomitant notions of realism, namely *cynicism* and *sentimentalism*, from a personal account, only one argument will be cited. In 1926 Niebuhr presents an argument that highly resembles the central argument of *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Among others, he highlights the immorality of group relations and the necessity of using power to change unjust social situations:

“People are not as decent in their larger relationship as in their more intimate contacts. The lust for power and the greed for gain are the dominant note in business. An industrial overlord will not share his power with his workers until he is forced to do so by tremendous pressure” (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 115).

Nevertheless, focusing on personal features is more fruitful concerning the *Leaves* since it will not be present elsewhere to this extent in Niebuhr's books. It might seem a lengthy analysis, but it is necessary since Niebuhr's thought revolves around these concepts. Five short fragments will be cited as bases for the argument. First, in 1919, Niebuhr seems emotionally charged since – as a pastoral visit – he meets an old lady at the hospital called “Miss Z,” who was very ill. The situation for the young pastor was so

nerve-racking⁴⁷ and also probably immobilizing that he concludes that the doctor's attitude was more beneficial since "[h]e is less sentimental but probably does more good" (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 44). After this, he repeatedly condemned sentimentality in his diary; for instance, the sentimental analysts of the Ruhr case in 1923 (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 68), churchmen "bathing in sentimentalities" in 1925 (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 96), and the sentimentalists who do not see the social problems of Detroit in 1927 (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 168). Based on his diary, until 1927, this attitude seemed to be constant; sentimentality has a negative connotation; it usually means the lack of clear vision or the inability to understand reality properly (whether individual or social). It is closely associated with the Church(es) and the concept of naivety.⁴⁸

Why are sentimentalists sentimental? First, because there is a lack of rational capacity hence knowledge, to understand the historical reality; most of their analyses, primarily the social, are "foolish."⁴⁹ Throughout his life, Niebuhr stresses the importance of education, which fosters rational knowledge, an unavoidable element in a modern individual and social life with one of its central characteristics, complexity. In both individual and social situations, a minority of the issues are evident, the majority are complex.⁵⁰ Therefore, the skill of formulating rational insights cannot be spared.

Nevertheless, rationality, in itself, is deficient. Niebuhr will later argue that rationality cannot provide meaning for life and often is the servant of interest. In these early years, he emphasizes the necessity of ethical conduct and argues that, especially compared to "vital religion," rationality lacks specific resources for being an ethical compass (Niebuhr, 1928). It also seems that often their *will* fail the sentimentalists; they are not searching for truth or at least obscure the reality (e.g., the oppression of the worker) not because their rational capacities lack but because they are not willing to formulate those

⁴⁷ He writes: „This sickness of Miss Z.'s is getting on my nerves. I can't think of anything for the rest of the day after coming from that bed of pain. If I had more patients I suppose I would get a little more hardened" (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 44).

⁴⁸ Bingham offers a short guide on how Niebuhr generally used the terms "idealist," "optimist," "pessimist," "liberalism," and "sentimentality." In the case of the last one, she refers to the same way Niebuhr understands sentimentality in the diary on himself and calls it "extreme emotionalness" (Bingham, 1961, p. 14). In this dissertation, it will be concluded that Niebuhr used it for his intellectual opponents in another way, as a synonym for the lack of social intelligence.

⁴⁹ "Foolish" was a label Niebuhr often preferred to use Niebuhr but in opposition to the foolishness of the world, he praised the "foolishness of the cross" (e.g., Niebuhr, 1937; 1953).

⁵⁰ Later, he will turn to the idea that they are so complex that central individual questions should be understood – as much as possible – in paradoxes (e.g., Niebuhr, 1937), while, for historical situations, the irony is a concept which might be useful (e.g., Niebuhr, 2008).

insights. It is because their will is biased towards themselves, their self-interest. Academics, churches, and middle classes, as favored classes of the capitalist system (especially compared to lower classes), are not interested in radical social change, so unconsciously, they formulate insights that comfort them and act accordingly. From the outside, it looks like hypocrisy; they are open to charity, which fuels their self-righteousness, but they fiercely fight for their privileged status.

It is not by accident that, in Niebuhr's understanding – even more than 20 years later, in *Christianity and Political Problems* (1953) – realism denotes the ability to see the factor of self-interest and power in a social and political situation that often lingers in the background. This is what Lovin calls the “hermeneutics of suspicion” in Niebuhr's thought which “draws on both Marxian and Freudian interpretations, but it corresponds neither of them” (Lovin, 1995, p. 8). A crucial element – which Niebuhr emphasizes, especially from *Moral Man and Immoral Society* – is that the whole liberal culture, with its idea of progress, is responsible for this illusion. No one has to worry or have a guilty conscience; time, in cooperation with education and love, will solve these problems sooner or later. Nevertheless, Niebuhr did not formulate these arguments in his early years consistently; he rather felt the effects of the internal problems of the system.

The first time when – in the *Leaves* – sentimentalism seems to be necessary is when he argues that:

“I think there ought to be a club in which preachers and journalists could come together and have sentimentalism of one matched with cynicism from of the other. That ought to bring them pretty close to the truth” (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 195).

So, cynicism occurs, which, including its representatives, the cynics, are present in the diary (e.g., Niebuhr, 1957, pp. 68, 70, 87, 115). Cynicism is not substantially better than sentimentalism since it prevents social action. Therefore, in an unjust situation, it preserves the unjust status quo. Additionally, it is also erroneous in analysis. Even though it might perceive some elements clearer than the sentimentalists, it falls into another extreme by not considering the possibilities of creative action in a social or political situation. Therefore, not just sentimentalism but also cynicism is – in itself – dangerous. In 1927, while questioning whether he is a part of the “forces of decadence”

who accepted the Spenglerian⁵¹ thesis that “culture is destroyed by the spirit of sophistication,” he confesses:

“Nevertheless I hate a thoroughgoing cynic. I don't want anyone to be more cynical than I am. If I am saved from cynicism at all it is by some sense of personal loyalty to the spirit and the genius of Jesus; that and physical health. If I were physically anæmic I never would be able to escape pessimism” (Niebuhr, 1957, pp. 157-158).

Niebuhr's diary refers to the necessity of being saved from cynicism elsewhere. In 1926, he writes that he saves himself from it by getting intimately familiar with other human beings (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 115). After talking to one of his Jewish friends in 1928, he also accentuates the importance of being saved from cynicism which destroys human relations (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 207). Thus, one can conclude that cynicism must be tamed, and an opportunity to achieve this is to combine it with sentimentalism.⁵² However, was Niebuhr a tamed cynic, as the title suggests, or was he a wildened sentimentalist? In 1928, he wrote in the *Leaves*:

“I always thought I was a fairly brutal realist, but I am beginning to suspect that the whole thing is a pose to hide the sentimental preacher (Niebuhr, 1957, p. 222).

Here, the situation is the following: Niebuhr is at the threshold of leaving Detroit for the Union Theological Seminary (New York), so a phase of his life ends, and he feels that pastoral relationships he built in the past decade, such as nurturing kids to build a future, are not just fruitful responsibilities but activities he will miss. Based on the report of Mrs. Z.'s doctor and this example, Niebuhr could be viewed as a sentimentalist, a heartfelt servant of God who could hardly accept the hard facts of reality.

⁵¹ Just like Niebuhr read Weber and Troeltsch, he read Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. Spengler became a reappearing figure in Niebuhr's writings, and even in *Beyond Tragedy*, published roughly ten years after the *Leaves*, he still called him “the most brilliant apostle of political reaction in the modern day” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 275).

⁵² This argument does not contradict Niebuhr's idea, which he also claimed in his early years, that “Sentimentality is a poor weapon against cynicism, and idealistic determinism has no way of defeating determinism of the naturalistic part” (Niebuhr, 1928 p. 209).

Nonetheless, Niebuhr uses the word “sentimentalist” differently in these two cases compared to how he uses it for his intellectual opponents. For himself, he describes a personal overflow of emotions that are difficult to be handled. Meanwhile, for his intellectual opponents, he uses it as a lack of social intelligence. Indeed, the lack of social intelligence can result in being carried away by emotions, but this is usually not the gravest problem of sentimentalist ministers, as was presented above. Furthermore, nothing proves Niebuhr’s realism better than his reflection on his feelings, which is also a part of reality.

In order to draw a satisfactory conclusion on the title, it should be mentioned that, as Fox points out, the title was originally given by the publishers “as an effort to express their view of Niebuhr’s growth from youthful cynicism to mature sympathy” (Fox, 1985, p. 107). The biographer does not see any development in this. In addition, he maintains that Niebuhr was more cynical in 1928 than in 1915 since “he had come to believe that the ministry was inevitably a wrenching series of compromises” (Fox, 1985, p. 107). Though Fox rightly doubts the publishers’ idea of whether this kind of development happened in Niebuhr’s thought, the *tamed cynic* is a proper expression of Niebuhr’s cynicism based on its retractive nature (as Gregory asserted in the case of realism). As Niebuhr argues in his last book when he touches on the ideas of Machiavelli, “[A]t any rate, the line between cynicism and realism is not too sharply defined when the realist seeks to unmask the pretensions of the idealist in the power struggles of politics (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 54).

6.2.6. *Does Civilization Need Religion?*

Does Civilization Need Religion? (from now: *Does Civilization*) is Niebuhr’s first monograph in the sense that it is not a collection of shorter writings but a single book with formerly unpublished chapters revolving around one thesis. Nevertheless, Niebuhr’s monographies are rarely monographies in that even if he overwhelmingly focuses on one problem; he cannot resist the temptation to discuss concepts that are only loosely tied to the central problem. In the case of *Does Civilization*, it is also known that Niebuhr has written some parts of it from 1923, and what he wrote for *Christian Century* in 1925, and early 1926 was incorporated into the text (Fox, 1985, p. 84, 101). The book correctly summarizes the essence of Niebuhr’s thought in the 1920s

on religion and the role of religion in Western civilization. “Religion is not in a robust state of health in modern civilization” (Niebuhr, 1928, p. 1), yet it is “difficult to imagine man without religion; for religion is the champion of personality in a seemingly impersonal world” (Niebuhr, 1928, p. 4).

Religion has failed to keep up the tension between the ideal and the real world and accommodated modern civilization to the degree that it cannot serve longer as a forceful ethical guide. Furthermore, applied sciences contributed to the depersonalization of the Western world. Thus, a tremendous ethical force is hidden in religion, which is not utilized due to its foes and the fallacies of the representative of religion itself. The tension between religion and science in Niebuhr’s thought, more specifically the opposition between Niebuhr, as a Christian apologist, and one of his permanent enemies, the modern scientists (either rationalists or naturalists), begins here and lasts until the end of his life. More than twenty years later, in *Faith and History*, he will still fight with Auguste Comte and Bertrand Russell (Niebuhr, 1949).

It does not mean that Niebuhr was against science, he was rather against *scientism*. He acknowledges the necessity of reason, not just here but elsewhere, and seeks adequate cooperation between religion and science. The partnership is necessary since both, even religion, lacks specific capacities, it is simply not enough for a complex civilization. Like *consistent* science, “a consistent religion is generally equally absurd (Niebuhr, 1928, p. 183). A modern or even heretical idea from a Churchman, especially from an Orthodox Christian viewpoint, with its rigid rejection of science. In this book, Niebuhr, affirming priorities he set in his diary in 1920 by prioritizing ethical problems over intellectual ones, argues that the “final test of any religion must be its ability to prompt ethical action upon the basis of reverence for personality” (Niebuhr, 1928, p. 31). Still, for making group relations ethical, a “robust ethical idealism, extraordinary spiritual insight and a high degree of intelligence are equally necessary” (Niebuhr, 1928, p. 139).

The explanation of Niebuhr’s early ideas, which were discussed at the part of the *Young Reinhold Niebuhr and Leaves*, could be continued in a review of the *Does Civilization*, including his early realism or idealism and the role of the prophet. Nonetheless, it would not be fruitful since the conclusions do not derive substantially from the previously described. Furthermore, another question is worth more examination since it is the first

moment Niebuhr mentions Augustine in his books. Augustine's name occurs three times in two paragraphs; both are in the chapter of *A Philosophy for An Ethical Religion*. Only a schematic outline is given by Niebuhr, who was far from being a master of philosophy at this time. He criticizes naturalistic and pantheistic tendencies, sentimental religious idealists, Nietzschean and Marxian cynics, and religions too embedded in metaphysics. On the other hand, he endorses the naïve but powerful dualism of early Hebrew religion, including the prophets and Jesus. He accentuates the importance of religion in fostering the repentance of sins and the encouragement to hope for redemption (Niebuhr, 1928).

The first moment where Augustine appears is when he discusses the question of dualisms. Nevertheless, it is not the body-mind dualism of the Greeks which will be a reoccurring problem of Niebuhr but the distinction between "God and the world, the real and the ideal" (Niebuhr, 1928, p. 194). Niebuhr argues that Persian dualism influenced Hebrew and Christian thought, and the "satanology of the Old Testament is partly derived from it; and Manichæism, through which Augustine passed before he embraced and elaborated Catholic orthodoxy, is a compound of Persian and Christian religion." (Niebuhr, 1928, pp. 194-195).

Thus, the first reference points to the fact that Augustine "went through" Manicheism, which is not thought-provoking. On the other hand, the fact that Niebuhr treated Augustine as someone who "embraced and elaborated Catholic orthodoxy" is exciting. Why? Because Augustine is as much an inspirational figure for Protestants (for instance, through the Augustinian monk Luther and the Anglican Church) as for Catholics. Moreover, in Niebuhr's argument, Augustine is a contributor to orthodoxy. Even if the argument seems neutral, the Catholic orthodoxy for a young Protestant pastor is far from inspiring. It is not intended to claim that Niebuhr automatically refuses everything from orthodoxy; in this regard, just like in any other issues, even in his radical phrases, he was not a doctrinaire. Nevertheless, while arguing for a *vital Christianity* in modern times and sharing several negative comments on orthodox Christianity, Niebuhr will probably not turn toward Augustine, the Catholic Orthodox.

The second argument on Augustine further strengthens that Niebuhr viewed Augustine as an orthodox, and he does not have a favorable opinion of him. Niebuhr seems to be

annoyed by the fact that Christianity had to incorporate Hellenistic philosophies into its theology to be more acceptable. Due to the infusion of Neo-Platonism into the gospel caused “[t]he naively and dramatically conceived omnipotence of God was metaphysically elaborated and inevitably betrayed the church into an essential pantheism...” and the

“process of compounding the simplicities of the gospel with the dialectic achievements of Greek philosophy culminated in St. Augustine who laid the foundation for Christian orthodoxy and made the simple Christian epic the basis of an elaborate theological structure in which God becomes at the same time the guarantee of the reality of the ideal and the actual cause of every concrete reality.” (Niebuhr, 1928, pp. 201-202).

Thus, even if Augustine’s intellectual act of bringing the “achievement of Greek philosophy,” “building a theological structure,” or laying “the foundation for Christian orthodoxy” could have been treated as a positive achievement, Niebuhr’s argument altogether stresses the problem of pantheism and metaphysical grounds brought into Christianity. In the end, Niebuhr saves Augustine from a devastating conclusion by arguing that “[v]ital religion has a way of expressing itself outside the limits of its rationally fixed concepts and the essential pantheism of orthodox Christianity therefore did not destroy the moral vigor of even such resolute determinists as Augustine or John Calvin” (Niebuhr, 1928, p. 202). So, Augustine was not just an orthodox who introduced the Neo-Platonism to Christianity by which he exposed Christian to the dangers caused by pantheism but was also a “resolute determinist.” The merits of Augustine is only acknowledged by the argument that he had a “vital religion,” something Niebuhr strived for.

Augustine’s largely negative entry onto the scene of Niebuhr’s thought should be balanced by reducing the relevance of these arguments. First, the parts when Augustine is discussed are mainly not on Augustine but on dualism, metaphysics, and pantheism; Augustine is only brought with them as an example. Furthermore, in the second case where Augustine occurs, Niebuhr refers to the fact that the general arguments on pantheism of the Church are from George Santayana’s *“Religion and Reason.”* (Niebuhr, 1928, p. 201) Above the fact that Niebuhr made a grammatical mistake since

Santayana wrote a *Religion in Reason*, most of the arguments Niebuhr articulates on Augustine can be derived from Santayana's book. Above the dangers of pantheism, which Niebuhr directly quotes from him, Santayana writes longer on Augustine, including his Platonism, Manicheism, his connection to Catholicism, and his "vital religion" (Santayana, 1962, pp. 107-119). This makes it probable that Niebuhr borrowed most of his arguments from Santayana (even if Santayana does not use the term "determinism" at Augustine).

The final argument in this question is that it is also indicative that places that cry out for Augustine avoid mentioning him. For instance, when Niebuhr discusses Lutheranism as a "revival of Pauline Christianity" (Niebuhr, 1928, p. 114) and underlines the perils of Pauline and Lutheran doctrines in social questions, such as in slavery and their attitude to governments, he not only could have used Augustine but will use Augustine later (e.g., Niebuhr, 2001). This is far from a criticism of Niebuhr. It is simply a fact that it seems that he did not know Augustine as much as he knew Paul or Luther. Stone also points out that the book "represents the thought of Niebuhr in his pre-Augustinian and pre-Marxist periods. *Does Civilization Need Religion?* attacked the 'sentimental optimism' but avoided a decisive break with liberalism" (Stone, 1992, pp 40-41).

6.2.7. Conclusion

Researchers can reach simplistic conclusions based on the first theoretical phase, such as treating the young Niebuhr idealist or even denoting this period as the "idealist Niebuhr." Obviously, a measure of truth is present in these arguments; compared to the "mature Niebuhr," the young Niebuhr held views that can be identified as idealistic. Indeed, he believed in the transformative power of religion (and even love and education). Therefore, he was an optimist in the possibility of moral development, not just in the individual but in social terms as well. On the other hand, in these writings, Niebuhr already shared several views which can be classified as realist arguments. Among others, just in *Young Niebuhr* (which is less harsh than his diary, in many respects), he acknowledges the selfish nature and the limitations of human beings, the complexity of social problems (hence, the difficulties in solving them), the cruelty of international relations, the sinfulness of the particular nations (e.g., the selfishness and pharisaism of America) and in general the world (Niebuhr, 1977). Fox also underlines

that Niebuhr criticized liberalism in his early career (Fox, 1985, pp. 59-60). Although they are not stressed, or the hopefulness of Niebuhr's narratives overshadows them, the seeds of the realist arguments are there, especially in his later writings but in some early ones as well. In short, it is misleading to treat the whole period as an "idealist" period. Furthermore, it shows how simplistic but also deceptive it can be to use labels as "realist" or "idealist." Based on Niebuhr's texts (or Augustine's), it would be easy to argue for any of them. Therefore, the proper question later is not whether Niebuhr (or Augustine) was a realist or idealist, but rather how were they realist or idealist, or which arguments were realist or idealist.

One might think that too much "ink" has been spared to present this period since Augustine is not substantially present. For this objection, counterarguments should be expressed. First, several scholars conclude correctly that the seeds of Niebuhr's mature thought can be found in this period (e.g., Merkley, 1975; Chrystal, 1984; Diggins, 2011). A large part of Niebuhr's personality also shows itself here. Thus, understanding these early years contributes to formulating a more precise picture of Niebuhr and his relationship with Augustine. In any sense, by 1928, Niebuhr was already 36 years old. Thus, the first part of his life was close to an end.

Only two closing arguments should be emphasized on which the books do not focus. First, as Fox underlines, Henry Ford was a crucial element in Niebuhr's mind. The entire city of Detroit or even America celebrated Ford for his benevolent attitude toward workers without seeing the deeper relationship between the employer, who holds the powers, and the employees, who suffer the consequences of power. On top of it, Ford was a loud advocate of noble causes, for instance, peaceful world order. Fox argues that "Ford's self-delusion was only an extreme form of the pretentious sentimentality to which Niebuhr believed liberal Protestants fell prey [...] It was ideology, false consciousness: Ford's idealism was a cover for power..." (Fox, 1985, 109).

The second argument is how Niebuhr perceived his time in Detroit:

"The automobile industry, particularly the Ford Motor Company, was just beginning its rapid expansion, which was to make Detroit the motor capital of the country. During my pastorate of thirteen years, Detroit was to expand from a

half to a million and a half population. The resulting facts determined my development more than any books which I may have read” (Niebuhr, 1961, pp. 4-5)

Considering the dissertation, taking this statement seriously, especially that the “resulting facts determined my development more than any books which I may have read,” leads to two essential conclusions. First, it affirms that the influences which oriented Niebuhr’s mind originated from Niebuhr’s *experiences* from this theoretical phase, including those which were discussed above, including his realism (which is occasionally discussed in relation to idealism, cynicism, and sentimentalism), his balancing attitude (Scylla and Charybdis), the idea of social justice (especially towards the workers and black people), the requirement of Christian responsibility, and the role of the prophet. Though not to the same extent as later, his dialectic attitude,⁵³ polemic style, and constant discontent were also prevalent.

Second, and this is at least as crucial as the first, it is all *without* Augustine. Based on these three sources, it can be stated that Niebuhr almost entirely avoided writing about Augustine in his young period. In other words, in this theoretical phase, Augustine was not substantially present in Niebuhr’s thought. Also, no severe similarities or influences from him can be detected. Suppose the two essential conclusions are put together. In that case, it results in the fact that no matter how much Augustine influenced Niebuhr’s mind later, his influence is limited in a way that he was not among the “primal movers” of Niebuhr’s thought. Several patterns were already present when he met Augustine.

The year 1928 brought radical changes in Niebuhr’s life. Partly thanks to the financial help and advice of the leading Protestant missionary, organizer, and educator Sherwood Eddy (1871-1963), without scholarly competence (meaning without doctoral studies or relevant university teaching experience), he moved to the castle of liberal theology, to the Union Theological Seminary, New York. Niebuhr, except for shorter bypasses (for instance, he was at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton), remained a professor at Union for more than 30 years and became the institution’s vice president. His first

⁵³ In this regard, Davies puts it quite aptly: “Reinhold Niebuhr is a supremely ‘dialectical thinker.’ In his mental process, ‘either...or’ is balanced by ‘both... and.’ Readers who can only think in terms of ‘either... or’ therefore find him difficult, and so are missing one of the most vital and profound contributions to contemporary Christian thought” (Davies, 1948, p. 6).

title was Associate Professor of Christian Ethics and Philosophy of Religion, and these were the two areas in which he taught courses for forty years (Stone, 1992, p. 54). This move opened the way for Niebuhr to join the academic world and immerse himself in serious research.

It is also well-known that in these years – already from around the middle of the 1920s – Niebuhr sympathized with the working class and criticized capitalism together with the liberal stance of the churches on social questions. Naturally, these feelings strengthened in him a year later when the great financial crisis broke out. In a completely new social and economic situation, surrounded by radical-leftist colleagues, Niebuhr became increasingly interested in socialist ideas, Marxist thought, and the Soviet experiment. Stone (1992, p. 56) concludes that “the association with Ward and Union radicalized Niebuhr, but he never fully shared Ward’s views.”⁵⁴

6.3. Too socialist to be Augustinian (1928-1934)

6.3.1. Introduction

The second theoretical phase can be framed as Niebuhr’s radical socialist or Marxist period, even if his Marxism was limited. Three books will be briefly reviewed here. First, *The Contribution of Religion to Social Work* (Niebuhr, 1932), an allegedly marginal book that raises the question of which way to go, Marxism or Christianity. Then *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Niebuhr, 2001 [1932]) and *Reflections to an End of an Era* (Niebuhr, 1934) will be reviewed, which represent an energetic young scholar with a solid socialist inclination whose voice becomes increasingly louder on behalf of the working classes. Though Niebuhr was already a professor of Christian ethics, these years were devoted more to secular writings and Marxism than religious writings and Christianity. Augustine appears more frequently here, but Niebuhr still writes superficially about him and mainly treats him critically. Before analyzing these crucial radical socialist books, a kind of transitional study between the two periods, *The Contribution of Religion to Social Work*, will be reviewed.

⁵⁴ For well-written scientific works of Niebuhr’s leftism, socialism, and Marxism, see Rasmussen (2005) and Liang (2007). Harry F. Ward (1873-1966) was an American Methodist minister and political activist who intended to reconcile Marxism and Christianity.

6.3.2. *The Contribution of Religion to Social Work*

Niebuhr's short, a little more than 100-page social-ethical book entitled *The Contribution of Religion to Social Work* (from now: *Contribution*), published in 1932, is an exciting step in his thought (Niebuhr, 1932). Not explicitly concerning the role of Augustine, since he is mentioned only once and the argument is irrelevant, but in Niebuhr's social and political thought. To be clear, this book is usually not even enlisted among Niebuhr's writings (e.g., in *Encyclopedia Britannica* by Bennett 2022, or Niebuhr 1991, edited by Ursula Niebuhr). The famous theologian Martin E. Marty also calls it "ephemeral" in one of his essay's footnotes when he writes that only two of Niebuhr's books will not be cited; *Contribution* was one of them (Marty, 1974, p. 336). Why can it be viewed as significant, then? Because this writing marks a junction in Niebuhr's thought since it catches a moment when Niebuhr – primarily based on his pastoral experiences in Detroit – is almost entirely disillusioned from the prevailing system, capitalism, and liberal Christianity. He begins to feel the final signs of the era (the Great Depression and its consequences), but he is not confident about which way to go forward.

It does not mean Niebuhr could not suggest alternatives, but he is hesitant. He analyses classical or orthodox religion (he uses them interchangeably) and communism with their advantages and disadvantages.⁵⁵ These two ways, Marxism and Christianity, will mainly define his political and social thought for the rest of the decade. Surprisingly, they have similar traits; unlike the dominant liberal Christianity, both acknowledge the paradoxical nature of human beings and its deleterious effects on human cooperation (Niebuhr, 1932, p. 68). Following his former book, Niebuhr praises several virtues of religion and calls for a "vital religion" in balancing the inadequacies of classical religion. This expression stuck in Niebuhr's mind for these years. His article entitled *Religion and Poetry* (which is included in *Young Reinhold Niebuhr*), published in the same year when the lectures of *Contribution* began, also uses the term "vital religion" (Niebuhr, 1977).

⁵⁵ Communism, which Niebuhr already treated as a religion in 1930, attracted him because of its vitality. Furthermore, it was one of the characteristics which made it a religion (see Darabos 2022c).

In these respects, *Contribution* is more familiar to *Does Civilization* than *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Thus, the inevitable arbitrariness with setting up the (sub)chapter boundaries occurs. In content and style, the *Contribution* is between the two sections; nevertheless, it is enlisted in the latter since Niebuhr's entry to the Union was a significant change. It is valid even if a kind of hesitance, mixed with moderate style and guarded arguments, significantly contrasts with the content and style of his next book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, a monograph with a firm and loud tone studded with convincing and radical claims. The publishing date may also be confusing since both books were published in 1932. From his letter to Ursula, it is clear that Niebuhr worked on *Moral Man and Immoral Society* from 1931 (Niebuhr, 1991). Its early title was "The Ethics of Social Change" (Fox, 1985, p. 128). Still, most of the writing was conducted in 1932 summer. The final modifications of *Contribution* were also done that summer (Fox, 1985, p. 134), but it was based on a part of a series of the Forbes Lectures at the New York School of Social Work in 1930-1931. Similar to *Does Civilization*, it was also one of the rare occasions when Niebuhr's book was not published by Charles Scribner's Sons.⁵⁶

In content, *Contribution* already contains topics and presuppositions Niebuhr later developed; several times with identical phrases. For instance, the last chapter is called *Religion and Social Action in Modern Life*, a lifelong topic of Niebuhr, and he also argues that

"[w]hatever fallacies may lurk in both the pessimism and the optimism of either classical or proletarian religion, they provide a basis for social attitudes which are realistic without cynicism, and trusting without degenerating into sentimentality" (Niebuhr, 1932, p. 68).

This approach, in which a middle road is preferred between pessimism and optimism, especially in a way that avoids the extreme forms of cynicism and sentimentalism, is one of the hallmarks of Niebuhr's thought, including his Christian realism. As highlighted before, Fox (1985, p. 277) sees the essence of Christian realism as a middle way between the two spiritual traps – utopianism and resignation, sentimentalism and

⁵⁶ Amy Hewes delivered the first lecture entitled *The Contribution of Economics to Social Work*, Niebuhr was the second with *The Contribution of Religion to Social Work*, and the third was *The Contribution of Sociology to Social Work* by R. M. MacIver (Niebuhr, 1932).

cynicism. However, it is rare to recall that Niebuhr's approach was also present in his early and relatively negligible writing. A further investigation affirms that already in 1916, at the age of 23, Niebuhr preferred this way of balancing between two ends. In his article entitled *The Scylla and Charybdis of Teaching* published in *The Evangelical Teacher*, Niebuhr writes: "There is a Scylla and Charybdis in almost every undertaking, two opposite dangers, two extremes, between which one must sail and both of which one must avoid if the undertaking is to be successful" (Niebuhr, 1977, w.p.). Niebuhr commonly used this metaphor in his subsequent books (e.g., Niebuhr, 1928, p. 193; 1935, p. 75, 99).

Furthermore, many of his later ideas are already present in *Contribution*, for instance, the social conservatism of classical religion, the problem of slavery in early Christianity, harmful consequences of the divine ordinance of power, the hypocrisy of middle classes, the necessity of responsibility and balance of power, the preference of realistic analysis, the religious ideal of love and the political ideal of justice (Niebuhr, 1932).

In the book, there is only one quote from Augustine. When Niebuhr summarizes the solidarity and charity in the life of the ancient Church, he writes, "Augustine, speaking of the futility of ritualism, declared 'The true sacrifice of a Christian is alms for the poor'" (Niebuhr, 1932, p. 6). Neither before nor after is there any addition to this idea, and the reference is indirect, meaning that it is not directly from one of the writings of Augustine but quoted from the German theologian Gerhard Uhlhorn's (1826-1901) book entitled *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*.

Still, this lack of reference does result in the fact that this book would not be essential in understanding Niebuhr's approach toward Augustine. Why? It is worth recalling what Niebuhr said about Augustine's influence on him. Niebuhr wrote that "the thought of this theologian was to answer so many of my unanswered questions and to emancipate me finally from the notion that the Christian faith was in some way identical with the moral idealism of the past century" (Niebuhr, 1961, p. 9).⁵⁷ Similarly to *Does Civilization*, *Contribution* is a typical example of this notion treating Christian faith in

⁵⁷ In the same article, Niebuhr confirms this identification of moral idealism with the Christian faith (Niebuhr, 1961, p. 6).

some way identical to moral idealism. Several fragments could be cited here (only two will be). Still, one of the most telling parts is when Niebuhr writes about the “constitutional difficulty of religion” since it does not consider the nature of inter-group relations, especially in politics and economy, and falls into the corruption of sentimentality. The “romantic analysis of the factors involved in a political problem” causes that “religious idealism finds tremendous difficulties in making itself effective in the economic and political life of our day” (Niebuhr, 1932, p. 64). This Christianity seems to be unable to terminate social injustices.⁵⁸ In the book's last paragraph, Niebuhr again enlists the benefits of the Christian religion, which are mainly individualistic. However, he seems doubtful whether it can solve the *social* problem of what the modern proletariat is ready for (Niebuhr, 1934, pp. 93-94).

Though Niebuhr expresses the merits of orthodox Christianity, which can serve as a balance, he does not view it as a part of the pendulum that could balance religion's natural inclination to moral idealism and sentimentality. One of the reasons for this was that he almost entirely rejected the Christian orthodoxy due to its errors, for instance, social conservatism. He knew orthodoxy superficially and thus did not see it as an alternative. It was too far from the liberal Christianity and the Social Gospel tradition in which Niebuhr was raised.

To sum it up, Christianity is naturally idealistic by which it is exposed to the danger of sentimentality. Christianity cannot overcome its religious idealism from its own sources. In other words, in this period, for Niebuhr, Christian idealism or the moral idealism of Christianity was equal to Christianity itself. New springs had to be found and incorporated to deal with the social question which are outside Christianity. Hence, he found Marxism. However, after Marxism, Augustine will emancipate Niebuhr “finally from the notion that the Christian faith was in some way identical with the moral idealism of the past century” (Niebuhr, 1961, p. 9).

⁵⁸ Niebuhr's following statement is not just thought-provoking but – since it tackles a continuously recurring dilemma in Christianity towards social injustices – can still be guiding in the 21st century: “one of the dangerous and difficult characteristics of religion, *i.e.*, the absolute character of its idealism, legitimate as a guide to personal conduct, but doubtful value as a basis for social and political strategy. [...] It is a rather tragic paradox that the Christian conscience should so frequently suffer injustice to continue, because it knows of no way to resist it without violating its perfectionist ideal of love” (Niebuhr, 1932, p. 21).

6.3.3. *Moral Man and Immoral Society – the general thesis*

In 1932 Niebuhr's first famous book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (from now: *Moral Man*), came out to the public. As mentioned in the introduction, its thesis was that a sharp distinction should be drawn between individuals' and social groups' (e.g., nations and classes) moral and social behavior. It suggested that "individual man may be moral in the sense that they can consider interests other than their own in determining problems of conduct, and are capable, on occasion, of preferring the advantages other to their" (Niebuhr, 2001, p. xi). Man's sympathy, especially supported by social pedagogy, prompts him to consider the interest of others, and his rational faculty, aided by education, can contribute to a sense of justice and a measure of objectivity; "[b]ut all these achievements are most difficult, if not impossible, for human societies and social groups" – argues Niebuhr (Niebuhr, 2001, p. xi).

