

# Reinhold Niebuhr

## Quotes

*Men, Religious, Justice, Thinking, Christian, Groups, Mean, Self, Church,  
Giving, Laughter, Democracy, Wisdom, Real, Believe, America, Problem,  
People, Achievement, Responsibility*

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Ultimately evil is done not so much by evil people, but by good people who do not know themselves and who do not probe deeply.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Every experience proves that the real problem of our existence lies in the fact that we ought to love one another, but do not.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

There was a time when I had all the answers. My real growth began when I discovered that the questions to which I had the answers were not the important questions.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

It's always wise to seek the truth in our opponents' error, and the error in our own truth.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Nationalism: One of the effective ways in which the modern man escapes life's ethical problems.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Forgiveness is the final form of love.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Religion is so frequently a source of confusion in political life, and so

frequently dangerous to democracy, precisely because it introduces absolutes into the realm of relative values.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Humor is a prelude to faith and laughter is the beginning of prayer.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Evil is not to be traced back to the individual but to the collective behavior of humanity.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

All men are naturally inclined to obscure the morally ambiguous element in their political cause by investing it with religious sanctity.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

There are historic situations in which refusal to defend the inheritance of a civilization, however imperfect, against tyranny and aggression may result in consequences even worse than war.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The tendency to claim God as an ally for our partisan value and ends is the source of all religious fanaticism.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Whether the man is an atheist or a Christian, I would judge him by his fruits, and I have therefore many agnostic friends.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

All men who live with any degree of serenity live by some assurance of grace.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

If you equate God's judgment with your judgment, you have a wrong religion.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

[There is] an increasing tendency among modern men to imagine themselves ethical because they have delegated their vices to larger and larger groups.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The final wisdom of life requires not the annulment of incongruity but the achievement of serenity within and above it.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The cross symbolizes a cosmic as well as historic truth. Love conquers the world, but its victory is not an easy one.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The will-to-live becomes the will-to-power.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The prophet himself stands under the judgment which he preaches. If he does not know that, he is a false prophet.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

If we survive danger it steels our courage more than anything else.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Life is a battle between faith and reason in which each feeds upon the other, drawing sustenance from it and destroying it.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The significance of the law of love is precisely that it is not just another

law, but a law which transcends all law.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Cheese, wine, and a friend must be old to be good.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Goodness, armed with power, is corrupted; and pure love without power is destroyed.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

God, give me grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Our age knows nothing but reaction, and leaps from one extreme to another.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Religion, declares the modern man, is consciousness of our highest social values. Nothing could be further from the truth. True religion is a profound uneasiness about our highest social values.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

All human sin seems so much worse in its consequences than in its intentions.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The chief source of man's inhumanity to man seems to be the tribal limits of his sense of obligation to other men.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Self-righteousness is the inevitable fruit of simple moral judgments.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The old prose writers wrote as if they were speaking to an audience; while, among us, prose is invariably written for the eye alone.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Love is the motive, but justice is the instrument.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in a lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

It is the evil in man that makes democracy necessary, and man's belief in justice that makes democracy possible.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Man is endowed by nature with organic relations to his fellow men; and natural impulse prompts him to consider the needs of others even when they compete with his own.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Family life is too intimate to be preserved by the spirit of justice. It can be sustained by a spirit of love which goes beyond justice.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Frantic orthodoxy is never rooted in faith but in doubt. It is when we are unsure that we are doubly sure.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Change what cannot be accepted and accept what cannot be changed.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The mastery of nature is vainly believed to be an adequate substitute for self mastery.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Men have never been individually self-sufficient.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Democracies are indeed slow to make war, but once embarked upon a martial venture are equally slow to make peace and reluctant to make a tolerable, rather than a vindictive, peace.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Marxism is the modern form of Jewish prophecy.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

It is significant that it is as difficult to get charity out of piety as to get reasonableness out of rationalism.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Life has no meaning except in terms of responsibility.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Original sin is that thing about man which makes him capable of conceiving of his own perfection and incapable of achieving it.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

What is so funny about us is precisely that we take ourselves too seriously. Laughter is the same and healthy response to the innocent foibles of men; and even to some which are not innocent.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

What is funny about us is precisely that we take ourselves too seriously.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Great talents have some admirers, but few friends.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Democracy is finding proximate solutions to insoluble problems.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

