

A Study on Reinhold Niebuhr's Central Concern¹

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Abstract:

Reinhold Niebuhr, a very famous American Christian theologian, imposed a great influence on American people and government in the second half of twentieth century. His Christian realism, deriving from his social activities and doctrine on man, does influence a lot of theologians and politicians. His ideas on human nature and destiny are of great meaning and creativity. There has been a controversy over his thought. His strong resistance of the pervasive optimism in America of 1920s and 1930s and his elaboration on human nature are the two main reasons for some people to consider his central concern as sin. But comprehensive analysis can lead us to the fact that his criticism and polemics are all concentrated on love and justice instead of sin.

Key Words: Reinhold Niebuhr; central concern; sin; love; justice

Reinhold Niebuhr was a very important figure in America in the past century. His thought imposed a persistent impact on American theological, political, social and ethical ideas. Christian realism can be used to symbolize his thought. His brave criticism or polemics of the pervasive optimism in the America of 1920s and 1930s brought him both positive and negative comments. There has been a very fierce controversy over the central concern of his total thought. Then, why do people have the impression that Niebuhr focuses on sin? What is the true intention of his polemics of optimistic waves of thought? What is the essence of all his ideas?

1. Controversy over Reinhold Niebuhr's Central Concern

Reinhold Niebuhr's courageous challenge to the pervasive optimism of his time brought him admiration as well as criticism. At a session of the 1974 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. paid his tribute to Reinhold Niebuhr saying that "No one has taken his place or the role he performed from the 1930s to the 1960s." (qtd. in Charles Brown 246) In an article titled "Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Man," William John Wolf wrote:

Niebuhr's sustained faithfulness to the biblical presentation of the doctrine of man

¹ 本文为河北省社科基金项目“社会福音运动中基督教参与社会改革方式及效用研究”，课题编号：HB16LS001 及国家留学基金委项目“社会福音：基督教与 20 世纪美国社会改革”，项目编号：201608130026 研究成果之一。

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in its historical focus, his contributions to an understanding of the problem of faith and experience and of sin and grace beyond the entrenched positions of Catholicism and Protestantism, and his ability to invest Christian theology with relevance for the personal, political, and economic problems of our day entitle him to first place among Christian thinkers in America and to serious attention as a Christian apologist throughout the world by thoughtful Christians and secularists alike. (229-250)

As for his political thought, Kenneth Thompson's words are worth noting: "If he fails to transcend the eternal and tragic paradoxes of politics, he clarifies and illuminates the problem as does no other contemporary social philosopher." (151-175)

Other people find limitations and flaws in Reinhold Niebuhr's thought. Charles C. Brown's opinion is representative in this regard:

his writings tended now and then to be repetitious, to lapse into patches of opaqueness, and to suffer from stylistic infelicities that vitiated their effectiveness on the printed page; sometimes he used words without clear definition; Niebuhr's grasp of the history of ideas and civilizations was remarkable, but his works do contain some generalizations a bit too sweeping and occasional inaccuracies on fine points. (249)

Aside from Brown's summary, critics also take issue with some of his ideas. One of the most controversial topics is Niebuhr's apparent concern about sin. Indeed Niebuhr paid a lot of attention to what he saw as man's commitment of sins, to the forms of man's sin, an interest that was associated with his criticism of the pervasive optimism in his time. As a result, many people get the impression that his central concern is man's sin or the fallen state of man. Holtan P. Odegard, for example, argues that "the central overwhelming idea for Reinhold Niebuhr is sin," and that "sin is the fundamental principle upon which his interpretations are based." Niebuhr, Odegard maintains, really had a "faith in sin."⁽¹²⁾ Hans Hofmann, who is certainly not lacking in appreciation of Niebuhr, writes in his book *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr* that "sin is Niebuhr's central concern."⁽²⁴⁷⁾ Whitney J. Oates best articulates this general opinion when he writes of Niebuhr's thought that

planted squarely as he is in the prophetic tradition, he has concentrated too exclusively on the fallen state of man, or to put it somewhat facetiously, has been so busy rehabilitating sin as a fact of man's nature that other and equally important aspects of Christianity suffer from under-emphasis. (Introduction xii)