Initially, the idea that social relations are naturally unethical and the differentiation of individual and social ethics, in which the latter is more limited in moral conduct, was not specifically new for Niebuhr. Four years before, in *Does Civilization*, he addressed:

"[G]roups as such find it even more difficult to maintain moral attitudes toward other groups than do the individuals within it toward individuals in other racial or political unities. Human groups tend to be more predatory than the individuals which compose them." (Niebuhr, 1928, p. 129).

"Group relations, particularly those which are intricate, are thus persistently unethical" (Niebuhr, 1928, p. 138).

What was new in *Moral Man* was the crystallization of this idea, its consistent argumentation, and the underlying reasoning. He also left some elements from his previous thought, especially the optimistic notion that a significant and peaceful social reconstruction is achievable. He also dropped the idea that education and religion are the two fields primarily responsible for social change. Economic and political power, including coercion and possibly non-violent resistance,⁵⁹ are as much necessary. Also, specific characteristics cannot be fixed, such as the hypocrisy and selfishness of nations,

⁵⁹ Niebuhr took Gandhi's case as an example (see Niebuhr, 2001, Ch. IX). It is also clear that, beyond many others, Niebuhr influenced Martin Luther King Jr. in this question. See, for instance, Gaál-Szabó (2013) or the summary of King Institute at Stanford.

group egoism, the inevitability of social conflicts, and the permanent desire to hide power, selfishness, and greed behind ideals by rationality.

What was also a significant change was the argumentative power of the book. Whether four years at the Union as a teacher or his social activism in New York, something has made its impact. Based on the analytical and rhetorical skills and a kind of “restrained radicalism” blended with powerful arguments on social, political, and moral issues presented in the book, it is well-deservedly treated among the best writings of Niebuhr. “Restrained radicalism” means that Niebuhr begins with “kicking the door down” with a catchy, radical, and forceful argument. Still, while unfolding it, it becomes clear that the whole picture is sophisticated and balanced; it is not even that radical.

For instance, he launches a full-scale attack against John Dewey, modern moralists, educators, and sociologists who think that the growth of rationality will result in social harmony and assume that “our social difficulties are due to the failure of the social sciences to keep pace with the physical sciences” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. xxvi). Nevertheless, a chapter later, he maintains that the “development of social justice does depend to some degree upon the extension of rationality” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 34). Alternatively, he also argues that violence is not intrinsically immoral and cannot be ruled out on a priori grounds (Niebuhr, 2001, pp. 172; 174) and “equality is a higher social goal than peace” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 250) but then he argues that the most favorable instrument for social change is rather non-violent coercion and resistance (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 250).⁶⁰ Niebuhr would have deserved attention for his analytic skills, but his rhetoric further reinforced that he needed to be read. He became a good writer.

Thus, even if Lovin argues that „[i]n *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr established his reputation as a social critic by contrasting the ethical attitudes of ‘privileged’ and ‘proletarian’ classes” (Lovin, 2021, p. 365), Fox is right that not the radicalism of the arguments, but the delivery of those arguments was exceptional:

“The real historic significance of *Moral Man* lay not in its call for proletarian fortitude or even its justification of violence as an ethical resource. Many other

⁶⁰ It does not mean that Niebuhr always favored *modus vivendi* solutions. He argues that numerous conflicts can be solved in this fashion, but he doubts whether it is effective in the case of the workers or black people in gaining social justice (Niebuhr, 2001, p. xxviii).

radical Christians were making use of the same arguments, although none were doing so with the same rhetorical and analytical power” (Fox, 1985, p. 140).

Not like the content, especially treating violence as a possible instrument for social change, was not scandalous in Christian circles. It was radical enough that even his former supervisor from Yale, a proponent of “religious realism,” D. C. Macintosh, rejected it. In his book entitled *The Social Religion*, published seven years after *Moral Man*, he praises Niebuhr’s social ethics since he grappled with the problem of “accommodating the vision of perfection to an imperfect world without losing the urge to perfect the world [...] courageously and in realist spirit” (Macintosh, 1939, p. 65). Still, he condemns Niebuhr for his affection towards Marxism; he argues: “[b]ut, not, I think without having made some serious missteps – as when, for instance, he encourages the project of violent revolution for the establishment of a just economic order” (Macintosh, 1939, p. 65). Niebuhr saw the demands of the proletariat as justified; even if his reservations are considered, he seems to overestimate the moral capacities of the proletariat throughout (see, Niebuhr, 2001, pp. 164-165); probably that is the greatest weakness of the book.

Considering Niebuhr, it was also criminative that he was, in the end, a Churchman. Praising Marx as a social thinker, seeing the socially redemptive power primarily in the proletariat, calling for economic and political power and coercion, not ruling out violence as an option, partially relieving the proletariat of the responsibility of the revolutionary spirit, and arguing that “it may be necessary at time to sacrifice a degree of moral purity for political effectiveness” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 244) is even too much from a secular Marxist. Not to mention a Christian pastor. For less, European Catholic priests ended up on the periphery of the Church. But Niebuhr was not a Catholic priest, as he was not just a Protestant pastor. He became a public figure and a politician. *Moral Man* is best read when that is taken into consideration. For Niebuhr deals with four great questions which captured his mind at the time: the relation of rationality and religion when he discusses the rational and religious resources of the individual for social living, the morality of nations, the class question with the ethical attitudes of privileged and social classes, and the relationship of politics and ethics. Niebuhr wrote a book for himself and his fellows on what is the reality (thus the realist analysis), what is

the goal (social justice), what is the strategy (revolution or political force), and how to preserve morals in politics even if that is not entirely possible.

Even though *Moral Man* touches on the question of religion shortly, to a significant degree, it is on social and political ethics; it is among the quasi-secular writings of Niebuhr. It is certainly not on theology or theological ethics. Therefore, it is not a surprise that Augustine appears only peripherally. Still, those instances when Augustine is present should be recalled.

6.3.4. *Moral Man and Immoral Society - Augustine*

Niebuhr's core idea of Augustine's thought appears – in chapter 3. entitled *The Religious Resources of The Individual for Social Living* – when he discusses the moral and social perils of religious sense expressed towards the absolute.⁶¹ He underlines that “one interesting aspect of the religious aspect of religious yearning after the absolute is that, in the contrast between the divine and the human, all lesser contrasts of good and evil on the human and historic level are obscured.” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 67). As an example of this wave of thought – after Jonathan Edwards, Rudolf Otto and in “the modern Barthian revival of Lutheran orthodoxy” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 68) – appears Augustine for the first time in the book. He writes: “Augustine, writing about the two cities in this *De civitate Dei*, contrasts the religious and the secular in a similar vein; and moral differences are thereby obscured or effaced” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 69).

In order to explain this kind of dualism in Augustine, Niebuhr directly cites him for the first time in his books. He was already forty years old. Based on the 28th chapter of the 4th of the *City of God*, Niebuhr presents how Augustine wrote on the radical contrast of the two cities, in short: the self-love has given origin to the earthly, God's love to the heavenly city; the “first seeketh the glory of man,” the “latter desires God only”; the first “lives according to the flesh,” the other “only the piety that serveth the true God” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 69). Although Niebuhr treats Thomas Aquinas's thought concerning the relationship between religion and ethics as a more sophisticated version (which is a rare situation when Aquinas is more favored by Niebuhr than Augustine), he still

⁶¹ It is typical of Niebuhr to emphasize the perils of phenomena in more detail than the possible advantages. Here, he also mentions that “it will produce some choice fruits of morality” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 67).

repeats his formerly articulated conclusion: “[n]evertheless the tendency of religion to obscure the shades and shadows of moral life, by painting only the contrast between the white radiance of divine holiness and the darkness of the world, remain a permanent characteristic of the religious life” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 69).

Even if it is natural, this kind of dualism, with its blindness to the moral achievements that are unrelated to the divine, has precarious effects because it can lead to “moral, social and political indifferentism” since “the individual, and more particularly society, are regarded as too involved in the sins of the earth to be capable of salvation in any moral sense;” the grace of God might save an individual, but society is the devil’s territory, and the “social problem is declared to be insoluble on any ethical basis” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 70).

Niebuhr acknowledges that based on the statement that the “city of this world is ‘compact of injustice,’ that its ruler is the devil, that it was built by Cain and that its peace is secured by strife,” Augustine managed to illustrate a “very realistic interpretation of the realities of social life” (Niebuhr, 1963, p. 70). This argument is an acknowledgment from Niebuhr since it contrasts to “sentimentalities and superficial analyses” common in modern religion; yet he cannot stop continuing to highlight its defect by pointing out the defeatism in Augustine’s realism:

“the injustices of society are placed into such sharp contrast with the absolute moral ideal, conceived by the individual conscience, that the religiously sensitized soul is tempted to despair of society. Religion thus degenerates into an asocial quest for the absolute” (Niebuhr, 1963, p. 70).

Even if his analysis of the earthly city was realistic, which was a new argument about Augustine⁶², it seems that Niebuhr was not fond of Augustine at the beginning of the 1930s. Augustine’s vital religion, manifested in an absolute reverence toward God, could not consider any social achievement not directed toward God. Also, his exaggerated or too consistent dualism between the divine and the mundane left every accomplishment of the earthly city seem to be deficient. It is not worth fighting for

⁶² Though Niebuhr once raises the question of realism in orthodox Christianity, he primarily associates it with Marxism (see Niebuhr 2001, p. 163). He also explicitly uses the phrase “communist realism” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 186).

social progress since it will not succeed; even if it will, it is irrelevant. It was understandably not an attractive approach for Niebuhr, who, at the time, made incredible efforts to solve the social problems. Augustine is mentioned once more in the book as an author who observed that “to the end of history the peace of the world [...] must be gained by strife” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 256).

Nevertheless, was Augustine’s approach that pessimist or Niebuhr just found Augustine a fine example for presenting the disadvantages of this kind of dualism and its disadvantages, such as defeatism?⁶³ Probably the second. The parts on which Niebuhr bases his arguments correctly present the pessimistic element of Augustine’s thought. However, this approach to Augustinian ideas is partly simplistic and biased. Either Niebuhr is not aware of it, or he does not treat it seriously that Augustine emphasized the significance of the normative motif that human beings should care about their social surroundings and neighborhood, as the realist-critic Elshtain, who is commonly labeled as Christian realist, has pointed to the fact (Elshtain, 2003). Chadwick highlights that even if government was more “effective in suppressing vice than in stimulating virtue,” for Augustine, they (especially the Christians) were responsible for civic virtue (Chadwick 2001, p. 109). Nonetheless, as emphasized before, Niebuhr did not wish to comply with the demand to paint a complete picture of Augustine.

Thus, even if Augustine slowly enters Niebuhr’s intellectual horizon, severe conclusions should not be drawn on Niebuhr’s Augustine interpretation here because he does not examine his thought in detail. Altogether, two pages negotiate Augustine’s ideas. Furthermore, as Loriaux mentions, the core assumption of the book, namely that structural elements limit the moral conduct of human beings, has nothing to do with Augustine (Loriaux, 1995, p. 409).

6.3.5. *Reflections on the End of an Era*

A year later, Niebuhr, for the first time, called himself a “Marxian” (Fox, 1985, p. 143). Two years later, *Reflections on the End of an Era* (Niebuhr, 1934) (from now: *Reflections*) was published, which usually treated as Niebuhr’s most Marxist work, even by Niebuhr himself (Stone, 1992, p. 90). In a sense, this perception is valid, Niebuhr

⁶³ Niebuhr further elaborates on the defeatism of religion, which is „derived from a too consistent God-world, spirit-body dualism.” See Niebuhr 2001, pp. 78-79.

applies Marxian insights. For instance, he similarly describes the capitalistic system, he believes in the inevitability of class conflict, he acknowledges the moral superiority of the proletariat in terminating social injustice, but he also praises realist Marxian political strategy. In the case of the latter, he writes that the worker's

„catastrophism is truer to the political realities of our era than the liberal optimism to which most of the middle classes cling and he is therefore bound to be the guiding factor in any political policy adequate to the task of social reconstruction. Marxian radicalism cannot afford to allow the dilutions of liberalism which the middle-class intellectuals try to press upon it. An adequate radical political policy must be Marxian in essentials of political strategy” (Niebuhr, 1934, p. 177).

On the other hand, he, as someone who was never an unconditional supporter of Marxism, stresses the dangerous consequences of Marxist thought; in the chapter entitled *The Peril of Barbarism in the Spirit of Vengeance*, his criticism – in this respect – is probably more profound than it was in the *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. An essential idea here, beyond the fact that not even the workers are free from egoistic attitudes, is that “victims of injustice are always actuated by the spirit of vengeance as much as by the spirit of justice” (Niebuhr, 1934, p. 167). Niebuhr mentions the limitations of human nature and his skepticism about the general development of people's moral performance. Beyond the fact that certain sins stem from the character of the class, most of the social problems are caused by the egocentrism and imperialism of human collectives and groups.

In *Reflections*, the purpose of moving towards a more orthodox religion is as present as moving towards a more radical political orientation. What scholars commonly emphasize as the period when “Niebuhr moved towards the right in religion and to the left in politics” is succinctly summarized by himself in the preface of *Reflections* when he writes that “[i]n my opinion an adequate spiritual guidance can come only through a more radical political orientation and a more conservative religious convictions than are comprehended in the culture of our era” (Niebuhr, 1934 p. ix). Why was this reorientation necessary? The capitalistic system, thanks to its “very character,” causes “unequal distribution of social power [which] leads to inequality and injustice”

(Niebuhr, 1934, p. 24). Meanwhile, the representatives of liberalism, including tradesmen and academics, are blind to see the social problems and do not understand human nature. An alternative must be found since the capitalistic system is disintegrating and sooner or later will perish (which the book's title also reflects).⁶⁴

Niebuhr's solution is to establish a position, or, in other words, to develop an approach that can overcome the deficiencies and, at the same time, blend the virtues of the contesting worldviews: liberalism, Marxism, liberal Christianity, and orthodox Christianity.⁶⁵ He does not have an exact expression; he sometimes refers to "an adequate approach," "an adequate world-view," "radical political theory," or "political policy" (Niebuhr, 1934, pp. 229-230). This "position" or "approach," as mainly developed in the three consecutive chapters entitled *The Political Realism of Christian Orthodoxy*, *Radical Political Theory*, and *The Balance of Power in Politics*, carries the political and ethical characteristics of Christian realism, a phrase that Niebuhr did not use in 1934.

On Augustine – just like the *Moral Man* – the book is short-spoken; he appears in three instances. Though these are not elementary references, the textual environment of the fragments is instructive, especially given his later thought. The first is in the chapter *Mythology and History*, which themes interested Niebuhr throughout his scholarship. Here, Niebuhr, while condemning the contemporary rationalistic perception of history since it lacks the vision which could serve as a source of meaning, argues that the philosophy of history must be more a myth than a philosophy. This philosophy of history must consider various perspectives (economists, political strategists, artists, moralists) to form a unified picture of history, and it "must combine the exact data of the scientist with the vision of the artist and must add religious depth to philosophical generalizations" (Niebuhr, 1934, p. 122). Niebuhr knows it cannot deal with all the

⁶⁴ Niebuhr did not give an exact date of the collapse. Also, from today's perspective, it sounds like a particularly wrong prediction. Furthermore, the idea that "[m]ass production requires mass consumption; and capitalism is unable to provide mass consumption" (Niebuhr, 1934, p. 24) seems to be an erroneous statement. Still, Niebuhr's idea on the lack of consumption was plausible after the Great Depression. He was also not alone with his apocalyptic visions or the idea of reorganizing the whole system. For instance, historian and international realist scholar Frederick L. Schuman once wished to combine liberalism with Marxism, while Harry Ward wanted to fuse Christianity and Marxism.

⁶⁵ Although it is just as much a lifestyle as a worldview, asceticism could also be mentioned here. Niebuhr admitted the merits of it, such as their clear understanding regarding the egoism of individuals (Niebuhr, 1934, p. 110). Later he calls attention to the fact that ascetic disinterestedness – since it is out of the society – cannot be used for adequate social morality (Niebuhr, 1934, p. 267).

historical facts or only one meaning is possible. Still, he maintains that history without mythology is not necessarily more accurate in historical details than a history with mythology. He also declares that it should also be able to serve as a source of meaning in the momentary chaos. Probably this latest idea led Niebuhr to treat Augustine as an exemplar of this in the next paragraph. He writes:

“Saint Augustine could regard the disintegration of the Roman Empire with equanimity because he had a mythology, derived partly from the Christian Gospels and partly from Platonism, which enabled him to see the rise of the Catholic Church as more than an adequate compensation for the disintegration of the empire. His mythology actually validated itself within limits because it created a church which became the residuary legatee and receiver in bankruptcy of a bankrupt empire [...] Something of the Augustinian conception has remained with Christian orthodoxy, both Catholic and Protestant. It was essentially an individualistic mythology because it permitted the sensitive spirit to transcend the vicissitudes of history, even to consign them to a realm of comparatively meaningless cycles and recurrences, and to find peace either in an institution of grace (the Catholic doctrine) or in a personal experience of grace (the Protestant version) in which a realm of meaning above history was discovered” (Niebuhr, 1934, pp. 124-125).

The tone of the fragment is descriptive; neither forceful acknowledgment nor harsh criticism is included. Nevertheless, the fact that Augustine had mythology, which “validated itself within limits” at a crisis period (when a historical era ends and a new one begins), seems appealing to Niebuhr. Also, the possibility of transcendence over history contributes to the fact that it is a meaningful mythology that also had significance since it heavily influenced Catholic and Protestant concepts of grace. In short, Niebuhr's remark on Augustine seems positive even if it is moderate. More accurately, it is his first positive remark in his books that is not instantly followed by criticism.

The other two references are less relevant in their contents, but the topics where Augustine is mentioned are still considerable. Niebuhr tended to emphasize the same merits and deficiencies of specific religious trends, which is also valid for his arguments

on Christian orthodoxy. One such constantly recurring problem is the acceptance of slavery, while the other is the divine ordinance of earthly institutions (typically the Church and political power). Augustine appears related these topics in two cases in the *Reflection*. First, when he explains how Christian orthodoxy understood slavery as both a punishment and a remedy for sin, he primarily highlights Saint Ambrose and Saint Isidore of Seville. However, he adds that it was “not foreign to the thought of Augustine” (Niebuhr, 1934, p. 218). The second question, which is similarly intertwined with the condemnation and, at the same time, justification of evil, is the attitude towards the governments. The power of governments is coercive and sinful. Still, it is divinely ordained since it fosters social cohesion and saves from graver sins – interprets Niebuhr the Christian orthodoxy. Just like Gregory VII understood the rule over other fellows as a form of sin,⁶⁶ “Augustine’s realism tempts him to similar descriptions of the evils of the state equally at variance with the more accepted doctrine of the state as divine ordinance” (Niebuhr, 1934, p. 220).

Augustine’s inclusion into these two problems marks a change in this regard to *Does Civilization*, where only Paul and Luther were held responsible for these fallacies. What needs to be noted is that when these two topics, namely slavery and divine ordinance of governments, emerge at Niebuhr, Augustine is treated as a representative of Christian orthodoxy and not as a sole or prominent representative of Christian thought who should be evaluated alone, in himself. The gradual change will be felt when Augustine is discussed as a Christian theologian who deserves more attention than just a simple example of Christian orthodoxy. It should also be mentioned that compared to *Moral Man*, Niebuhr puts more emphasis on the realism of Christian orthodoxy. Next to Marxism, Christian orthodoxy rose as a source of realism. This feature is even visible if the title of the XV’s chapter is considered: *The Political Realism of Christian Orthodoxy*.

Another notable yet overlooked characteristic can be grasped in this book of Niebuhr, and it is also relevant regarding his claims about Augustine. Namely, Niebuhr reveals

⁶⁶ Here, Niebuhr quotes Gregory VIII. from C. H. McIlwain’s book entitled *The Growth of Political Thought in the West* in the following way: „Who does not know that kings and rulers had their beginning in men inspired by the devil, the prince of the world to turn from God and presume in the blindness of their lusts and their intolerable arrogance to bear their rule over men, *their equals*, through pride, violence, fraud, bloodshed and almost every known crime?” (Niebuhr, 1934, p. 220).

himself through the references in the footnotes. Again, this would not be a particularly weighty insight, but considering Niebuhr's writings, perhaps it is. On the one hand, Niebuhr cites rarely, especially compared to today's scientific works. Sometimes so few that it seems like the whole train of thought has popped out of his mind.

On the other hand, the secondary literature pays little attention to these references and does not scrutinize them. This is not an exception in the case of *Reflections*; it is a general pattern. Just like Niebuhr seems to rely on Santayana in evaluating Augustine in *Does Civilization*, here he seems to base his ideas mostly on two historians, Charles Howard McIlwain, and Alexander James Carlyle. Niebuhr used McIlwain's book titled *The Growth of Political Thought in the West* (McIlwain, 1932) when Augustine appears, more specifically when he quotes Gregory VII on the divine ordinance of governments. McIlwain's was further valuable since it discussed previous interpretations of Augustine, including John Neville Figgis' and Carlyle's (McIlwain, 1932).

The other textbook was A. J. Carlyle's *History of Medieval Political Theory in the West*, which he wrote with his brother, Robert Warrand Carlyle (Carlyle, 1961). From the six-volume classic, Niebuhr marks the first volume as a source when he writes about Augustine's views of slaves. Though Niebuhr's conclusion that Augustine accepted slavery is not contrary to Carlyle's, the latter also underlines how Augustine tried to mitigate the injustices of slavery (Carlyle, 1961, pp. 121, 123). The appearance of Carlyle in Niebuhr's case is further interesting since Gregory places him in realist Augustinianism (Gregory, 2008, p. 80). Nonetheless, Niebuhr's usage of Carlyle is so limited that it does not indicate any serious influence. The most visible evidence that Niebuhr knew these authors is that he discusses their interpretation together around a decade later in *The Nature and The Destiny of Man* (Niebuhr, 1964b, p. 273). The main difference will be that he can pose Augustine's position against them based on Augustine himself. Thus, the conclusion should be drawn that without having a deep knowledge of Augustine, Niebuhr naturally relied on other sources in his early interpretations.

6.3.6. *Stressing questions and a conclusion*

Before turning to the next period, a note should be made on Niebuhr's interest in Augustine, namely on what he taught about him at the Union. Based on Stone, it can be claimed that Augustine was part of the Christian ethics course. He writes:

“Following a lecture on the Constantinian age and the increasing ascetic protest against church compromises with the world, Niebuhr turned to his favorite subject, Augustine. His lectures on Augustine gradually evolved from two in the early 1930s version of the course to four in later years. He had begun his study of Augustine in Detroit and deepened it while at Union through study, conversation with friends, and the contributions of his wife, Ursula” (Stone, 1992, p. 67).

Stone continues how Augustine appeared at Niebuhr and how they resembled, which insights will be mentioned later. The most stressing question is as follows: on what Stone bases his argument that “[h]e had begun his study of Augustine in Detroit?” Unfortunately, his reference does not help. At the end of the passage, he refers only to *Augustine's Political Realism* in *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (Niebuhr, 1953), which was intended to signify Niebuhr's most important writing on Augustine, published in 1953. Hence it is not connected to the argument that Niebuhr studied Augustine in Detroit.

Naturally, Stone could have meant the references to Augustine in *Does Civilization*, which is from the Detroit period. Still, knowing the small amount and indifference of those references, it would be an overestimation to claim that “he had begun his study of Augustine in Detroit.” Suppose Stone meant that Niebuhr began to study Augustine in Detroit, but its results occurred only in his subsequent books. In that case, the problem is that those books (*Leaves*, *Contribution*, *Moral Man*, and *Reflections*), as the dissertation pointed out, were also free from substantial Augustine references, differences, and influences. Thus, it seems implausible again.

At this point, one might suggest it was a careless note from Stone. It was not; he repeats his statement twice. He argues that “Augustine had been a subject of Niebuhr's since Detroit” (Stone, 1992, p. 170) and that the “influence of Augustine had grown on

Niebuhr, starting with his reflections in Detroit” (Stone, 1992, p. 204). The severe problem here is still that Stone does not justify the validity of these arguments.

Though it is not equally critical, the same dilemma appears with Ursula’s role in encouraging Niebuhr towards Augustine. Stone first writes that “Ursula also enriched his perspective on Augustine from her historical and theological studies at Oxford” (Stone, 192, p. 170). Then he argues that “Ursula’s encouragement of this theme of his thought bore more fruit in *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Stone, 1992, p. 204). Nonetheless, the underlying arguments are missing again.

These are significant issues since if Stone’s arguments are correct, they would modify certain conclusions of this dissertation. It would date Niebuhr’s interest in Augustine earlier and acknowledge Ursula’s attribution as well. Stone is an authoritative source who personally knew Niebuhr, which might result in having information that cannot be cited (or knowing articles not included in the dissertation). Nonetheless, it is exciting that the second argument seems to be plausible. Ursula brought Anglicanism closer to Niebuhr, which might have led him to Augustine. Still, based on the lack of underlying facts behind Stone’s arguments and the auxiliary sources which would support his conclusions, the responsible decision is not to confirm the validity of his arguments.

In order to conclude this question, the note of two equally authoritative sources, Bingham and Gary Dorrien, will be cited. Bingham claims that “in the mid-thirties, Niebuhr started seriously pondering the writings of St. Augustine” (Bingham, 1961, p. 165), while Dorrien mentions that Niebuhr began to draw more and more deeply on Augustine after *Reflections* (Dorrien in Niebuhr, 2011, p. xv). These arguments are in line with the dissertation’s findings.

To sum up this section, it can be concluded that, similarly to the end of his pastorship, the second theoretical phase did not drive Niebuhr substantially closer to Augustine. Though Augustine appears more often, he is not significantly present in Niebuhr’s thought considering the references, similarities, or influences. Superficially, it could be argued that Niebuhr became an Augustinian realist unconsciously by stressing the selfishness, brutality, and fragmentary character of social life, just like Augustine did.

Nevertheless, these aspects of Niebuhr's thought originated more from his experiences in Detroit and New York, his radical socialism and Marxism, than Augustine.

Nonetheless, this conclusion is much more severe than the similar arguments at the end of the first theoretical phase. Why? Since there, it could be claimed that Niebuhr's political thought was immature or undeveloped. Yet, by the end of 1934, after *Moral Man* and *Reflections*, Niebuhr's political thought and political ethics were already in a developed stage. The fundamental elements will withstand the passage of time: the differentiation of individual and social ethics, the acceptance of the brutal facts of social life, the skepticism towards the moral progress of social groups, the promotion of power balances, the call for social justice and responsibility, the criticism of the representatives of rationality and naturalism, the realist analysis of social problems, the combination of idealism and realism, and the distinguished relevance of the prophetic role.

Obviously, these will continue to develop over time; new elements, such as order, will emerge, while others, like Marxist radicalism, will be moderated. Still, the core remains, and Augustine is still nowhere. He will gain importance since the substantial shift at Niebuhr will be the expansion of his theological knowledge and the involvement of those theological arguments in his relatively stable political thought. Augustine is an indispensable figure in this intellectual development, which will be understood by the further analysis of Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine. However, his role in Niebuhr's political thought, especially his political ethics, will remain limited due to the late discovery.

6.4. Prophetism over Augustinianism (1935-1939)

6.4.1. Introduction

From the middle of the 1930s, simultaneously with his strengthening critical voice towards communism, Niebuhr began his deep theological and philosophical investigations. In addition to the criticisms he received from theologians for his secular writings, he was encouraged to do so based on at least three reasons. First, he was in personal relationships with many learned theologians at Union. The same year Ursula arrived at the Union, the "German fellow" was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with whom he had contrasting theological views (Fox, 1985, p. 126). The intercourse with Bonhoeffer, or

with Tillich from 1933, for whom, having fled from Germany, Niebuhr helped to obtain a job at Union, necessitated theological knowledge. Courses taught at the Union also contributed to his preparedness. Finally, he was invited to the Gifford Lectures in 1934, one of the most prestigious lecture series a theologian can hold. Niebuhr conducted deep theological and philosophical research until his lectures in 1939 in Edinburgh.⁶⁷

The modified and expanded version of Niebuhr's lecture series, usually treated as his magnum opus, was published in two volumes entitled *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (Niebuhr, 1964). The gradual change between *Does Civilization* and *Moral Man* was already stressed; comparing *The Nature and Destiny of Man* and *Does Civilization* might cause confusion about whether the same man wrote it. However, Niebuhr was not the same man since he went through a decade, first marked by social radicalism and then by theological involvement. Naturally, he was aware of the contradictions between the two versions of himself; in 1939, he wrote that *Does Civilization* "is proved to contain almost all the theological windmills against which today I tilt my sword" (Niebuhr, 1939, p. 542).

Nonetheless, specific steps had to be taken before his Gifford Lectures. The first serious written product of theological development is Niebuhr's first systematic elaboration on Christian ethics, published in 1935, titled *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Niebuhr, 1935). In this book, while Niebuhr began to work out the answers for his theological critics, he initiated the task of establishing his theologically grounded Christian social ethic. Though the lack of deep interest in Augustine's ideas remained present in this book, some ideas and topics began to draw closer to Augustine.

After examining *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, a surprising episode will occur in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine. Niebuhr's article in *The Spectator* in 1936 uses an entirely new and, at the same time, especially appreciative sound about Augustinian Christianity. Nevertheless, it does not bring a substantial change and can be viewed as an unexpected acknowledgment.

Regardless of the substantial changes in his life after 1928, Niebuhr remained what he was in Detroit, a preacher. His daughter, Elisabeth, recalled that her mother, Ursula,

⁶⁷ For a reminiscence on the travel and Reinhold's lectures written by his wife Ursula, see Niebuhr (1991, pp. 144-158).

always emphasized that Reinhold's work of art had always been primarily preaching (Sifton, 2015). Niebuhr's first written collection of sermons was published in 1937 with the title *Beyond Tragedy* (Niebuhr, 1937). In this, Augustine will receive another particularly significant compliment from Niebuhr. At the end of the chapter, a reflection will be given on why Niebuhr turned toward Augustine in the middle of the 1930s, with a particular emphasis on his brother, H. Richard's criticism.

6.4.2. *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics – general theses*

As mentioned, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (from now: *Interpretation*) is Niebuhr's first systematic elaboration on Christian ethics (Niebuhr, 1935). Nevertheless, it is far from a textbook for universities, and the terms "an" and "systematic" need clarification. It is "an" interpretation since it is a *Niebuhrian* interpretation. Though Niebuhr presents different waves of thought, such as orthodox or liberal Christianity, he opts for a kind of prophetic interpretation of Christian ethics. "Systematic" means that from Niebuhr's argument, a solid overview can be perceived of the foundations of his interpretations of Christian ethics. However, it is far from being as systematic as a dogmatic theology. Niebuhr's negligence of creating any "big theory" and his vigilance in relating Christianity to social and political questions, which are always contingent and morally ambiguous, are also dominant features of this book.

Interpretation was based on the Rauschenbusch Memorial Lectures at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School in the spring of 1934. In its preface, Niebuhr expresses his special indebtedness to Tillich (Niebuhr, 1935). The book reveals significant changes in Niebuhr's thought. It was not the first book that dealt with Christian ethics, but it was the first which had *theological* foundations. Its middle-way between social and theological ethics may be best framed as theologically based social ethics. These new foundations, whose seeds were present in his previous writings, brought a gradual change and determined Niebuhr's later views. It means a lot could be written about them. However, in order not to stretch the framework of this dissertation apart, only a few relevant topics will be introduced here briefly: Jesus' ethic and its relation to social problems, the characteristic of prophetic religions, and, naturally, Augustine.

The most significant novelty in *Interpretation* is probably the systematic evaluation of Jesus' ethic. "The ethic of Jesus is the perfect fruit of prophetic religion. Its ideal of love

has the same relation to the facts and necessities of human experience as the God of prophetic faith has to the world. It is drawn from, and relevant to, every moral experience,” Niebuhr begins his chapter on the ethic of Jesus (Niebuhr, 1936, p. 37). One of Niebuhr’s ambitions is to present how central love is for every human life. Calling the law of love the ultimate law of life, arguing that “God is, therefore, love” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 38) and that the ideal of love transcends all law (Niebuhr, 1938, p. 149) are expressions that contribute to the reception of this essential idea. These are to be taken seriously. These are not sentimental lamentations, or an instrument used to cover Niebuhr’s realist arguments. These are the essences of Christianity, or, at least, what Niebuhr thought as the central points of Christianity. Thus, they deserve outstanding attention. “All human life stands under an impending doom because it does not live by the law of love. Egoism is always destructive. The wages of sin is death” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 60).

Nevertheless, Jesus’ ethic has severe limitations. Namely, its norms are unrealizable for social life. Why? Since it

“does not deal at all with the immediate moral problem of every human life-the problem of arranging some kind of armistice between various contending factions and forces. It has nothing to say about the relativities of politics and economics, nor of the necessary balances of power which exist and must exist in even the most intimate social relationships. The absolutism and perfectionism of Jesus’ love ethic sets itself uncompromisingly not only against the natural self-regarding impulses, but against the necessary prudent defenses of the self, required because of the egoism of others (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 39).