All you earnest young men out to save the world. . . please, have a laugh.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

We have had to learn that history is neither a God nor a redeemer.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

There is no cure for the pride of a virtuous nation but pure religion.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Aim for the stars and maybe you'll reach the sky.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

That's why history is not an answer to our problem, because history complicates, enlarges every problem of human existence. Now, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries didn't believe this.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

I think that the achievements of Catholicism on race are very, very impressive.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

A republic properly understood is a sovereignty of justice, in contradistinction to a sovereignty of will.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

I cannot worship the abstractions of virtue: she only charms me when she addresses herself to my heart, speaks through the love from which she springs.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

We ought to really at least recognize the common predicament of Communists and democrats - or Americans, whatever.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

That is the truth about man - that he has a curious kind of dignity, but also a curious kind of misery, and that these forms of agnosticism don't understand.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

As racial, economic and national groups, they take for themselves, whatever their power can command.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

There must be equality of all men before God and in a democratic society. Now that's one of the great achievements.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

I don't know whether any religious leader would say that we must ultimately win, because we're on God's side. If they do say that, it's bad religion.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Man is both strong and weak, both free and bound, both blind and far-seeing. He stands at the juncture of nature and spirit; and is involved in both freedom and necessity.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Certainly, anybody who says, "in the eyes of God," is pretentious.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

If we can find God only as he is revealed in nature we have no moral God.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The history of mankind is a perennial tragedy; for the highest ideals which the individual may project are ideals which he can never realize in social and collective terms.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The recalcitrant forces in the historical drama have a power and persistence beyond our reckoning.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The whole art of politics consists in directing rationally the irrationalities of men.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

I'm not afraid of too many things, and I got that invincible kind of attitude from my father.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

I think I should know how to educate a boy, but not a girl; I should be in danger of making her too learned.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Humour is, in fact, a prelude to faith; and laughter is the beginning of prayer. Laughter is swallowed up in prayer and humour is fulfilled by faith.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The fence and the boundary line are the symbols of the spirit of justice.

They set the limits upon each man's interest to prevent one from taking advantage of the other.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

A genuine faith resolves the mystery of life by the mystery of God.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The society in which each man lives is at once the basis for, and the nemesis of, that fulness of life which each man seeks.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

All social cooperation on a larger scale than the most intimate social group requires a measure of coercion.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The individual or the group which organizes any society, however social its intentions or pretensions, arrogates an inordinate portion of social privilege to itself.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The dimension of depth in the consciousness of religion creates the tension between what is and what ought to be. It bends the bow from which every arrow of moral action flies.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

In the 17th and 18th centuries there was a kind of Protestantism that said, "If you could only get rid of the Bishop, then you'd be a true Christian".

~Reinhold Niebuhr

History may defeat the Christ but it nevertheless points to him as the law of life.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

...(I)ndividual selfhood is expressed in the self's capacity for self-transcendence and not in its rational capacity for conceptual and analytic procedures.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

For democracy is a method of finding proximate solutions for insoluble problems.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

No nation can say, 'We will capitulate to tyranny rather than accept a speculative fate - to accept an absolute fate in alternative to a speculative one' - no nation can do that.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

That is one of the flagrant misconceptions about Catholicism in America that if a man is a Catholic he owes allegiance to what they say a foreign sovereign, or something like that.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

We misjudge anybody who's different from us and the Jews diverge from our type, ethnically and religiously. That's their chief offense, but there are particular causes.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

I think there is and ultimate answer in a true religious faith, but it doesn't give you any immediate answers, it doesn't.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

You can't say that religion or irreligion will give us a particular answer to the nuclear dilemma.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The separation of church and state is necessary partly because if religion is good then the state shouldn't interfere with the religious

vision or with the religious prophet.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

We have to risk a nuclear war in order to escape capitulation to Communism. For all I know, we may stumble into this terrible war.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The churches that are most obviously democratic are most obviously given to race prejudice. I mean the churches that have absolute congregational control.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Better not read books in which you make acquaintance of the devil.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

The more complex the world situation becomes, the more scientific and rational analysis you have to have, the less you can do with simple good will and sentiment.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

To be religious is not to feel, but to be.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

To the end of history, social orders will probably destroy themselves in an effort to prove they are indestructible.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Man is always worse than most people suspect, but also generally better than most people dream.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

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