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The Doctrines of Sin and Atonement in Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology: An Analysis and a Proposed Corrective

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I. Overview

It has sometimes been stated that Reinhold Niebuhr has presented the most penetrating analysis since Augustine of the persistent and pervasive reality of sin in human existence. In presenting his analysis of the fallen human condition Niebuhr posits two fundamental forms of sin which he terms "the sin of pride" and "the sin of sensuality". The former entails a denial of human finiteness and exaggerated claims for the self, while the latter entails a denial of human freedom and a subsequent loss of the self. Niebuhr argues that the sin of sensuality is a derivative form of the sin of pride; thus in his analysis all manifestations of sin tend to become subsumed under the primary category of pride. His portrayal of the atoning work of Christ consequently focuses exclusively on the "shattering" of pride in each person's life so as to deliver them from pride's illusions and bring them to a recognition of their finite limitations.

This article will challenge Niebuhr's claim that the sin of sensuality is secondary to the sin of pride. It will be argued instead that pride and sensuality should be treated as co-lateral and complementary forms of sin which must *both* be addressed in any adequate formulation of an atonement theory. The direct implication is that Christ's atoning work must be such that it not only shatters pride and restores a recognition of finiteness, but also salvages forfeited selfhood and affirms human freedom.

Furthermore, it will be argued that this positive complement to Niebuhr's presentation of the atoning work of Christ does not necessitate a move away from a theology of the cross

to a theology of glory. Instead, both the shattering of pride and the reconstruction of selfhood can be comprehended under a theology of the cross.

II. The Sin of Pride and the Sin of Sensuality

A. Basic Terminology

First we will need to situate Niebuhr's ideas and provide some basic definitions: Niebuhr's most systematic treatment of the human condition, the pervasiveness of sin, and the remedy for sin demonstrated in the atoning work of Christ, is to be found in his Gifford Lectures of 1939, later published under the title *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. In this work, Niebuhr describes the natural and spiritual dimensions of human existence under the rubrics of "finiteness" and "freedom". These two dimensions constitute an inner paradox as all persons discover themselves to be "both free and bound, both limited and limitless".¹ The tension arising from this apparent contradiction is manifested in anxiety which (in a positive sense) is "the basis of all human creativity" and (in a negative sense) is "the internal precondition of sin".² In seeking to resolve this contradictory state of affairs human beings inevitably (but not necessarily)³ succumb to the temptation either to hide their finiteness by attempting to overreach the limits of human creatureliness, or to hide their freedom by losing themselves in some aspect of the world's vitalities.⁴ The former, Niebuhr terms "the sin of pride"; the latter, he calls "the sin of sensuality". Niebuhr succinctly summarizes this view, stating:

When anxiety has conceived it brings forth both pride and sensuality. Humanity falls into pride, when it seeks to raise its contingent existence to unconditional significance; it falls into sensuality, when it seeks to escape from its unlimited possibilities of freedom, from the perils and responsibilities of self-determination, by immersing itself into a 'mutable good', by losing itself in some natural vitality.⁵

In the sin of pride, persons claim ultimacy for themselves, becoming their own god, and claiming to be the source of their own fulfilment. In the sin of sensuality, persons yield ultimacy to another being or object, letting it become their god, and seeking fulfilment through submitting themselves to that "other".

B. *The Sources of Niebuhr's Conceptual Model*

In preparing for his Gifford Lectures, Niebuhr read a just published work by Emil Brunner (*Der Mensch im Widerspruch*, 1937) which later appeared in English as *Man in Revolt*. Niebuhr discovered that the same issues he was wrestling with in defining a clearly Christian anthropology were being dealt with by Brunner in a manner with which he wholeheartedly concurred.⁶ It is useful to note that the specific Christian understanding of human nature which Niebuhr develops in volume one of *Nature and Destiny* greatly resembles the analysis found in Brunner's *Man in Revolt*.

