

Cluster Writers Report, Evaluate Lectures Presented By Dr. Niebuhr

By PATTYE LITTLE

A special chapel program on morning, Nov. 13, Dr. Richard Niebuhr, Harvard divinity professor, lectured Mercerians on subject "Nature and History: World or Two?"

He began with the assertion that modern man has been in quest of the natural, a way of life that has negated the authority of nature. This quest has played a significant part in western culture, this search for an unwritten law that is equally evident to all men.

This resulted in the 18th century in the concept of a natural religion, a religion prior to the revealed religions, a religion given to man because he is man.

In the 20th century, the scientist has become the priest, his pronouncements have unquestionable authority. Scientists are supposed to have contact with the basic nature reality. Twentieth century man is pre-occupied, said Niebuhr, with a quest for health, or natural condition for human happiness.

Why, he asked, does the idea of the natural assume such importance for us? Why, for instance, do we think it proper to orient our lives around a diet, a pre-occupation of the whole population? Because, Niebuhr suggests, we believe in the natural or nature being identical with and a symbol of law. We are looking for a foundation of order that cannot be challenged by man and to which we must conform to be man, conforming to this law, or order, being, we become genuine man and thus attain security and happiness.

There is, however, a difficulty, Niebuhr notes. "The idea of nature is constantly changing." The idea of the natural is a very abstract idea. Even the idea of a natural man has fluctuated, he pointed out, because life has adapted to almost every environment.

Modern medicine has created a false state of nature in prolonging life span by conquest of diseases which is natural or un-natural, depending on the century to which it belongs and has thus changed the idea of the natural.

There is no abiding eternal idea of the natural, he reiterated. By seeking a thing is natural, man is seeking a refuge from responsibility and the need to make decisions. "While we may use nature as an explanation," he said, "we must understand that man must make decisions as to what he does."

The idea of nature is inseparable from the Christian faith," he stated, noting that while nature had a definite part in Creation, "we recognized the distinction between nature and his humanity. We will find himself (or fulfillment) only in other men."

There was no absolute pattern of behavior given to Adam, only a command to be faithful to Eve. "He is a historical being and a natural being, Niebuhr declared. "He finds his own needs in other men."

In tracing the history of Israel as a history of a group fused with God, Israel was not a natural religion, Niebuhr takes up the subject of Christ and the New Testam-

The Kingdom of God, which Christ preached, and which Niebuhr conceives of as being the fulfillment of man's destiny, comes to those who keep sharp vigil.

Jesus taught, Niebuhr said, that we should look through nature to the law of God. "Jesus' own dying, suffering and resurrection conforms to this teaching. His humanity was an example of the ever-new creative presence of God bringing the new to pass."

"Human life does not depend on an inherent law of growth," Niebuhr postulated, "but on the continued creativity of God." The essence of faith, he said, is not to despise nature.

"The natural cannot supply the clue to our proper behavior, we must find a new balance," he concluded. "The wisdom of the Christian religion is not that man finds his fulfillment in conforming to the natural, but in becoming creator of the natural."

By CLIFF HENDRIX

"Adam, where art thou?" This quote taken from The New Testament and Myth, sums up the entire approach that Rudolph Bultmann feels that man must take if he is to enter into relationship with God.

Thus spoke Dr. Richard R. Niebuhr, guest speaker at Mercer last weekend in his address "The Bible and the 20th Century Man" which treated Bultmann's solution to this problem.

In order to resolve this dilemma, Dr. Niebuhr said, Bultmann has stated that no knowledge of religious significance can take place in the world of fact, in the realm of space and time, in history or in nature. Rather, Bultmann concludes; man, at any point in history must face God as a free individual, with no attempt to hide in nature or in fact, man must stand before God naked, lacking factual footing as God once called the first man Adam to do.

To Bultmann, any attempt of man to see God in the forms and structures of nature is merely evidence of man's sinful condition.

This modern man misses the point when he fails to see meaning to the New Testament, merely because the various miracle accounts do not square with his concept of the world posited by the industrial technological culture of the modern West.

The New Testament must be read in the light of the "de-mythologizing concept" in which the inner truths posited about extra-factual reality are clothed in miracle accounts related by man with a different world view from that of the 20th century.

The miracle accounts can't be discarded Bultmann feels, for they are too closely woven in with the whole New Testament message, rather one must real through the myth accounts to the real message of the New Testament which concerns a new self-understanding and belief in God which has nothing to do with our world of fact and history.

So, just as God called Adam in the Genesis narrative to stand before Him naked rather than hide himself in the Garden, Bultmann, Niebuhr feels, calls upon man to face God having stripped himself

of all connections with the realm of space and time; man is called to cease his effort to escape God with its mass man, mundaneness and over-organized-bureaucratic culture and, to face God as a free and responsible individual.

By FERRELL RUIS

Dr. Richard R. Niebuhr has come and gone and one might seriously ask the question "What lasting impression did he make at Mercer?" It is apparent that various responses can be given to this question.

"He was too deep for me," said one honest student who was so engrossed in his studies during the chapel lecture that he wasn't so polite as to fall asleep.

"What he said was good, but I

didn't understand him," remarked another.

"There have been few speakers on Mercer's campus who have made as great an impact as Niebuhr has..." replied a faculty member, who continued with good-humored hyperbole. "He will probably be the most outstanding American theologian since Jonathan Edwards."

And such were the answers. However you look at it you cannot deny the fact that Dr. Niebuhr has visited Mercer. The preparatory discussion groups, appropriately dubbed "Ready for Richard" groups, inspired deep thought on the part of many students.

His lecture Thursday night was The Bible and Twentieth-Century Man. This subject was discussed from the point of view of a well-known contemporary theologian, Rudolf Bultmann.