Therefore, the actors of social life, including groups (e.g., classes and nations) but also individuals, cannot completely comply with the norms of love. Individuals can do better, but their sinfulness also limits them. Suppose concerns for physical existence are prohibited, the love of possessions is condemned, and the idea of forgiveness is practiced without limitations, as Jesus expected. In that case, the prudential norms of social life, such as order, which is used to prevent anarchy, cannot be maintained. However, maintaining order in domestic jurisprudence and defense against external foes is not just a possibility but a necessity. Niebuhr does not argue that Jesus’ ethic is

irrelevant or has no role in social questions, but it turns out that even if the ultimate law of life is the law of love, the law of social life cannot be love. In his words, the “ethic of Jesus may offer valuable insights to and sources of criticism for a prudential social ethic which deals with present reality; but no such social ethic can be directly derived from a pure religious ethic” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 51). Closing to the end of his career, twenty-two years after the *Interpretation*, Niebuhr will still argue that there is “no social ethic in the love universalism of the gospel (Niebuhr, 1958a, p. 118).

It should be clear that Niebuhr’s rejection of Jesus’ ethic as a basis for social ethics originated from earlier times. In 1932 he debated with H. Richard on the question of the Sino-Japanese war on the columns of the *Christian Century*. After he approves most of his brother’s arguments, he writes:

“All this does not prove, however, that we ought to apply the words of Jesus, ‘Let him who is without sin cast the first stone,’ literally. If we do we will never be able to act. There will never be a wholly disinterested nation. Pure disinterestedness is an ideal which even individuals cannot fully achieve, and human groups are bound always to express themselves in lower ethical forms than individuals. [...] The relation of nations and of economic groups can never be brought into the terms of pure love. Justice is probably the highest ideal towards which human groups can aspire (Niebuhr, 1962, p. 224).

Thus, the highest which can be aimed at social relations is justice. Niebuhr affirms in *Interpretation* that the “problem of politics and economics is the problem of justice” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 140). Though full justice will never be attained, the norm of social justice should invoke responsibility to reach a proximate or more equal social justice. Among others, the idea of social justice at Niebuhr can be derived from the legacy of the Social Gospel tradition in which he was raised, his social attentiveness towards the workers from the mid-1920s, which was further strengthened by the Marxist notion of fighting against injustice, and his affection for the Hebrew prophetic thought.⁶⁸ He refers to the latter in *Interpretation* when he argues that in contrast to the “complete

⁶⁸ As Tsonchev argues, for Luther, “justice is the highest and most important function of the “temporal sword” (Tsonchev, 2017, p. 9). With Niebuhr’s Lutheran background, it is not absolutely excludable that Luther’s idea was influential in his case. Nevertheless, taking into account his general wave of thought, and the constant rejection of Lutheran social ethics, it is unlikely that it had a substantial impact.

disinterestedness which the ethics of Jesus demands,” the “social justice which Amos demanded represented a possible ideal for society” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 31). Among others, Amos and Isaiah called for social justice, and they – just like Niebuhr did in the case of the workers and black people – emphasized the needs of the neediest: the weak, the mothers (the widows), and the children (the orphans).

Nevertheless, as Niebuhr already addressed in *Moral Man*, “any justice which is only justice soon degenerates into something less than justice” (Niebuhr, 2001, p. 258). Niebuhr thought that justice needs support from other spiritual and intellectual sources. Though he rejected the idea of secular and religious moralists that love or greater love, in itself, will contribute to the general development of humankind, he, as a Christian author and a pragmatist who always rejected too consistent theories, could not omit love from his theory. The law of love remains the ultimate law of life, the basis of certain forms of justice, and a possible guide as well. Thus, a dialectic relationship occurs between love and justice: “Jesus’s conception of pure love is related to the idea of justice as the holiness of God is related to the goodness of men” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 31). Later, Niebuhr affirms that “the law of love is involved in all approximations of justice, not only as the source of the norms of justice but as an ultimate perspective by which their limitations are discovered” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 140).

Still, not only love is a regulative principle; Niebuhr claims that “[e]quality is always the regulative principle of justice; and in the idea of equality there is an echo of the law of love. ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as Thyself’” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 108). The explanation of Niebuhr’s set of values and their relation to love and justice could further be continued, for instance, the balance of power or critical intelligence as prerequisites for social justice. As a conclusion of this question, it can be emphasized what has been noted before, that Niebuhr was again following the general pattern of his thought in rejecting any consistent theory.

The second ambition of Niebuhr is to construct a position that follows the essence of Christianity but can serve as a guide for modern social problems. The position is called prophetic religion and not Christian realism. The *Interpretation* is Niebuhr’s first book that uses the term “Christian realism” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 142). However, surprisingly, the term does not have any positive connotation. It is the opposite doctrine of Christian

perfectionism, which “have been used to thwart the efforts at a higher justice in society” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 142). Though Niebuhr argues that it was rather the intention of their representatives than the weaknesses of the doctrines that it contributed to bad causes, the term is not used as sophistically and as a normative guiding principle as it will be later (Niebuhr, 1953). Thus, what Niebuhr treats as principles to follow is ordered under prophetic religion.

Prophetic religion overcomes the defects of orthodox and liberal Christianity, for instance, their inability to handle the dialectic relation of love and justice. It is able to mix the “profound pessimism and ultimate optimism which distinguishes prophetic religion from other forms of faith and other world-views (Niebuhr, 1935, pp. 73-74). Prophetic religion uses faith *and* reason. Continuing his elaborations on the relationship between religion and science, Niebuhr, referring to Miguel de Unamuno, argued that “[f]aith must feed on reason [...] But reason must also feed on faith. Every authentic religious myth contains paradoxes of relation between the finite and eternal which cannot be completely rationalized without destroying the genius of true religion” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 14).

Furthermore, prophetic religion understands and uses the paradoxes of the Christian faith. In his first attempt to write a theologically profound work, Niebuhr realized that he had to use the paradoxes of Christian faith and its myths, including the paradoxes of the Creation, or the Fall, to formulate the wisdom which lies in the truth. Thus, Niebuhr’s continuous affection towards the paradoxes of Christianity begins here. As he will argue in *Christianity and Power Politics*: “the most adequate religion solves its problems in paradoxes rather than schemes of consistency” (Niebuhr, 1940, p. 197). Again, the rejection of consistency occurs.

An equally relevant feature of prophetic religion is its understanding of man. In *Moral Man*, Niebuhr focused on the selfishness of groups. Hence, the selfishness of individuals was obscured. Though he was not sentimental in the question of individuals either, and he maintained that collectives are more inclined to evil, in *Interpretation*, his theory of man *began* to catch up to his theory of collectives both in the depth of elaboration and in the question of the tendency to evil. Prophetic religion is aware that the “world of nature is also a world of sin” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 51), the character of

moral evil in man, and it “attributes moral evil to an evil will rather than to the limitations of natural man” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 77). In the myth of the Fall, the “origin of evil is attributed to an act of rebellion on the part of man” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 73). Sin is an act of rebellion against God when man pretends to be more than he is. Refusing to acknowledge his creatureliness, he puts himself in the organizing center of life, making himself God. Thus, “while egoism is the driving force of sin, dishonesty is its final expression” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 87). Though not to the same extent as he will do later, Niebuhr relates the problem of pride to sin and begins to stress its relevance as a “subtle form of self-love” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 43) and a form of egoism (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 44). In short, Niebuhr seems ready to explore human nature’s depth. Interestingly, he still treats Marxism as a crucial influence in modern thought, even in the case of human nature.

To be more precise, a crucial influence on *his* thought. Niebuhr commonly refers to general tendencies without acknowledging that the arguments best fit *him*. In this case, he concludes that the “insights into human nature which Marxism has fortunately added to modern culture belong to the forgotten insights of prophetic religion. They must be reappropriated with gratitude for their rediscovery” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 124). As Niebuhr treated parts of Marxism as a secularized religion that followed patterns of the Hebrew prophetic, the connection should not be surprising (Niebuhr, 1940).

6.4.3. *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics – Augustine*

The problems of theological anthropology, including sin, and the discussion of Biblical myths are closer to Augustine than Niebuhr’s former sociological and political topics. The question is whether Augustine can leave behind the accusation of orthodoxy. Though prophetic religion uses the insights of Christian orthodoxy, the fallacies of the latter, including dogmatism, sacramentalism, literalism, pessimism, and the lack of genuine social and political ethics, still outweigh its virtues. At least Niebuhr acknowledges that it has virtues. How did Niebuhr interpret Augustine here?

Probably in an even more critical manner. Though Niebuhr repeats the verdict that he expressed at the end of *Moral Man*, that “[w]ith Augustine we must realize that the peace of the world is gained by strife” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 60), he closely links

Augustine to orthodoxy when he argues that just like St. Isidore of Seville, he accepted the divine appointment of wicked rulers (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 158).

In another part, what seems to be an acknowledgment first becomes a repudiation at the end. Niebuhr formulates his thesis that “a genuine faith in transcendence is the power which lifts religion above its culture and emancipates it from sharing the fate of dying cultures” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 30). The Hebrew prophets not just saved their religion at the end of the Babylonian exile but forged new concepts which brought new purity to their religion. “In somewhat the same fashion Augustine’s faith disassociated Christianity from a dying Roman world, though the Greek other-worldly elements in Augustine’s faith created the basis for a sacramental rather than prophetic religion of transcendence” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 30). In short, Augustine’s effort culminated in a significant change, but it resulted in the obscuration of prophetic religion, which Niebuhr endorses. Niebuhr did not hide his opinion about the harmful effects of sacramentalism on prophetic faith. He argued that “sacramentalism of Christianity orthodoxy, in which all natural things are symbols and images of the divine transcendence, but in which the tension between the present and the future of prophetic religion is destroyed, is a priestly deflation of prophetic religion” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 29). He also argued that sacramentalism a “constitutional disease of mythical religion” (Niebuhr, 1935 p. 33). Thus, Augustine was responsible for taking out the dynamism of prophetic religion.

The last theme where Augustine occurs is the question of the orthodox doctrine of original sin. Niebuhr sympathizes with the idea generally but rejects the orthodox understanding of its origin. Niebuhr rightly points out that it was treated as an “inherited corruption,” partly due to the literal interpretation of the Myth of the Fall and how the early theologians sought to relate original sin with lust. Niebuhr, the modern man with a liberal understanding of religion, always abhorred literalism, which he identified with orthodoxy. Until this point, Niebuhr’s arguments are acceptable, but he does not evaluate orthodoxy fairly. He concludes that “[i]f original sin is an inherited corruption, its inheritance destroys the freedom and therefore the responsibility which is basic to the conception of sin. The orthodox doctrine is therefore self-destructive” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 90). Then he continues:

“Augustine faced this problem, but could not solve it within terms of his presuppositions. Original sin is not an inherited corruption, but it is an inevitable fact of human existence, the inevitability of which is given by the nature of man’s spirituality. It is true in every moment of existence, but it has no history” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 90).

Probably Niebuhr’s constant social activism prompted him to criticize the factors behind the inactivity of orthodox Christians, but his reasoning is not convincing. The logical error lies in the fact that even if Niebuhr is right with the origins of original sin (which is not altogether sure since, as contemporary psychology begins to reveal, certain destructive elements of human life are hereditary), the orthodox understanding does not limit the freedom and therefore responsibility in any sense more than Niebuhr’s concept. Why would it be less self-destructive if we imagined that original sin is not hereditary but an inevitable fact of human existence?⁶⁹

Niebuhr’s further objection touches not directly on Augustine but on the orthodox doctrine of “total depravity,” which flows from the “complete corruption of the ‘image of God’ in man” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 90). He argues that this “type of pessimism is developed most consistently in Augustinian-Lutheran theology,” which altogether does not understand the resources of rationality and reduces the sense of guilt by treating everything sinful (Niebuhr, 1935, pp. 90-91). Altogether, “Augustinian Christianity” did not correctly distinguish between reason and impulse, did not understand that a “significant portion of human wrong-doing is due to human finiteness,” and as it “does not make the distinction between finiteness as such and the sin which flows from the divine pretensions of finite creatures, it failed to strengthen the rational sources of virtue and led to the protest of the Age of Reason and modern culture” (Niebuhr, 1935, pp. 92-93).⁷⁰

What should be taken seriously here? Probably not the conclusions that are rather simplistic and flow from Niebuhr’s social activism and anti-orthodox attitude. The only

⁶⁹ For a reflection on the broader context of Niebuhr’s criticism of Augustine’s literalism of original sin, see Geoffrey Rees 2003.

⁷⁰ Niebuhr probably bases his last idea on Augustine’s statement that “[o]ur very righteousness, too, though true in so far as it has respect to the true good, is yet in this life of such a kind that it consists rather in the remission of sins than in the perfecting virtues” (The City of God, XIX, 27).

positive novelty in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine is the occurrence of an "Augustinian Christianity." Until this point, Niebuhr primarily distinguished between liberal and orthodox Christianity. Though Augustinian Christianity is almost synonymous with orthodox Christianity, or more precisely, it is part of the orthodox tradition, it becomes a separate trend of thought in Niebuhr's mind. Still, in sum, the general opinion on Augustine is devastating; this is Niebuhr's most critical book of Augustine.

Therefore, when Niebuhr argues that "[t]he measure of Christianity's success in gauging the full dimensions of human life is given in its love perfectionism, on the one hand, and its moral realism and pessimism on the other" (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 65), which could be an apt definition of what Augustine tried which his two cities, Niebuhr does not relate him in any ways. Ultimately, this book is on prophetic religion and not on Augustinian.

6.4.4. *An unexpected acknowledgment – The Book of Common Prayer*

A limitation of this dissertation, which was raised in Chapter 4. (*Challenges and Limitations*), would have certainly affected a decisive conclusion here without reading a relevant excerpt from the secondary literature. Why? Because the dissertation mainly focuses on Niebuhr's books and, for understandable reasons, does not include every single piece written by Niebuhr, which exceeds more than a thousand writings. Fortunately, David True's (2021) article on Niebuhr's ecclesiology in the *Handbook* calls attention to one of Niebuhr's shorter writings entitled *The English Church: An American View* published in the English *The Spectator* in 1936 (Niebuhr, 1936). In the article, Niebuhr, being true to his Anglophilia which was even prevalent before his marriage,⁷¹ appreciates the virtues of Anglicanism, including its liturgy. He also supposes that probably *The Book of Common Prayer* is the secret between the highly secularized American religion and the Anglican form, which managed to "transmit and preserve religious feeling much more adequately than the formless worship of the Free

⁷¹ Niebuhr's affection towards England and generally Britain did not exclusively stem from his intimate relationship with Ursula, though it certainly contributed to it. Beyond the ritualism of the Anglican Church, Niebuhr appreciated the nation's traditionalism, the wisdom of British socialism and argued that "British have exceeded all modern nations, including our own, in combining moral purpose with political realism" (Niebuhr, 1940. p. 60).

Churches” (Niebuhr, 1936). Thus, *The Book of Common Prayer* is remarkable with its theological insights. He writes:

“The Book of Common Prayer is not a theologically neutral prayer manual. It is informed by a definite theological tendency, which could be defined most briefly as Augustinianism. The Anglican service significantly begins with a prayer of general confession. That prayer is typical of the spirit of contrition which pervades the whole book. The classical words of that first prayer are a perfect expression of the sense of sin which characterises Augustinian Christianity: ‘- Almighty and most merciful Father: We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us.’ Such a prayer, with its sweeping confessional climax, ‘and there is no health in us,’ can be prayed with sincerity only if the Augustinian interpretation of human nature is accepted—i.e., if the doctrine of original sin is believed” (Niebuhr, 1936).

First of all, Augustinian Christianity occurs again. Even if it is still considered orthodox, it is not necessarily a negative path. What are the main characteristics of Augustinian Christianity? Based on the citation above, the related notions are contrition, a sense of sin, a certain interpretation of human nature, and original sin. These concepts, together with self-interest and pessimism, which are mentioned later in the article, will be echoed in the mature Niebuhr’s perception of Augustine. It should also be noted that Niebuhr praises Augustinian Christianity. He contrasts Augustinian Christianity with modern moralists, who cannot accept the doctrine of original sin. He gives superiority to the former from the two and does not reject both as he did in *Interpretations*. He writes that the “specific truth, in the myth of the fall of man and in the doctrine of original sin, is that all human ideals, even the highest, are corrupted by self-interest. That is a truth full of illuminating insights for the political and social life of contemporary man” (Niebuhr, 1936). So Augustinian Christianity, with its doctrine of original sin, can and *should* be applied in modern times, for instance, against the sentimental preachers. Now, the minor critical note, detailed at length in *Interpretation*, that the concept of original sin

should not be understood precisely how Augustine did, namely that it was hereditary, seems negligible.

But why Augustine? Why did Augustine come into Niebuhr's mind when he read the quoted part of Morning Prayer from *The Book of the Common Prayer*? In other words, what is specifically Augustinian in this prayer? The sense of sin and contrition that occur not only in the quoted parts (e.g., "We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts," or "and there is no health in us") but also in those parts which come after the quoted part of the prayer ("But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders," see *The Book of Common Prayer*) are in line with the spirituality of Augustine's *Confessions* (Augustine, 2019). Nevertheless, it is not a direct quote from Augustine, and Niebuhr could have chosen another author. Paul, Luther, and many other Christian authors equally focus on contrition, sin, and self-regard. The following part, "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done," resembles the dynamics and conclusions of the Pauline confession "The good that I would do I do not do; and the evil that I would not that I do," so much that it came into Niebuhr's mind and he quotes it at the end of his article.⁷² Then why not Pauline Christianity?

David True also touches on this question and argues that what "Niebuhr refers to as an Augustinian perspective might better to be described as a Reformed influence" (True, 2021, p. 300). Rice also introduces Augustine as an ally for the Reformers and Niebuhr and stresses the relevance of Reformed theology in the Prayerbook and Niebuhr's doctrine of sin (True, 2021). True might be right in his assumptions, but the problem is that Niebuhr, rightly or wrongly, but clearly writes that the prayer's spirit is Augustinian and then discusses the merits of Augustinian Christianity (not Reformed theology).

It would be easy to formulate dubious ideas on why Niebuhr preferred Augustine above Paul and others. However, two hints from the article might help find an adequate explanation. The first, which is less likely to be decisive, is based on Niebuhr's idea that the Myth of the Fall and the doctrine of original sin understand that "all human ideals, even the highest, are corrupted by self-interest," and in its intention to escape the fragmentariness, man is inclined to set "universal scheme of values," which, in the end,

⁷² This verse became one of Niebuhr's from Paul; see, for instance, Niebuhr, 1935; 1965.

serve the interest of those who set the scheme of values (Niebuhr, 1936). He concludes that

[a]ll religion and morality tend therefore to be both the worship of God (the subjection of the partial to the universal) and rebellion against God (the bogus identification of the partial and egoistic with the universal). This is the truth which Augustinian Christianity saw clearly and modern moralism obscures (Niebuhr, 1936).

To this question, it can be raised that Augustine differs from the “competitors”: Paul and Luther. While Paul and Luther based on Paul stressed that the “saving grace” brings radical changes in personality (see, for instance, Ephesians 2), Augustine was more skeptical in this regard; he saw that human ideals are always fragmentary (Chadwick 2001, pp. 3, 63, 126).

The second question, which is more decisive here, is the dynamics of the opposition, which Niebuhr posits in the article. He argues that the Anglican preacher’s sermon was Pelagian (Niebuhr, 1936). Thus, Niebuhr could easily construct a framework in which the simple moralism of Pelagianism is contrasted with the “Augustinian sense of contrition and pessimism” (Niebuhr, 1936). Furthermore, a former, seemingly irrelevant reference about Augustine, but not directly on Augustine, strengthens this assumption. In *Interpretation*, Niebuhr quotes a fragment from Pelagius (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 118). The introduction and the conclusion of the quotation are more critical than the quotation itself; in the end, the question is how Niebuhr interpreted Pelagius and not what Pelagius said. Niebuhr criticizes those ideas which confess the ultimate realization of the love commandment in history. Then he writes that “[w]hile modern culture since the eighteenth century has been particularly fruitful of these illusions, the logic which underlies them was stated as early as the fourth century of the Christian faith by Pelagius in controversy with Augustine” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 118). Then comes the citation, which is on how man contradicts God when he blames his human character for his weakness, and the conclusion:

“There is a certain plausibility in the logic of these words, but unfortunately, the facts of human history and the experience of every soul contradict them. The

faith which regards the love commandments as a simple possibility rather than an impossible possibility is rooted in a faulty analysis of human nature which fails to understand that though man always stands under infinite possibilities and is potentially related to the totality of existence, he is, nevertheless, and will remain, a creature of finiteness” (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 118).⁷³

Thus, the grounds of the framework were already present in the *Interpretation*: Augustinian Christianity and its original sin and Pelagius with its simple moralism and his modern followers. What Niebuhr did in *The Spectator* was to connect Anglicanism and Augustinian Christianity and bulge out the merits of Augustinian Christianity to give the upper hand to it against modern Pelagians. By this, Niebuhr could place himself in the debate. Austere moralists follow the Pelagian way; he, as a realist, would instead choose Augustinian Christianity in this vital question. This dialectic narrative was right at hand in the case of Augustine. Also, Niebuhr lacked tradition in which he could place himself. Secular moralism was never an option, and he had already left his religious moralism. Marx’s secular realism was also deficient. This article presents that, in some crucial questions, he could identify himself with Augustinianism, a kind of religious realism.

Nevertheless, even if this article brought an entirely new tone to Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine, it is clear that Augustine is used to reinforce Niebuhr’s general ideas on modernism. Also, the general tendency of Niebuhr’s opinion on Augustine suggests that it was rather an unexpected acknowledgment than a substantial shift in his thought. In *Beyond Tragedy*, he will repeat specific parts of the *Interpretation*’s indictment on Augustine.

It is also a question of why Augustine entered Niebuhr’s mind as the opposite of Pelagianism. The answer might lie in the works of Emil Brunner. In his research, Niebuhr began to read the great contemporary theologians. From a footnote in *Interpretation*, it is clear that he read Emil Brunner’s *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen* published in 1932 (Niebuhr, 1935, p. 167). Based on the first English translation, *The Divine Imperative*, for which H. Richard Niebuhr wrote the recommendation, Brunner

⁷³ Now, it is relatively insignificant but altogether important that Niebuhr’s standard way of using the “facts of human history” and “experience” as ultimate reasons is prevalent here. This shows not just pragmatism but a reverse logic, or the concomitant of pragmatism, namely empiricism.

argues that the real ethical reflections began in ancient Christianity when Augustine began to conflict with Pelagianism (Brunner, 1937a, p. 94). He also claims that “[r]egarded as a whole Augustine’s ethical achievement was of the highest importance; it meant the rediscovery of the distinctively Christian Idea of Good contrasted with the ethical rationalism and eudaimonism of the ancient world (Brunner, 1937, p. 94). Nevertheless, Semi-Pelagianism entered Catholicism, whose most outstanding representative is St. Thomas Aquinas (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 95).

In his other book, translated to English in 1934, titled *The Mediator*, Brunner is even more explicit. He argues that original sin was discarded in modernism and the “thought of the present day – whether consciously or not – is thoroughly Pelagian” (Brunner 1934, p. 138). Modern life does not consider the social environment in which sin occurs, does not acknowledge sin as the corruption of human existence, and the “idea of divine wrath is a taboo;” these were all present in the conception of Pelagianism and it “was this individualistic and moralistic conception of evil against which Augustine and the Reformers contented (Brunner, 1934, pp. 138-139). It is just a slight addition that Brunner criticizes Troeltsch in both cases in this relation as a modern mind, who was highly relevant for early Niebuhr (Rasmussen, 2005). Although it is not sure that Niebuhr read this book, it is probable. Also, its preface was written by his former academic supervisor, Macintosh. Nevertheless, the template which Niebuhr used in his short writing on Anglicanism was already set by Brunner before.

A last exciting fact on how Niebuhr might have connected Augustinian Christianity and Anglicanism should be mentioned here. The answer, or at least a part of the answer, probably lies in the book Niebuhr used to cite Pelagius in *Interpretation*. The book was titled *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, written by Normal Powell Williams (Williams 1938 [1927]). According to the *Interpretation’s* index, Niebuhr uses Williams’ book four times; all were for citations. Nevertheless, the author and the content of the book matter. Williams was an *Anglican* theologian who dealt with Augustine’s doctrine, including the concept of sin. In the synopsis of contents, Williams argues that “the now dominant system of Ritschlianism has no place for any kind of Fall-doctrine, Augustinian or other. The Anglican Articles were doubtless meant by their compilers to rivet a decided Augustinianism upon the English Church...”

(Williams, 1938, p. xxviii). If Niebuhr read this part of the book, it was not hard to connect Augustine to Anglicanism and the doctrine of original sin to Augustine.

6.4.5 *Beyond Tragedy*

Niebuhr's fifteen formerly unpublished sermons delivered mainly at colleges and university chapels were printed in 1937 entitled *Beyond Tragedy* (Niebuhr, 1937). Given the genre of the sermon, *Beyond Tragedy* discusses religious and ethical questions but is articulated with a poetic tone. Still, most sermons include political implications or direct political messages. Fox affirms that from his *first* sermon in Lincoln, Niebuhr always preached on social and political questions. He adds that at Bethel Evangelical Church, Niebuhr occasionally devoted the Sunday morning sermon to political questions (Fox, 1985, p. 66). In his more than five hundred sermons, Augustine dealt with philosophical studies and polemics partly to overcome the difficulties of Manicheism, Academic skepticism, and Neo-Platonism (Cochrane, 1940, p. 382).

Beyond Tragedy does not carry a particularly serious novelty compared to *Interpretation*, but it fits into the development that Niebuhr began a few years ago with his theological investigations. Thus, many conclusions were already articulated in *Interpretation* and will be found in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. Probably the most considerable novelty is the appearance of a new topic, the question of history, and the different views of history. As the sub-title of the collection exaggeratedly suggests, these are *Essays on the Christian Interpretations of History*. Just like in the case of human nature, Niebuhr emphasized the remarkable character of the Christian interpretation of history. He points to his thesis in the preface as follows: “[t]he biblical view of life is dialectical because it affirms the meaning of history and of man’s natural existence on the one hand, and on the other insists that the centre, source and fulfillment of history lie beyond history” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. ix). This topic will gain more focus from him in the second volume of *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1964) and *Faith and History* (Niebuhr, 1949).

In *Beyond Tragedy*, Niebuhr remains on the ground of prophetic religion. He still uses the expression “prophetic religion,” but above the “ordinary,” Amos and Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, and Hosea also occur. His affection toward prophetic thought and

the role of the prophet is most visible when, in the fifth chapter, he discusses the question of true prophecy. Niebuhr's attention-grabbing first sentences have also become permanent elements: [w]hen a man speaks in the name of God and prefixes his pronouncements with a 'Thus saith the Lord,' he is either a fool, or a knave or – a prophet (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 93). Niebuhr underlines that "courage remains a primary test of prophecy" (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 85) but also argues that the "[t]rue prophecy has the function of revealing the true laws of life to the sinner, and discovering to his blind eyes how he increases his insecurity by taking the law into his own hands for the purpose of establishing himself in an insecure world" (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 94).

The citation also indicates that Niebuhr discusses the question of the sense of security in an insecure world. Still, it can also be instilled from his idea that when the prophet reveals the "true laws of life to the sinner," *pride* is among those laws. The two questions are also related in a way that pride "as a consequence of power gives man a false security. Thus it enhances his insecurity" (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 101). As mentioned at *Interpretation*, sin occurs, but pride is scarcely mentioned. In *Beyond Tragedy*, the question of pride receives notably more focus than in *Interpretation*.⁷⁴

In Niebuhr's view, sin is a consequence of man's freedom, derived from his rational capacities rather than his natural impulses. This freedom gives him the possibility to disturb the harmonies of nature, which happens "when he centres his life about one particular impulse (sex or the possessive impulse, for instance) or he tries to make himself, rather than God, the centre of existence" (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 11). This argument occurs in slightly different formulations, but their essence, namely, that man plays the role of God, is the same. For instance: "[m]an always remains a creature and his sin arises from the fact that he is not satisfied to remain so" (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 17), or "[m]an is mortal. That is his fate. Man pretends not to be mortal. That is his sin" (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 28).

As the Christian view of history recognizes, "evil is an inevitable concomitant of even in the highest spiritual exercises" (Niebuhr, 1937, pp. x-xi), and every human being is

⁷⁴ Though the numerical comparison can easily mislead in the case of history of thought, in *Beyond*, the word "pride" is more than six times more present than in *Interpretations* (roughly 65 compared to 10).

exposed to the sin of pride.⁷⁵ However, two groups are more tempted to fall into pride: the wise and the powerful. Pride is also dangerous since it is destructive to social relations; “injustice is the social consequence of pride; and the inevitable fruit of injustice is self-destruction” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 203). Niebuhr, again, sees the key to balance pride in the prophets. Genuine prophets, including Amos and Isaiah, avoided falling into the pride of the wise because they were anti-cultural (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 206). Also, the prophets saw the relation of power, pride, and injustice when they condemned the religious sin of pride and the social sin of injustice (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 103).

The question is whether Augustine can reduce the chasm between himself and the prophets. Though Niebuhr seems to favor it since he mentions again and again that Augustine argued that the “peace of the world is based on strife” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 180), the repetition will probably not bring the decisive shift. Neither will Niebuhr’s thirteens sermon on Jesus’s two parables about judgment. Niebuhr intelligently assumes that a contradiction might lie between two parables of Jesus: the parable of last judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and the laborers in the vineyard (Mt, 20:1-16). While in the former, the Judge of the world rewards the good and punishes the evil, in the latter, the exact measure of the degree of good and evil is not counted. Augustine comes into the picture when Niebuhr argues that it “would not be quite exact and yet it would not be erroneous to designate the first parable ‘Pelagian’ and the second ‘Augustinian’” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 254). When Niebuhr unfolds his argument on the general idea of the second parable, his idea of what Augustinian is becomes clear. First, he argues that the 143rd Psalm includes “an Augustinian confession: ‘Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified’” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 255). Thus, the general idea is that it “makes no difference whether men are good or evil in the sight of God, because they are all in need of God’s mercy” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 255). Though, in parallel to his previous objections, Niebuhr admits that it is difficult to avoid the “danger of depreciating moral distinction” and “encouraging indifference toward moral striving” if this Augustinian emphasis is truly kept, he holds it as a part of the Christian

⁷⁵ “There is, in other words, no type of human eminence which is not subject to the sin of self-destroying pride” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 212).

truth. Therefore, while Niebuhr discusses Augustinianism in contrast to Pelagianism again, Augustine appears on a new topic.

Still, the most relevant novelties are yet to come. In his sermon titled *Ultimate Trust*, Niebuhr echoes his previous idea that the “profoundest expressions of prophetic religion come out of periods of catastrophe” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 113). Just like prophets proclaimed the religion at the threshold of the end of the national identity of Israel, “Christianity was born in the decay of Graeco-Roman culture. Augustine interpreted Christianity and gave its theology a foundation during the death throes of the Roman Empire” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 113). The reformation and the decline of feudalism were also parallel historical processes. It might be that the renewal of the Christian faith will happen in his era full of crises (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 113). Thus, for a moment, it seems that Niebuhr’s argument is still the same. However, the seemingly minor differences (e.g., “gave its theology”) are of critical importance and relevance. The most decisive change is that Niebuhr misses the part when he quarrels with Augustine due to his deflation of prophetic religion. The plural form of “profoundest expressions of prophetic religion” also indicated that Augustine is among the appreciated. Some pages later, his relevance is further affirmed when Niebuhr argues that at the fall of Rome “St. Augustine performed a service to the Christian theology, comparable to the reinterpretation of Hebrew thought in the great prophets” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 119). Therefore, it is another case when Niebuhr praises Augustine related to notions they resembled (or in which Niebuhr thought they resembled); they both lived in catastrophic times and wished to give a new impulse to Christianity.

Using Augustine’s phrases – unfortunately, without references – Niebuhr continues to unfold why “Augustine saw the tragic aspects of human history very clearly” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 120). Augustine knew that earthly cities were bound to be destructed, and his perspective, which focused on God, helped him to interpret the flow of catastrophic events not as meaningless chaos but as God’s presence in history (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 120). Still, what Niebuhr appreciates the most is that Augustine knew the sin of pride and that it accelerates the fall of earthly cities. About Augustine’s merits, he highlights that “[w]ith the prophets he regarded human pride as the root of human injustice; and both pride and injustice as violations of the will of God (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 120). Thus

Augustine, just like the Hebrew prophets, understood pride and was able to give meaning to history, which is one of the most elementary functions of prophetic religions. Regarding Augustine's view of history, Niebuhr also notes in *Beyond Tragedy* that

„[h]uman society may continue to develop from primitive innocency to maturity; but there is no final conquest of good over evil in this development. Both good and evil develop. Both the city God and the city of the world grow, as Augustine observed” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 191).

This argument is an additional step in Niebuhr's positive remarks on Augustine. Nevertheless, the harsh criticisms are not missing either. By setting the city of God against the city of the world and by trying to “maintain the idea of meaningfulness in mundane human history,” “Augustine identified the heavenly city with the Church” (Niebuhr, 1937, pp. 120-121). By doing this, he made a historically bounded, earthly, human institution into the object of divine grace. Augustine's trust towards the redeemed members of the Church was also too extensive; he did not consider that every human life is fragmentary and “[e]ven a man who lives by grace remains finite and sinful, and the church which he builds is very human institution” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 121). Niebuhr always emphasized that the Church, like any human institution, is characterized by the mistakes, misunderstandings, and fallacies of its times. Augustine's idea about the perfection of the Church is not just a false statement but also an idea with severe and harmful historical consequences, especially in medieval times. In short, Niebuhr makes Augustine “responsible for the great heresy of Roman Catholicism, the heresy of identifying the church with the Kingdom of God and of making unqualified claims of divinity for this human, historical and relative institutions” (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 121).