Brunner drew heavily on Kierkegaard's thought in his analysis of sin, and it is quite likely that Niebuhr was drawn to a closer examination of Kierkegaard's writings through Brunner's book.⁷ Niebuhr's basic understanding of human nature being characterized by both finiteness and freedom, the paradoxical nature of which produces a fundamental state of anxiety which is the internal precondition of sin,⁸ comes straight from Kierkegaard's writings.⁹ Furthermore, Kierkegaard in his writings defined two distinctive forms of despair which arise in the failure to actualize one's selfhood: the one arises from the vain attempt of willing to be a self on one's own, what Kierkegaard called "defiance"—approximating what Niebuhr terms the sin of pride; the other, from the passive acquiescence not to be a self at all—approximating what Niebuhr calls "sensuality"—and which Kierkegaard termed "weakness".¹⁰

In further developing the concepts of "pride" and "sensuality" as signifying the basic forms of human sinfulness, Niebuhr also shows the influence of certain psychoanalytic theories of his time in which the "will-to-power" and the libidinal impulse are regarded as the basic human impulses, both of which are said to be derived from a more basic sense of anxiety.¹¹ As an apologist for the Christian faith in the modern world, Niebuhr deliberately incorporated the findings of contemporary social scientific analysis in elaborating his theological views. It was, for him, an important component of his theological reflection to speak the language and utilize the concepts of the modern age.

Finally, Niebuhr calls attention to the rich theological tradition in which the fundamental form of sin is variously defined

either in terms of *hubris* (the Greek word for arrogance or self-elevation)—which corresponds to Niebuhr's use of the term "pride"¹²—or *concupiscence* (the Latin word for eager desire, usually associated with the passions and the love of pleasure)—which has an affinity with Niebuhr's concept of "sensuality".¹³ Both *hubris* and *concupiscence* have been identified as primal forms of sin in historical theological thought. Pride is frequently cited in the theological tradition as the original form of sin on the basis of both Lucifer's and Adam's desire to be like God;¹⁴ but *concupiscence* is frequently given primal status as well, in denoting fallen humanity's basic state of being enslaved to the passions.¹⁵ In addition, Niebuhr's definition of sensuality as an "unlimited devotion to limited values"¹⁶ parallels the definitions given by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas of sin as a turning from the immutable good (i.e., God) to the mutable good (or mutable goods); for Aquinas this phrase is used in specific reference to *concupiscence*.¹⁷ This dichotomy between pride and sensuality itself hearkens back to the classical theological distinction between sins of the intellect and sins of the will or passions.¹⁸

C. The Relationship of Sensuality and Pride

Thus far in the discussion, the sin of pride and the sin of sensuality appear to be contrasting but co-equal components of our fallen human condition. However, Niebuhr's primary concern is with addressing the sin of pride. On many occasions he speaks as if the entire problem of human sinfulness could be discussed in terms of pride alone. For example, in one extended passage he states:

The real evil in the human situation... lies in humanity's unwillingness to recognize and acknowledge the weakness, finiteness and dependence of its position, in its inclination to grasp after a power and security which transcend the possibilities of human existence, and in its effort to pretend a virtue and knowledge which are beyond the limits of mere creatures... [T]he sin of humanity consists in the vanity and pride by which it imagines itself, its nations, its cultures, its civilizations to be divine. Sin is thus the unwillingness of humanity to acknowledge its creatureliness and dependence upon God and its effort to make one's own life independent and secure. It is the "vain imagination" by which humanity hides the conditioned, contingent and dependent character of its existence and seeks to give it the appearance of unconditioned reality.¹⁹

Consequently, when Niebuhr moves from his detailed analysis of pride to a close examination of sensuality, one finds much of the discussion focused on proving that the sin of sensuality is secondary to and derivative of the sin of pride. However, the evidence which Niebuhr presents to prove his point is rather ambiguous, and his argument is, in my judgment, quite inconclusive.