Supporters of Niebuhr reject this assessment, however. Gordon Harland, for example, insists that "Niebuhr's penetrating analysis of sin" is "but part of his total task of illuminating what is involved in relating Christian insight creatively to the social task. This, not sin, is Niebuhr's central concern." (Introduction ix) In the same

vein, Henry Nelson Wieman writes: "I want to defend Niebuhr against two major criticisms frequently leveled against him: namely, (1) that he is too pessimistic; (2) that he unduly magnifies man's sin." "Niebuhr," Wieman goes on, "is sure that everything will work out all right in the end and that men will live in a realm of perfect love." (333-354) John Bennett, a colleague of Reinhold Niebuhr at Union Theological Seminary, also refuses to see Reinhold Niebuhr's ideas as pessimistic. He reminds his readers that Niebuhr's elaboration of God's grace and the possibility of the achievement of justice is an optimistic extreme in tension with the pessimistic extreme of sin.

2. Reinhold Niebuhr's Alleged Interest in Sin

Several factors are responsible for the impression of Reinhold Niebuhr's central concern for sin or man's fallen state. Among them, two are the most apparent and important: first, his powerful polemics against the prevalent optimism in America before the Second World War. Second, his elaboration of man's sin.

2.1 Niebuhr's Strong Resistance of the Optimism of His Time

Along with the development of science and technology in the 19th and 20th centuries, man became more and more confident of his ability of self-perfection. The conquest of nature gave him a tremendous sense of satisfaction and a self-image as the host of the world. This pride or even arrogance was pervasive in America in the 1920s and 1930s. The phenomenon largely results from World War I that turned America from a debt nation into a creditor nation and, in fact, into the wealthiest nation in the world. Its preponderance was manifold: politically, it became the savior of Europe from self-annihilation; economically, its wealth almost equaled the total of the six most powerful European nations. Reinhold Niebuhr, however, was not intoxicated with such apparent achievements. Rather, in such optimism, he saw a threat that was often embodied in Christian liberalism, pacifism and scientism.

Christian liberalism is in close connection with liberal culture. In the modern world, liberal culture is represented by the middle class. Its central idea is the belief in social progress, whose main demonstrations are individual freedom and the practice of tolerance. Reinhold Niebuhr considers Liberal Christianity as a part of this liberal culture. He says: "Christian liberalism is spiritually dependent upon bourgeois liberalism and is completely lost when its neat evolutionary process toward an ethical historical goal is suddenly engulfed in social catastrophe." ("Reflections on the End of an Era" 135) American Christian liberalism reached its peak in the 1920s and 1930s. Its most powerful voice was the Social Gospel Movement, whose major tenets are righteousness, peace, self-sacrifice and social concord. Members of this movement expected to achieve social progress and individual happiness by advocating these ideas. While praising their good intentions, Niebuhr spared no effort in attacking their fallacies. Much of his attack was on their erroneous estimate of human nature. In Niebuhr's opinion, they paid too much attention to man's positive characteristics while understanding the seriousness of man's sin.

Pacifism is a belief or policy of opposition to war as a means of settling disputes. Confronted with unrelenting violence, the practice of pacifism may seem unduly forgiving and weak. However, pacifists maintain that unswerving nonviolence can bestow upon people a power greater than that achieved through the use of violent aggression. Reinhold Niebuhr was familiar with the pacifist positions both on Christian and secular grounds. He was a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a Christian pacifist organization that had emerged in the disillusionment following the World War I. But even when Niebuhr served as president of the organization, he never agreed with the extreme pacifism held by those FOR members who advocated total non-resistance toward any manifestation of aggressive power. Instead, he favored active resistance to any manifestation of injustice, domestic or foreign. The context in which Reinhold Niebuhr articulated his polemics against pacifism was the pacifist position toward Japanese militarism in Asia and Nazi aggression in Europe. The focus of his criticism is on the blindness of pacifism to the brutal reality and the sin of people.

It is apparent that man has made great progress with the method of science. The power of science makes some people believe in scientism, the assumption that the methods of the natural sciences are the avenue to the understanding and the solution of all human problems. Niebuhr opposed such kind of arrogance. He sought to undercut such scientific imperialism, and to show the serious limitations of the scientific method in illuminating the issues, which are essentially human and historical. To him, what science reveals is only a part of truth, not the whole.

