

March 7, 1960

Prof. H. Richard Niebuhr
409 Prospect
New Haven, Conn.

Dear Dr. Niebuhr,

My teaching assignment at Perkins this year, though heavy and diverse, has been quite interesting. I have served as a sort of odd-job man. I have been roped into teaching in several portions of the curriculum for which I am not prepared, such as homiletics, an advanced course in Christian worship, and introduction to philosophy (for students with inadequate preparation in that field). But it has all been quite stimulating and has kept me on my toes.

I have even been asked to do some precepting in pastoral counseling. Actually one of the most interesting activities of this year began when several students, finding themselves under considerable stress, asked for therapy, and requested that I help them attempt to understand themselves better. I am now acting as counselor (non-directive and client-centered) to two groups meeting weekly for group therapy. I am finding all this an extremely interesting human supplement to my theological studies. I think I am coming more and more to be concerned with human questions rather than "religious" questions.

I greatly appreciated your article in the Christian Century. I do not remember any article this year which has elicited such earnest conversation here at Perkins. I was surprised and pleased to hear you speak of Bultmann as you did. After working with his writings for several years, I am persuaded that his contribution to ethics is an important one. However, under your guidance, I think that I also have begun to learn to use some critical tools which help me more adequately to assess his work.

I am continuing my studies in reformation theology and ethics. I am presently conducting a seminar in the Ethics of Luther and Calvin. I will enclose a spare syllabus which will give you an idea of what we are doing, if you would care to look at over. I think it represents the growing edge of my thinking. Generally, it is the basic inter-relationship of indicative and imperative. I hope someday to be able to write something on Protestant deontology. I am constantly amazed, however, to find that the growing edge of my thinking involves ground which has already been covered by others more capable than I, both in the historical tradition and in contemporary theology.

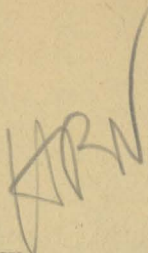
Teaching at Perkins has been a demanding and growing experience for me. One is constantly pressed by one's colleagues and students for more adequate clarification of one's meaning and foreintegrity and consistency in one's statements.

Please forgive the lengthy preface to the real matters about which I sat down to write you.

(1) As you perhaps recall, my appointment at Perkins has been as Visiting Lecturer. In other words, I do not plan to be here permanently. I thought I would check with you and see if you knew of any teaching positions for which I might be qualified and in which I might serve meaningfully.

(2) I have several positions under consideration, none of which seems to be a clear-cut affirmative choice. One is at Hartford Seminary, where a man is needed to work half time as the seminary and half time with Dr. Peter Berger in the development of a lay institute along the lines of the German evangelical academies. I would very much appreciate your assessment of that situation if you happen to know anything about it. Other positions are as yet not concrete offers. I do not wish to be too choosy, but I would like to have other options before me if they are available.

(2) Another question on my dissertation: Having carefully combed the manuscript sentence by sentence with Dechard Turner, our librarian, seeking to correct errors and to cast the dissertation in appropriate English style, I gave the pages (100 or so) which needed considerable revision to the typist. I am correcting the pages which needed only slight revision, usually erasing and retyping on the solid master copy. In some cases I have simply crossed out German terms which are the exact (genau!) equivalent of the English.



The manuscript is almost ready to be bound. My question now is, would you like to see the manuscript before it is re-bound, or would you advise me to go ahead and have it re-bound first, and send it in for your final review. I would appreciate your judgment on this matter. Either alternative is perfectly satisfactory with me.

I hope you are feeling well, and I trust that your work this year has bearing genuine fruit. With best wishes I remain,

Your student,

Thomas C. Oden