This conclusion on Niebuhr's part that the sin of sensuality is a secondary effect of the sin of pride has major consequences, not only for his analysis of the nature of sin, but also for his understanding of the remedy for sin articulated in his view of the atonement. For if sensuality can be subsumed under pride as merely one of its consequences,²⁰ then if one can prescribe an effective corrective to the sin of pride, it is to be expected that the sin of sensuality will be counteracted at the same time—and by the same means. However (and this is the important point) if the sin of sensuality is co-lateral to the sin of pride, and is not to be subsumed under it as a derivative effect, but is to be treated as a second primary form of sin, then the specific corrective for counteracting the sin of pride may *not* be effective in counteracting the sin of sensuality, and a separate strategy must be defined for dealing with and overcoming this form of sin.

D. Implications for the Doctrine of the Atonement

Since Niebuhr sees pride as the persistent and pervasive form under which sin is manifested, it is natural for him to define the corrective to this sin in terms of the antithesis of pride. Pride evidences itself as the elevation of the self over others (and over God); consequently, the proper remedy to pride is defined by Niebuhr as a “sacrificial love” which places the interests of others before the interests of one's self.²¹ Niebuhr argues that this sacrificial love is synonymous with *agape*, the perfect love shown in Christ.²² In other writings Niebuhr describes this sacrificial *agape* as a “heedlessness toward the interests of the self”.²³ This love is manifested most powerfully by Christ on the cross. There, Niebuhr argues, Christ displayed a “perfect disinterestedness” with regard to himself²⁴ which culminated in a final act of “self-abnegation” with his death²⁵ as he offered his life up for the sake of others.

The problem is this: Such sacrificial love which renounces primary regard for the self may indeed be the appropriate remedy to the sin of pride. But it is not at all appropriate for rectifying the sin of sensuality since that sin itself promotes a “self-abnegation” and a forfeiture of one’s self for the sake of others. As Susan Nelson Dunfee quite rightly observes, what Niebuhr posits as humanity’s highest virtue, self-sacrificing love, can easily become confused with the escape from one’s self which the sin of sensuality encourages. She charges that “by making self-sacrificial love the ultimate Christian virtue, one makes the sin of [sensuality] into a virtue as well, and thereby encourages those already committing the sin of [sensuality] to stay in that state.”²⁶ In other words, rather than breaking the power which this form of sin exerts over such individuals’ lives, the call for self-sacrifice merely serves to reinforce this form of sin.²⁷

III. Feminist and Liberation Critiques

A. *“Woman’s Sin”*

In recent years feminist writers have taken Niebuhr to task on this very point. Valerie Saiving, in a landmark article first published in 1960, presented a penetrating critique of the dominant characterization of the human situation provided in contemporary theology with “its identification of sin with pride, will-to-power, exploitation, self-assertiveness, and the treatment of others as objects rather than persons.” These traits, she argued, are characteristic of male social and biological patterning in which there is an orientation to personal achievement, self-differentiation and self-development.

The social and biological patterning of women, Saiving claimed, promotes passiveness rather than assertiveness, and a surrender of self-identity rather than an actualization of it. In particular, Saiving stated that

...the temptations of woman as woman are not the same as the temptations of man as man, and the specifically feminine forms of sin—“feminine”...because they are outgrowths of the basic feminine character structure—have a quality which can never be encompassed by such terms as ‘pride’ and ‘will-to-power.’ They are better suggested by such terms as...underdevelopment or negation of the self.²⁸

Judith Plaskow, in her extensive critique of Niebuhr's doctrine of sin, adds her voice to that of Saiving and states:

The flaw in [Niebuhr's] doctrine of sin lies in the fact that, in subordinating sensuality, he loses sight of it as a significant human sin and one independent of pridefulness. He focuses only on those aspects of sensuality which do seem to follow from pride, entirely rejecting important dimensions of the human flight from freedom. He is thus unable to speak to or evaluate those patterns of human behaviour which are particularly characteristic of women..²⁹