2.2 Reinhold Niebuhr's Doctrine of Man

It is of no exaggeration to say that the fountain of Reinhold Niebuhr's thought, secular or theological, is based on his idea of human nature. The fact that much of his ink goes to the elaboration of man's sin leads to the consequence that some people mistake sin as Reinhold Niebuhr's central concern.

2.2.1 Origin of Sin

In explaining the origin of sin, Reinhold Niebuhr touches upon the myth of the Fall. In the myth of the Fall, the temptation arises from the serpent's analysis of the human situation. The serpent depicts God as jealously guarding his prerogatives against the possibility that man might have his eyes opened and become as God, knowing good and evil. Man is tempted, in other words, to break and transcend the limits God has set for him. The temptation thus lies in his finiteness as well as freedom. But the situation would not be a temptation of itself, if it were not falsely interpreted by "the serpent." In Reinhold Niebuhr's words, man "stands at the juncture of nature and spirit; and is involved in both freedom and necessity." (*Nature and Destiny of Man* 1:181) Standing at such a juncture, he is anxious. This anxiety is the internal precondition of sin. But it should not be identified with sin itself because there still exists the possibility that faith would purge anxiety of the tendency toward sinful self-assertion. It is not the precondition of sin partly because the anxiety is also the fountain of all human creativity. Thus, the origin of sin lies in man's mind, in his wrong use of such anxiety, in his pretending and trying to be as

God, the master of himself and the centre of the world.

2.2.2 Sin of Pride

In consistency with the Christian thought, Reinhold Niebuhr considers pride as the basic form of sin. He divides the sin of pride into three types: the pride of power, the pride of knowledge and the pride of virtue.

(1) In Niebuhr's opinion, the pride of power lies in two different situations. One is when man thinks self-sufficient and secure against all vicissitudes. The other is he feels not so secure and tries to grasp more power in order to make itself secure. The first form of pride of power is particularly characteristic of individuals and groups whose position is, or seems to be, secure. A case in point is from the Old Testament. In it, Egypt is accused of imagining herself the creator of the River Nile and saying, "my river is my own, I have made it for myself." In the doom which overtakes this pride the real source and end of life will be revealed: "they shall know that I am the Lord."(*Nature and Destiny of Man* 1:190³) The second form is more apparent in those who know their insecurity, especially in the advancing forces of human society. It is perfectly described in Jesus' parable of the rich fool who assures himself: "soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Significantly this false security is shattered by the prospect of death, a vicissitude of nature which greed cannot master. God said to the rich fool, "this night thy soul shall be required of thee." (*Nature and Destiny of Man* 1:191⁴) But just as Reinhold Niebuhr points out, the more power man has the more he wants and the greedier he becomes. Thus forms a vicious cycle. The root lies in the infinite capacities of the human imagination and an uneasy recognition of man's finiteness, weakness and dependence.

(2) The intellectual pride of man is more apparently demonstrated by an individual man and his association with others. Roughly speaking, we can equate man's intellectual pride with his self-righteousness and self-centeredness. We all know that man's knowledge is limited, but he always pretends or claims to be the only right one and considers his knowledge as the final truth. According to Niebuhr this pride is derived from ignorance of the finiteness of human mind and from an attempt to obscure the known conditioned character of human knowledge and the taint of self-interest in human truth. Two cases are provided by Reinhold Niebuhr to elaborate these two reasons of intellectual pride. And it makes sense. One is the philosopher who imagines himself capable of stating a final truth and considers his conditioned idea as the final truth. He points out that Descartes' intellectual pride was something more than the ignorance of his own ignorance. That was disclosed when he resented the reminder of a friend that his "cogito, ergo sum," the keystone of his philosophical arch, was derived from Augustinian thought. "Schopenhauer's pride was more than the consequence of his inability to measure the limits of his system. It was compensation for his lack of recognition in competition with more widely acclaimed idealistic thinkers."(*Nature and Destiny of Man* 1:196) The other is the relation between majority and minority racial groups for which the black-white