The chapel lecture on Friday, Nature and History - One World

or Two, was concerned with two themes that have been variously interpreted by philosophers, and which underlie any real understanding of the book Dr. Niebuhr has written.

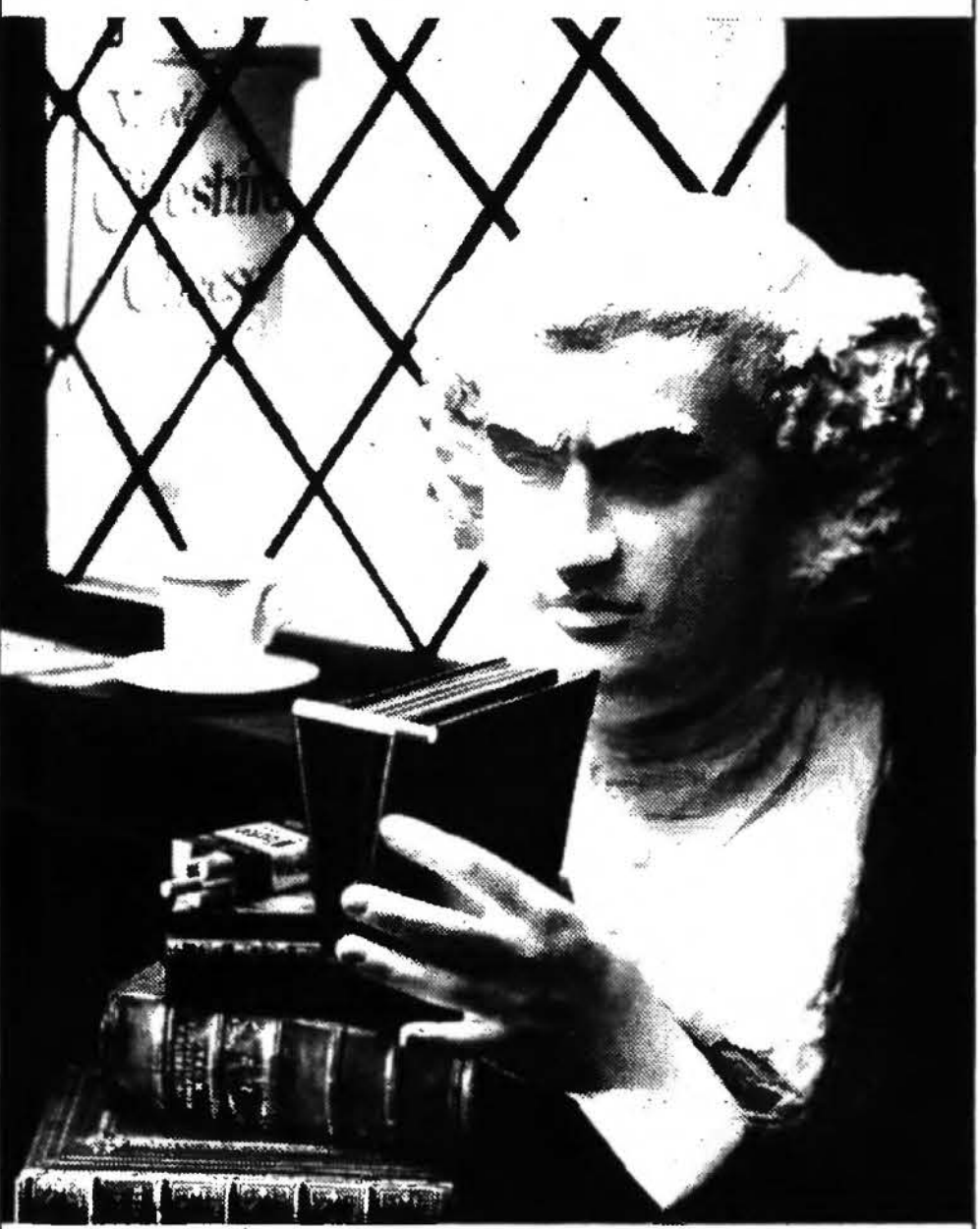
And then he was gone. Many began evaluating what he had to say, and what relevance it had to them. Thus the question "What lasting effect did Dr. Niebuhr have on Mercer's campus?"

These impressions stand out: The student body came into contact with a real theologian - a man who thinks for himself in matters of Christianity.

The preparatory seminars provided a closer relationship between students and faculty along with the informative discussion that took place concerning Dr. Niebuhr's book, Resurrection and the Historical Reason.

Many students were challenged as never before to use their minds. (Continued on page B-4)

Dr. Johnson turns another elegant phrase:



Sir, if it hasn't got it there, it hasn't got it!

Old Dr. Sam has done it again - brought his dictionary up to date in terms of modern Winston usage.

Winston (wɪn'stɒn) n. A cigarette with Filter-Blend on one end and a wise man on the other.

Taste (tæst) n. What decorators argue about and Winston smokers enjoy.

Filter-Blend (fɪl'tɜ:blɛnd) n. A happy marriage of art and science. Light, mild, flavorful tobaccos are artfully selected, then scientifically processed for filter smoking.

Slogan ('slɒɡən) n. (e.g., Winston tastes good like a cigarette should). A statement of disputed grammar but unquestioned fact.

Front (frʌnt) n. (used in conjunction with the preposition "up"). The section of a filter cigarette where if it hasn't got it, it hasn't got it. Also, the section that counts, the section where exclusive Filter-Blend is to be found.

Boswell ('bɒz/wel) Nickname for a guy who is always hanging around to caddy Winstons from you.

"There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man by which so much happiness is produced..."

Boswell's Life of Dr. Johnson, Vol. 1, Page 620

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