B. Sins of the Weak and the Oppressed

I wish to argue that the failure of Niebuhr's doctrine of sin to address the full spectrum of the human condition extends far beyond the particular experiences of women. As Dennis McCann notes, "A psychological profile on Niebuhr's anthropology would probably suggest that he was concerned with the aggressive personality and its problems."³⁰ William John Wolf adds that "Niebuhr's categories fail adequately to account for the sins of the weak person as they do so forcefully for those of the strong person."³¹ Yet weakness must be understood in a broader context than just the failure to be self-assertive or "manly" (in the sense of a character fault) as Wolf uses the term. Here, I believe, it is helpful to keep in mind Kierkegaard's use of the term "weakness" as a technical term to denote the opposite of "defiance".

To give a brief illustration, I vividly recall the words of an elderly American black man remembering his experiences of some fifty years ago. Back then, he said, a black person learned never to look a white person in the eye when speaking or being spoken to; one looked down to the ground instead. To look a white person in the eye was interpreted as showing defiance. Blacks learned, in concern for their own safety, not to appear defiant.

In such cases, self-interest often required the appearance of weakness for the sake of preserving selfhood. Such a display of "weakness" cannot be interpreted as a sign of personal character deficiency; it was imposed on black people and generally accepted by them for many years in acquiescence to the bitter reality of one's assigned role within society. Yet tragically, even such a false (and often deliberately projected) appearance of weakness inevitably had a negative effect on a person's self-image and actually vitiated one's selfhood. Underlying this

artificially constructed appearance of weakness lay a genuine powerlessness; unless one became defiant, at some personal risk, one remained powerless to change the demeaning and debilitating social reality to which one was subjected.

To offer yet another illustration, in the Canadian context we bear the shameful legacy of generations of aboriginal youth from northern areas being transported to southern residential schools where the use of English was enforced, their native language was forbidden, and adherence to white customs and practices was made mandatory. Defiance of these rules was harshly suppressed through physical punishment, and even compliance did not remove the repeated psychological abuse experienced by those youth in having their traditional values, beliefs and customs denigrated. As a result, the self-identity of many native people became vitiated, dissipated, and disintegrated. Again, this was not of their own choosing, but was pressed upon them by the dominant culture through coercive and oppressive means.

Such examples are indicative of the situation of many of the oppressed people of the world today. They have been made "weak" not out of their own preference or desire; as a consequence, their own sense of freedom, identity and self-determination has been forfeited. Niebuhr has little to say to those who are "weak" rather than strong, those who are passive rather than self-assertive, those who are compliant rather than defiant—especially when they are compelled to assume such roles by forces beyond their own choosing. It must certainly be admitted that Niebuhr speaks forcefully to the powerful, the proud and those who would see no limits to their own self-aggrandizement. But as John Raines comments, "Niebuhr's critique of the persistent pride and self-righteousness of collective humanity does not seem very helpful in dealing with the revolutionary struggle of peoples seeking to emerge from centuries of oppression."³² Roger Shinn offers a more detailed criticism, stating that while Niebuhr "tears the camouflage from the foolish pride and idolatries" of those tyrants who would make themselves masters of the destiny of others, "he says less about those who are buried in the struggle...where frustration is so oppressive that it is hard to awaken people to action; where the development of...self-respect is painfully difficult...where progress depends less upon shattering vain ambition than upon overcoming hopelessness."³³

IV. The Remedy of Sin

A. *Sacrificial Love or Mutual Harmony?*

The solution to this problematic situation emerges only as we depart from Niebuhr's thesis that the sin of pride is primary and the sin of sensuality secondary so that all manifestations of sin (and their corresponding remedies) can be characterized in terms of pride alone. Instead, we must treat pride and sensuality as co-equal forms of sin, the one characterized by an aggrandizement and assertion of the self in relation to others, the other characterized by a diminishment and dissipation of the self in relation to others. The necessary corrective to both forms of sin, I propose, is the establishment of a proper balance which places the desires of the self neither above nor below those of the other.