The consequences enumerated by Niebuhr are indeed severe, but Niebuhr's criticism only stands if he correctly assumed that Augustine identified the Church with the city of God. Paul Weithman (2001) argues that there are debates on this question. In some cases, Augustine writes about it in this respect. Still, in Augustine's arguments, no tangible human institution or society could be identified either with the city of God or with the city of Earth. In Augustine's works, these realms are more eschatological than

political; the inhabitants of the two cities are intermingled in the earthly reality, the *saeculum* (Weithman, 2001, pp. 236-237).⁷⁶ In this respect, Eric Gregory draws attention to the fact that Robert Markus, who, like Niebuhr, belonged to the realist groups of Augustinian liberals, would disagree with Niebuhr's Protestant claim. Here, Gregory quotes Markus's conclusion while he interprets Augustine's view on *ecclesia*: "[t]he church is no more 'sacred' than the world is 'profane': both are 'secular'" (quotes Gregory: 2008, p. 92). Furthermore, Markus highlights that

"[f]or Augustine the *ecclesia* must always be 'secular' in the sense that it is, during its early career, like any other human grouping, part of the *saeculum*. Its membership embraces citizens of both the heavenly and the earthly cities. It cannot be identified, *tout court*, with the body of the elect, those predestined to be saved. In this sense it is in an eschatological perspective ambivalent: like all human institutions, the Church comes under the Judgment (Markus, 1970, p. 179).⁷⁷

Therefore, Niebuhr's robust criticism of Augustine seems to be not just biased but factually incorrect. To be fair to Niebuhr, it should be mentioned that he deals with the question later (e.g., Niebuhr, 1955; 1964; 1966), and he handles the question more sophisticatedly and articulates his criticism more carefully. This is especially true for his interview in 1966, where he clarifies his argument:

"Hildebrand, as Gregory VII, was the father of the medieval papacy and he simply used the Augustinian conception of the Civitas Dei. Augustine had some apprehensions about identifying the Church and the City of God; sometimes he affirmed it, and sometimes he denied it. But Hildebrand always affirmed it" (Niebuhr, 1966).

Still, what could have been the reason for Niebuhr's early criticism? Gregory's use of "Protestant" in "Niebuhr's claim" is meaningful: Niebuhr's excessive criticism probably

⁷⁶ Attila Károly Molnár (2016) came to the same conclusion; the Church resembles the city of God the most, yet no human institution would possess God's grace.

⁷⁷ Even though – as Gregory (2008) highlights – crucial similarities occur between their interpretations of Augustine, the thought of the Hungarian-born British historian Robert Markus Austin and Niebuhr does not coincide. Markus does not refer to Niebuhr's understanding of Augustine and mentions him only once when he contrasts Niebuhr and Brunner with Barth's interpretation.

stemmed from his Protestant background. In conclusion, Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine in *Beyond Tragedy* is Janus-faced. He occurs in more instances, and new topics are connected to him. This indicates that Niebuhr began to expand his knowledge of Augustine, and it also began to incorporate into his sermons and books. Additionally, in two elements, pride, and view of history, Augustine rose to the level of the prophets, which is a substantial change in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine. Nonetheless, the breakthrough is postponed. Augustine's fallacy with the Church was so massive in Niebuhr's understanding that he fell considerably behind the prophets altogether.

6.4.6. *The role of criticisms*

An essential question still needs to be answered: what is the role of criticisms in Niebuhr's general tendency to move forward in theology? And how is it connected to Augustine? As emphasized earlier, Union was an exceptionally suitable place for theological growth, and the invitation for Gifford Lectures further accelerated Niebuhr's research on philosophy and theology. Also, a more detailed knowledge of theology could, in itself, lead to Augustine. Still, criticisms, especially H. Richard's, were formative factors in immersing in theology and Augustine. This argument is not exceptional; it is in line and can be derived from Fox's conclusion that "Richard was a vital catalyst for Reinhold's shift toward theology and religious action after *Moral Man* and the Socialist electoral debate in 1932" (Fox, 1985, p. 147). However, Fox explains the general tendency of Niebuhr to turn towards theology and does not explicitly focus on Augustine in this regard. Based on the letters cited by Fox, the systematic evaluation of these criticisms in relation to Augustine deserves a place in this dissertation.

In 1932, Reinhold just subverted American liberal Christianity with *Moral Man*. He received many criticisms for his arguments, including his permissive attitude towards violence, his appraisal of Marxism, and his offensive or even revolutionary rhetoric (Fox, 1985, p. 136). Nevertheless, H. Richard, at the time already the theology professor at Yale, did not join the "idealist" camp in their assault but shared his views with his brother in a private letter (Fox, 1985, p. 144). Above some shorter fragments, Fox quotes four longer parts from H. Richard's letter (Fox, 1985, pp. 144-146). The first, which deals with the criticism of cynics on Niebuhr's book, and the last, which disapproves of Reinhold's general attitude of religious social activism, are irrelevant to

this dissertation. Nevertheless, the rest two are indispensable. First, H. Richard argues that Reinhold was too optimistic about human nature in *Moral Man*. In other words, the difference between individuals' and collectives' moral capacities is not as significant as suggested. He concludes:

“It seems to me then that the apparently more decent behavior of men in face-to-face relationships is not due to all to any element of reason or of moral idealism, any inclination of the will but to the fact that there is more coercion, more enlightened self-interest (because the relations are more easily seen) and more possibility of identifying ourselves with the other man and loving ourselves in him or her. I do not deny the presence of ideals. I deny their efficacy in influencing action” (quotes Fox, 1985, p. 145).

If this did not have its effect, H. Richard continued his criticism of his brother's view on religion.

You think of religion as a power – dangerous sometimes, helpful sometimes. That's liberal. For religion itself religion is no power, but that to which religion is directed, God. ... I think the liberal religion is thoroughly bad. It is a first-aid to hypocrisy. It is the exaltation of goodwill, moral idealism. It worships the God whose qualities are “the human qualities raised to the *n*th degree,” and I don't expect as much help from this religion as you do. It is sentimental and romantic. Has it ever struck you that you read religion through the mystics and ascetics? You scarcely think of Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin. You're speaking of Humanistic religion so far as I see. You come close to breaking with it at times but you don't quite do it (quotes Fox, 1985, p. 145).

Therefore, H. Richard argued that Reinhold, in the basic concepts of human nature and religion, still belongs to the tradition he vehemently tries to undermine intellectually, liberalism. That must have been much more painful than any other criticisms from the backlash of the “naïve idealists.” With his theological vein and profound knowledge of his brother, H. Richard has seen to the heart of his brother. He also carefully used Reinhold's expressions when he wrote about God's qualities “raised to the *n*th degree” (see Niebuhr, 2001, p. 63). In simple terms, H. Richards' answer can be framed as a

theological answer to a secular, an orthodox to a liberal, an established to a scattered, a realist, or even pessimist to an optimist. Fox concludes that H. Richard wanted Reinhold as a comrade in the fight for a realistically radical Christianity (Fox, 1985, p. 145).

Reinhold probably took his brother's criticisms particularly seriously, which might have directly influenced him towards "orthodox," "classical," or, at least, a more profound theology. Later, in 1956, he professed that his brother "was always a few paces ahead of me in theological development; and all my life I have profited greatly from his clearer formulation of views I came to hold in common with him" (Niebuhr, 1961, p. 4). Fox confirms this influence and adds that Reinhold immediately began to rework his theological stance on human nature, which is apparent already in his Taylor Lectures in 1933 (Fox, 1985, p. 147).

Is there anything visible from these criticisms in Niebuhr's following books? Furthermore, how did it affect the role of Augustine? Though *Reflection*, which Reinhold dedicated to his brother,⁷⁸ continues to weave the Marxist thread, his efforts of making theoretically more profound writings, which formulate a more established and realist position concerning religion and human nature, is visible in *Interpretation* and *Beyond Tragedy*. It is far from being the final form, but significant changes occurred. Concerning Augustine, the difference is less conspicuous. Even though *Interpretation* and *Beyond Tragedy* contain more references to Augustine and an unexpected acknowledgment happens in Niebuhr's article on Anglicanism, followed by further compliments in *Beyond Tragedy*, the change is comparatively less significant. The robust and occasionally incorrect criticisms also balance the positive remarks.

The criticism of Presbyterian theologian Joseph Haroutunian probably further strengthened the development that began. The professor explained the theological shallowness of *Beyond Tragedy* with the lack of reflections on the thought of Paul, Augustine, and Luther. According to Fox, he wrote:

⁷⁸ Reinhold wrote the dedication as, "[t]o My Brother – H. Richard Niebuhr" (Niebuhr, 1934. P. VII), and in the preface, he expressed his gratitude – beyond his wife – "to my brother, Professor H. Richard Niebuhr, who disagrees with most of the conclusions at which I arrive, but whose stimulating analyses of the contemporary religious and social problem prompted many of these reflections" (Niebuhr, 1934, p. x).

“I called you a Platonist because your God is primarily the ethical ideal which passes judgment upon us by its sheer unattainable excellence. The ‘tension’ between the ideal and the real seems to be the essence of your religion. Your God does not perform miracles, never has and never will; hence to you the Incarnation and the Resurrection of the dead are myths, not fantasies indeed (I never said so, nor made an ‘effort’ to say so), and yet ‘trans-historical’ – shall we say unhistorical?... Reiny, for truth’s sake, tell me, just what do you do with Paul, Augustine, and Luther, for whom sin and death, *together*, were what Christ save us from? . . . Yours is a truncated Christianity, one that pushes aside the cry of the human heart for life with God in eternity” (quotes Fox, 1985: 183).

In parallel to H. Richard’s criticism, Haroutunian expected not just a theologically more grounded Christianity from Niebuhr, with, again, Paul, Augustine, and Luther, but to take the doctrines of Christianity seriously while writing about it and its social implications. The criticisms probably had their effects. In the introduction of the *Handbook*, the authors suggest that Niebuhr, in the *Nature and Destiny of Man*, also includes ideas that he “discovered as he followed the implications of his criticism of previous theology in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* and *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Lovin-Mauldin, 2021, p. xx). William Stacy Johnson, in his article on H. Richard Niebuhr also expresses that the *Nature and Destiny of Man* was “Reinhold’s crowning achievement,” which also bore its marks because H. Richard urged him to “pay more attention to classical theologians such as Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, a recommendation Reinhold now brought to stunning fruition” (Johnson, 2021, p. 101). To sum it up, in addition to the formerly mentioned factors, criticisms were decisive in leading Niebuhr toward theology and Augustine. Still, it should be affirmed that Niebuhr was far from being Augustinian by the end of *Beyond Tragedy*. Though new elements, including positive remarks, appeared in his interpretation of Augustine, it was still relatively immature and critical.

6.4.7. Conclusion

Both the structural elements (Union Theological Seminary, Gifford Lectures) and the criticisms (H. Richard’s and Haroutunian) were mentioned, which directed Niebuhr toward theology and, most probably, Augustine. The topics which were related to

Augustine were also thoroughly discussed, both the negative (excessive realism, orthodox errors of literalism, accepting slavery, the divine ordinance of kings, the exaltation of the Church) and the positive ones (realist position, the idea of original sin that contrasts with rationalism, and giving meaning to history). Finally, the central elements of Niebuhr's early thought in relation to Augustine were also mentioned, including his central Marxist insights, its realist strategy, and the essentiality of the prophets. What needs to be considered briefly is how the second and the third topics (i.e., Marxism and prophetism), essential for the Niebuhr, are related to Augustine. Two crucial connections will be presented to justify that these are related concepts and that the road was already paved for Augustine; he just had to arrive.

The first topic was previously touched on. It is what relates Marxism and Augustine, namely realism or realist perception. Niebuhr, even in his mature writings, where he condemned the utopian character of communist religion, appreciated certain realist insights of Marx. Marxism is instrumental in pointing to the injustices of the capitalistic system and can see behind the liberal delusions which cover it up. Niebuhr always tried to explain the sociological background of intellectual and spiritual developments. Put plainly, democracy was not primarily born because it was morally superior to oligarchy but because the middle classes managed to acquire power which made it possible to build a system that was beneficiary for them. It does not mean that democracy is not morally superior to tyranny, but it means that it serves the interest and is based on the power of the middle classes.

In detecting the factors of interest and power, next to Marxism occurs Augustinian realism. Augustine's concept of sin presents the source of evil in human individuals, but his criticism of Cicero's *Pax Romana* confirmed that he could also discover the illusions of rationalists. Furthermore, how he understood the destructive social effects of pride and pretension is analogous to how social injustice occurs as a consequence of sin. In this way, Augustine did not only see historic reality correctly, but he could also know that social destruction is related to individuals; Marx could not achieve it since he was as optimistic about the moral performance of individuals and the proletariat as the liberals themselves. Stone rightly suggests that "by the end of World War II,

Augustinian realism had replaced Marxism as a source of criticism of American liberal optimism” (Stone, 1992, p. 169).

The second question is about the relationship between the prophets and Augustine through the phenomenon of crisis. In *Interpretation and Beyond Tragedy*, it became visible that Augustine is discussed with the prophets since he, like the Old Testament prophets, lived on the threshold of civilizations. This fact facilitated that Augustine gained importance in Niebuhr’s thought. The analogy between the prophets and Augustine could have been the description of social decay. Still, it was rather the perception of the catastrophe itself and the new religious impulse which they could provide. Augustine fitted into this theme so much that Niebuhr wrote about the three great crises of the West: the first was at the time of Augustine, the second at Luther, and the third in the middle of the 20th century (Niebuhr, 1960). Thus, it is not only the prophets who are useful in knowing how to call for social justice in times of crisis, but Augustine is equally relevant in showing how to denounce the intellectual opponents who contribute to the formation and the deepening of the crisis.

A proper conclusion of the 1930s and the step to the 1940s may include Niebuhr’s own reflection on the decade. As a part of a series, Niebuhr wrote an article for *The Christian Century* in April 1939 entitled *Ten Years That Shook My World*, in which he overviews his theological turns (Niebuhr, 1939). Some of its conclusions might serve as a valuable addition to the overview provided by his books. One of them is that, even if he admits that he expresses his opinion “to liberal civilization politically in terms of Marxian politics” and argues that “Marxian analysis to the relation of economics to politics is essentially correct,” he breaks with Marxism (Niebuhr, 1939, p. 543.). He does not treat it as an alternative to liberal Christianity anymore; the final resort has become a form of Christianity.

Meanwhile, his political concepts, such as the equilibrium of economic power, demand for social justice, or socialization of property as a supportable instrument, which were already present at the beginning of the decade, remained in his thought (Niebuhr, 1939, p. 545). Probably the most significant change was the introduction of the concept of *man* after *Moral Man*, which also brought Augustine with itself. Niebuhr highlights that his theological convictions began to be formulated at the end of his pastorship in

Detroit, which was further developed by his teaching position. Though he insists that he is “not so much scholar as preacher” whose “theological ideas has come not so much through study as through the pressure of world events,” he admits that

“[g]reater leisure has given me opportunity to discover the main currents and emphases of the classical ages of Christian thought, and to find insights there which have been long neglected and which are yet absolutely essential to modern man, or indeed to man of any age” (Niebuhr, 1939, p. 545).

Augustine was undoubtedly among those classical Christian authors who have been “long neglected” but serve as an “absolutely essential to modern man,” like Niebuhr.

6.5. Augustine, the “first theologian” (1940-1952)

6.5.1. Introduction

Though never leaving his social attentiveness behind, Niebuhr’s intellectual capacity and public activism were necessary on another front. By the end of the 1930s, the Nazi threat became the gravest question of world politics. Right from their occupation of power, Niebuhr has been writing about the threat of Nazism. In 1934, he noted that “[i]t is difficult, for instance, to see how Hitler’s Germany can finally avoid war with either France or Poland” (Niebuhr, 1934, p. 58). As the danger became increasingly imminent, Niebuhr became a loud voice of anti-Nazism in the United States, partially through his anti-pacifism. In short, the war captured Niebuhr’s mind; he offered his services at the best place possible. In *Christianity and Power Politics*, published in 1940, he began destroying the lighthouses of bad religion and bad politics (Niebuhr, 1940).

It was accidental that the fruits of Niebuhr’s theological studies ripened in the forms of his Gifford Lecture exactly when the Second World War broke out. Nonetheless, it was not incidental that his theological, social, and political views bear the marks of the war and the preparations for war. As Bingham confirms, during his lectures in Edinburgh, bombs fell, but “according to the report he did not even look up” (Bingham, 1961, p. 25).⁷⁹ Based on the lectures, his major theological work was published, the first volume

⁷⁹ Though Edinburgh was not heavily bombed during the Second World War, one of the first aerial fights was at Firth of Forth (near Edinburgh) when Niebuhr held the second part of his lecture series in the Autumn of 1939.

in 1941 titled *The Nature of Man*, and the second in 1943, *The Destiny of Man*, constituting the two volumes, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1964).⁸⁰ Concerning Augustine, this work affirms that the Patristic Father became increasingly valuable for Niebuhr during his theological research. This brought a substantial development in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine.

Among others, Davies (1948) and Merkley (1975) call this time the peak of Niebuhr's authorship. He also received an honorary degree from Oxford University, Doctor of Divinity, in 1943. From 1944 to 1951, Niebuhr published three other books. This interval, similar to the beginnings of the 1930s, was highly uncertain, not in an economic but in a political sense. In *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, published in 1944, Niebuhr summarizes why democracy is worth defending and should have a more Christian basis than a liberal one (Niebuhr, 2011 [1944]). As *Discerning the Signs of the Times* was a collection of sermons, it reflected more on religious questions, but Niebuhr could not omit the description of the threshold: the moment between the Second World War and the Cold War (Niebuhr, 1946). In *Faith and History*, Niebuhr systematically deals with the concept of Christian interpretation of history in relation to the contesting understandings (Niebuhr, 1949). The last reviewed book will be Niebuhr's work on the history of America and its foreign policy, *The Irony of American History* (Niebuhr, 1952). From the mid-1940s, Niebuhr became a leading figure in the spiritual and intellectual fight against communism.⁸¹

6.5.2. *Christianity and Power Politics*

Christianity and Power Politics (from now: *Christianity*) was a collection of articles that Niebuhr formerly published in Britain and the United States (Niebuhr, 1940). Though a few writings focus on the history of religious and philosophical ideas, the (closing) war has been given a particular emphasis in the book. Among others, it discusses pacifism, peace, German expansion, the relationship between democracy and foreign policy, liberalism, idealism, Marxism, and utopianism. Before looking at Augustine's presence in this work, two issues need to be considered.

⁸⁰ In the text, *The Nature of Man* was denoted as 1964a, while *The Destiny of Man* as 1964b.

⁸¹ Among others, the inherent contradictions and dangers of Marxism, the success of the New Deal, the Moscow trials, and the political shift after the Second World War contributed to the fact that Niebuhr began to view Russian communism as a grave threat.

First, the articles were previously published in different journals, and years passed between their first publications. For instance, *Greek Tragedy and Modern Politics* was published more than a year before the war (1 January 1938). *Peace and the Liberal Illusions* is almost halfway between the Congress of Munich and the outbreak of the War (8 January 1939). *Ideology and Pretense* could discuss the behavior of Russia considering the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the invasion of Poland (9 December 1939), while Niebuhr wrote the preface after the conquest of France (1940 August). Still, in theoretical content, it is more relevant that *Christianity* was written when Niebuhr delivered his Gifford lectures (1939 spring and autumn). It means that its basic arguments, whether political, theological, philosophical, or sociological, were mostly analogous to those in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*.

The second note intends to shed light on the historical context. Niebuhr's apologetics of democracy, which will be systematically furnished in *Children of Light and The Children of Darkness*, is strongly present in *Christianity*. Retrospectively, Niebuhr's extensive worry about the status of democracy in America might seem to be exaggerated. Nonetheless, the consequences of the global financial crisis caused serious challenges to democracy, not just in Europe, which mostly failed to resist fascism and communism, but also in America. The spread of autocratic tendencies around the globe further intensified the danger. How to handle social unrest? How to stop those who would employ autocratic measures without being an autocrat? How to defend the virtuous yet circumstantial democracy from demonic yet effective fascism?

The apocalyptic situation enhanced Niebuhr's polemic rhetoric. He has never been lukewarm. Probably he did not need to exert himself since it flowed from his personality, but he was certainly not the primary target of the Johannine warning that "[s]o because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (Rev, 3:16). From 1925, he spoke out for the workers and always tried to frame these ideas as grave questions. Yet, *Christianity's* tone is even tenser since the significance of the political outcomes is higher. The future of Western human civilization is at stake. That is why Niebuhr allows fulminatory warnings that increase the perception and depth of the crisis, thus encouraging social and political action. For instance, the first sentence of the *War and American Churches* begins with the

statement that “[t]he Christian Church in America been never upon lower level of spiritual insight and moral sensitivity than in this tragic age of world conflict” (Niebuhr, 1940, p. 33). Or later, he argues that “[t]his culture does not understand historical reality clearly enough to deserve to survive. It has a right to survival only because the alternative is too horrible to contemplate” (Niebuhr, 1940, p. 168).

Niebuhr’s polemics is also dominant in his dialecticism. The first step – which, in the end, might lead to the right solutions – is to demolish the invalid and useless arguments of intellectual opponents. Nonetheless, these opponents are internal. Niebuhr does not intend to convince the Russian propagandist or the German warmonger. He opposes those who, even if they are not friends, are on the same side, such as the rationalists who do not see that reason is the servant of interest, the optimists who falsely view history as progress, the utopians who confuse reality and possibility, the pacifists who do not understand that there is no clean hand in politics and the communists who cannot conceive that they are even more utopian than the liberals (Niebuhr, 1940).⁸² His criticism of extreme opposites appears in a condensed form when he argues that “[i]f democratic nations fail, their failure must be partly attributed to the faulty strategy of idealists who have too many illusions when they face realists who have too little conscience (Niebuhr, 1940, p. 104).

Due to the urgent political themes, Augustine plays a peripheric role in this book. He appears only in two instances, and one of them is repetition. Similar to *Beyond Tragedy*, he occurs as an author who wrote the *City of God* when the Roman civilization was the victim of barbarians (Niebuhr, 1940, p. 211). It is not worth drawing far-fetched conclusions from the slight difference that it is not treated as the “profoundest expressions of prophetic religion,” as in *Beyond Tragedy* (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 113), but the “truest interpretations of the Christian faith” (Niebuhr, 1940, p. 211). Still, Augustine’s was one of the “truest interpretations of Christian faith,” and a slight hint might also refer to the fact that, like other authentic interpretations, he was able to detect

⁸² Niebuhr constantly wrote about utopianism and its dangers, but one of his most systematic investigations on it is found in the XIII’s chapter of *Structure of Nations and Empires*, titled *The Utopian Basis of Soviet Power* (Niebuhr, 1959, pp. 217-238). The title of the chapter is misleading in a way that he, beyond communist utopianism, discusses the Cromwellian one and the French Revolution, together with general tendencies.

the pride of the mighty civilizations which were about to collapse (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 212).

Nevertheless, it is spectacular that – in line with *Beyond Tragedy* – Niebuhr does not discuss this deed of Augustine as a corruption of the prophetic religion, as he put it once in the *Interpretation* (Niebuhr, 1935, pp. 29-30). It is also conspicuous that even if Niebuhr repeats all the errors he previously attributed to orthodox Christianity (e.g., Neo-Platonism, literalism, pessimism, and defeatism), he does not relate them to Augustine. It should be added that not only Augustine but other authors are also left out since Niebuhr can only discuss these features generally here. Still, it can also indicate that his ideas positively changed about Augustine to the extent that he did not feel it was mandatory to relate him to these errors directly.

The second argument indirectly appreciates Augustine's view on the earthly city. Niebuhr's simple idea is that an external perspective is required to see reality. Having the perspective of the Kingdom of God helps to see more clearly how human communities work: sinful element is present in "all the expedients which the political order uses to establish justice" (Niebuhr, 1940, p. 22). Furthermore, "it must also be recognized that it is not possible to eliminate the sinful element in the political expedients. They are, in the words of St. Augustine, both the consequence of sin, and the remedy for, sin" (Niebuhr, 1940, p. 22). In *Reflections*, the same Augustinian argument for slavery was criticized by Niebuhr (Niebuhr 1934, p. 218). It seems that for Niebuhr, the application of this argument for another question, namely the sinful character of power, hence politics, was appealing. Therefore, Niebuhr not only discusses the question of power in numerous parts of the book but also connects Augustine to the question of the sinfulness of power, a thoroughly Augustinian theme.

The last note here will touch upon a progress that finally ended in Niebuhr's thought. As it was presented in the introduction of this chapter (5th chapter), Niebuhr emphasized that Augustine emancipated him "finally from the notion that the Christian faith was in some way identical with the moral idealism of the past century" (Niebuhr, 1961. p. 9). By the publication of *Christianity* (and giving the Gifford Lectures), it had happened. The thesis of this book, according to Niebuhr, is "that modern Christian and secular perfectionism which places a premium upon non-participation in conflict, is a very

sentimentalized version of the Christian faith and is at variance with the profound insights of the Christian religion” (Niebuhr, 1940, p. ix). As mentioned, Niebuhr’s moral idealism manifested in *Does Civilization and Contribution*. Furthermore, he chose Marxism partly because he still identified Christianity with this moral idealism. For years, his ambition was to overcome the errors of both orthodox and liberal Christianity; it was presented in *Interpretation*. The thesis of *Christianity* presents that he contrasts the “very sentimentalized version of the Christian faith” with the “profound insights of the Christian religion.” Thus, he could finally get rid of the notion that moral idealism is identical with the Christian faith. Retrospectively, from 1956, this immense change is attributed to Augustine by Niebuhr. The next book, Niebuhr’s magnum opus, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, will present how Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine changed.

6.5.3. *The Nature and Destiny of Man*

The Nature and Destiny of Man’s (from now *Nature and Destiny*) first volume, *Human Nature* (from now *Nature*) (Niebuhr, 1964a [1941]), provides a detailed historical overview of the interpretations of human nature. In short, it is theological anthropology.⁸³ Meanwhile, the second, *Human Destiny* (from now *Destiny*) (Niebuhr, 1964b [1943]), carries out the same concerning human destiny. More specifically, the latter examines how the view of history influences an individual’s view of their fate. In short, it is on the history of thought. The book’s subtitle, *A Christian Interpretation*, perfectly suggests Niebuhr’s perspective because, in the elaborated themes, Niebuhr’s standpoints are revealed thanks to his criticism, acknowledgments, and concluding arguments. The first chapter of the book is a decent example of it; Niebuhr compares the classical (Greek-Roman), the Christian, and the modern view of man, and, even after taking the justified criticisms into account, he argues that the correct interpretation of the Christian view has the slightest contradiction and fits best to the historical reality (Niebuhr, 1964a).⁸⁴

⁸³ Niebuhr’s theology is anthropology, argued Stanley Hauerwas (2021) quite rightly in the sense that his views on human nature are essential for his theological thought. Naturally, Hauerwas’s argument includes a negative tone, namely, Niebuhr is considered to be a theologian who lacks serious ecclesiology or Christology which is not altogether incorrect.

⁸⁴ An interesting phenomenon can be detected regarding the title of *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. Namely – as Liang (2007) observes – some books of Niebuhr had a very similar title to the famous

Thus, *Nature and Destiny* is a combination of grounded theological anthropology, a massive history of thought, and convincing Christian apologetics. It is simply a masterpiece. If the *Interpretation* was called systematic in a way that Niebuhr deals with a few questions (love and justice) seriously, *Nature and Destiny* is systematic in a way that it deals with much more topics and even more profoundly, including his new themes, the view of man, the Christian view of man, sin, pride, guilt, human destiny, human history, and grace.

Unfortunately, the dissertation cannot focus on the whole range of new topics, but fortunately, it can focus on how Augustine is placed in them. For this book is a turning point in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine. Niebuhr does not only discuss Augustine at length and connects him to new topics (as he does with many other authors such as Kierkegaard, Pascal, Paul, and Luther), but, mainly due to the deeper knowledge in him, Niebuhr's general attitude is changing towards Augustine, it is becoming highly appreciative. It will be intended to incorporate as many references to Augustine as possible. Nevertheless, due to the high number, which stems from the fact that if a question occurs, Niebuhr enlists the arguments of the relevant authors in footnotes, certain categorizations are necessary. Therefore, four topics will be elaborated in length. From *Nature*, the question of the image of God in man and the notion of sin. From *Destiny*, the problem of grace and the Christian attitude towards government.

6.5.4. *The Nature and Destiny of Man - Human Nature*

In the first half of *Nature*, more focus is given to the differences between the three views of man (classical, Christian modern) and their relevance. Until the end of the first half of the book, Augustine is not even mentioned. The second part is Christian theology; thus, Augustine's occurrence is not surprising. What is surprising after the

Christian philosopher and theologian Nikolai Berdyaev's (1874-1948) writings. The Russian existentialist wrote *The End of Our Time* in 1924 and *The Destiny of Man* in 1931, while Niebuhr published *Reflections on the End of an Era* in 1934 and the second volume of his book, *The Destiny of Man* in 1943. Niebuhr knew Berdyaev's writings; he also wrote reviews on Berdyaev's book, including *The Destiny of Man* and *The Origins of Russian Communism* (for more similarities between the two Christian thinkers, see Liang 2007, pp. 106-108). Naturally, the themes which Niebuhr discusses are constant topics in theoretical works; thus, serious conclusions should not be drawn. For instance, Dewey also wrote a book entitled *Human Nature and Conduct*.

first three theoretical phases is the frequent occurrence, the comprehensive analyses, and the positive opinion.

One of the permanent paradoxes that Niebuhr stresses from *Nature* is that man is both made in the “image of God” and is a creature. Nevertheless, he states that the full doctrine of the image of God cannot be derived from the Testaments since it is “given no precise elaboration in the Bible itself” and Biblical psychology does not “ever achieve the careful distinctions of Greek thought.” (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 151). A rare occasion to receive such distinctions from Niebuhr in which the Greek thought is superior to the Biblical one. Nevertheless, Niebuhr rapidly defends the latter since even though it did not make too sharp distinctions between the soul and spirit, and the body and soul, it did not contradict the Christian truth. But who was responsible for formulating the Christian doctrine? It was Augustine. Niebuhr argues that “Augustine, in this as in other doctrines, the first Christian theologian to comprehend the full implications of the Christian doctrine of man” (Niebuhr, 1964a, pp. 153-154). In a footnote, he also adds that “Calvin rightly points to Augustine’s profundity in distinction to the inconsistencies and obscurities in the doctrine of man in the early father” (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 155).

At least five notions are new in Niebuhr’s interpretation. First, he acknowledges that Augustine was the first to make a huge theoretical effort. Second, his achievement is related to Augustine’s doctrine of man, especially how he is made in the image of God. Third, he has given the full implications of this question. Fourth, he refers to it as not the only doctrine in which Augustine, as a Christian theologian, has given the full implications or was the first. Fifth, he puts Augustine above the Hebraic thought and the Testaments in this question. But why was Augustine able to accomplish such achievements?

Basically, Augustine skillfully distinguished between the right and false elements of his Neo-Platonism. He rejected to define God as pure rationalism, but he understood that *nous* at Plotinus meant introspection and capacity for self-knowledge. Niebuhr argues that for Augustine, the question of self-transcendence of the human spirit was a grave question, and it was human memory that served “as a symbol of man’s capacity to transcend time and finally himself” (Niebuhr, 1964, p. 155). Based on longer

Augustinian fragments, Niebuhr concludes that Augustine understood that the “limits of the self lie finally outside the self” and that

“[t]he conclusions at which Augustine arrives in the contemplation of this mystery of human self-transcendence are of tremendous importance for the understanding of man’s religious nature. He concludes that the power of transcendence places him so much outside of everything else that he can find a home only in God...” (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 156).

Niebuhr continues to highlight that Augustine’s deed was outstanding because he was able to combine Christianity with other waves of thought without falling into their traps. He argues that Augustine’s insights on the human spirit are remarkable

“because he was able to exploit what mysticism and Christianity, at their best, have in common: their understanding that the human spirit in its depth and height reaches into eternity and that this vertical dimension is more important for the understanding of man than merely his rational capacity for forming general concepts. This latter capacity is derived from the former. It is, as it were, a capacity for horizontal perspectives over the wide world, made possible by the height at which the human spirit is able to survey the scene” (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 157)

In short, Augustine used mysticism to point to the fact that “human life points beyond itself,” but his Christianity saved him from the peril of mysticism to “make itself into that beyond” (Niebuhr, 1964, p. 158). Niebuhr concludes that even if some parts of his Neo-Platonism are to be criticized

“it must be recognized that no Christian theologian has ever arrived at a more convincing statement of the relevance and distance between the human and divine than he. All subsequent statements of the essential character of the image

of God in man are indebted to him, particularly if they manage to escape the shallows of a too simple rationalism” (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 158).⁸⁵

Thus, Augustine’s ideas are theoretically fruitful in understanding man’s religious nature. How could this radical shift occur in Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine? As mentioned at the end of the previous theoretical phase, the ground where Augustine had to be planted was already there. In *Nature*, it became visible that the plant grows. Nevertheless, *Nature* provides new insights into this question. Probably it would be a little unfair, but not incorrect that it is because Niebuhr began to read Augustine seriously. This part of *Nature* contrasts with most of the previous references on Augustine: here, he does not only formulate Augustine but *analyses* him, and does it based on *direct* references from *On the Trinity*, *Confessions*, *On the Gospel of John*, *On True Religion*, and *The Retractions*.