³ Bible: Ez. 30:8

⁴ Luke. 12:19-20

relation is a convenient example. “The majority group justifies the disabilities which it imposes upon the minority group on the ground that the subject group is not capable of enjoying or profiting from the privileges of culture or civilization.”(*Nature and Destiny of Man* 1:198)

(3) Niebuhr thinks that all elements of moral pride are involved in the intellectual pride. Moral pride exists in all “self righteous” judgments in which the other is condemned because he fails to conform to the highly arbitrary standards of the self. He who judges others by his own standard will definitely find others’ standards wrong and evil. The character of moral pride is perfectly described in the words of St. Paul: “for I bear them record that they have the zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (qtd. in *Nature and Destiny of Man* 1:199⁵) In essence, moral pride is the pretension of the finite man that his highly conditioned virtue is the final righteousness and that his very relative moral standards are absolute.

Derived from moral pride, spiritual pride gets Reinhold Niebuhr’s special attention but not an individual class. He says that:

The ultimate sin is the religious sin of making the self-deification implied in explicit moral pride. The worst form of class domination is religious class domination. The worst form of intolerance is religious intolerance. The worst form of self-assertion is religious self-assertion. (*Nature and Destiny of Man* 1: 201)

Here Reinhold Niebuhr reminds us of the potential danger existing in religion. He takes Christianity as an example to illustrate such danger. He thinks that Christianity is right in regarding itself as a religion of revelation in which a holy and loving God is revealed to man as the source and end of all finite existence against whom man’s self-will is shattered and his pride abased. But when the Christians assume that they are more righteous and contrite than other men, they are committing the sin of self-righteousness. What he says here also applies to other religions both inside and outside America.

2.2.3 The Sin between Individuals and Groups

After defining and illustrating the sin in man himself, Reinhold Niebuhr moves on to make a distinction between group pride and the pride of egotism of individuals. Reinhold Niebuhr thinks that the necessity of the distinction is due to two factors: the authority of group pride over the individual and its deeper sin than the individual.

The pride of nations consists in the tendency to make unconditioned claims for their conditioned values. The unconditioned character of these claims has two aspects. The nation claims a more absolute devotion to values that transcend its life than the facts warrant; and it regards the values to which it is loyal as more absolute than they really are. Nations may fight for “liberty” and “democracy” but they do not do so until their vital interests are imperiled. They may refuse to fight and claim that their refusal is prompted by their desire to “preserve civilization.”

⁵ Romans 10:2-3

It cannot be denied that the instinct of survival is involved in all spiritual manifestations of a group's egotism; but that is equally true of individual life. Every human self-assertion, whether individual or collective, is therefore involved in the inconsistency of claiming, on the one hand, that it is justified by the primary right of survival and, on the other hand, that it is the bearer of interests and values larger than its own and that these more inclusive values are the justification for its struggle with competing social wills. No modern nation has ever proved whether to insist that its struggle is a fight for survival or a selfless effort to maintain transcendent and universal values.

No nation is free of the sin of pride, just as no individual is free of it. While all modern nations, and indeed all nations in history, have been involved in the sin of pride, one must realize, in this as in other estimates of human sinfulness, that it is just as important to recognize differences in the degree of pride and self-will expressed by men and nations, as it is to know that all men and nations are sinful in the sight of God. Here, as in individual life, the final sin is the unwillingness to hear the word of judgment spoken against our sin. The sin of nation-state Reinhold Niebuhr tells here still exists in the nations of our day. Maybe it will be of great help to read what Reinhold Niebuhr says here when we solve the international problems.

3. Truth of His Polemics against the Pervasive Optimism

Reinhold Niebuhr's powerful polemics against the pervasive optimism in American society are not indiscriminate. His final aim or central concern is the better achievement of love and justice in society. His criticism of Christian liberalism, pacifism and scientism is primarily based on his view of human nature and is of great importance in refreshing people's mind when they are lost in the apparent social progress and affluence.