Niebuhr himself speaks of agape in this larger sense in *Nature and Destiny* when he refers to it as "the ultimate and final harmony of life with life".³⁴ He gives primary status to this "harmonious relation of life to life", describing it as the fundamental "law" of human nature³⁵ and "the ultimate norm of human existence".³⁶ The specific content of this law of love is explained by Niebuhr in a brief commentary on the Great Commandment. This law, he says, contains three elements:

(a) The perfect relation of the soul to God in which obedience is transcended by love, trust and confidence ("Thou shalt love the Lord thy God"); (b) the perfect internal harmony of the soul with itself in all of its desires and impulses: "With all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy mind"; and (c) the perfect harmony of life with life: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."³⁷

Such a harmony of the self with God, the self with the self, and the self with the neighbour is the antithesis both of pride which seeks to subordinate others to the self and of sensuality which seeks to subordinate the self to others. This harmony does not allow the denial of finiteness which lies at the heart of the sin of pride, for it prohibits the tendency, in Niebuhr's words, "to overestimate one's power and significance and to become everything."³⁸ Neither does this harmony allow the forfeiture of freedom which lies at the root of the sin of sensuality; for it defines a relationship, again quoting Niebuhr, "in which the self relates itself in its freedom to other selves in their freedom under the will of God."³⁹

B. Shattering of Pride or Reconstruction of the Self?

What are the implications here for a theology of the cross? In full consonance with the traditional emphasis upon the cross as the means of our salvation, Niebuhr stresses that pride must be shattered in order for the remedy for sin to be successfully mediated to the individual. All persons must be brought to see the vanity of their attempts to avoid finitude by pretending ultimacy for their own selves and their own will; they must be brought to see the tragedy which results from their self-seeking exertion of power over others. It is through Christ's death on the cross as the victim of the willful abuse of power by others that the depths of this tragedy are most clearly seen. Only through the realization that human sin—the sin of pride—causes God to suffer, is one brought to a position of despairing of one's own personal goodness.⁴⁰

Despair, for Niebuhr, is the necessary precondition of salvation; from despair arises contrition, and through contrition one receives God's mercy and forgiveness.⁴¹ Niebuhr appeals to St. Paul's confession that "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20) to reinforce his emphasis on the shattering of pride. Paul, he says, uses the symbolism of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ to assert that "the old, the sinful self, the self which is centered in itself, must be 'crucified.' It must be *shattered and destroyed.*"⁴²

Care must be taken, however, in applying such a forceful image as the "shattering" or "destruction" of the self to the process by which the sin of sensuality is to be remedied. In this case one is no longer dealing with an inflated self-assertive will which must be brought low, but with a self which has already been weakened and dissipated through non-assertion, and may even have been victimized and oppressed by others. It must be remembered that God does not deal harshly with the weak; "he will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick" (Matt.12:20). We should keep in mind that the fulfillment of God's plan for humanity as expressed in the Magnificat, e.g., entails not only the humbling of the mighty but also the raising up of the weak.

It is this reconstruction of the forfeited self as an aspect of salvation to which we must now turn. In finding release from the sin of sensuality—the loss of selfhood—it is imperative that

those who have succumbed to its effect should be brought to see the vanity of their attempts to escape freedom by placing themselves under the rule of another. Yet even here care must be taken lest an inappropriate corrective be proposed. The attempt to free oneself from subjection to others solely by one's own efforts—whether through a program of self-assertiveness, rebellion against oppressive societal structures, or appropriating various psychological insights for “wholeness”—has the undesirable effect of reintroducing the sin of pride through the attempt to be a completed self on one's own. Niebuhr, who was quick to identify the various subtle forms under which pride continually surfaces in human affairs, steadfastly warns that it is impossible for self-realization to be accomplished through the self consciously seeking its own ends.⁴³