The second visible aspect in *Nature* is that Niebuhr does not reject Neo-Platonism in itself as a degeneration for prophetic religion. He rejects certain parts and is not fond of it, but not everything is dismissible. It is crucial in Augustine’s case since his Neo-Platonism is evident. The reasons for this change are multifarious, and only grounded assumptions will be shared. The first is that he began to realize the values of Augustine’s theory. From a deeper understanding of Augustine, he concluded that Neo-Platonism was necessary to formulate these insights. The second is that due to the deeper knowledge of the history of thought, he arrived at Plotinus and comprehended his truth (e.g., Niebuhr 1964b, p. 14). The third is related to the general theoretical development in Niebuhr’s case, which often leads to a more balanced perspective. Niebuhr repeatedly tried to see the values in his opponents’ views, but this tendency became more visible as he grew older and thus grew in knowledge.

The fourth assumption is related to Emil Brunner’s famous Christian anthropology, *Man in Revolt*, published in 1937, which Niebuhr cites in *Nature* (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 272). When Brunner considers the rational idea of God, he notes that it is nonsense to reject certain views because of their sources; “[h]ence to the view that everything in Augustine which is Platonist or Neo-Platonist is, for that very reason and for no other,

⁸⁵ Niebuhr cannot resist pointing out in a footnote that Barth, despite following the general Augustinian tradition, does not accept Augustine’s doctrine on the image of God (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 158). Niebuhr later repeats his conclusions on this topic, see Niebuhr, 1964a, pp. 161, 165.

un-scriptural, is erroneous,” and the “this false separation of theology and philosophy is rightly leveled at us as a reproach by the Catholic” – argues the Reformed theologian (Brunner, 1937b, pp. 241-242). Even if it is not entirely verifiable that Niebuhr read this part (his citation was around thirty pages after it), it perfectly fits his thought.

Beyond the previously mentioned, two new possible ways lead toward Augustine. *Nature* is the first book in which Niebuhr seriously enters into debates with the greatest contemporary theologians (not just simple idealists). Two figures were extremely vital in this question: Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. Both were fundamental figures of Protestant neo-orthodox theology⁸⁶ who stressed the importance of sin and opposed simple liberal Christianity. If Niebuhr wanted to present relevant ideas at Gifford Lectures, he had to know them and certainly knew them. It is further relevant that both were closely connected to Augustine. In the preface of the *Man in Revolt*, Brunner argues that “[t]here is a great deal to learn from Augustine the thinker which escaped the notice of Luther the fighter” (Brunner 1937b, p. 10), while Niebuhr himself argues that Barth “stands, of course, in the general Augustinian tradition” (Niebuhr, 1964, p. 272).

The last aspect that naturally attracted Niebuhr towards Augustine is that he was useful against too simple rationalism. In other words, Niebuhr did not only read Augustine to write on his theories for academic uses but used him against modern rationalists. For Niebuhr, theory and public debates always go hand in hand. He delves into a theory to find answers and then applies them publicly. It was already visible at *The Book of Common Prayer* that he had seen the potential in Augustine’s theories for public use due to the dialectical framework. However, these tendencies further strengthened from *Nature*, and Augustine’s theories became a constant source of inspiration in his conflict with the rationalists and other intellectual opponents.⁸⁷ In the grand history of debates between rationalism and Christianity, Niebuhr found an ally. After being a target of

⁸⁶ Along with Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, Niebuhr is usually treated as a neo-orthodox theologian. Though Niebuhr, similarly to other neo-orthodox theologians, stressed the importance of sin and criticized theological liberalism, he never abandoned the presuppositions of the latter (Stone, 1992), and he was also progressive in social questions.

⁸⁷ For instance, when he criticizes modern (Freudian) psychology for its encouragement of public manifestation of sex, he cites Augustine since his criticism directed against the Cynics „is strikingly applicable to these modern theories” (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 239).

criticism due to Niebuhr's social zeal, anti-orthodoxy, and Protestantism, Augustine became a sword-bearer in fighting against rationalism and modern idealism.

Why modern idealism? Since modern idealism (and generally modern man) cannot comply with the idea of original sin and sinfulness of human beings. Augustine was not the only one who contributed to Niebuhr's understanding of sin. Among others, Kierkegaard and Pascal are equally relevant with their doctrines; the former with anxiety as a preliminary condition of sin, and the latter with stressing how freedom leads not just to the dignity of man but also to the misery of man. Nevertheless, it is decisive that Niebuhr examines Augustine's ideas of sin and original sin. In contrast to his earlier critical remarks that Augustinian Christianity could not distinguish between finiteness and sin (Niebuhr, 1935, pp. 92-93), Niebuhr argues that Augustine knew that finiteness should not be identified with sin (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 173). The Church Father also rightly argued that sin lies in the defect of *will* (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 292), and original sin is committed of man's own *free will* (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 242).

Sin had different manifestations, and Niebuhr, based on his lamentations on the history of theological thought, primarily distinguishes between the sin of pride and the sin as sensuality. He discusses Augustine in both questions, but pride is more connected to him. Niebuhr prudently presents Augustine's definition of sin as pride based on *The City of God*. Put plainly, it is when man makes himself the first object of love, and places himself in the place of God, becoming the beginning and the end of everything (Niebuhr, 1964a, pp. 186-187). Niebuhr argues that the "definition of sin as pride is consistently maintained in the train of theology known as Augustinian" (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 186). The sin of pride is so central in Pauline-Augustinian tradition that the sin as sensuality is also a derivation of it (Niebuhr, 1964a, pp. 230-231, 233). For Augustine, who followed Paul's doctrines in this question, never argued that sensuality flows from man's animal impulse (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 231). This was again a merit of Augustine since it contrasted with the Greek rationalists who derived the weakness of man from his body. Niebuhr attributed sin to the will of man and not to the flesh. In this, he was similar to Augustine and to his former teacher, Samuel Press, who "was fixed on the Pauline reality of human sinfulness" (Chrystal, 1984. p. 517).

Fortunately, Augustine did not only see the sinfulness of human beings but also a crucial aspect of the sinfulness of human collectives. Only the religions of revelation can formulate the “conviction that collective pride is the final form of sin” since they are able to perceive how great the power of God is compared to nations (Niebuhr, 1964a, pp. 214-215). Niebuhr states that

“[t]his genus of prophetic faith enables Augustine in the Christian era to view the destruction of the Roman Empire without despair and to answer the charge that Christianity was responsible for its downfall with the assertion, that, on the contrary, destruction is the very law of life of the “city of this world” and that pride is the cause of its destruction” (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 215)

Augustine, who deteriorated prophetic religion, became Augustine, who used the genius of prophetic religion. Quite a radical change in Niebuhr’s interpretation. It should be observed that, above the already mentioned general pattern that Augustine’s efforts were made on the edge of civilizations, a new element occurs: the pride and pretension which contribute to the fall of great empires. Niebuhr adds that “[u]nfortunately this prophetic insight of Augustine was partially obscured by his identification, however qualified, of the city of God with the historic church” (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 216). Therefore, the negative consequences are clear when Augustine’s reservations are not kept, the spiritual pride of the Church is established, which is equally dangerous as the pride of the Roman Empire.

Niebuhr insisted on this idea, but what is crucial here, especially compared to the previous interpretations, is that he mentions that it was useful in placing a “check upon the autonomy of nations” and Augustine’s reservations were not considered (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 216). Thus, he originated the idea from Augustine, but he is neither the sole nor the primal figure responsible for this heresy. The same restrained tone is present when Augustine’s literalism, primarily in relation to the hereditary character of original sin is discussed. It is interesting that Niebuhr partially exempts Augustine from this as well, as Augustine argues in the opposite way when, with other Church Fathers, he follows the Pauline idea that “for all have sinned” (Niebuhr, 1964a, pp. 260-261).

This idea, which made Niebuhr mitigate his criticism, was, most probably from Cochrane, who argued that although the hereditarian idea was still present, the post-Nicene theologians distinguished between “ancestral sin” and the “original sin” and the latter was ascribed to the problem of personality, thus to every individual (Cochrane, 1940, p. 241). Cochrane’s influence will be further examined, but as a summary of Augustinian references in *Nature*, it can be concluded that based on the two topics (the image of God in man and sin), Augustine is presented in an absolutely new light.

6.5.5. *The Nature and Destiny of Man – Human Destiny*

Destiny is just as grounded as *Nature*. The number of footnotes does not necessarily indicate the seriousness of theoretical works, but Niebuhr’s tremendous amount of references, which was not prevalent until this point, is analogous to the sophistication of his arguments. Augustine occurs related to two great questions in this volume; the first is the concept of grace. It is already telling that Augustine’s views are detailed at the Catholic conception of grace. Moreover, the previous section deals with the Pauline concept, which, concludes Niebuhr, deals with both facets of the experience of grace (“the conquest of sin in the heart of man,” and the “merciful power of God over the sin which is never entirely overcome in any human heart”). Furthermore, Paul’s elaboration has no contradiction and “contains the whole Christian conception of God’s relation to human history” (Niebuhr, 1964b, pp. 100-104). Niebuhr appreciated Paul because he acknowledged the human sinfulness of every level of communities; thus, he did not make the Church or the community of believers a *societas perfecta*. The question is whether Augustine can contest Paul’s insights on grace.

In some sense, he can, but altogether his doctrine of grace is imperfect. Amid the confusion which was caused by the numerous trends of thought in the early Church, including Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism, Augustine made the “first clear and explicit expression” in relation to the fact that history should be understood in relation to grace to sin and not to eternity to time (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 134). Moreover,

[w]ith Augustine’s elaboration of the Pauline doctrine of original sin, the Christian ages arrive at a full consciousness of the fact that it is not finiteness but the “false eternal” of sin, the pretension that finiteness has been or can be overcome, which brings confusion and evil to history (Niebuhr, 1964b, p. 134).

The discrepancies in Augustine's doctrine of grace and love probably occurred due to his excessive reliance on Plotinus. Unfortunately, Augustine slightly obscured the Biblical paradoxes, which resulted in an inadequate understanding of self-love. He knew that sin cannot be eradicated entirely but, his elaboration of self-love after redemption was not as persistent as Paul's. By introducing the venial and mortal categories of sin (which became a ground for the Catholic doctrine of grace) and praising certain deeds (such as almsgiving), the righteousness of human actions entered into the realm of grace, thus, God's territory. According to Augustine's concept of grace, God's grace through redemption brings a new status of life where self-love is less dominant. It is present but can be handled and is a mitigated form of self-love. After this summary, Niebuhr disagrees; there is no condition, not even after redemption, in which pride is not the manifestation of self-love and or where pride is a venial sin. Self-love can stop operating as long as man acknowledges his evilness and recognizes the love of God. Unfortunately, the Reformation was the first that fully apprehended this part of spiritual life, namely that

“[p]ure love is ‘by faith’ in the sense that only when man, in prayer and contemplation is lifted beyond himself does he have a vantage point from which self-love does not operate. In action the power of self-love is mixed with the new power of the love of God which grace has established” (Niebuhr, 1964b, 137).

In short, “Augustine's failure to understand it had the consequence of making him the father of Catholicism in his doctrine of grace; while he became at the same time the ultimate source of the Reformation in his doctrine of sin” (Niebuhr, 1964b, 137). Naturally, his doctrine of grace affected Augustine's conception of the community of grace, the Church. Even if Augustine made qualifications to not identify the Church with the *civitas Dei*, the consequent ages did not consider them. Nonetheless, it was not necessary to modify Augustine's view substantially since “on the whole he identifies the *civitas Dei* with the historical church” and “the church is, despite the qualifications, in some sense the Kingdom of God” (Niebuhr, 1964b, 138). In the Church, the “contradiction between the historical and the divine was overcome,” and it rather reigns with Christ than bears the judgment of God on itself (Niebuhr, 1964b, 139). It was further regrettable that Catholicism rejected Augustine's view of the human situation

and thus entered a semi-Pelagian doctrine, even if the Catholic concept of grace and Augustine are one (Niebuhr, 1964b, p. 139).

It is not the role of this dissertation to decide between the Catholic and Protestant concepts of grace. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that Niebuhr's intention to eliminate all the possible oversimplifications and formulate a balanced and valid position concerning Augustine's doctrine of grace and the doctrine of the Church is impressive. These descriptions are substantially more qualified and more correct than his previous ones. Ultimately, the whole dilemma was decided by religious presuppositions, specifically Niebuhr's preconception that all human beings are affected by egotism and are exposed to sin, even those born anew by God's grace.

The second theme where Augustine occurs is the Christian attitude toward governments. After a short analysis of the Biblical view of politics, Niebuhr writes very positively about Augustine's social theory. The mixture of evangelical perfectionism, Biblical realism, and classical (especially Stoic) thought characterized political ethics in Augustine's time. Niebuhr claims that "Augustine was the first to introduce a new and more Pauline note into this field of thought, as he did in so many other fields" (Niebuhr, 1964b, 273). Augustine, criticizing Cicero's rationalism and optimism, denied that any earthly state would be a compact of justice. The world's peace is nothing more than an uneasy armistice between the contending forces and fractions; social peace is constantly threatened by the contest or the tyranny of the dominant forces.

According to Niebuhr, Augustine overemphasizes some aspects, for instance, the distance between the two cities and the destructive forces in history, which might stem from the fact that he analyzed the decay and not the prosperity of the civilization. Still, his picture of political life's anarchic and dynamic elements is far more accurate than any other political theory of his era. Unfortunately, Augustine's political realism did not really influence the Medieval Church (Niebuhr, 1964b, p. 274). Therefore, Augustine's concept of the earthly reality, which appears first in *Moral Man*, occurs again. Nevertheless, not defeatism but realism is the defining feature of it. It is not a concept that needs to be dismissed because of its social inattentiveness but a view that, considering its excessive claims, is a utilizable notion.

In conclusion, it would be false to think that Niebuhr's major theological work, *Nature and Destiny*, is about Augustine; there is no separate chapter on him. Still, in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine, this book's content is crucial. Augustine frequently occurs, and he is discussed at length, related to new topics, including the image of God in man, the notion of sin, and grace. His social theory is also more detailed and evaluated positively. Furthermore, though his doctrine of the Church is still not to be followed, the criticisms are mild. In short, Niebuhr's attitude towards Augustine is significantly more positive than before. To be more precise, this book probably contains the least potent criticism of Augustine. Niebuhr rarely acknowledged an author to this extent. It is also vital that Niebuhr's theological findings, including the Augustinian ones, will be present in his mature thought even if Augustine is not explicitly mentioned. Thus, in the first book, where Niebuhr's profound theological and philosophical arguments are presented, Augustine already gained special importance, which could be easily seen in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine.

6.5.6. *The influence of Charles Norris Cochrane*

The last crucial question that needs to be addressed here is how the Canadian historian, Charles Norris Cochrane, relates to *Nature and Destiny*, Niebuhr, and his interpretation of Augustine. One of the reasons why *Nature and Destiny* was not discussed before *Christianity*, thus when the Gifford Lectures were delivered, is Cochrane's influence. As a reminder, the lectures were delivered in 1939 spring and autumn, *Christianity* was published in 1940, *Nature* in 1941, and *Destiny* in 1943. Cochrane's book *Christianity and Classical Culture* was published in 1940 but is cited in *Nature and Destiny*, which means it was incorporated into the text after the lectures. What signs indicate the relevance of Cochrane?

First, in a footnote, after using Cochrane's work for a citation, Niebuhr denotes it as a "profound analysis of the inadequacies of the classical mind in coming to terms with the unique realities of history, in contrast to nature or reason" (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 15). Being able to point out the inadequacies of the classical mind is already sympathetic work for Niebuhr. As Niebuhr is often stingy with recognition, the "profound analysis" is also alerting. Second, Niebuhr also uses Cochrane in some of his following books. In *Structures of Nations and Empires*, he uses Cochrane's book to cite Cicero, Tertullian,

and Eusebius (Niebuhr, 1959). In *Faith and History*, he argues that “[i]n Charles Cochrane’s searching study of the decline of classical spirituality and the triumph of the Christian faith over it, the decay of classical spirituality is attributed to the inadequacy of the doctrine of recurrence” (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 21). Until this point, it is only on the limitations of classical thought and spirituality, but then Augustine enters. Niebuhr explains that

“Cochrane sees Augustine’s *Civitas Dei* as the most significant triumph of the Christian faith over classical pagans. This triumph was most obviously occasioned by the breakdown of the Roman civilization, Augustine’s masterpiece having, in fact, the immediate and superficial objective of proving that the Christian faith was not doomed by the destruction of Rome” (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 21).

Though the secondary literature does not focus extensively on Cochrane’s influence on Niebuhr, a few mention it. Lemert points out that Cochrane treated Augustine’s theory of history as a history of prophecy that focuses on the future, and it was essential for Niebuhr’s thought (Lemert, 2011, p. 136). Stone also mentions Cochrane concerning Niebuhr’s view on history and presents that in his lectures on Roman history, Niebuhr preferred Cochrane’s interpretation over Toynbee’s or Gibbon’s (Stone, 1992, p. 60).⁸⁸

Nonetheless, the two most significant sources that affirm Cochrane’s special relevance are still missing. The first is the book itself. Its theme is “the revolution in thought and action which came about through the impact of Christianity upon the Graeco-Roman world (Cochrane, 1940, p. 8). Although Cochrane’s work is mostly theoretical, he emphasizes that it was partly written in view of contemporary European cultural developments. Concerning actualities, he also points out that “[i]n America, modern liberal theology apparently finds Augustine almost wholly unintelligible” (Cochrane, 1940, p. 378).

The book is a colossal work, an extensive investigation of the intellectual developments from Augustus to Augustine. Only the Augustinian part is roughly a hundred and fifty pages from the five hundred. If all Niebuhrian texts on Augustine were put together,

⁸⁸ Niebuhr discusses these questions in *Faith and History* (Niebuhr, 1949).

they would probably not exceed a hundred pages. Moreover, Cochrane's account of Augustine is clearly an exceptionally grounded examination. He does not omit Augustine's social theory but primarily analyses how his theological and philosophical concepts broke with classical theories. It is difficult to do justice to what Niebuhr took from Cochrane because several of his mature views on Augustine could be derived from Cochrane's account. This is why the lack of examination of Cochrane is astonishing. Only those parts that were surely attractive to Niebuhr and could contribute to his mature interpretation of Augustine will be highlighted here.

First, Cochrane puts a significant emphasis on the limits of classical rationality. Augustine argues Cochrane, "rejecting its pretensions [...] associates himself with the revolt against 'reason' which we have noted as typical of Christianity" (Cochrane, 1940, p. 400). Then he continues in the following way:

"For Augustine, however, the revolt from 'reason' does not mean a return to the instinctive, nor does it imply that the intellect is radically corrupt. On the contrary, it points the way to an attitude from which, if faith precedes understanding, understanding in turn becomes the reward of faith" (Cochrane, 1940, p. 400).

Probably nothing could summarize better how Niebuhr generally viewed the relationship between faith and reason. In addition, Cochrane repeatedly draws attention to how vital experience was for Augustine in formulating his ideas (Cochrane, pp. 380, 388, 394, 400). For Niebuhr, the empiricist, who intended to validate as many religious truths or emphasize their relevance as possible based on the experiences of history, it was unquestionably an attractive feature. Niebuhr was always bold in engaging in a debate, but sometimes it seems that he tried to escape the theoretical hairsplitting by appealing to the facts of reality and experience. One of his favored statements from a secular magazine was that "[t]he doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith" (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 24).⁸⁹

The third theme which admittedly attracted Niebuhr's attention was Augustine's view of history. "Augustine was born into a world the perplexities of which have probably

⁸⁹ Here, the focus is rather on empirical verifiability, not the term "only."

never seen exceeded by any period, before or since, in human history,” would probably state Niebuhr. Still, in this case, it was Cochrane who argued it (Cochrane, 1940, p. 380). According to the historian, the most remarkable element of early Christianity, which was in antagonism with classical antiquity, was the idea of progress (Cochrane, 1940, p. 243). Augustine, who, based on the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, is treated as “the first thinker to undertake a philosophy of history” (Cochrane, 1940, p. 377), analyzed the “*operatio Dei*, the working of the spirit in human history” in the *City of God* (Cochrane, 1940, p. 397). The exact way Augustine did it, based on the Trinitarian formula, would deserve a more thorough investigation, which is done by Cochrane; the intention here is to stress how closely it resembles Niebuhr’s mature interpretation of Augustine.

The Augustinian understanding of sin, original sin, pride (*superbia*), will-to-power, egocentricity, and self-love (*amor sui*), which became so crucial for mature Niebuhr theology, are all analyzed in Cochrane’s account of Augustine (Cochrane, 1940). It is emphasized that Augustine attributed the corruption to the soul and not the body, and the whole sequence of sin begins with the wrong determination of will (Cochrane, 1940, p. 449). Fortunately, Augustine understood not only the evilness of human beings but also the whole personality, including that he is made in the image of God (Cochrane, 1940, p. 433). Augustine, based on his experience at Cassiciacum, managed to separate the true and false elements of Platonism and the synthesis he arranged “in a fuller and more adequate knowledge of man and of his universe than anything of which Classicism had proved capable” (Cochrane, 1940, p. 383).

The enlistment of the analogous elements could further be continued. For instance, Augustine was skeptical towards the perfectibility of knowledge and professed the limitations of education in overcoming the aberrations of human beings (Cochrane, 1940, p. 452), or the capacity of human beings on the awareness of objects and awareness of being aware which gives “man his character and enables him to fulfill his destiny as a human being” (Cochrane, 1940, p. 433). Though it would be hard to prove the direct influence in this last case, even the terms Cochrane uses in relation to Augustine, such as “perplexities” or “creativity,” are commonly used expressions by

Niebuhr. If it would not convince someone about Cochrane's tremendous influence on Niebuhr, the second crucial source might be more decisive.

As indicated in a note by Stone (Stone, 1992, p. 170), Niebuhr wrote a review of Cochrane's book in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* (Niebuhr, 1941). Based on the relevance of the review, the ignorance of the secondary literature, and Niebuhr's admiring (almost childlike) tone, which radically contrasts his books, it would not be a grave mistake to paste the whole review here. Even if this will not happen, significant fragments will be cited. Niebuhr begins with the following:

"A reviewer of books is not frequently embarrassed by the fear that his appreciation may seem too extravagant; but that is the fear which assails me as I seek to express my opinion of a book which has given me more unalloyed pleasure than anything I have read in the past decade. This historical study of "thought and action from Augustus to Augustine" is a masterpiece. First of all it is a truly a study of "thought and action" because the historian has mastered the thought of the classical world as thoroughly as he knows the movement of political and social events in the Roman Empire" (Niebuhr, 1941, pp. 505-506).

What a compliment from a Gifford lecturer and a professor of Union Theological Seminary, who read a tremendous number of books in the 1930s. Niebuhr continues in a similar manner and captures the "disturbing analogies" of Cochrane's analysis with contemporary political history (Niebuhr, 1941, p. 506). Niebuhr's general argument is that Cochrane brilliantly captured the limitations of the classical view of history, which resulted in the collapse of the Roman Civilization. Before discussing his views on Cochrane's interpretation of Augustine, Niebuhr claims that "I thought the book a most remarkable one before I had arrived at this treatment of Augustine" (Niebuhr, 1941, p. 507). Then he writes:

"I hardly dared hope that Augustine would be understood so profoundly and that what is essential would be distinguished from what is peripheral in his thought with such fine discrimination. I had not dared to hope this because the religious world is only beginning to emerge from the arid wastes of rationalized and sentimentalized Christianity, to appreciate Augustine. Why should a greater

appreciation be expected in a historian and a philosopher? Yet this is what we have in Professor Cochrane's book." (Niebuhr, 1941, p. 508).

Therefore, the confrontation is the point again: rationalized and sentimentalized Christianity versus Augustine. Niebuhr also highlights the profundity of Cochrane's account of Augustinian psychology, the "importance of the doctrine as 'original sin' as a basic category for the interpretation of history," and his emphasis on grace in "Augustine's thought as a revelation of Christianity's understanding for the problem of power, vitality, and will in life against the tendency to equate virtue with 'form' or 'order' or 'ratio,' in both classical and modern culture" (Niebuhr, 1941, p. 508). The overlap between the topics Niebuhr highlights at Cochrane and *Nature and Destiny* is clear: original sin and grace are essential in both, and Augustine's psychology and philosophy of history are also common to a lesser extent.

In the end, Niebuhr devotes a longer section to how Cochrane contributes to a better understanding of history; he argues that it is probably the most remarkable in the book how, based on the Trinitarian formula, Christians could break with the classical view of history (Niebuhr, 1941, p. 509). Thus, Lemert and Stone are correct in pointing to this connection. The closure is surprising again since Niebuhr almost makes an oath of allegiance to Augustinianism:

"In the broadest sense modern civilization requires an Augustinian reformulation of the problem of life and history. This reformulation cannot be the Catholic neo-Thomist version of Augustinianism because some of the dialectic of the Augustinian system is obscured in this version. Nor can it be the Reformation revival of Augustinianism because in this version the task of political justice is obscured. It will have to be more truly Augustinian than either traditional Catholicism or orthodox Protestantism; and it will certainly have to be more profound than either secular or Christian liberalism, which now literally nothing of the profound problems that engaged Augustine. For these reasons the rediscovery of Augustine by one who is not a theological schoolman but first of all a historian and philosopher is of greatest significance" (Niebuhr, 1941, p. 510).

After this, it should not be surprising why Niebuhr was so appreciative toward Augustine and why he alleviated his criticism in *Nature and Destiny*. Augustinianism became a better option than anything else: Catholicism, orthodox Protestantism, and secular or Christian liberalism. Also, Augustine needs to be released from the captivity of these contesting interpretations. What is needed is Augustine himself applied to the modern problems of life and history. The latter is what Niebuhr tries to do with his interpretation of Augustine.

6.5.7. *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*

As mentioned, *Christianity* raised several questions about democracy. Niebuhr did not intend to undermine democracy but pointed to its weaknesses, both in practical and theoretical questions. Due to its structural limits, democratic governments are weaker in foreign policies, which is further intensified by the fact that liberal culture, which supported democracy for two hundred years, does not understand the “tragic sense of life” in human nature and collective human behavior (Niebuhr, 1940, pp. 65-66). Though these ideas were formulated during the war, and their bases preceded the war, the end product, which develops these ideas further, resulting in a systematic elaboration of Niebuhr on democracy, was *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (from now: *Children*) published in 1944 (Niebuhr, 2011 [1944]).⁹⁰

Niebuhr wanted to save the democratic world and feared that it would end. Based on the idea that a structure collapses if its pillars no longer stand, he argued that since bourgeois civilization is “in grave peril, if not actually in *rigor mortis* in the twentieth century, it must be obvious that democracy, in so far as it is a middle-class ideology, also faces its doom” (Niebuhr, 2011, p. 2). Above the brutal facts of social life manifesting in injustice, the illusions of both the children of light and the children of darkness contribute to the fall.⁹¹ The former might be defined “as those who seek to bring self under the discipline of a more universal law and in harmony with a more

⁹⁰ It should be mentioned that not just in his books but in his journals did Niebuhr write about the threats of tyranny. Stone concludes that the biweekly paper *Christianity and Crisis*, which Niebuhr founded, “reaffirmed that its original purpose had been to interpret Christian faith in a manner relevant to the threat of tyranny” (Stone, 1992, p. 130).

⁹¹ The phrases, as Niebuhr indicates, were derived from Luke’s gospel (Lk. 16:8), where it is written that „[t]he children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light” (Niebuhr, 2011, p. VI).

universal good,” while the latter, or the children of this world, are those “moral cynics know no law beyond their will and interest” (Niebuhr, 2011, pp. 9-10). Later, Niebuhr will also use idealism and excessive realism while discussing these groups for whom optimism and pessimism are describing characteristics. Both children misunderstand the human situation; for instance, the children of light do not see the perils of human freedom while the children of darkness do not consider the rational capacities for justice.

As was emphasized at *Leaves*, for Niebuhr, the excessive forms of idealism and realism, sentimentalism and cynicism, were always repulsive. Here he affirms it when he deals with the question of new realist schools in America and Britain, stating that “[i]t is indicative that these realistic approaches are often as close to the abyss of cynicism as the idealistic approaches are to the fog of sentimentality” (Niebuhr, 2011, p. 173). When he writes about the necessity of a “more realistic vindication that is given it [democracy] by the liberal culture” (Niebuhr, 2011, p. xxxi), he does so because the “democratic civilization has been built, not by the children of darkness but by foolish children of light (Niebuhr, 2011, p. 10). Niebuhr has to combat idealism first because the whole culture is more idealistic than realistic. Nonetheless, he also rejects those realistic schools which began to rise during the World War and became leading voices of the Cold War. Thus, as a view of reality, realism is distinguished from realists as a group that knows no interest beyond them. The solution is a Christian view of human nature, which overcomes both sentimentalism and cynicism.

Above the fact that Niebuhr framed democracy as a system that can adequately balance order and freedom, it is also apparent that he linked democracy to his central social value, justice. It is how the famous and often-cited aphorism was born: “Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary” (Niebuhr, 2011, p. xxxii). Niebuhr’s analysis of democracy is penetrating, consistent and compact. Niebuhr, especially compared to himself, barely deviates from the main line of thought. The book consists of only five chapters, and the discussion is limited to the distinction between the children, the relationship between the individual and the community, the question of property, tolerance, and world community. It would be a mistake to engage in a debate with Gary Dorrien, who called

the *Children* “the most comprehensive statement of his [Niebuhr’s] political philosophy” (Dorrien in Niebuhr, 2011, p. x).

Niebuhr also keeps himself to the promise that he has “not sought to elaborate the religious and theological convictions upon which the political philosophy of the following pages rests” (Niebuhr, 1944, p. xxxiv). Nevertheless, he adds that it rests on the Christian view. In this way, the book is connected to Augustine since it contains fragments and concepts discussed at Augustine. These are the “profundities” of Christianity: pride, will-to-power, self-love, human creatureliness, and the possibility of self-transcendence. Nevertheless, Augustine is not mentioned in the book, not even where Niebuhr discusses the pessimistic realism of Luther and Hobbes (Niebuhr, 2011, p. 44).⁹² This lack of reference to Augustine occurs for the first time since *Contribution* was published in 1932. The reason seems to be quite simple: although the profundities of Christianity are already related to Augustine in Niebuhr’s mind, democracy is not. This makes the book irrelevant to Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine.

6.5.8. *Discerning the Signs of the Times*

The Second World War brought a collapse to the world. In the first part of the 1930s, Niebuhr thought he had arrived at the end of an era; at the end of 1945, though not in the same sense, he really arrived. Niebuhr calls it, among others, “an age between the ages” (Niebuhr, 1946, p. 39). For a short moment, it seemed that three competitors, namely the USA, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain, would determine the future of world politics (until the last dropped out of the race quickly). What could be more vital and yet more challenging than predicting a future after a cataclysm? Yet, how to predict the future when nothing is certain? Natural knowledge is certain (though not as certain as its proponents suggest, would Niebuhr add), but it is inadequate in foretelling the future. Only those who can capture the “signs of the times” can acquire historical knowledge, can interpret its events and values, taking into account the interests of all actors (including their own) until they constitute a meaning of history (Niebuhr, 1946, p. 2). Niebuhr begins with these arguments in his collections of sermons preached at

⁹² It is interesting, but, in itself, not decisive, that while in the 1930s, Niebuhr vehemently criticized orthodox Christianity, in *Children*, his target is more Catholicism, especially the natural law theories (Niebuhr, 2011).

American colleges and universities, entitled *Discerning the Signs of the Times* (from now: *Discerning*) (Niebuhr, 1946).

Similar to his former compilation of sermons, *Beyond Tragedy*, Niebuhr intends to interpret the Biblical truth in general and apply it to his era; “[t]here is in fact no greater proof of the perennial relevance of the biblical analysis of the meaning of life than that the course of history seems to make it even more true” – he writes (Niebuhr, 1946, p. 65). The delivery of the sermons is obviously different from the delivery of a book with a central political or theological thesis. It is a separate genre. In Niebuhr’s case, it is more eschatological, emotional, and normative. Moreover, a sermon has a fixed verse from the Bible, which leads the way of the thought. Niebuhr edited his speeches before publishing them, which he acknowledges in his preface, emphasizing that they became more theological and theoretical (Niebuhr, 1946, p. ix). Still, it would be a mistake to state that the written forms of his sermons are incomparably different from his other writings. *Discerning* is far from Niebuhr’s quasi-secular writings, such as *Moral Man* or *Reflections*. Still, the social or political “superstructure” in Niebuhr’s thought always belongs to a Christian “base,” to express it in Marxian terms. Though in the case of Niebuhr, it is not always clear if it is not the other way round, so his social and political are the primary, and the Christian insights are the secondary (which stem from the primary), the Biblical faith unquestionably establishes a basis in the sermons of the *Discerning*.

Which authors constitute the fundamental theological message of these writings? Certainly not Augustine. A part of the reason might lie in Augustine’s disadvantageous situations that he cannot be cited from the Bible, which Niebuhr interprets as a preacher. Nevertheless, Niebuhr could have easily infused more Augustine into his arguments. Once he does, when discussing the questions of peace, he writes, “but the peace of the world is always, as St. Augustine observed, something of an armistice between opposing factions. There is no perfect social harmony in human history, no peace within the limits of understanding” (Niebuhr, 1946, p. 187). This idea has been provided by Niebuhr before and is marginal considering both Niebuhr’s view on Augustine and Augustine’s view on peace generally. Obviously, Augustine could easily be related to certain parts of the texts. In some instances, it seems that Niebuhr writes about or is

inspired by Augustine when he discusses, for example, the ideas of Orthodox Christianity, the “City of God,” the selfish pride, the self-righteousness of nations or the evilness of power in the hands of men. Also, Niebuhr’s continuous emphasis on the urgency of providing meaning for history, which he also ambitions, had been previously attributed to an appraisal of Augustine (Niebuhr, 1937).