3.1 Discriminate Criticism of Christian Liberalism

3.1.1 Niebuhr's Negation of Christian Liberalism

The key point of Niebuhr's attack is that Christian liberalism takes an erroneous attitude towards human nature. Faith in man's reason, in his goodness, and in his power to overcome the limitations of existence has led liberalism to a view of the progressive fulfillment of good in history which simply does not conform to the facts. As early as 1929, Niebuhr expressed his doubts on some basic liberal tenets and, by the time of the publication of *Reflections on the End of an Era* in 1934, this critical approach had reached its full growth. His criticism of liberalism can be summarized into the following points:

(1) The judgment of liberalism on historical realities is naïve and too optimistic, because there is nothing to prevent new sources of evil from emerging. The liberal mind usually traces the evil in human life to specific causes which time or effort could eliminate, such as outworn and unjust institutions; or remnants of animal nature yet to be sloughed off; or unfair economic orders to be overthrown.

(2) Reinhold Niebuhr thinks that even more important than the optimistic

intellectual climate is the error in understanding of the nature of man by liberalism. Neither secular nor Christian liberalism has really understood man because of their failure to see the full dimension of his being. Niebuhr sees man as rooted in nature, subject to the power and vicissitudes of finite existence. Man's mind enables him to transcend time to a limited degree, and it permits him to organize his experience into wider and wider circles of coherence. Yet mind is not the full height of man. Man transcends himself with spirituality. He is aware of a mystery beyond all rationally determinable coherence. He can imagine possibilities beyond the given order of things. Niebuhr turns this analysis against liberal faith in reason. It is just because man lives both in the depths of nature and on the heights of spirit that his deepest anxieties arise. The corruption of the self affects the whole man. He falls into the sins of pride or sensuality precisely to escape the threats that his peculiar situation involves. Liberals generally have assumed that mind can lift man beyond the frustrations of nature and seize control of history. But they forget that mind itself is limited in its reach and is subject to the corruptions of fear and pride.

(3) Niebuhr's interpretation of the liberal confidence in reason is so fundamental for understanding both his criticism of liberalism and his own theological method that we need to examine an additional aspect of it here. He insists that liberal culture has not understood the organic unities of life because reason does not offer an adequate grasp of organic processes. He makes this point in connection with his analysis of individualism in liberal culture. As he points out in *Reflections on the End of an Era*, "the organic character of the individual's relation to society can be comprehended and illumined by an adequate mythology, but hardly by rationalism, for reason mechanizes human relations." (93) The rationalistic approach leaves the individual rootless. He is bound to his neighbor only by mechanically defined contracts that allow no deeper participation in concrete community. This is what Niebuhr calls mutuality. When taken as an ethical principle, "mutuality" leads to the satisfaction of the other's interests only so long as mine are taken care of. Liberalism therefore misses the meaning of sacrificial love in the gospel. It reduces the cross to "success story." It cannot understand the radical giving of the self beyond any visible or historical reward. To Niebuhr, this is the failure of mutuality and liberal ethics.

In sum, Niebuhr sees all liberalism as lacking in depth of understanding of who man is and what his problems are.

The liberal soul," he says, "is pedestrian and uninspired. Its moral philosophy is always utilitarian and practical. It avoids the fanaticism and passion of the servants of the absolute and goes about its business to tame life and bring larger and larger areas of human society into its circles of humane good will and prudent reciprocity. (*Reflections on the End of an Era*" 261)

3.1.2 Reinhold Niebuhr's Affirmation of Christian Liberalism

Niebuhr's evaluation of Christian Liberalism is not totally negative. He argues against liberalism from a broad base of rational and ethical criticism, as well as from strictly Christian premises. He does not affirm a simple Christian orthodoxy or an

exclusively biblical norm against liberalism. He argues from within a framework that is largely dominated by the liberal problems, including the relation of reason to revelation and the relation of the gospel to social ethics. He sees positive values in the liberal outlook, and his own method is dependent on the liberal achievements.

Niebuhr appreciates the liberal spirit of tolerance and believes that reason has its validity and constructive function. To him, “The extension of rational justice and the encouragement of a tolerant attitude toward life is the very essence of liberalism.” (“*Reflections on the End of an Era*” 252) Coupled with tolerance is liberalism’s outstanding achievement of the “discovery and affirmation of the rights of the individual.” (“*Reflections on the End of an Era*” 88) Reason has played an important role in the discovery of the worth of the individual and is necessary to the achievement of tolerable justice in human relations. The very reliance on reason does tend to achieve a balance of power. The liberal spirit in morals is of most value in working out pragmatic adjustments within a fairly stable environment although it is often unable to cope with major upheavals and conflicts.