However, merely to accept the rule of God over one's self in lieu of being made subject to the rule of a different “other” is not an appropriate solution either, since it does not necessarily restore one's selfhood. Subjecting one's self to the will of another (even if that “other” is God) is, in Tillich's language, a “heteronomous” solution rather than a “theonomous” one. The fruit of salvation is evidenced not in compelled subjugation to God but, as has already been stated, in a “relation of the soul to God in which obedience is transcended by love, trust and confidence.”

In identifying the proper solution, it must be clearly stated that the necessary precondition to deliverance from both the sin of pride and the sin of sensuality is a profound realization of the consequences of one's own choices, with the attendant despairing of that chosen path. This point cannot be emphasized enough. What Niebuhr states for the sin of pride is no less true for the sin of sensuality: “Without this despair there is no possibility of the contrition which appropriates the divine forgiveness.”⁴⁴

At one point Niebuhr speaks of a “creative despair” which induces faith;⁴⁵ it is this kind of despair which motivates individuals to reverse their chosen paths—i.e., to repent—and to seek out a new path in which the intended harmony between themselves, God and others can be established. Whether in coming to despair in the ultimacy of their own selves, as with the sin of pride, or in coming to despair in the ultimacy of others, as with the sin of sensuality, they become aware that

they must look to a power beyond themselves and beyond the human or natural order to find the answer which they seek.

The primary factors in the loss of selfhood in the sin of sensuality are the flight from freedom and the forfeiture of self-actualization. The recovery of freedom and self-actualization is, therefore, an essential element in the reconstruction of the self which accompanies the deliverance from this sin. In this regard, an appropriate biblical text to illustrate the necessary corrective to the sin of sensuality (paralleling Niebuhr's application of Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ", to the sin of pride) would be Galatians 5:1, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery."

Those who have fallen into the sin of sensuality have yielded up their own freedom by letting themselves become subjected to the will of others. In the remedy for this sin they must be brought to see the tragedy of their own denial of selfhood, that it contradicts God's primary intention and design for humanity and for their own life, and that ultimately it required God in Christ going to the cross to win back their forfeited selfhood on their behalf. Through despair, contrition, and the reception of God's grace through mercy and forgiveness, they are enabled to lay hold of a liberating power beyond themselves and to regain the selfhood which had been forfeited, take responsibility for their lives, and assume the freedom to begin actualizing this new selfhood in accordance with God's original intent.

The cross is central to this realization. For it is in the passion and death of Christ that one finds the most powerful witness to a fully actualized selfhood which resists the most anxiety producing and coercive attempts to rob it of its identity, destroy it, or make it subject to another power. Jesus' own testimony to his identity through his actions in his entry into Jerusalem is that he is a divinely appointed king. Following his arrest, neither the taunting, cruel and dehumanizing abuse of the soldiers nor the coercive force of Pilate's claim to have the power of life and death over Jesus are sufficient to make him deny this identity and surrender to either the power of brute force or political authority. Even on the cross, in the depths of physical agony and emotional anguish, when the inner harmony of his self-identity seems to have collapsed and he cries out, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" this

intense anxiety still does not culminate in a breach of relationship with God, but in a final cry of affirmation and trust: "Into thy hands I commit my spirit." In short, Christ through his passion and death—which graphically represent the most traumatic and anxiety-ridden conditions imaginable—successfully resists the temptation to turn away from his trust in God and place his selfhood under some other authority.

"I am crucified with Christ," as St. Paul has said. Through the event of the cross, Christ establishes the process of reconciliation with God which is to be enacted in our own lives. Scripture presents the image of Christ as the "Second Adam". As the Second Adam, he recovers the essential harmony which had been lost in the first Adam's fall, and through his grace—which is a power both over us and in us which enables us to become what we are truly meant to be⁴⁶—he makes it possible for us to regain our own selfhood, to act in freedom, and to live in harmony with God and neighbour.