Still, Niebuhr sticks to the introductory thoughts of the Gospel, and his theological arguments remain based on Biblical sources, especially the prophets (including Amos, Isaiah, and Ezekiel), Jesus, and St. Paul. How these figures illuminated or sometimes resolved the paradoxes of Biblical faith is much more striking and dominant than any Augustinian thoughts in this book. The point is that Augustine can easily be “read into” probably every work of the mature Niebuhr since he does not abandon the theological and political insights that he formulated in his past ten years related to Augustine. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to treat Augustine as a primal source of the *Discerning* that substantively contributes to understanding Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine.

6.5.9. *Faith and History*

Faith and History was published in 1949, but its original idea was formulated years before (Niebuhr, 1949). Among the several lectures which dealt with the topic, Niebuhr admits that the earliest is dated to 1945, presented at Yale Divinity School. The notion of history entered in *Beyond Tragedy* and was also elaborated in *Destiny*. Just like he compared the Christian view of human nature with the classical (mainly Greek) and modern conceptions, Niebuhr analyses history, formulating a Christian (and, again, specifically Niebuhrian) interpretation of history. Still, it is sympathetic, and it was probably appealing also for his secular followers, that Niebuhr also criticizes the errors of certain Christian views (e.g., Protestant literalism, Catholicism) and mentions the few merits of liberal culture (for instance, in its view of tolerance). The message from Niebuhr was that neither history nor man’s freedom and power is redemptive (Niebuhr 1949). The question is whether Augustine is related to the Christian philosophy of history in Niebuhr’s mind. It is, and although Augustine is mentioned around ten times, it can be grouped into four more significant questions.

The first theme is the *memory* which already occurred in *Nature*. The difference is twofold here compared to his previous writings. First, Niebuhr underlines how remarkable is the Christian idea of memory. While mysticism finds the freedom in a “level of consciousness above the temporal flux,” and rationalism finds it “primarily in his rational capacity for conceptual knowledge,” in reality, memory “represents man’s capacity to rise above, even while he is within, the temporal flux” (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 18). By this, Niebuhr frames history as a memory of past events. By this, he united the notion of memory and history, which connection can be derived if *Nature* and *Destiny* are put together, but explicitly it is not present. Second, Augustine is a central figure here since

“[t]he significance of memory as one aspect of what Christian thought has defined as the ‘image of God’ in man was first given due appreciation in western thought by Augustine, who also first elaborated the sense of history, derived from Biblical thought, into the philosophical speculations of the West” (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 18).

Therefore, Augustine’s exceptional novelty with the memory is not just repeated but, by framing history as a memory of past events, results in the fact that Augustine can be viewed as the first who elaborated the sense of history. It does not equal what Cochrane mentioned in the case of the encyclopedia, that Augustine is treated as the first maker of the philosophy of history, but it is closer. It is so close that roughly forty pages later, Niebuhr concludes that Augustine, “who first fully developed the implications of the Biblical view of time and history within terms of western culture, rejected the cyclical theory of time and history contemptuously” (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 65). This argument can also be derived from Cochrane’s account.⁹³

The second theme is related to Arnold J. Toynbee’s philosophy of history which Niebuhr reviews in *Faith and History*. He argues that when Toynbee describes the death of civilizations, he heavily relies on the Biblical-Augustinian (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 110; 222) or the Augustinian interpretations (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 129). Niebuhr evaluates it positively that Toynbee, based on the Biblical-Augustinian addition to the classical

⁹³ Niebuhr also mentions that he does not agree with Augustine on every point regarding the notion of time (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 19) and that Augustine could not solve all the mysteries of time which are related to the creation (1949, p. 50), but these are minor questions.

view, knows that civilizations can die by their own hands and the “instrument of their destruction is the pride by which they make some ephemeral techniques, structure or instrument of history into a false absolute” (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 109). In this context, he again discusses the question of giving meaning to historical events in times of catastrophes and treats Augustine’s interpretation as superior to both Constantine’s clerical courtiers and Thomas Aquinas (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 111). What is new here is rather a question than an answer. Niebuhr realized that even if historical patterns seem to validate the idea that profound religious insights replaced idolatrous cults in catastrophic times, it is not a general necessity. There is neither historical evidence nor scriptural denial that valuable religions will not perish with the civilization itself.

The third topic is discussed in the chapter titled *False Absolutes in Christian Interpretations of History*. If someone would suggest that Augustine’s concept of the Church is discussed again, it is right. Niebuhr, just like in *Destiny*, takes a middle position; he mentions Augustine’s reservations about the imperfections of the historic church but maintains that the Catholic doctrine was derived from his definition of church. The theory finally ended in Hildebrand’s formulation in which *civitas Dei* became the *sacerdotium* exercising superiority over the transformed *civitas terrena*, the *regnum* (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 201).

The last relevant reference to Augustine anticipates the next theoretical phase since it is the first time in his book that Niebuhr denotes Augustine as the representative of Christian realism (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 221). Niebuhr begins with Augustine’s social theory, the general outlook of *civitas terrena*. He argues that conflict is the inevitable consequence of pride, domination, and injustice, which stems from the idolatrous self-exaltations of the leaders of the society, the oligarchies. Thus, Augustine’s description of the earthly reality is valid. Nonetheless, Niebuhr switches the perspective and states that “[b]ut there is life as well as death, virtue as well as sin in these social and political configurations. St. Augustine’s Christian realism errs in its too consistent emphasis upon the sinful corruptions of the world’s peace” (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 221). Niebuhr finds the reason for this mistake. Just like in *Destiny*, Augustine focuses on the death of civilization at the expense of the rise and prosperity of the culture. In short, despite connecting memory and history and explicitly calling Augustine a representative of

Christian realism, nothing substantive changed from *Nature and Destiny*. Nevertheless, the latter anticipates that Augustine will end up as a crucial figure of Christian realism.

6.5.10. *The Irony of American History*

The Irony of American History (from now: *Irony*) was published in 1952 (Niebuhr, 2008 [1952]). Niebuhr's concept of irony was in the making in the 1940s. In one of his sermons in *Discerning, Humour and Faith*, he already touched on the character of Cervantes' Don Quixote and the expression from the Psalms that "he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh" (Niebuhr, 1946, pp. 111, 116). Humor has common characteristics with irony; thus, the reoccurrence of these two ideas is not surprising (Niebuhr, 2008, pp. 11-12, 15, 63-64, 168). In *Faith and History*, Niebuhr claimed that the "modern experience belongs in the category of pathos or irony rather than tragedy" (Niebuhr, 1949, p. 9). In the preface of *Irony*, he also acknowledges that a part of his book is based on a lecture he held in 1949. As he expresses, his intention was to distinguish ironic elements in history from tragic and pathetic ones and analyze history with the concept of irony (Niebuhr, 2008, p. xxiii).

Even if Niebuhr's interpretative framework is new (though irony contains similar notions as paradoxes), and Andrew Bacevich argues that it is the "most important book ever written on U. S. foreign policy" (Bacevich in Niebuhr, 2008, p. ix), *Irony* will be one of the least discussed books in this dissertation. The reason is simple; it does not directly contribute to a more proper understanding of Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine. Augustine is not even mentioned in the book (the third from 1932 and the last case), and its general theme is American history. Naturally, it could be detailed how certain topics appear in *Irony* that were previously mentioned with Augustine. However, the number of these hints is numerically low and irrelevant. Nevertheless, from the two topics discussed, the second will affirm the *indirect* relevance of *Irony* in relation to Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine.

The first exciting question relates to the book title that Niebuhr mentions in one of his footnotes. It was titled *Civitas Dei* and written by Lionel Curtis (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 72). The book finally consisted of three volumes, which is a monumental book (Curtis, 1950). It was also revised and republished a few times. Unfortunately, Niebuhr does not indicate which version he refers to. Nevertheless, whether it could influence Niebuhr's

interpretation of Augustine can still be answered. It probably did not. First, Niebuhr refers to the book in a negative way as the British version of the American dream, namely when someone considers his nation a master of his destiny (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 72). He is even more ruthless in *Destiny* when he argues that “[i]n between these pretensions of youth and of age are such aberrations as Lionel Curtis’ identification of the British Empire with the ‘City of God’” (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 307). Therefore, Niebuhr did not refer to Curtis’ interpretation of Augustine but to his general view of history, which he largely rejected. Throughout his life, Niebuhr doubted whether Curtis’ general ambition to form a world government and establish the Kingdom of God upon earth was realizable. Furthermore, Niebuhr already had a relatively stable view of Augustine, which, considering Curtis’ arguments on Augustine in his three-volume book (Curtis, 1950), did not change.

The second observation is on Christian realism and its representatives. As mentioned, Niebuhr barely uses the term Christian realism. However, in *Irony*, it occurs altogether twice. The first one is a summary of a type of thinking. The “reservations of Christian realism” (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 23) are related to the understanding of the human situation, which opposes the modern understanding of man, including the Marxist and liberal. It is present in John Adams’s thinking when he warned Thomas Jefferson; Adams’ understood that “the power of the self’s passions and ambition to corrupt the self’s reason” (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 21). Fortunately, the Christian understanding of man was incorporated into American life when the Calvinist fathers built it into the institutions. This still balances the illusions about the innocence of human behavior covered by reasons and idealism and “safeguards against the selfish abuse of power,” argued Niebuhr (2008, p. 22).

The second part, where Niebuhr mentions the term Christian realism, could have come right after the first one since it revolves around the same question. He argued that even though Adams’ letters to Jefferson are recalled when the different philosophies on American government are discussed, the real distinction was between Jefferson and Madison (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 96). How they thought is best seen in the differences between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. Together with Thomas Paine and inspired by the concept of John Locke’s view of

human nature, Jefferson was afraid that the government's interference would reduce man's liberty and destroy the harmonies of economic man. Madison also feared the tyranny of the government, but he knew better that it was a necessary instrument. He introduced the concept of the *balance of power* to mitigate the possible abuse of the strong government.⁹⁴ Madison knew the perils of the "factions" but did not think it could be easily solved by prudence; "[w]ith every realists of every age he knew how intimately man's reason is related to his interest" (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 98). Madison also anticipated Marx in realizing the dangers which stem from property and the inequalities of property. Altogether, Niebuhr is delighted that the "early American culture was not bereft of a realistic theory" (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 96). The combination of Jefferson's passion for liberty and James Madison's "Christian realism in the interpretation of human motives and desires" brought remarkable achievements (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 96).

In conclusion, *Irony* is irrelevant regarding Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine *directly* as it does not contain any references to Augustine. Yet, how Niebuhr conceptualizes Christian realism is *indirectly* related to it. The dialectic tension between modern culture (and its manifestations in liberalism and Marxism), the Christian way of thinking, the special relevance of the anthropological questions, the fact that reason is the servant of interest, and the notion that idealistic illusions are used to cover interest and power is already present in Niebuhr's mind. When these ideas are connected with Augustine, it will become a perfect match: Augustine, the Christian realist.

6.5.11. Conclusion

This theoretical phase began with Niebuhr's Gifford Lectures and the Second World War and ended with *Irony*, which discussed America's responsibilities in the new world order. Gary Dorrien argues that Niebuhr "[i]n the late 1940s and early 1950s, as a pillar of the Democratic Party's 'Vital Center' establishment, he became a chief apologist of the United States' Cold War against Communist" (Dorrien in Niebuhr 2011, p. ix). This evolution is clearly visible. Niebuhr remained a realist, but the tensivity of *Christianity's* political realism and *Nature and Destiny's* theological realism published during the World War began to fade.

⁹⁴ Niebuhr only mentions that it might have originated from Calvin through John Witherspoon.

Considering Augustine, in this theoretical phase, the number of books that were less relevant to Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine (including *Christianity, Children, Discerning*, and *Irony*) was more numerous. Nonetheless, *Nature and Destiny* significantly changed Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine, and its signs were also present in *Faith and History*. It is imperative to recall that the change occurred in Niebuhr's most significant theological work; thus, the consequences are also more far-reaching.

This theoretical phase made Augustine the "first theologian." Augustine was the first theologian who comprehended the full implications of the Christian doctrine of the image of God in man. Breaking with the classical understanding, he was the first who clearly framed history in relation to grace to sin. He reintroduced the Pauline notion of sin, which acknowledged that not finiteness but the pretension of finiteness; thus, pride is the essence of sin. Finally, he was the first theologian who had a sense of history. From a simple representative of orthodox Christianity, Augustine became the "first theologian." Furthermore, Augustine developed into an indispensable theologian for Niebuhr in another sense. For Augustine became one of the most influential theologians in Niebuhr's thought with his views on human nature, sin, original sin, and interpretation of history. Even those Niebuhrian books bear the marks of Augustine in which Augustine's name is absent.

In the 1930s, a gradual shift occurred in Niebuhr's thought; he began to deal with the problem of *man*. Obviously, one of the main elements was the *nature of man*; thus, it was the first phase in which Niebuhr had grounded theological anthropology. Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine confirmed that theological anthropological aspects were present when Niebuhr addressed Augustine. Six elements will be mentioned here.⁹⁵ (1) Niebuhr understood that to express the complexity of the human being, its oppositional qualities (sometimes paradoxes) must be captured. He employed several, but as mentioned, he argued that man is both made in the "image of God" and is a creature. He found this dualism in Augustine's thought. (2) Furthermore, it also belongs here that in his view, in the doctrine of the image of God, the "full implications of the Christian doctrine of man" was comprehended by Augustine. (3) Sin is an inevitable feature of

⁹⁵ For a table that summarizes these theological anthropological aspects of Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine, see Appendix 2.

human life. Augustine was one of the great theologians who stressed its importance. In this phase, Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine is enriched by the incorporation of Augustine's notion of sin. In contrast to his previous arguments, Niebuhr underlined that Augustine distinguished between finiteness and sin. Niebuhr also followed the Augustinian path, arguing that sin lies in the defect of will and not the body. (4) From the manifestations of sin, pride was essential in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine. Pride is the quintessence of sins. The sin as sensuality also flows from it in the Pauline-Augustinian understanding. The "definition of sin as pride is consistently maintained in the train of theology known as Augustinian," stated Niebuhr (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 186). (5) In the doctrine of grace, Niebuhr favored the Pauline over the Augustinian. In line with the Lutheran doctrine, Niebuhr argued that self-love and pride are more consistent – even when grace is taken into account – than Augustine imagined. (6) The last element, namely love, was not elaborated on in-depth until this point, but – as an aspect related to theological anthropology – it can be anticipated that in the subsequent phases, Niebuhr will remain critical of Augustine's concept of love. In short, Niebuhr argues that Augustine overemphasized the first love commandment compared to the second. He remains loyal to his former ideas that love is central in human life, but the conversion of its implications to the social sphere is limited. In short, not all elements in Niebuhr's theological anthropology are Augustinian,⁹⁶ but his interpretation – in the form of appreciations – confirmed that in certain crucial elements, it is Augustinian. Ultimately, it is essential because Niebuhr's Christian realism will include them.

Though several factors led to Niebuhr's new interpretation of Augustine (which were mentioned previously), three were fundamental in this phase. The first is that Niebuhr began to know and use Augustine. The fact that Niebuhr was searching for theological

⁹⁶ Naturally, other great theologians – including those who influenced Niebuhr – professed similar verdicts. Luther – as an Augustinian monk not free from Augustinian influence – also used the distinctions between being created and being made in the image of God. The famous German theologian Gerhard Ebeling argues in his book on Luther that "[a]lthough man as God's creature is naturally not his own cause, but is caused, yet from the point of view of his nature, he is the origin of his works. This expresses the idea that he is the image of God: like God, man is also the origin of his works, a source of contingent action, although this is so under the conditions of created being" (Ebeling, 1970, pp. 231-232). Ebeling's monography is not only an insightful introduction to Luther's thought but can serve as a starting point for detecting similarities between Niebuhr and Luther. Without delving into the parallels (e.g., favoring Augustinianism over Aristotelianism, knowing Augustine's work by heart, speaking about good and bad theology, criticizing philosophy in favor of theology), it should be noted that Ebeling, similarly to Stone (1992), conceptualizing Niebuhr, discusses Luther as a professor (Ebeling, 1970).

tradition and the necessity to get into touch with the two great neo-orthodox theologians, Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, for whom Augustine was essential, facilitated the knowledge of Augustine. The fact that Augustine became useful against rationalism and idealism in the contemporary historic environment also fostered the establishment of a new interpretation. The third was the influence of Cochrane's book, *Christianity and the Classical Culture*. With slight exaggeration, Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine can be derived from Cochrane's arguments in this theoretical phase. It results from the fact that *Nature and Destiny* is the most decisive piece of work in relation to Augustine and Cochrane influenced precisely that book. It was intentionally not mentioned that Cochrane calls Augustine's account of nature and man realistic (Cochrane, 1940, p. 432), which is so closely identified with Niebuhr. And it is not a mistake since Cochrane only uses it once, just like he does Christian realism (Cochrane, 1940, p. 502). For one of the novelties in the next theoretical phase is this one; Niebuhr incorporates his theological conclusions originated from Augustine into his social and political thought. By this, he will change the general tendency of this theoretical phase, namely that Augustine is discussed mostly in theological and philosophical works and is avoided in secular and political books. The second novelty of the new theoretical phase will be even more surprising and explains why Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine is treated as a realist understanding.

6.6. Augustine, the Christian realist (1952-1958)

6.6.1. Introduction

Niebuhr's merciless pace of work, which had lasted for more than three decades, ended in 1952, in the sixtieth year of his life. On February 15, he felt "spasm in the limbs of his left side," and "[i]n the spring a series of spasms left him increasingly paralyzed on the left side and his speech impaired," according to the doctors' diagnosis "a sclerotic artery was delivering insufficient blood to one part of the brain" (Fox, 1985, p. 248). In the summer, Niebuhr worsened; a stronger spasm occurred, which made him unable to speak for a short period (Fox, 1985, p. 249). Altogether, the series of small strokes led to severe physical and mental consequences. His left side was immobilized for a long time, and his weakness limited the possibilities of his intellectual work, especially holding as many public lectures as before.

Niebuhr resumed his academic work at Union, but the physical trauma and the inability to continue his restless life caused lasting depression. Twenty-five years before, he wrote in the *Leaves*: “if I were physically anaemic I never would be able to escape pessimism” (Niebuhr, 1957, pp. 157-158).⁹⁷ Niebuhr’s report on his condition was written in 1967 retrospectively, but it was published only fifteen years after his death. After the selected essays and addresses in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr*, edited by Robert McAfee Brown, the collection is finished by *Epilogue: A View of Life from the Sidelines* (Niebuhr, 1986).

Altogether, only two books will be discussed in this chapter, for which the reason is multifold. First, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (Niebuhr, 1953), especially the chapter entitled *Augustine’s Political Realism*, is the most significant source of Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine; hence it will be analyzed thoroughly. For structural reasons, the book’s introductory chapter will be separately discussed. The second book will be *The Self and the Dramas of History*, which is less relevant than the former but should be reviewed shortly. As this theoretical phase consists of only two books, the conclusions on the books will be formulated at the end of the chapter. The conclusion will be preceded by a private letter written by Niebuhr, which sheds light on his view of how Augustine relates to his thought.

6.6.2. *Christian Realism and Political Problems - Introduction*

Christian Realism and Political Problems (from now: *Christian Realism*) was dedicated “To my friend, comrade, and colleague, John C. Bennett, with gratitude” by Niebuhr (Niebuhr, 1953). Bennett did not only help Niebuhr after his stroke but was also one of the most significant representatives of early Christian realism. As Niebuhr writes in his preface, *Christian Realism* was a “collection of essays on political, social, ethical and theological themes” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 1). Out of the eleven shorter writings, seven were published before.

Niebuhr’s general perspective on the book’s themes can be found in the introductory chapter, *Faith and the Empirical Method in Modern Realism*. Niebuhr argues that the essays of this book are united in a way that they all try to establish the importance of the

⁹⁷ Fox also points to this connection (Fox, 1985, p. 248).

Christian faith to contemporary political and ethical problems. He further adds that the “central issue around which the various essays revolve or which they seek to illumine in its various facets, is fairly well explicated in the essay on the political realism of Augustine” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 2). Niebuhr anticipates that it is impossible to provide a perfect theory or perspective which would help to analyze all the aspects of man perfectly. Still, it might be possible, and it is also necessary, to reduce the fallacies. Augustine was neither perfect nor accurate in many instances, yet:

“He is presented as a significant figure, however, because he manages to escape some of the obvious errors in both Christian and secular theories and does so, not fortuitously but upon the basis of an interpretation of human selfhood (and a concomitant theory of the egotism of which the self is guilty) which enables him to view the heights of human creativity and the depth of human destructiveness, which avoids the errors of moral sentimentality and cynicism, and their alternate corruptions of political systems of both secular and Christian thinkers (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 2).

What is to be taken seriously here? First, Niebuhr originates the essence of Augustine’s “truth” from his interpretation of human selfhood, especially his views on egotism and guilt. In other words, Augustine was correct since he was correct in his interpretation of man. Second, the first and probably the last possibility in normative social and political theory, since all human individual and social achievements are fragmentary, should be to avoid as many mistakes as possible. Augustine is placed above other authors since he avoided certain grave errors, not because he constructed a big theory. Niebuhr’s polemics with other waves of thought was not substantially more than that; try to avoid the opponent’s errors without stepping into an even graver one and formulate a limited conclusion. In this way, Niebuhr resembled Augustine, but Niebuhr accentuated this tendency in Augustine.

Third, there is slight tension regarding the merits of Augustine and the general view of Augustine until this point. Namely, here Niebuhr declares that Augustine was able to view not just the depths of human destructiveness but also the heights of human

creativity; thus, he avoided cynicism.⁹⁸ Until this point, Augustine was criticized as the “pessimist,” “too pessimist,” and “too realist” author. He was not called a cynic, but cynicism, pessimism, or excessive realism are analogous in that they deny or at least highly doubt the realization of creativity in social and political life. Niebuhr contributes to this confusion since he does not justify this new compliment or presents an example that would make it more understandable. Furthermore, the idea of seeing both the creative and destructive elements, which became one of Niebuhr’s most favorite, was usually associated with Pascal and not Augustine:

“This freedom is the basis of the self’s destructive as well as creative power; and there is no simple possibility of making nice distinctions between human destructiveness and creativity. In the words of Pascal, the “dignity of man and his misery” have the same source” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 6).

In short, until this point, Augustine was not known for his creativity. So – if it is not considered a careless remark – how can this slight contradiction be reconciled?

The key is the difference between Augustine’s view on individuals and collectives. Arguments on Augustine’s creativity are designated to the individuals, while the pessimism is related to the collectives (to the *civitas terrena*). As raised in *Nature*, Augustine understood how man bares the “image of God” (Niebuhr, 1964a) by which he confirmed the possibility of creativity. It does not mean that the destructive elements (sin, pride, guilt) were not present in Augustine’s account of individuals (which infiltrated the social sphere resulting in the overall pessimistic picture of the *civitas terrena*). Still, it saved Augustine from a one-sided analysis that would end up in cynicism.

In the introduction of *Christian Realism*, Niebuhr also designates his target of criticism: the so-called „scientific culture.” From his first book, the relationship between science and religion and the misunderstandings of science interested Niebuhr (Niebuhr, 1928). Here, he argues that religious presuppositions are also in work in modern scientific analyses, and it has two central views which cause serious contradictions and represents fatal mistakes: the perfectibility of man and the idea of progress in history. Though the

⁹⁸ Here, creativity is used in a Niebuhrian way. Niebuhr usually contrasts creativity with destruction, which also leads to the conclusion that creativity is a realization of the “good part” of human nature.

representatives of modern science pride themselves on their empiricism, their beliefs simply do “not conform to the obvious facts of human existence” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 4). Just like Niebuhr offered his Christian version of democracy in *Children*, he offers his Christian alternative to the scientific culture, which can be called Christian realism. Why only a cautious “can be called” was expressed even though the book’s title includes “Christian Realism”? Since – even if someone hoped that Niebuhr would finally write a systematic work on Christian realism, as the title would suggest – this book is neither systematic nor on Christian realism. Except for the title, he uses the term “Christian realism” only once and puts the “realism” part between the quotation marks (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 6). The representatives of this group, the “Christian realists,” also occur only once in the whole book, where Niebuhr calls attention to the idea that they are incorrect when they overemphasize the depravity of human beings (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 120).

As a fruit of his theological research, partly thanks to Augustine, Niebuhr realized that Christianity has a realist thread. As mentioned, it was when he was emancipated from the view that the Christian faith equals the moral idealism of the past century. Now, it seems that he goes further since he incorporated the insights of Christian realism into his notion of Christianity. This is how the term Christian realism slightly loses its relevance. Why would someone use “Christian realism” if the term “Christian” already includes the meaning of it? When Niebuhr distinguishes his thought from his opponents, he primarily uses the “Biblical view,” “Christian view,” “Christian faith,” or “Christian belief.” Thus, he can simply use “Christian” even if the book is “devoted to the question of realism and its criticism of the lack of realism in contemporary culture” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 6). To sum it up, the book manifests Niebuhr's Christian realism, but the book is not on Christian realism.

The ten writings after the introduction are very diverse. Some are secular and political (e.g., *The Illusion of World Government*, *The Foreign Policy of American Conservatism and Liberalism*), while others are religious (e.g., *The Christian Witness in the Social and National Order*) or historical (e.g., *Love and Law in Protestantism and Catholicism*). Also, some of them were published years before. What unites them is, to which Niebuhr refers but in a different manner, that they altogether stand in the mature

Niebuhr tradition that takes the paradoxes of human nature (including of use and the abuse of human freedom) and man's contradictory role of history as granted. Thus, theoretically, no significant novelty can be captured.

Considering Augustine, it is on the contrary. Even beyond the arguments on Augustine mentioned above, Niebuhr puts the early Church Father into a new light. The ninth essay is titled *Augustine's Political Realism*, specifically devoted to Augustine's thoughts. It is the only place in Niebuhr's books where he writes a whole essay on Augustine, and it is only Augustine, as an author, on whom Niebuhr writes a separate essay. In all his books, no separate article, chapter, or essay is found on the thoughts of St. Paul, Luther, Calvin, Kierkegaard, Pascal, or Marx. This fact indicates that Augustine had a distinguished place in Niebuhr's thought. "Saint Augustine was probably his favorite," echoes Ursula's statement (Niebuhr, 1991, p. 3). Furthermore, the content of the essay also affirms this prominent role resulting in the zenith of Niebuhr's sympathy towards Augustine.

6.6.3. *Christian Realism and Political Problems – Augustine's Political Realism*

Augustine's Political Realism was originally a lecture at Columbia University on the Frances Carroll Memorial Lecture Foundation. The essay is structured into four sub-sections: the first is a general introduction, the second is on Augustine's social realism, the third places Augustine into a broader context, and the last is criticism and conclusion. The article begins with an uncommon phenomenon; Niebuhr gives definitions. As Bingham – referring to Lee Miller, who pointed out that Niebuhr is not a "definitional" writer – argues, "Niebuhr rarely stops to define his terms, and when he does, the definition may not be identical with that in some other book (Bingham, 1961, p. 17).

Moreover, the terms defined are no less than *realism* and *idealism*. So, he felt that these two notions must be clarified in an essay on Augustine. According to Niebuhr, realism "denotes the disposition to take into account all factors in a social and political situation which offer resistance to established norms, particularly the factors of self-interest and power" (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 119). To further illustrate, he continues in the following way, "[i]n the words of the notorious 'realist,' Machiavelli, the purpose of the realist is 'to

follow the truth of the matter rather than the imagination of it; for many have pictures of republics and principalities which have never been seen” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 119).⁹⁹ It would not be expedient to delve into the fact that Machiavelli never used the “realist” as Niebuhr’s argument implicitly suggests. Instead, it should be emphasized that Niebuhr’s definition of realism focuses on the proper understanding of the main factors of complex political and social reality.

Niebuhr knew it is a matter of the question of what is treated as “main factors” and among those main factors which are more prior to the other. Niebuhr highlights the importance of self-interest and power, which are universal elements of reality, and thus cannot be omitted from the analysis. Nevertheless, moral factors are also part of the complex reality. This is why Niebuhr would, among others, criticize Augustine to a lesser and Luther and Hobbes to a greater extent: they did not count on moral factors in social questions. Thus, they were not realist enough. In conclusion, even if the part that “offers resistance to established norms” is slightly revolutionary, this realism is a perspective or an interpretive framework that seeks to *understand* social and political reality.

Idealism, on the other hand, “in the esteem of its proponents, is characterized by loyalty to moral norms and ideals, rather than to self-interest, whether individual or collective.” (Niebuhr, 1953, pp. 119-120). Niebuhr’s narrative indicates that he is not among the proponents but among the critics of idealism. In relation to his definition of realism, he writes that it “implies that idealists are subjects to illusions about social realities, which indeed they are” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 119). Then, he highlights that according to the critics of idealists, idealism is “characterized by a disposition to ignore or to be indifferent to the forces in human life which offer resistance to universally valid ideals and norms” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 120).

Although Niebuhr’s objection towards idealism is spectacular, it might be raised whether a distinction can be made in a way that realism is the descriptive part while idealism is the prescriptive part of his normative political theory; thus, both parts are necessary. The question is answered rapidly since Niebuhr only discusses the notion of

⁹⁹ Here, Niebuhr again omits the reference, even though it is a verbatim quote from Machiavelli.

description here without entering any kind of prescribing attitude. Furthermore, realism incorporates the description of morals, norms, and ideals.

Niebuhr is aware that his conceptualization is limited in at least two ways. First, he stresses that treating realism and idealism as stable doctrines in political theory would be a mistake. They are rather dispositions that depend on the current social and political situations and are bound to be inexact. Second, by using Plato as an example of whether he was a realist or not, he correctly implies that it is always dubious to conclude with absolute certainty that someone is a realist or an idealist (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 120). Instead of taking it as a lead and arguing that “certain elements in Augustine are realist while others are idealists,” he simply puts that “Augustine was, by general consent, the first great ‘realist’ in Western history” (Niebuhr, 1953, pp. 120-121). Nevertheless, he justifies the claim:

“He deserves this distinction because his picture of social reality in his *civitas dei* gives an adequate account of the social factions, tensions, and competitions which we know to be well-nigh universal on every level of community; while the classical age conceived the order and justice of its *polis* to be a comparatively simple achievement which would be accomplished when reason had brought all subtraction forces under its dominion (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 121).¹⁰⁰

Opposed to classical philosophers, Augustine managed to accomplish these because his “conception of human selfhood with the ancillary conception of the seat of evil being in the self” was based on the Bible and not on the rationalistic understanding of man (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 121). It meant – what Niebuhr already elaborated in the first chapter of *Nature* – that in contrast to the classical dualism, which is based on the idea that in the mind-body relation, the former is the seat of the virtue and the latter is the source of unorder; Augustine knew that “the self is the integral unity of mind and body” and that it has “a mysterious identity and integrity transcending its functions of mind, memory, and will” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 121). While Niebuhr explains the difficulty of placing the

¹⁰⁰ Presumably, it was a simple inattention, but it is striking that Niebuhr uses the term “*civitas dei*” incorrectly. If he meant the book’s title, it should have been “*De civitate Dei*,” if he wished to refer to the city of God, “*Civitas Dei*” would have been correct. Still, the earthly city also fits into the sentence; thus, it could have been “*civitas terrena*.” Niebuhr obviously knew this. Even if he was not specifically an Augustine researcher, he knew Augustine much better than, among others, his contemporaries and the author of this dissertation. Still, he spoiled it in a written form, which seems disturbing.

transcendent freedom of the self into a valid philosophical structure, he repeats the conclusion on Augustine already expressed in *Nature*, that the mixture of the Biblical doctrines and the correct elements of Neo-Platonism helped out Augustine (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 122).

It should be recalled that Niebuhr does not discuss Augustine alone but in tension with the classical authors. Thus, when he stresses that “Augustine broke with classical rationalism in his conception of selfhood,” the radicality of the term *broke* should be emphasized (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 121). Also, when he repeats what he already elaborated in *Nature*, namely how Augustine understood self-love as pride and how he designated the sin to the will in the self and his soul rather than the body, it is not just “the real basis for a realistic estimate of the forces of recalcitrance,” but it also refutes the modern charges that “the Christian faith is ‘dualistic’ and generates contempt for the body” (Niebuhr, 1953, pp. 123-124). Niebuhr declares that contemporary realists are not more realist than Plato and Aristotle, and the two sources which can provide guiding insights are the common sense of the man in the street and the older disciplines, which are not attracted by the methods of science.

The last serious argument of the essay’s first part is that Christian realism “is based on Augustine’s interpretation of biblical faith.” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 123). Until this point, some hints were given on Christian realism as a wave of thought and its representatives, including Augustine (Niebuhr, 1949) or Madison (Niebuhr, 2008). Nonetheless, the statement that it “is based on Augustine’s interpretation of biblical faith” is simply astonishing. Not because it was not clear that Augustine was a crucial part of this trend; instead because it is a too powerful statement. It could have been said that Augustine’s views of man and history are valuable or that Christian realism is *also* based on Augustine’s interpretation of biblical faith. Now the whole interpretation of biblical faith is designated to Augustine. If it is valid, then Niebuhr, if he treats himself as a Christian realist (which is not altogether sure), should follow Augustine’s interpretation of biblical faith about the Church and grace as well, which he rejected. With this poetic question, it is intended to claim that Niebuhr’s statement is exaggerated. Augustine took a solid place in Christian realism, but not to this extent. Nevertheless, it is a forceful rhetorical statement that surely attracted attention.

