

"E'en down to old age," Reinhold Niebuhr was at work on his lifework of assessing, and preaching from, the subject of this thinksheet. (E.g. see his Scribner paperback, MAN'S NATURE AND HIS COMMUNITIES.) Below is the first time another's diagram has appeared on one of my thinksheets(!): Max's thing is highly useful in understanding Niebuhr....Try interfacing all this (including #559, distinguishing self/individual/person) with "The Hartford Heresies," the black list of hyper-assimilations ticked off by 18 theologians the first week in February, 1975 (as printed in 10Feb75 TIME):



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The specific theses that the churchmen condemned as "false and debilitating":

1. Modern thought is superior to all past forms of understanding reality, and is therefore normative for Christian faith and life.

2. Religious statements are totally independent of reasonable discourse.

3. Religious language refers to human experience and nothing else, God being humanity's noblest creation.

4. Jesus can only be understood in terms of contemporary models of humanity.

5. All religions are equally valid; the choice among them is not a matter of conviction about truth but only of personal preference or life-style.

6. To realize one's potential and to be true to oneself is the whole meaning of salvation.

7. Since what is human is good, evil can adequately be understood as failure to realize human potential.

8. The sole purpose of worship is to promote individual self-realization and human community.

9. Institutions and historical traditions are oppressive and inimical to our being truly human; liberation from them is required for authentic existence and authentic religion.

10. The world must set the agenda for the Church. Social, political and economic programs to improve the quality of life are ultimately normative for the Church's mission in the world.

11. An emphasis on God's transcendence is at least a hindrance to, and perhaps incompatible with, Christian social concern and action.

12. The struggle for a better humanity will bring about the Kingdom of God.

13. The question of hope beyond death is irrelevant or at best marginal to the Christian understanding of human fulfillment.

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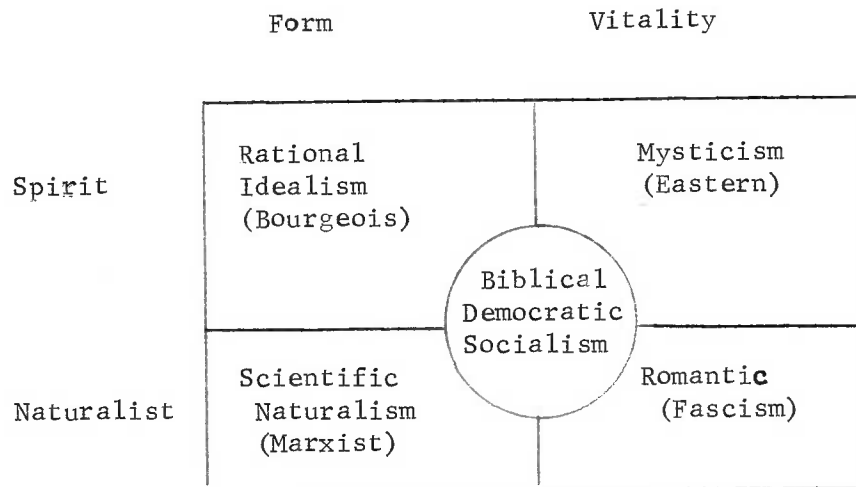
February 3, 1975

Dean Willis E. Elliot  
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Dear Willis:

Thanks for your thoughtful note and your thought-provoking think sheet.\* I have passed it on to John B. (\* #559.)

Reading your think sheet--especially the diagram--reminded me of a chart I use in teaching Vol. I of Niebuhr's Nature and Destiny. The students find it much easier to grasp if they use the following to chart his arguments about the nature of the self and its social-political implications:



Thine,

*Max*