While certainly we may agree with Niebuhr that the cross of Christ shatters inflated pride, we have argued against him that it does *not* necessitate the abnegation of the self—especially a self which is already wounded and suffering. Instead, it has been argued that the atonement accomplished by Christ on the cross summons forth human freedom and responsibility rather than negating it, and reinforces the constitution of the self rather than diminishing it.

Notes

- 1 Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols. (vol. I: *Human Nature*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941; vol. II: *Human Destiny*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943) [denoted hereafter as *ND I & II*], I:182
- 2 *Ibid.*, I:182, 183; cf. 185.
- 3 Niebuhr states that "Sin is natural for humanity in the sense that it is universal but not in the sense that it is necessary...Sin is to be regarded as neither a necessity of human nature nor yet as a pure caprice of human will. It proceeds rather from a defect of the will..." *ibid.*, I:242 *pph.* (Throughout this essay direct quotations which have been paraphrased so as to employ inclusive language will be identified by *pph* in the reference citation.)
- 4 *Ibid.*, I:178, 179.
- 5 *Ibid.*, I:186 *pph.*
- 6 Niebuhr later stated that "Brunner's whole theological position is close to mine and...it is one to which I am more indebted than any

other" (Reinhold Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," in *Reinhold Niebuhr, His Religious, Social and Political Thought*, ed. by Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall [New York: Macmillan, 1956] 431).

- 7 Niebuhr acknowledged his indebtedness to Kierkegaard's insights in no uncertain terms: In *Nature and Destiny* he stated that "Kierkegaard has interpreted the true meaning of human selfhood more accurately than any modern, or possibly any previous Christian theologian" (*ND* I:170-171). He also described Kierkegaard's analysis of the relation of anxiety to sin as "the profoundest in Christian thought" (*ibid.*, I:182, n. 2; cf. I:44, n. 4).
- 8 *Ibid.*, I:182.
- 9 Kierkegaard defines the human person as "a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity" (S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. by Walter Lowrie [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944, denoted hereafter as *SD*] 17). He also states that "Anxiety is the psychological condition which precedes sin" (Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, trans. by Walter Lowrie [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957, denoted hereafter as *CD*] 82; cf. 41).
- 10 Kierkegaard, *SD*, 17, 74.
- 11 See Niebuhr, *ND*, I:44, n. 4; 192.
- 12 Note Paul Tillich's report of Niebuhr's admission that the concept of "hubris" is precisely what he wished to express in using the term "pride" (Paul Tillich, "Sin and Grace in the Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr," in *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Prophetic Voice in Our Time*, ed. by Harold R. Landon [Greenwich, CN: Seabury, 1962] 38; cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63] II:50).
- 13 See Niebuhr, *ND* I:229, 232.
- 14 See Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.13, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, first series, 14 vols., ed. by Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1886-89) [denoted hereafter as *NPNF*], II:273; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, IIa-IIae, q. 163, a.1&2, Latin text and English trans., 60 vols. (Cambridge, England: Blackfriars and New York: McGraw Hill, 1964-66) [denoted hereafter as Blackfriars], XLIV:149-157; Martin Luther, "First Psalm Lectures," *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia vols. [1-30]; Philadelphia: Fortress [vols. 31-55], 1955-86) [denoted hereafter as *LW*], 10:438-439 and "[Commentary on] Psalm 101," *LW* 13:196; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.1.4, *Library of Christian Classics* [denoted hereafter as *LCC*], vols. XX-XXI, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, ed. by John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) XX:244-246.
- 15 See Augustine, "On Marriage and Concupiscence," I.34, *NPNF* V:277; Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, Ia-IIae, q. 82, a. 3, Blackfriars,