The second part of the essay is on Augustine's social thought, where Niebuhr heavily relies on the 19th book of *The City of God* (Augustine, 2019). After summarizing Augustine's views on *civitas terrena*, Niebuhr brings examples from the modern age to shed light on their current relevance. In this way, just like Niebuhr wished to apply the truth of the Gospel to modern problems, he uses Augustine to refute modern fools. For example, Augustine envisioned a world community with three levels (family, commonwealth, and the world). Still, unlike modern "idealists," he knew that there are frictions in all levels of community and, among others, the limitation of language will always prevent complete unity between men. Augustine also justifies why he could be called a realist since he saw the elements of self-interest and power behind Cicero's commonwealth of justice. Both in international and domestic politics, Augustine's realism can be utilized to see the power reality that is poured with the glaze of idealism. Finally, Augustine's realistic attitude towards governments also presented that the dominant group which is entrusted with keeping the social peace is not free from the corruption of self-interest; "[o]ne thinks incidentally how accurately the Augustinian analysis fits both the creative and the ambiguous character of the American hegemony in the social cohesion of the free world," concludes Niebuhr (Niebuhr, 1953, pp. 124-128).

Niebuhr's criticism of Augustine's view on social relations is twofold. First, he points out that early Christianity, partly derived from early Stoicism, was also exposed to the danger of treating reality as a "natural order." Niebuhr calls it a kind of primitivism and describes its general attitude sophistically but, put plainly, it resembles the argument that "things are as they are because they were created that way." Certain aspects of social life were criticized in this primitive view; it knew that life was limited, but there was no intention of changing the inordinate elements which *should* be changed. In Niebuhr's words: "[t]his primitivism avoid the latter error of the absolute sanctification of governments. But its indiscriminate character is apparent by his failure to recognize the difference between legitimate and illegitimate, between ordinate and inordinate subordination of man to man" (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 129). Again, the problem is the lack of force behind social activism that fosters social reconstruction.

Niebuhr's other objection is not correct. He argues that Augustine's realism was excessive and failed to do justice to the positive elements of the Roman Empire (e.g., the sense of justice in the Ciceronian formula). Until this point, he repeats what he formerly argued in *Destiny* and *Faith and History*, which is acceptable. The problem occurs when he argues that

“[o]n the basis of his principles he could not distinguish between government and slavery, both of which were supposedly rule over man by man and were both a consequence of, and remedy for, sin; nor could he distinguish between commonwealth and a robber band, for both were bound together by collective interest...” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 127).

What does the “basis of his principles” mean? Since Niebuhr does not unfold it, it is difficult to be considered. Nonetheless, Augustine could distinguish between government and slavery, commonwealth, and a robber band. He indeed saw their common elements, but it does not mean that he identified them with each other. As Chadwick presents, even if Augustine's concept of government was not intended to abolish slavery and he thought that “slavery was not an unmitigated evil when slaves in good homes were better clothed, fed, and housed than the free wage labourers who were the great majority of the labour force,” he hated slave trade and used the church to save the oppressed slaves (Chadwick, 2001, p. 110). The government was also a remedy for sin, but it had a different function from slavery; it maintained order to prevent anarchy. It was equally clear that Augustine equated the robber bands and the commonwealth until the point where the interest binds them together, not entirely. Augustine acknowledged the merits of Roman virtues even if they were, as a manifestation of pride and lust, inferior to the Christian love of God.

In Niebuhr's defense, it must be added that he does not place Augustine to the realistic pessimism of Luther and Hobbes. He argues that it is not fatal as long as the realistic emphasis on power and interest addresses the dangers of tyranny besides moralism. In the third part of the essay, he also adds that “if Augustine's realism is contained in his analysis of the *civitas terrena*, his refutations of the idea that realism must lead to cynicism or relativism is contained in his definition of the *civitas dei*...” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 129). The fact that the two cities commingle leads to the fact that *civitas Dei*

balances the realism of *civitas terrena*. This is how Augustine, based on the biblical account, avoided both illusion and cynicism since he “recognizes that the corruption of human freedom may make a behavior pattern universal without making it normative” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 130).

Throughout the essay’s third section, Niebuhr analyses Augustine’s theory of love and its social relevance in a broader context. He argues that its love ethic is superior to modern sentimentalities since it considers the “power and persistence of egoism, both individual and collective, and seeks to establish the most tolerable form of peace and justice under the conditions set by human sin” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 131). However, even if its theory is based on love and not on justice, he rightly placed the value of love above the value of the law. In this way and given his knowledge of the radical freedom of human beings, Augustine’s social theory, which stems from love, is superior to Medieval natural law, which “invariably introduce some historically contingent norm or social structure into what they regard as God’s inflexible norm” (Niebuhr, 1953, pp. 132-133). After, Niebuhr tries to illustrate again how Augustine’s concepts can be used in relation to modern class conflicts and international tensions. Though Niebuhr emphasizes only one aspect of it, Augustine’s formula “for the leavening influence of a higher upon a lower loyalty or love, is effective in preventing the lower loyalty from involving itself in self-defeat” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 136). The modern realists, who do no more than reduce the interest to the sphere of the nation, could learn from it, adds Niebuhr.

The last part is the combination of Augustine’s criticism and Niebuhr’s lamentations on the current affairs of the world; only the first will be addressed. Augustine’s fallacies are again mainly theological, but the theme is new, as it reflects the question of love. Though Niebuhr repeats his verdict on Augustine’s doctrine of the Church based on *Destiny*, he gives a new perspective of how Augustine “made several errors in [his] account of love and of the relation of love to self-love” (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 130). Niebuhr opposed the idea that the two loves (the love of God, which is present in the heavenly city, and the love of self, which is present in the earthly city) are separated in the way Augustine held. Based on Luther, Niebuhr supported the view that the mixture

of loves is possible because both loves dwell in every human, not because the two cities, thus the two loves commingle (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 138).

A new theme appears, and it is related to Anders Nygren, the Lutheran theologian from Lund University. Nygren wrote a two-volume classic, *Agape and Eros*, which occasionally occurs in Niebuhr's writings (Niebuhr, 1935; 1949). It is the first time when Nygren is directly related to Augustine. The connection is not a surprise since, beyond the fact that Nygren – like Niebuhr – interpreted Augustine as a founder of the Catholic doctrine of grace, and he saw Augustine's success in being on the borderline between two religious worlds, he investigated Augustine's account of love and its influence thoroughly (Nygren, 1953). Nevertheless, Niebuhr tests the validity of Nygren's claim that "the Augustinian conception of *amor dei* is rooted in a classical rather than a biblical concept (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 139). Based on the analysis, it becomes clear that Augustine did not fall into the trap of mysticism. He perceived the social character of love, but based on Plotinus, his conceptions of *charitas* and *amor dei* are not in line with the *agape* of the New Testament. Augustine placed too much emphasis on the first commandment at the expense of the second one; thus, he did not consider the expression which connects them, "the Second is like unto it" (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 139). In his way, loving the neighbor is viewed as an instrument of the love of God, and it loses its relevance as an end, argues Niebuhr.

Treating God as an ultimate object of love saves everyone (and would do an excellent service to save the modern world) from every idolatry. Nevertheless, if only the object of love is considered, sacrificial love (which is also a scriptural expectation) is only judged by the object it loves. In short, Niebuhr misses the emphasis on the social relevance of love and self-realization through sacrificial love, which manifests itself in social actions. Altogether Niebuhr maintains that based on Augustine, no robust social ethic can be formed. Nevertheless, his analysis of Augustine's fallacies ends with the statement that

"[w]hatever the defects of Augustine's approach may be, we must acknowledge his immense superiority both over those who preceded him and who came after him. A part of that superiority was due to his reliance upon the biblical rather than idealistic or naturalistic conception of selfhood" (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 145).

The last page of the article is significant in two aspects. First, Niebuhr mentions that Augustine's realism is hard to be perceived by secular thought without ending up in "cynicism or in avoiding nihilism without falling into sentimentality" (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 146). Second, after pointing out the fallacies of modern pragmatists, modern "realists," and modern liberal Christians, Niebuhr's article ends in the following way:

"[t]hus Augustine, whatever may be the defects of his approach to political reality, and whatever may be the dangers of a too slavish devotion to his insights, nevertheless proves himself a more reliable guide than any known thinker. A generation which finds its communities imperiled and in decay from the smallest and most primordial community, the family, to the largest and most recent, the potential world community, might well take counsel of Augustine in solving its perplexities (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 146).

6.6.4. *The Self and the Dramas of History*

In the fall of 1953, Niebuhr already began to write a book with a tentative title, "The Mystery of the Self and the Dramas of History," he told some of his students (Bingham, 1961, p. 283). Finally, the book was published in 1955 entitled *The Self and the Dramas of History* (from now: *Self*) (Niebuhr, 1955). The preface of *Self* begins with a gratitude Niebuhr acknowledging his "indebtedness to the great Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, whose book *I and Thou* first instructed me and many others on the uniqueness of human selfhood and the religious dimension of the problem" (Niebuhr, 1955, p. ix). This also presents that not only Augustine was influential in Niebuhr's concept of human nature.

The book's first part, which discusses the self, is meticulous and systematic. No evasive argument, every word has its place, only the essence remains. Fox, who seems to find pleasure in criticizing Niebuhr, also highlights that it was far superior to *Christian Realism*. He concludes that even if it reworked certain topics from *Faith and History* and *Nature and Destiny*, *Self* "was a phenomenal achievement for a man suffering physical and emotional ills" (Fox, 1985, p. 256). However, after *Augustine's Political Realism*, it was probable that Augustine would not be discussed at length.

Augustine is first discussed in the chapter on *Dogma and Ontology in the Christian Consensus*. The chronological investigation results again in the fact that Neo-Platonism is discussed before Augustine. Though Niebuhr's vocabulary slightly differs from his previous books, Augustine seems to acquire the same arguments. He rearranged the philosophical sphere with his return to the Biblical dramatic faith. Niebuhr assumes that it was probably fortunate that Augustine was raised in a Neo-Platonic rather than simple Platonic or Aristotelian culture. Neo-Platonism took the first step by emphasizing the "mystery beyond meaning rather than rational structure as the basis of meaning" (Niebuhr, 1955, p. 100). It made room for understanding the drama of Biblical revelation. Niebuhr was so organized that he enlisted almost all the themes in which Augustine was outstanding, thus "Augustine restored the Biblical accounts of creation, of selfhood, and of the sin and the grace in the dimension of human freedom (Niebuhr, 1955, p. 100). Here, the error of Augustine was the misunderstanding of redemption and grace. The simplistic understanding of the latter that "we may be denominated perfect if we walk perfectly on the road to perfection" led Augustine to divide the *civitas dei* and the *civitas terrena*, which made it possible or was "the first example of the perennial inclination of the religious community to make itself odious by its pretensions of righteous" (Niebuhr, 1955, p. 101).

The second reference to Augustine is in the chapter on *Organism and Artifact of Democratic Government*, and it is only a minor note. Niebuhr presents that Stoic equalitarianism, which was in parallel with Augustine's idea that equality was God-ordained, was balanced by the social hierarchy, government, and property. The remedies of sin were necessary to mitigate man's egotism through order. Thus, the same Augustine, who professed equality, accepted slavery (Niebuhr, 1955, p. 167). In short, these ideas affirm rather than modify the already stable interpretation.

6.6.5. *A letter and a conclusion*

Niebuhr's attitude towards Augustine can be further understood from a letter in response to a philosopher and historian of ideas, Morton White, written in 1956 (Niebuhr, 1991). White published an article entitled *Original Sin, Natural Law, and Politics* in *Partisan Review*, where he investigated two critics of liberalism: Walter Lippman and Reinhold Niebuhr. In its introduction, White clearly expresses that he will

criticize certain views of Niebuhr (White 1956). White sent his article to Niebuhr, for which he received a chivalric greeting and vicious criticism. If Niebuhr was polemical in most of his articles and books, he was downright relentless in his responses to criticism. Fox also discusses how Niebuhr defended *Moral Man* “down to the last comma even as he was leaving it behind” (Fox, 1985, 143, 148).

Niebuhr, among others, seems to be offended by the common classification with Lippman. In his incomprehension of why White thinks he resembles Lippman, Niebuhr writes:

“I can find only one reason for these categories in your statement, ‘Niebuhr’s Augustinian doctrine of original sin is neatly matched by Thomistic doctrine of natural law in Lippmann.’ Neatly matched? What have they to do with each other? Aquinas was not Augustinian in his doctrine of sin; and Augustine had no doctrine of natural law” (Niebuhr, 1991, p. 379).

In Niebuhr’s indignation, his objection against natural law theories and the superiority of Augustinianism over Thomism is undoubtedly present. His further intention with the reply to Morton becomes even clearer if his report written a day later to his fellow, Arthur Schlesinger, about White’s letter is considered. There he writes: “I am rather amused by my debate with every consistent rationalist to find that argument tends to make all of us unfair, no matter what our creed” (Niebuhr, 1991, p. 380).

This presents that Niebuhr did not only wish to delineate himself from other thinkers (in this case, Lippmann) but also wanted to defend his position. Nevertheless, in this case, Niebuhr seems to have succeeded. In 2005 White republished his article in a selection of his earlier writings (White, 2005). In its introduction, he admits that he has “attempted to iron out stylistic wrinkles, to correct as many errors as possible, to reduce repetition as much as I could without too much rewriting, and to make more evident the united purposes I have come to recognize in them” (White, 2005, p. 1). In the republished article “neatly matched” is omitted, and, stressing the differences he writes that “Niebuhr uses the Augustinian doctrine of original sin while Lippmann appeals to the Thomistic concept of natural law” (White, 2005, p. 277).

Fortunately, Niebuhr had other purposes with the letter. To defend his position and dismiss the charge that his ideas, including the doctrine of original sin, would be based on *a priori* grounds, he provided an outline of how his thought changed over time and how Augustine entered it. He first writes:

“When I began to speculate about the mystery of the universality of inordinate self-regard and the paradox of our feeling of responsibility of selfishness, I restudied my own presupposition more carefully and came for the first time on Augustinian thought and through Augustine discovered Paul. I had heard of the latter in church for a long time, but, being a liberal Christian, I was rather ashamed of beings associated with him (Niebuhr, 1991, p. 379).

Until this point, Augustine is a mediator in Niebuhr’s account who led him to Paul. But when Niebuhr continues with the statement that “I want to make a rueful confession of the exact chronology of my movement of thought” and shortly reflects on his early pacifism and socialism, he touches on Augustine.

“I meanwhile became a theological professor and for the first time really studied the history of thought. I became a critical student of Augustine because his presuppositions seemed to throw light upon facts that had perplexed me. It was not the other way around, that I looked at the facts from a rigorous “*a priori*!” (Niebuhr, 1991, p. 379).

Thus, it is not only affirmed that Augustine’s arrival was parallel to Niebuhr’s study of the history of thought (which also affirms the previous argument that he did not study Augustine in Detroit), but it is also clear that his interest in Augustine was facilitated by the already existing dilemmas and Augustine’s “ability” to solve those dilemmas. This latter characteristic is especially visible in this theoretical phase. Since even if Augustine’s theological ideas carried political implications in themselves in the previous phase (as was pointed out), this chapter further strengthened this trend. Almost every argument articulated at Augustine brings a modern example to which it can be applied. Through his inspiration and intellectual resources for the great dilemmas affecting man and human coexistence, Augustine became one of the central figures of Niebuhr’s political thought.

Nevertheless, the most significant development in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine is not this. The achievement is that even if he kept the theological basis that he learned partly from Cochrane in relation to Augustine, he brought new topics and new perspectives on Augustine. The elaboration of Augustine's ethic of love is historically less relevant but theoretically more appreciable, which Niebuhr avoided until *Augustine's Political Realism*. From *Interpretation*, Niebuhr refused to treat the ethic of love as the primal guide for social relations. Still, here he acknowledges the merits of Augustine's ethic of love and its superiority over other waves of thought.

The second accomplishment, which has historical relevance, is to relate Augustine to realism to such a great extent through his analysis of social theory. Niebuhr wrote nineteen books, and *Augustine's Political Realism* is the only place where he systematically writes about the definition of realism and idealism. Niebuhr was not the first one to denote Augustine as a realist. Still, his interpretation was so convincing and grounded that, supported by his national reputation, Augustine became a reference point for the realists. It cannot be emphasized enough that this could only happen because Niebuhr was also a realist. The disillusioned Marxist social thinker, looking for deeper meanings in theology, found Augustine. When he found it, he began to know his theology. After getting acquainted with theology, the shape of the Christian realist tradition began to be seen. In the end, Niebuhr, primarily as a recognition, began to carve out a realist Augustine. The question is whether this interpretation of Augustine will receive any new impulses from the last theoretical phase.

6.7. Augustine, the rigorous Christian realist (1958-1971)

6.7.1. Introduction

Niebuhr retired from Union Theological Seminary in 1960, where he taught for over thirty years. Beyond Ursula, Union was one of the constant elements in Niebuhr's hectic career. As his daughter, Sifton highlights, even in the 1960s, Niebuhr tried to keep in touch with his colleagues and students (Sifton, 2015). Nevertheless, he was not the same as in the 1930s and 1940s; Niebuhr's life irrevocably changed after his stroke in 1952. His late writings, including *Pious and Secular America* (1958a), *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (1959), and *Man's Nature and His Communities* (1965), bear the signs of the changes.

Though Niebuhr was always inclined to repeat his well-established arguments, he could usually articulate fresh insights (partly since his views changed) or at least could display his repeated arguments from new perspectives. The novelty, eloquence, and argumentative power that characterized most of Niebuhr's writings from the beginning of the 1930s began to fade in the middle of the 1950s. It was a natural consequence of aging, not to mention the multifold effects of the stroke. His apologetic attitude towards his previous polemic attitude also contributed to the change of tone in his writings. These reasons, added by the fact that Niebuhr dealt with questions that were not necessarily his interest or field of expertise, resulted in several unsophisticated parts in *Pious and Secular America* (1958a) and *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (1959). For instance, in the case of the former, his articles which touch on the sociology of religion, do not seem to be particularly profound. Also, certain parts are primarily summaries of other authors' work; probably, it is the most visible when Niebuhr deals with Chinese imperialism (Niebuhr, 1959, pp. 84-88).

Still, it would not be fair to judge Niebuhr based exclusively on these less detailed parts since the fruits of his efforts are particularly valuable generally and for this dissertation. Namely, while Niebuhr intends to formulate new ideas, provides an overview of certain questions, or reflects on the dilemmas that have occupied his mind in the past decades, he articulates the essence of, mostly his mature, theological, social, and political thought. These manifest themselves in two ways: either his former broad themes are capsulized into a phrase, a paradox, or a paragraph,¹⁰¹ or he provides the reasoning of his previously formulated insights at length. In the case of Augustine, it seems to be the latter since he does not develop radically new ideas, but he sheds light on his previous arguments with new reasons.

As a last note, it can be added that Niebuhr's thinking became more "balanced" so that he became less polemic and more optimistic about the ethical conduct and development of individuals and human communities. It was not independent of the general progress

¹⁰¹ The most prominent example is in his essay *Frustration in Mid-Century*. Niebuhr begins a sentence with the argument that "the historic forms of faith preserved an unexpected vitality," which is explained by the facts of human nature and history (Niebuhr, 1958a, p. 19). Yet, the analysis is nothing more than an excellent summary of *his* interpretation of these questions.

of American welfare in the last decades.¹⁰² The attentiveness toward workers was replaced, though not with the former vigorous tone, but with calm and stable arguments, to the inequality of black Americans. He continued to praise Jewish tradition and began to appreciate certain values of Catholicism and conservatism. Nevertheless, these were not radical changes; the new elements were partly the result of new events which attracted Niebuhr's attention, and the incorporation of novel arguments did not affect the core of Niebuhr's mature thought.

For instance, many conservatives follow Niebuhr, and he, indeed, acknowledged the merits of Burke's "moderate conservatism" (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 61)¹⁰³, his accurate analysis of international relations (Niebuhr, 1959, p. 194) or his account of writing about historical growth (Niebuhr, 1959, p. 58). Still, he argues that his "guiding principle" of the "relation of religious responsibility to political affairs" in his mature life was connected to his firm conviction presented in his Edinburgh lectures that "a realist conception of human nature should be made the servant of an ethic of progressive justice and should not be made into a bastion of conservatism, particularly a conservatism which demands unjust privileges (Niebuhr, 1965, pp. 24-25).

6.7.2. *Pious and Secular America*

Pious and Secular America (from now: *Pious*) was a collection of nine essays written in 1956 and 1957 (Niebuhr, 1958a). Four were published earlier; the rest were new. As Niebuhr suggests in the preface, most of the writings, which are journalistic in style, are united in a way that they deal with the "relationship of the religious to the social and political life of America" (Niebuhr, 1958a, p. viii). Still, the topics in which Niebuhr thought ranges are extremely broad: sociology of religion, theology, history of political thought, domestic politics, and contemporary international relations.¹⁰⁴ Also, new topics

¹⁰² For example, Niebuhr criticized Roosevelt's reforms in the 1930s (he did not think they were radical enough), but looking back from the 1960s, he admitted them as significant achievements.

¹⁰³ Niebuhr mentioned the philosophy of Burke as the most perfect expression of British traditionalism already in *Christianity* (Niebuhr, 1940). In *Irony*, he argued that "America has developed a pragmatic approach to political and economic questions which would do credit to Edmund Burke, the exponent of the wisdom of historical experience as opposed to the abstract rationalism of French Revolution" (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 89). Even if he rejected some of his ideas, Niebuhr appreciated Burke.

¹⁰⁴ It is exciting that there is an immense similarity between *Pious and Secular America* and a well-known television interview with Niebuhr hosted by famous journalist and media personality Mike Wallace on the ABC television network. With slight exaggeration, the interview is a short transcript of the book (Niebuhr, 1958b).

occur compared to his previous books, such as the different religious American congregations, the question of higher education in America, or the issue of justice in relation to black people; these are irrelevant in regard to Augustine, who is, altogether not central in this book (he occurs only twice).

In the essay *The Relations of Christians and Jews in Western Civilizations*, Niebuhr reviews the similarities and differences between Jewish and Christian religions. Regarding law and grace, and more specifically, the relation of grace to moral dynamics, he equates an Augustinian idea with a Pauline in the following way:

“The problem of grace looms so large in the New Testament because the diagnosis of the human situation includes an analysis of what Augustine has defined as the ‘defect of the will,’ a situation of self-contradiction of self, which Paul describes in the words, ‘the good that I would I do not do, and the evil that I would not, that I do’” (Niebuhr, 1958a, p. 105).

A sentence later, Niebuhr also expresses that “[t]his confession of importance is probably the most significant characteristic of Pauline Christianity. It is from the diagnosis of impotence that the doctrine of grace achieves its significance; for grace is the answer to the human problem” (Niebuhr, 1958a, p. 105). It is clear that Niebuhr largely endorses the Augustinian or the Pauline description about the character of fallenness. Still, the reason why it is the “most significant characteristic of Pauline Christianity” is that it is the description of the *situation* in which God might intervene with grace.

Nonetheless, this truly appreciative comment should be interpreted and evaluated in the context of the entire article, which again manifests Niebuhr’s attentiveness toward Jewish thought. The Jewish capacity for civic virtue, the prophetic passion and sense for justice, the critical attitude towards the mighty, and the bias of justice towards the poor were just as attractive for Niebuhr in Jewish thought as the “prophetic analysis of the problems of the community” which “was the beginning of the realism which knew that power was never completely in service of justice” (Niebuhr, 1958a, pp. 91-94). In short, one of his decisive conclusion is that “[i]f prophetic sense of justice was more existential than the speculation of Greek philosophers, it may also be true that it was

more relevant to the problem of the community than the Christian ideal of love” (Niebuhr, 1958a, p. 92). Thus, no matter how high Augustine rose as a crucial author in Niebuhr’s thought, the social aspects of Jewish religion and the prophets remained where they were when he began the discussion of the prophetic religion in *Interpretation*, in the center.

In the second reference, Niebuhr – similar to *Christian Realism* – discusses the question of the double love commandment. Niebuhr argues that the first words of the second love commandment, “like unto it,” serves to express the equality of the two love commandments: “Love the Lord our God with all our soul and all our strength and all our mind” and „Love thy neighbor as thyself” (Niebuhr, 1958a, p. 119). These vertical and horizontal dimensions are united, and many fallacies stem from the fact that the superiority of the first love commandment is acknowledged above the other. Augustine’s “City of God” was “informed by *amor Dei*,” thus, the “love of the neighbor has an insecure place in the economy of the *amor Dei*” (Niebuhr, 1958a, pp. 119-120). As for Augustine, the object of love was the central question; the love of the neighbor can only manifest itself in the love of God; thus, the second commandment is subordinated to the first. (Niebuhr, 1958a, p. 120). In short, Niebuhr thought that Augustine’s interpretative framework of love erred theoretically and led to the lack of robust social ethics.

At least Augustine understood self-love and its relation to self-realization more appropriately. Augustine “distinguishes between two forms of self-love: that in which the self loves itself simply and that in which the self loves itself in God” (Niebuhr, 1958a, p. 120). It seems that Augustine realized something similar to Jesus’ paradox that “Whosoever seeketh to gain his life will lose it; but whosoever loseth his life will find it,” by describing a self-love that is directed to an object and end beyond itself (Niebuhr, 1958, p. 120). This is a serious compliment for Augustine in the case of Niebuhr since he was interested in how man can reach self-realization without self-love.

The positive image related to Augustine, who produced the “most significant amalgam of the biblical and Neo-Platonic viewpoint,” is further strengthened if the realist elements are considered (Niebuhr, 1958a, p. 119). Based on Niebuhr, Augustine

“describes the ‘city of the world’ realistically in terms of all its the particular loyalties, competitions and conflicts. He defines the equilibria of power which are necessary for justice and he rightly derives the order of the community from the security of some dominant power. Here are the beginnings of a social ethic, but it is made in contrast, rather than derived from, Christian principles.” (Niebuhr, 1958a, p. 119)

Though the idea of realist analysis is as old as *Moral Man* and the dominant source of order can be derived from *Christian Realism*, the other two elements are rare in Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine. First, Niebuhr writes about equilibria of power in relation to Augustine, a concept highly relevant to his social ethics as a prerequisite for social justice. It is disturbing that Niebuhr does not unfold his arguments here; the equilibria of power can be derived from his earlier interpretation of how Augustine viewed the relation between “international actors,” but it is not sure that he means it. The second exciting element is in the last sentence. What does Niebuhr mean by that Augustine had the “beginnings of a social ethic?” What are the aspects of this social ethics? Why is it in contrast to Christian principles? Niebuhr seems to perceive something from the Augustinian social ethics – which could be seen in *Christian Realism* – but does not deem it strong enough to be the primal guide. Probably that is why it is not elaborated systematically in his texts.

6.7.3. *The Structure of Nations and Empires*

In a letter to his friend and famous jurist, Felix Frankfurter written in 1956, Niebuhr reports that Robert Oppenheimer, then the director of the Institute for Advanced Study, invited him to write a book on “The Morality of Nations” (Niebuhr, 1991). As a product of his works at the Institute, the book which finally investigated the historical patterns of nations and empires to apply its conclusions in a nuclear age, was published in 1959 entitled *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (from now: *Structure*) (Niebuhr, 1959). It was not just Niebuhr’s last book before he retired from the Union but also one of his longest and least cited. The latter is not accidental. Though several parts, mostly those which are on the history of religious and political thought or international power politics, are theoretically rich or analytically precise, many writings, especially the historical chapters, are plain and simply undeveloped, both in analysis and conclusions

(which is not a surprise since he was not a historian). For instance, most parts of Niebuhr's account of the historical development of nation-states (chapters IX and X) do not fundamentally exceed the level of a high school history class (Niebuhr, 1959). Not to mention how diverse the topics are. Still, before delving into the sophisticated and relevant parts of the *Structure*, a content of a private letter worth to be shared, which is in connection with the book but leads to a crucial differentiation in relation to Augustine.

When Niebuhr moved to Princeton with Ursula to write his book in 1958, he wrote a letter to one of his closest friends, Episcopal bishop William Scarlett. After referring to the fact that they are settled "in a super-modern apartment with one whole side glass," he writes:

"I am getting started in my work though I find the prospect somewhat terrifying. About Barth and Tillich and myself. I wouldn't want to be Tertullian. He was too obscurantist. I would rather emulate Augustine. This comparison Tillich made. The reason I don't like the 'ontology of love' is that ontology is the sciences of essences and love is in history and not in essential nature the only ontology in love is the natural basis of marriage in heterosexuality. My quarrel with Tillich is that he subsumes all history and grace into metaphysics, but he does it with tremendous skill" (Niebuhr, 1958c).

Without investigating Niebuhr's objection to Tillich's "ontology of love," which is mainly on the application of love, Niebuhr's attentiveness towards Augustine's figure should be highlighted. He writes that he "would rather emulate Augustine" but maintains that Tillich made the comparison. Though these two statements are far from controversial, the way Niebuhr arranges and uses the words shows a kind of incited perspective. Namely, Tillich probably pointed to Niebuhr's closeness to Augustine but not to his emulation. Based on Niebuhr's personality and his books, it can be assumed that the word "emulation" is used because it has a double meaning. In short, it does not mean an explicit equation, but, in this context, it shows respect towards him with an ambition for being similar. Even if Augustine made severe mistakes, he was an enormous thinker. Niebuhr's argument that Augustine "proves himself a more reliable guide than any known thinker" (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 146) is also valid to himself. Niebuhr

was often embarrassed when others made flattering statements about him; he knew that it led to pride (even if sometimes he enjoyed the acknowledgments, it caused him mixed feelings). Niebuhr would never have said, “I am Augustine” or “I am better than Augustine.” Still, if Tillich, a great theologian, used this phrase, it was not alien to him to acknowledge that “I emulate Augustine.”¹⁰⁵

The preface of *Structure* includes exciting additions to the network in which the mature Niebuhr worked since he expresses his gratitude to Oppenheimer and those who read the whole manuscript, including – above John C. Bennett, and Llewellyn Woodward – Kenneth Thompson, Hans Morgenthau, and George Kennan. This also indicates how close the ties were between Niebuhr and contemporary realists and why Kennan could – as a realist – call Niebuhr the “father of us all” (Fox, 1985, p. 238). Without questioning the validity of Kennan’s aphorism, Fox underlines that it was Niebuhr’s philosophical perspective that Kennan appreciated, not his particular political judgments or foreign-policy views (Fox, 1985, p. 238).¹⁰⁶

Since *Structure* is around three-hundred pages, only those parts will be emphasized that directly or indirectly focus on Augustine (and even those will be limited). The first uniqueness of the book in this regard is that it contains plenty of Augustine references. To be more precise, it equals the level of *Nature and Destiny* and does not reach *Christian Realism* only because there is no separate chapter on Augustine. Niebuhr gathers most of his mature arguments on Augustine and stirs them to the reader (Niebuhr, 1959, pp. 99-107). This method is both beneficial and confusing. It is useful for those who want to read Niebuhr’s perception of Augustine in one place. Nevertheless, the context in which Augustine was discussed usually helped to understand his position. Furthermore, only one or a few topics were discussed longer; here, all his merits and errors are enlisted shortly after each other without a real

¹⁰⁵ It is exciting that already in 1941, in the review of Cochrane’s book, Niebuhr wrote that Cochrane “treats us to a remarkable astute historical analysis of pre-Augustinian Christian history, including the quasi-Platonism of Origen, the anti-rationalism of Tertullian (is Karl Barth the modern counterpart?) ...” (Niebuhr, 1941). Probably Cochrane’s extensive analyses sparked these distinctions in Niebuhr.

¹⁰⁶ The relation was two-way because Niebuhr also commented on Kennan’s work. In *Irony*, he argues that the “most rigorous and searching criticism of the weaknesses in our foreign policy, [...] has recently been made by one of our eminent specialists in foreign policy, Mr. George Kennan” (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 147). Niebuhr praises Kennan’s criticism of the idealists, but he argues that “his solution is wrong. For egotism is not the proper cure for an abstract and pretentious idealism (Niebuhr, 2008, p. 148).

investigation. For this reason, only a few new elements will be set, and two additional inconsistencies will be raised.

Though several shorter fragments mention Augustine (e.g., Niebuhr, 1959, pp. 33, 51, 83, 84), the focus on Augustine arrives in Niebuhr's discussion when the *pax Romana* is in collapse by Alaric's sack of Rome. Niebuhr begins his discussion with a general argument that Augustine's influence was certainly immense (Niebuhr, 1959, p. 100). It is evident that Augustine was an intellectual and spiritual giant, and none of the serious Christian theologians – neither directly nor indirectly – can avoid his influence. When Barth was asked in an interview about his former remark that “we are all Augustinians,” he explained that the “Augustinian influence is so omnipresent that I don't know where to begin” (Barth, 1967, p. 236).

