

## **ABSTRACT**

The later views of W. H. Auden were influenced by numerous thinkers and intellectuals and one of the most important among those was the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. This bachelor thesis explores the influence that Auden's friendship with Niebuhr had on both his life and his poetry primarily in the period from the late 1940s to the 1960s. Niebuhr provided the theoretical framework for many of Auden's later ideas and thus helped him to find sense in his poetic vocation, as well as to resolve his more general ideological struggle. The thesis examines three major areas of thought in which Niebuhr's influence on Auden can be traced: Christianity, history and politics.

Christianity, which is the focus of the first part of the thesis, serves as an ideological frame and provides a wider background for Auden's and Niebuhr's understanding of both history and politics. Niebuhr's theological opinions are introduced with primary focus on his understanding of Christian realism and the doctrine of original sin. Auden's approach to Christianity is discussed then, primarily in relation to his crisis of vocation and its eventual resolution. Most importantly, the two perspectives are compared, concentrating on Niebuhr's influence on Auden's religious thinking. Their related conceptions of the unconditional and original sin are reflected in their understanding of pacifism and liberalism, further expanded in Niebuhr's idea of the optimistic and pessimistic corruptions of Christianity. These are crucial concepts which are then reflected in both historical and political theories.

The second part deals with Auden's and Niebuhr's views of history. Niebuhr's perspective is disclosed primarily in relation to abstract concepts and the developments in the course of history. That includes his interpretation of the roles of good and evil in history and their relation to human nature, as well as some political developments in history. Auden is, besides such general social developments, interested also in the relationship between history and art. The parallel between Niebuhr's and Auden's views is drawn mainly in terms of the role Christianity played in the historical process and the responsibility arising from the human capacity for choice. That leads them both to the recognition of democracy as the most fitting of the political systems and thus serves as a link between Auden's and Niebuhr's views of Christianity and politics.

Finally, the last part of the thesis focuses on the topic of politics. Auden's and Niebuhr's attitude to politics elaborates on the historical developments and their contemporary applications in the light of the established Christian theoretical framework. First, the wider political and cultural environment of the early Cold War is introduced,

providing the framework for Auden's and Niebuhr's connection to contemporaneous politics. Then, the political opinions of Niebuhr and Auden, respectively, are discussed, focusing on their attitudes towards political action of both the individual and the society. The thesis concludes with an examination of the influence Niebuhr had on Auden's views of the position of art, with emphasis on poetry, in society, and how this is reflected in Auden's conduct in the period.