- XXVI:39; Luther, "Lectures on Romans" (1515-16), *LW* 25:259; Calvin, *Institutes*, II.2.8, *LCC* XX:252.
- 16 Niebuhr, *ND* I:185.
- 17 See Augustine, "On the Free Will," II, 53 & 54, *LCC* VI:168; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, Ia-IIae, q. 83, a. 3, Blackfriars XXVI:39. Cf. Niebuhr's own citation given in *ND* I:185 of Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, Ia-IIae, q. 72, a. 2, Blackfriars XXV:31.
- 18 E.g., Calvin states that "[As a result of sin] the mind is given over to blindness and the heart of depravity." *Institutes* II.1.9, *LCC* XX:253. Cf. a similar statement by Luther regarding the "intellect" and the "will" in *LW* 1:114.
- 19 Niebuhr, *ND* I:137-138 *pph*; cf. I:92, 140, 147.
- 20 See *Ibid.*, I:186.
- 21 Note Niebuhr's statement that "As the essential sin of the first Adam was pride and self-love, so the essential goodness of the 'Second Adam' is sacrificial, suffering and self-giving love" (Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949, denoted hereafter as *FH*], 171; cf. *ND* II:68).
- 22 For a fuller discussion on "the law of love" as "the final law of human existence" see Niebuhr, *FH* 173-179.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 171, 184; cf. 173, 176, 197.
- 24 Niebuhr, *ND* II:72.
- 25 *Ibid.*, II:74.
- 26 Susan Nelson Dunfee, "The Sin of Hiding: A Feminist Critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's Account of the Sin of Pride," *Soundings*, vol. 65, no. 3 (Fall 1982), 321.
- 27 Daphne Hampson, "Reinhold Niebuhr on Sin: A Critique," in *Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of Our Time*, ed. by Richard Harries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986) 49.
- 28 Valerie Saiving [Goldstein], "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *Journal of Religion*, vol. 40 (April 1960), 109; emphasis is the author's.
- 29 Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1980) 63.
- 30 Dennis P. McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981) 127.
- 31 William John Wolf, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Man," in *Reinhold Niebuhr, His Religious, Social and Political Thought*, ed. by Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1956) 317 *pph*.
- 32 John C. Raines, "Sin as Pride and Sin as Sloth," *Christianity and Crisis*, vol. 29, no. 1 (Feb. 3, 1969), 5 *pph*.
- 33 Roger L. Shinn, *Man: The New Humanism [New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. 6] (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 159-160.
- 34 Niebuhr, *ND* II:81.
- 35 *Ibid.*, *ND* I:16.

- 36 Ibid., *ND* II:51 *pph.*
- 37 Ibid., *ND* I:288–289; cf. 286.
- 38 Ibid., *ND* I:92 *pph.*
- 39 Ibid., *ND* II:95; cf. I:147.
- 40 Similarly, the events of the cross cause one to despair of prideful belief in human goodness in general. Elsewhere Niebuhr pointedly states that “It is in the cross that we become conscious how, not only what is worst, but what is best in human culture and civilization is involved in humanity’s rebellion against God. It was Roman law, the pride of all pagan civilization, and Hebraic religion, the acme of religious devotion, which crucified the Lord” (Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940] 210–211 *pph.* Cf. *FH*, 143; *Discerning the Signs of the Times* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946] 142; *Beyond Tragedy* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937, denoted hereafter as *BT*] 18–19).
- 41 Niebuhr, *ND* II:56–57; cf. 61.
- 42 Ibid., *ND* II:108, emphasis added.
- 43 Reinhold Niebuhr, *Man’s Nature and His Communities* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965) 118; cf. *ND* II:98, 99.
- 44 Niebuhr, *ND* II:56–57.
- 45 Ibid., II:206, 207.
- 46 Ibid., II:99; cf. 61–62, 184; *BT*, 16.