In *Structure*, a new element takes place, which is a grounded statement, even if it is short. Niebuhr points out that while Augustine “artfully combined” Neo-Platonism with Hebraic Biblical elements, he wisely rejected the former concerning the myth of creation. By this, he could accept the “simple biblical dictum that ‘God saw all that he had made and behold it was very good’ [...] which lies at the basis of all life-affirming and history-affirming tendencies in western civilization” (Niebuhr, 1959, p. 100). Though Augustine only rightly interpreted this truth and did not add anything, it is a new compliment in Niebuhr's book. Unfortunately, Niebuhr does not unfold it, just like how he – similar to the arguments in *Pious* – meant that Augustine had a conception of relative justice derived from the balance of social forces (Niebuhr, 1959, p. 143).

The second exciting phenomenon is that Niebuhr mentions again that Augustine “sought to interpret both the creative and the destructive elements of human freedom” (Niebuhr, 1959). This part affirms what was concluded at *Christian Realism*. Here, creativity seems to be derived from the fact that Augustine explicated both the Christian doctrine of the image of God in man and that it is a fallen creature.¹⁰⁷ Augustine managed to describe creativity as an anthropological fact that becomes “alive” through human freedom.

¹⁰⁷ Later, Niebuhr also mentions the creative influence of Christianity by separating temporal and eternal (Niebuhr, 1959, p. 133). This notion is related to Augustine but not just to him; thus, it is not possible to formulate far-fetched conclusions.

One could only claim with great benevolence that Niebuhr does not end up in self-contradictions concerning Augustine in *Structure*. Only two examples will be presented here. First, he affirms what he formerly stated in *Christian Realism*, that Augustine was the first realist in Western thought. To be more precise, he writes that “[...] the fate of realism which Augustine first introduced to the western culture...” (Niebuhr, 1959, p. 40). At the same time, he also writes the following:

“Tertullian, who tried to preserve the value of the old eschatological tension of early Christianity, anticipated Augustine in his estimate of power realities which the loyal Constantinians later obscured. [...] Tertullian, in fact, anticipated Augustine’s critical judgment of the *civitas terrena*, availing himself of an ultimate principle of criticism for surveying the moral ambiguities of an imperium built by power. Tertullian, likewise, with equal lack of equivocation, rejected the religious veneration of the emperor” (Niebuhr, 1959, p. 97).

Though the term “realism” is not written explicitly, all three arguments on Tertullian are about realism, are connected to Augustine, and include the fact of anticipation. Thus, Augustine was the first realist, but Tertullian anticipated him in realism. Who was the first realist of Western thought then, Tertullian or Augustine?

The second charge concerning Niebuhr’s inconsistency is how Niebuhr relates Augustine to other authors, especially Hobbes and Luther. From the 1940s, even though Niebuhr maintained that Augustine was a realist, or his *civitas terrena* was too consistently realist, he usually differentiated it from the extraordinary realism of Hobbes and Luther. This argument is valid *before* and *after* the *Structure* (Niebuhr, 1953; 1965). Still, when he discusses the relationship between democracy and authority, he argues that “Hobbes’s description of political realities is remarkably similar to Augustine’s conception...” and “[b]oth Augustine and Hobbes may express an extravagant realism and fails to do justice to the moderating influences upon human ambitions...” (Niebuhr, 1959, p. 51). Now was Augustine’s realism as extravagant as Hobbes’ or not?

It needs to be accentuated that this inconsistency of Niebuhr’s thought is not exclusively connected to Augustine; it is a general characteristic. This presents what has been argued in the beginning, that even if he was a remarkable thinker with a scholarly vein,

Niebuhr was not a systematic thinker. Additionally, he was not an Augustine scholar. Instead, he was a normative political thinker with an attitude of a debater and a preacher, and he used the arguments that the context necessitated, also with Augustine. Considering Augustine, these inconsistencies are most visible in the *Structure*, which further limits the relevance of Augustine, despite the numerous references.

6.7.4. *Man's Nature and His Communities*

Man's Nature and His Communities (from now: *Man's Nature*) was Niebuhr's last book (Niebuhr, 1965). Though it is short, it is a significant one for several reasons. Niebuhr succinctly emphasizes its relevance when, in the first chapter, titled *Introduction: Changing Perspectives*, he writes that the essays are "intended to serve two purposes: namely, to summarize, and to revise previously held opinions" (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 15). The first chapter follows the development of Niebuhr's thought, concentrating on "permanent" Niebuhrian ideas and those which changed over time. For instance, he writes about his constant appreciation of Jewish thought, the growing recognition of Catholic values, or his regret over the pedagogical error of using the concept of original sin. A year later, Niebuhr referred to this book which "Augustine would call [...] recantations" (Niebuhr, 1966). Though this introductory chapter, with its autobiographical note, might be a useful guide for Niebuhr scholars, the book's essence is in its main essay, which has the same title as the book itself, *Man's Nature and His Communities*.

Before concentrating on the Augustinian references in the central essay, an idea in the introduction deserves consideration. It is on using the thoroughly theological terms sin and original sin in modern culture. Niebuhr maintains that his perspective of these notions – formulated in *Nature and Destiny* – did not change in content. Still, by the end of his life, he understood that the terms were not necessarily advantageous. He explains:

"My theological preoccupation prompted me to define the persistence and universality of man's self-regard as "original sin." This was historically and symbolically correct. But my pedagogical error consisted in seeking to challenge modern optimism with the theological doctrine which was anathema to modern culture. [...] The remnants of social optimism pictured me as a regressive religious authoritarian, caught in the toils of an ancient legend. But it was even

more important that the “realists,” including many, if not most, political philosophers who were in substantial agreement with positions taken in my Gifford Lectures, were careful to state that their agreement did not extend to my “theological presuppositions” (Niebuhr, 1965. p. 24).

This argument perfectly illuminates how difficult it is to use theological concepts in the political and social sphere, especially in a way acceptable to modern culture. Imagine how secularized (or sensitive) modern culture is if – in Niebuhr’s era, in the mid-20th century – even his fellow realists distanced themselves from these theological ideas. Niebuhr’s decision in the last book is to “use more sober symbols of describing well-knowns facts” (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 24). What is lost, and what is gained with this solution? The new position taken can be framed by anthropological pessimism that – due to similar conclusions – meets the appreciation of conservatives and secular realists. Nonetheless, the acceptance of the modern culture of this pessimism, in general, is nowhere near guaranteed, especially considering the two features Niebuhr highlighted in *Christian Realism*: the optimistic approach to the idea of human progress and the perfectibility of man. What may be lost is the profundity of the Christian concept of sin that declares – with its oppressive weight – that man is *sinful* (not only limited, selfish, or immoral). It is not argued that Niebuhr committed a fault; in certain situations, mainly when the historical reality verifies it (for instance, in the cases of wars), more sober (or secular) terms may be more efficient in calling attention to the destructive potentialities of human beings. Ultimately, it is clear that Niebuhr touched upon one of the critical questions of Christianity in the modern era: how to infuse theological concepts into the political context adequately.

Returning to the essay, the subtitle of the chapter, *A Critical Survey of Idealist and Realist Political Theories*, easily captures the attention of any political theorist. For Niebuhr aims to summarize the history of the political thought of the past 2500 years, from the Greeks to the moderns, in the framework of realism and idealism. Niebuhr has around 55 pages for this incredible ambition, but it helps him that he has already elaborated on these issues in-depth several times before.¹⁰⁸ The expression “critical

¹⁰⁸ So, for example, his arguments in *Nature and Destiny* when he writes about a man being a rational creature do not need to be repeated (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 30). Furthermore, he already elaborated on the realism of Machiavelli, Hobbes and Luther (Niebuhr, 1959, pp. 141-144).

survey” is also accurate since Niebuhr cannot accept any realist or idealist theories entirely; as it would be compulsory to criticize something. Furthermore, he does not construct his theory, but his perspective becomes visible in tension with these ideas. As emphasized above, this dialecticism was analogous to Augustine’s way of making theories. Altogether the question is whether he, compared to his previous theories, can add any substantial or contrasting ideas in general or concerning Augustine.

The first difference is that he interprets realists and idealists through their attitudes toward the “results” of freedom. He argues that “[r]ealists emphasize the disruptive effect of human freedom on the community,” while “idealists, on the other hand, regard man’s rational freedom primarily in terms of its creative capacity...” (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 31). In contrast to his former definitions of realism and idealism in *Augustine’s Political Realism* (Niebuhr, 1953, pp. 119-120), this approach brings closer the idea of associating realists with pessimism and idealists with optimism. He adds that “most consistent theories, whether realist or idealist of political behavior, fail to observe the intricate relation between the creative and disruptive tendencies of human freedom” (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 31). Thus, everyone who is excessive, too consistent, or too rigorous is mistaken: the religious realists (religious or secular), the rational idealists, and the religious idealists. Again, Niebuhr clearly condemns consistent realisms, even though he formerly appreciated realism as an approach that considers all factors (including moral), social and political reality (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 119). Niebuhr’s inconsistencies or inaccuracies in his use of the terms, such as realism, might confuse, not to mention that in some instances, he places “realism” between hyphens (e.g., Niebuhr, 1965, p. 40).

After Aristotle, Plato, Freud, Marx, Hebraism, and Jesus, comes St. Paul in Niebuhr’s analysis. He argues that Paul’s idealism can be detected in his views on the spiritual rebirth of individuals by grace and in his treatment of the Church as the “body of Christ.” On the other hand, his realism prompted him to call attention to the “morally ambiguous human nature” and that civil society needs authority instituted by God to prevent evil and construct order (Niebuhr, 1965, pp. 42-43). Augustine, together with Luther, enters the stage as a “chief discipline” of Paul. Niebuhr argues that “Augustine’s classic *De Civitate Dei* related the Pauline concept of *Agape*, or perfect love to a

mythical *Civitas Dei*, and thereby transmuted it into a neo-Platonic *Amor Dei*” (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 45).

The reoccurring question at Niebuhr, which was discussed before, whether Augustine identified the city of God with the historic Church, is present again. Indirectly Niebuhr acknowledges his former error, or, at least, overstatement when he concludes that though Augustine was uncertain about it, “his denials of the identity were more numerous than his hints of identity” (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 43). From this, Niebuhr changes his former perspective again by acknowledging that Augustine did not “accord divine sanction to the established civil authority” (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 44). Probably these changes were caused by acquiring a more profound knowledge of Augustine. Additionally, even if these are too specific questions and too severe differences from his former arguments to attribute to it solely, it aligns with the general change in Niebuhr’s attitude, namely that he regretted his earlier offensive or polemic rhetoric.

It should also be asserted that Niebuhr frames Augustine in relatively new ways, even in his late writings. Here, as a disciple of Paul and an idealist with his conception of *Civitas Dei*. However, it is argued that Niebuhr had these ideas beforehand; the feeling of novelty occurs primarily because he has written a few about Augustine.

The realism of Augustine’s thought is not omitted either. Niebuhr writes that “the Augustinian *Civitas Terrena* was the first and most rigorous expression of Christian realism” (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 43). Niebuhr already connected Augustine and Christian realism a decade ago (Niebuhr, 1953), affirming this relation. However, at least two stressful questions occur with this strong argument. First, what is Christian realism? In other words, in what manner Augustinian *civitas terrena* is the first representative? Though, as it was presented at the beginning of the dissertation, Christian realism can be conceptualized in many ways, Niebuhr’s definition would undoubtedly differ from theirs. The problem is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to find an exact meaning at Niebuhr of what Christian realism is. Fortunately, he helps in the same essay by stating that the following assumption is the basis of Christian realism: “In principle, the Christian faith holds that human nature contains both self-regarding and social impulses and that the former is stronger than the latter” (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 39). It must be underlined that he does not write that it is Christian realism, neither he states that it

consists of all elements of Christian realism. Therefore, it is not his definition of Christian realism but the basis of it. Indeed, Augustine's *civitas terrena* would fit this basic assumption, not just from Niebuhr's perspective but in general.

The second significant question is whether Augustinian *civitas terrena*, as an expression of Christian realism, can be used as a normative guide. Or, in other words, whether Niebuhr appreciates Augustine's expression of Christian realism. Surprisingly, he does not. Or, at least, not entirely. If one suggested that secular realism, secular idealism, and religious idealism should be replaced by Christian realism, with which Niebuhr is altogether satisfied, it was an error. Not all forms of Christian realism are enough; Augustinian is not since it had

“the defect of all consistent realistic accounts of human behavior. Relations in this ‘city’ were governed purely by self-love, by an uneasy armistice between contending interests and by the provisional peace caused by the momentary victory of a dominant political force” (Niebuhr, 1965, pp. 43-44).

So, Niebuhr has at least two problems, with Augustine's Christian realism manifested in *civitas terrena*. First, the “city” is never only governed purely by self-love. Augustine was blind to see the creative capabilities of human nature, according to Niebuhr. It should be noted that with this idea, Niebuhr contrasts with scholars, such as Elshtain or Gregory, who argue that it is possible to derive a robust social ethic from Augustine's concepts, such as from his concept of love. Second, in the end, it does not matter whether Augustine was right or wrong with this specific argument since, mainly because they cannot track the complexity of reality, *all consistent* theories fail. Even if Niebuhr was a moral realist in theological questions and social and political ethics, he was a pragmatist.

Continuing his elaboration on Augustine's realism, Niebuhr brings the criticism of Cicero as an example again. Augustine was aware of the power factors behind the idealistic conception of Cicero's *Pax Romana*. It was not just merit of the Church Father but a feature Niebuhr unequivocally praised after his encounter with Henry Ford. He affirmed this crucial characteristic at Marx (and sometimes at Freud) and then at

Augustine.¹⁰⁹ This capability of detecting the factors of self-interest and power behind the seemingly rational and righteous ideals was so essential for Niebuhr that, as presented above, it became the basis of his definition of realism (Niebuhr, 1953, p. 120).

In his last book, Niebuhr also presents how Augustine's rigorism became even more extravagant in Luther's thought, who was also a Christian realist (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 63), and concludes that their "realism was too consistent to give a true picture of either human nature or the human community, even before the advent of free government, and was certainly irrelevant to modern democratic governments" (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 46). In his next chapter he continues this by treating Augustine's "realism" too excessive which lead to the fact that he could not acknowledge the "Roman and Stoic genius for universal imperial community" (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 97). This was due to his Neo-Platonist conception of the distinctions between the two cities in which self-love is simply absent since every love, even the love of the neighbor, should lead towards the love of the highest object, God. Thus, the second love commandment was obscured – repeats Niebuhr (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 98). Furthermore, the Augustinian doctrine of grace, together with the Pauline one, was right in placing grace to a superior level in saving men from "undue and destructive self-regard." However, they thought this kind of "saving grace," but they did not place enough emphasis on the relevance of the "common grace" (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 118).

Thus, besides the positive evaluation, the harmful effects of Augustine's exaggerated realism are now more prominent. The extremely grim description of earthly conditions made Augustine utterly pessimistic in his belief in man's moral capacity and development. It can be recalled that around twenty-five years before, in *Nature and Destiny*, Niebuhr highly appreciated Augustine's views on human nature (Niebuhr, 1964). Moreover, around ten years earlier, in *Christian Realism*, he emphasized that Augustine's realism in power politics, both domestic affairs and international relations, is still valid in modern times (Niebuhr, 1953). Niebuhr does not contradict himself since

¹⁰⁹ Though not more than a simple parallel should be seen in it, Niebuhr mentions Marx and Augustine in the same context once. In *The Structure of Nations and Empires*, he discusses how communism in Russia diverged from what Marx envisioned and argues that Marx "certainly would have been as surprised by the use of which Russian power made of this universalism as Augustine would have been surprised by the use which was made of his conception of the „City of God“ by the Cluniac monk, Hildebrand, who ruled as Pope Gregory and quoted Augustine to justify the power and prestige of the medieval papacy" (Niebuhr, 1959, p. 242). Again, Niebuhr acquits Augustine of the sin he previously accused him of.

he writes on the whole concept of Augustine's *civitas terrena*, not on separate parts of it, which he also endorses. Nevertheless, his criticism seems to be more grievous. Also, in relation to the hereditary character of original sin, which he delicately handled in *Nature and Density*, he now calls "horrendous" (Niebuhr, 1965, p. 24).

6.7.5. *A late interview and a conclusion*

Niebuhr's last comments on Augustine will not be from a book but from a late interview conducted in 1966. The discussion touches on different topics, but the interviewer, Patrick Granfield, is straightforward with his question: "Would you call St. Augustine a 'Christian realist'?" Niebuhr answers in the following way:

"Definitely. Though I came to him rather late in my career, Augustine was for me a wonderful introduction into realism. He had a very realistic, in my present opinion, too realistic, analysis of the power realities of the *civitas terrena*, which are governed by self-love. I studied Augustine further and discovered that there was something wrong about his conception of the *Civitas Dei* and that something wrong was his Neoplatonism. There was no place for the love of brother, because the love of God was set against the love of self, and this love of self-contaminated the love of created things. I found out that Augustine availed himself, from the standpoint of the normative ethics of the City of God, of Stoic radicalism and equalitarianism. This is the pathos of all historical, organized religions (Niebuhr, 1966).

Altogether nothing new, but it is analogous to Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine in his last theoretical phase. Realism and the deficient understanding of love were already present in the 1950s; the only substantial change is that even if Augustine's concept of *civitas Dei* occurs more frequently, the negative consequences of Augustine's pessimism are more emphasized. Niebuhr did not return to his early interpretations of Augustine since he could not forget all he knew about Augustine and all that Augustine gave him (such as the wonderful introduction to realism). But the general tone of the last theoretical phase is less favorable than the previous two.

Above the enlisted appreciation of Niebuhr at the beginning of this dissertation from Bennett, Schlesinger, and Morgenthau, Niebuhr was also regarded as the "greatest

native-born Protestant theologian since Jonathan Edwards” (Patterson 1977, p. 13). It was probably unplanned, but as Niebuhr had a residence in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in his late life, it happened that he preached in the same Church (First Congregational Church) where Jonathan Edwards ministered roughly two-hundred years before him. It was also Stockbridge, where Niebuhr died in 1971.

His relevance from the 1930s was remarkable. Stone recalls that

“[s]hortly before his death eighteen of his books were still in print, his aphorisms were widely quoted and a whole generation of scholars, preachers, and policymakers was deeply affected by those who used much of his conceptual apparatus” (Stone, 1992. xi).

Indeed, beyond many achievements, Niebuhr’s vocabulary distinguished him from others. It is also telling that among the most significant Protestant theologians of the time, Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Rudolph Bultmann, a separate elective course on Niebuhr’s theology was announced at the Columbia Theological Seminary during his lifetime. The course catalog for 1965-1966 confirms that Shirley Caperton Guthrie, professor of systematic theology, taught *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr* (CTS, 1965). Probably it did not disturb them that Niebuhr did not treat himself as a proper theologian, and they were right. The summary of the course was the following:

“This is a seminar to investigate the contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr to the life of the American Church. Special attention is given to Niebuhr’s concern for realistic and responsible Christian action in dealing with political and social problems” (CTS, 1965, p. 65).

In short, Niebuhr overcame one of his fears that he confessed in the *Leaves*; by the end of his life, he was everything but anonymous.

7. CONCLUSION – “A CRITICAL STUDENT OF AUGUSTINE”

Niebuhr’s magnetic presence, urgency for social action, and constant demand for social justice lifted him above most of his contemporaries.¹¹⁰ Some argued that he did not only follow the prophets but was also a prophet or had a prophetic voice (e.g., Davies 1948). John A. Mackay probably exaggerated in 1934 by claiming that Niebuhr is a “Nahum, or Prophet of Doom, among American philosophers” (quotes Bingham 1961, p. 153). Nevertheless, it is valid that Jewish prophets, including their inclination for social justice and the prophet’s role, entered Niebuhr’s mind early, much earlier than Augustine. It was also presented that this influence remained in Niebuhr until the end of his life. This trend was emphasized because it belongs to Niebuhr’s thought and could be used to balance the Augustinian opposite.

It is an exciting coincidence that in an Augustine translation that Niebuhr used, Whitney J. Oates devotes a few notes to Niebuhr in the preface. He argues that the naïve optimists of early twentieth-century Protestantism neglected Augustine’s thought, and “Reinhold Niebuhr, with a profound sense of the comprehensiveness of Christianity, has reacted vigorously against this modern version of Protestantism” (Oates, 1948, p. xii). Oates appreciates Niebuhr’s stance towards the simplistic version of Protestantism but argues that he is too deeply involved in the prophetic tradition and his excessive emphasis on the fallen state of human beings; the pendulum swings to the other side. To balance between optimist Protestantism and Niebuhrian sin-centeredness, “St. Augustine’s balanced view can contribute to twentieth-century Christianity” (Oates, 1948, p. xii). Although this introduction was written in 1948, thus, before Niebuhr wrote his separate essay on Augustine, it is almost amusing that while Oates accuses Niebuhr of being too realist and offers Augustine as a cure, Niebuhr accuses Augustine of being too realist and offers himself as a cure. This presents how hard it is to do justice to both elements in Niebuhr’s thought.

As anticipated in the chapter *Challenges and Limitations* (chapter 5), this dissertation deliberately avoided the in-depth analysis of Christian realism. Nonetheless, based on the investigation of Niebuhr’s interpretation of Augustine, an argument can be

¹¹⁰ For Niebuhr’s magnetic rhetoric Bingham, 1961, pp. 3-4.

formulated on Augustine's role in Niebuhr's Christian realism. It was argued that Christian realism is ultimately about implementing social justice that requires an adequate understanding of human nature and political and social reality. Thus, the three elements are (1) implementing social justice, (2) an adequate understanding of human nature, and (3) an adequate understanding of political and social reality.

The dissertation confirmed that the first element, implementing social justice, did not originate from Augustine but primarily from Niebuhr's social attentiveness, the legacy of the Social Gospel, and the prophetic tradition. By the end of the second theoretical phase and the beginning of the third, it was clear that the value of social justice was at the center of Niebuhr's social ethics. Until that point, Augustine was not present substantively in Niebuhr's thought.

The second aspect, an adequate understanding of human nature, was closely related to Augustine. The dissertation could not balance Augustine's influence on Niebuhr's theological anthropology with other definitive authors (such as Paul, Luther, Kierkegaard, or Buber). Still, the interpretation of the topics related to Augustine (image of man in God, man as a creature, sin, original sin, pride, grace, love) justifies the assumption that Augustine was a crucial figure in the second element.

The most challenging component in this regard is the adequate understanding of political and social reality. The complication lies in that Niebuhr's perspective changed throughout his scholarship, and it is not evident which phase should be considered. It was argued that Niebuhr's early political realism in the second phase stemmed from his "searching honesty," experiences in Detroit, and Marxist insights. It could be concluded that these factors were enough to understand political and social reality adequately, and Augustine had no role in it. Nevertheless, these insights manifested themselves mainly in analyzing the *social* sphere. Augustine becomes relevant in this aspect not *primarily* by enriching Niebuhr's knowledge on the social and political questions directly (even if, based on Niebuhr's examples on the application of Augustine's social theory in modern times, Augustine was valuable in this regard as well). He develops into an indispensable influence since the second aspect, the adequate understanding of human nature, contributes to the third, the adequate understanding of political and social reality. The gradual change between the fourth and the fifth theoretical phase was the incorporation

of theological aspects into the political ones. In this way, Augustine plays an *indirect* but crucial role in the Niebuhrian Christian realism.

The general ambition of the dissertation was to contribute to the understanding of Augustine's role in Niebuhr's thought by systematically elaborating and evaluating Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine. First, Niebuhr was placed into the context of realism and Christian realism, followed by a review of the three paths of the literature. Based on nineteen primary sources, Niebuhr's books, his interpretation of Augustine was presented through six theoretical phases from 1913 to 1971.¹¹¹ The focus was on the content and context of Niebuhr's thoughts on Augustine and his ideas, the different characteristics of Niebuhr's theoretical phases, the reasons for changes, and the overall picture. Throughout the dissertation, not only the most significant misinterpretations of Augustine were addressed, but also those authors who framed Niebuhr's mind, especially Charles Norris Cochrane.

The first theoretical phase (1913-1928) included three writings, *Young Reinhold Niebuhr*, *Leaves*, and *Does Civilization*. Though Augustine occurs in the last book, the reference is irrelevant. Nevertheless, this period allowed dealing with definitive aspects of Niebuhr's thought, his early idealism, the opposite stances of sentimentality and cynicism, the prophets' role, and early experiences in Detroit. The simple fact that Niebuhr did not treat Augustine as a helpful source was also derived from the chasm between a young Protestant pastor from Detroit and an old Orthodox Catholic.

Niebuhr's entry into the Union Theological Seminary brought new possibilities in involving himself in theology, but he turned toward socialism and politics. While *Contribution* captures a moment of hesitation between Christianity and Marxism, *Moral Man*, which gained fame for Niebuhr, was a handbook for radical social action for Christians. Here Augustine occurred first with his realism, but the interpretation's message was defeatism. *Reflections*, Niebuhr's allegedly most Marxist book, began to deal with Christian orthodoxy, but the generally negative opinion on it and one of their representatives, Augustine, remained. The second theoretical phase (1928-1934) also presented that Niebuhr's early interpretation of Augustine relied on other authors (e.g., McIlwain and Carlyle).

¹¹¹ For a table that summarizes the six theoretical phases see Appendix 3.

The third theoretical phase (1935-1939) was the most turbulent since Niebuhr, parallel to his theological and philosophical research, began to face Augustine. *Interpretation* was Niebuhr's first Christian ethics, but it brought rather a prophetic than an Augustinian tone. As a product of Anglican Augustinianism, the morning prayer in *The Book of the Common Prayer* was surprisingly apprehended by Niebuhr as the opposite of modern rationalism and idealism. *Beyond Tragedy* was the first book in which Augustine gave meaning to history; it was treated as a positive feature. The end of the third theoretical phase meant the end of the first part of the dissertation. Until this point, the general outline of Niebuhr's thought was summarized, and a substantive emphasis was given on the factors which led Niebuhr toward Augustine, including his brother H. Richard Niebuhr's criticism.

Nature and Destiny brought a breakthrough in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine. The image of God in man, sin, original sin, grace, and Augustine's social ideas were not just interpreted, but most of them were given a new light. Augustine became a part of Niebuhr's theological thought, which remained until the end of his life. Based on his book and Niebuhr's review of his book, the Canadian historian Charles Norris Cochrane's influence became unequivocal. Though Niebuhr's magnum opus dominated the fourth theoretical phase (1939-1952) in which Augustine became the "first theologian," his books, *Christianity, Children, Discerning, Faith and History, and Irony*, were reviewed shortly.

The crown jewel of Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine is *Augustine's Political Realism* in *Christian Realism*. Without getting into contradictions, Niebuhr could get out of Cochrane's shadow by introducing realism, Augustine's ethics of love, into his interpretation. The tremendous number of examples of the applicability of Augustine further strengthened the relevance of Augustine's ideas. Though *Self* could not provide any severe additions, in the fifth theoretical phase (1952-1958), Niebuhr made Augustine a founding father of Christian realism. Also, Augustine became a central figure in Niebuhr's political thought.

The last phase (1958-1971) included three late books *Pious, Structure, and Man's Nature*. Here, Augustine remained a frequent reference point, but, for obvious reasons, no real novelty arrived in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine, even if he began to

stress the deficiencies of Augustine's rigorous pessimism. To sum it up, Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine confirmed the general idea that Augustine was crucial for Niebuhr's thought. Though he discovered Augustine late, his theological thinking and political thought gained new impulses from Augustine, lasting until the end of his life. Therefore, it is safe to say that Niebuhr was a student of Augustine.

One of the permanent features of Niebuhr's thought, representing itself from the first to the last book, is that he criticizes almost everyone. If he discusses any author or wave of thought in length (from the Greeks to his contemporaries), Niebuhr treats them as targets of criticism. Niebuhr remained a debater from his first successful debate contest at Eden Theological Seminary. Sometimes it is so dominant that it is hard to decide whether he is a critical thinker or simply a nit-picker. Still, it should be emphasized that, besides his general attitude, he cannot formulate a conclusion on an entirely positive author due to a more profound reason. Namely, the fact that no one is perfect but God. Even before he immersed himself in Augustine's thoughts, he shared the Augustinian idea that all human achievements in history are fragmentary and contingent.

Though some authors are more positive in his taught than others, for instance, Pascal or the Old Testament prophets are not significant targets of criticism, he did not obscure this Christian axiom. Even if Jesus, his doctrines, including his paradoxes, were central for Niebuhr, he once argued that – even if it was meaningful in the end – but Jesus made an error in expecting the establishment of the Kingdom of God in history too soon (Niebuhr, 1964b, pp. 49-50). Thus, it perfectly fits Niebuhr what Cochrane stated: “As the Christian (somewhat ungenerously) put it, the best approach to truth is through a study of error” (Cochrane, 1940, p. vii). Augustine, as presented, was not an exception. Therefore, Niebuhr was not only a student and a critique of Augustine but a “critical student of Augustine.”

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. List of previous writings on Niebuhr

The appendix enlists my previous writings, which are not in the bibliography but are related to the topic of this dissertation.

Darabos, Ádám (2016): *Reinhold Niebuhr és a keresztény realizmus*. Unpublished article for the Bibó István College for Advanced Studies

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Appendix 2. Theological anthropological aspects in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine	
Human nature	Human beings are made in the image of God but are also creatures (Niebuhr, 1964a).
Doctrine of the image of God	"Augustine, in this as in other doctrines, the first Christian theologian to comprehend the full implications of the Christian doctrine of man" (Niebuhr, 1964a, pp. 153-154).
Sin	Sin is an inevitable feature of human life, and sin lies in the defect of will and not the body, as Augustine professed. Sin should be distinguished from finiteness (Niebuhr, 1964a).
Pride	Pride is the quintessence of sins; sin as sensuality also flows from it. The "definition of sin as pride is consistently maintained in the train of theology known as Augustinian" (Niebuhr, 1964a, p. 186).
Grace	Niebuhr favored the Pauline concept of grace over the Augustinian. In parallel to Lutheranism, he maintained that Augustine underestimated the influence of grace in eradicating self-love and pride (Niebuhr, 1964b).
Love	Niebuhr remains loyal to his previous understanding of love and its role in social life; thus, he criticizes Augustine's concept of love based on the idea that Augustine overemphasized the first love commandment compared to the second. (Niebuhr, 1953)

Table 1. Theological anthropological aspects in Niebuhr's interpretation of Augustine

Appendix 3. Tables of Summary

1. A young protestant pastor and an old Orthodox Catholic (1913-1928)

2. Too socialist to be Augustinian (1928-1934)

3. Prophetism over Augustinianism (1935-1939)

Key facts

- Yale Divinity School (B.D. and M.A.)
- Bethel Evangelical Church (1915-1928)
- Liberal or idealist phase

- Union Theological Seminary (1928-1960)
- Public intellectual and politician
- Marxist or radical socialist phase

- Invitation to the Gifford Lectures (1934)
- Gifford Lectures in 1939 Edinburgh (World War II.)

Sources

- *Young Reinhold Niebuhr (1911-1931)*
- *Does Civilization Need Religion? (1927)*
- *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic (1929)*

- *The Contribution of Religion to Social Work (1932)*
- *Moral Man and Immoral Society (1932)*
- *Reflections on the End of an Era (1934)*

- *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (1935)*
- *The English Church: An American View (1936) – The Book of Common Prayer*
- *Beyond Tragedy (1937)*

General development

- Early idealism and the seeds of realism
- Sentimentality vs. cynicism
- Role of the prophets
- Detroit as a source of experience – implications for Augustine

- Hesitation between Marxism and Christianity
- Social and political action on Christian ethical grounds
- Political realism of Marxism

- Theological research (love and justice)
- The influence of prophetism
- The problem of sin (pride) and original sin

Augustine

- Almost entire lacks
- Augustine, as a representative of (Catholic) Orthodoxy
- Immature interpretation

- Few references – often critical (defeatism, social inaction)
- Augustine as a realist
- „Borrowed” interpretations (McIlwain and Carlyle)
- Still not Augustinianism

- The most severe criticisms (literalism, Church as an object of grace, divine appointment of wicked rulers)
- A few acknowledgments (meaning to history, dialecticism)
- The role of criticisms (H. Richard Niebuhr)

4. Augustine, the “first theologian” (1940-1952)

5. Augustine, the Christian realist (1953-1958)

6. Augustine, the rigorous Christian realist (1958-1971)

Key facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The peak of Niebuhr’s scholarship and journalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A series of strokes (1952) – changed lifestyle (depression) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retirement from Union (1960)
Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Christianity and Power Politics</i> (1940), <i>The Nature and Destiny of Man</i> (1941; 1943), <i>The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness</i> (1944), <i>Discerning the Signs of the Times</i> (1946) <i>Faith and History</i> (1949) <i>The Irony of American History</i> (1952) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Christian Realism and Political Problems</i> (1953) – <i>Augustine’s Political Realism</i> <i>The Self and the Dramas of History</i> (1955) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Pious and Secular America</i> (1958) <i>The Structure of Nations and Empires</i> (1959) <i>Man’s Nature and His Communities</i> (1965)
General development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-Nazism, anti-pacifism New world order – a Christian basis Mature theologian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-communism (anti-utopianism) More focus on Christian realism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moderate changes in emphases (conservatism, values of Catholicism, and Jewish thought) Summaries (retractions or reconsiderations) – less polemics
Augustine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Augustine as a crucial source (the „first theologian”) Augustine as a theologian (image of God, sin, pride, grace, and social thought) The influence of Charles Norris Cochrane 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New topics (realism, ethics of love) – Augustine as a political realist and Christian realist Augustine as the „most reliable guide” (theoretical validity and practical applicability) Augustine as a central figure in Niebuhr’s thought 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No substantial novelty <i>Civitas Dei</i> vs. rigorous pessimism (too realist) „Wonderful introduction to realism”