In addition, Niebuhr thinks that in modern times, Christian liberalism is right and scientific in using reason to destroy crude supernaturalism in the understanding of nature. As he points out that science did disclose a realm of law in the processes of nature, and theology must respect this aspect of the truth in its doctrine of God’s action. Liberalism applied the scientific method to the historical records of Christianity. Liberalism saved the Christian mind from the error of making an inflexible and infallible law out of the historically conditioned precepts in the biblical record. Thus, he thinks, “liberalism recognized the law of love as the final norm for Christian ethics and made it possible in principle the criticism of every historical dogma and ethical system”. (Williams. *Niebuhr and Liberalism*, qtd. in Kegley 203)

Most important of all in Niebuhr’s positive appreciation of liberalism is his assertion that liberalism was right in declaring the relevance of Christian love to social issues even though it understood this relationship far too simply. He acknowledges a “prophetic element in the passion for justice in eighteenth and nineteenth century moralism.” (qtd. in Williams 193-213)⁶

3.1.3 Nature of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Evaluation of Christian Liberalism

Yet in spite of its elements of permanent validity, liberal culture, both in its secular and Christian expressions, remains in Niebuhr’s eyes inadequate to preserve the very values it cherishes. The preservation and renewal of what is good in civilization depend upon its establishment on the foundation of the Christian faith that apprehends the true depth of man’s problems and the source of his ultimate redemption. Just because Reinhold Niebuhr tries to improve liberal Christianity and make the whole world full of love and justice, he relentlessly points out the lack or deficiency of Christian liberalism.

3.2 Reinhold Niebuhr’s Criticism of Pacifism

3.2.1 Niebuhr’s Analysis of the Errors in Pure Pacifism

⁶ Title Essay in *Christian Faith and the Common Life*. Chicago: Willett Clark & Colby, 1938. p91

Niebuhr's opposition to pacifism emanates from his understanding of human nature. In the early twenties of 19th century he came to realize that, "the principle of nonresistance is too ideal for a sinful human world."(qtd. in Fox 79) Later in 1927, he wrote "A Critique of Pacifism" for the *Atlantic Monthly*. In this article, he expressed his opposition to the movement for outlawing war, viewing it as "representing the moral idealism of privileged groups, irrelevant to the poor nations, and ignorant of the structure of international power relations".(qtd. in Fox 100) Throughout the thirties, Niebuhr attacked pacifism as "the naïve belief of liberals who assumed inevitable progress toward peace and, consequently, viewed war as something too foolish and primitive for any intelligent person to support".(Naveh 63) He also fought the utopian illusion of Christian pacifists that postulated the love ethic as an absolute value that ruled out any support for violence and war. As he repeated in his many statements, a society living according to the love ethic in history was a utopian illusion and a human impossibility. The love ethic as a divine value and ideal could never be actualized in any social situation. "It is relevant to every social but fully applicable to none."(qtd. in Naveh 63)⁷ In 1934 Niebuhr withdrew from the FOR. Internal strife, personal rivalries, and ideological debates were among the causes for his resignation. Besides that, it seems that Niebuhr, a vehement opponent of pure pacifism, could no longer find his place in such a pacifist organization as FOR whose non-resistance position was both passive and aloof. All these arguments became poignant in the context of the Second World War, especially after the fall of Europe to Hitler. Niebuhr participated in the heightened disputes between isolationists and interventionists that took place from 1939 to 1941, when Axis powers were overrunning their neighbors in Europe and Asia. He wrote short pieces against pacifism in 1940 and 1941, in order to promote the interventionist agenda. He claimed that a pacifist refusal to participate in any war and violent conflict resulted in a gloomy concrete outcome: namely, the surrender of democratic states to Hitler's aggression.

Niebuhr's most comprehensive critique of pacifism, "Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist," appeared in a booklet that was first published in England shortly before the Nazi air attack on London. The essay was intended to construct an anti-pacifist Christian theory by interpreting most forms of pacifism as Christian heresy.

The essay started with the assertion that the Christian gospel was not simply the introduction of the law of love but the measuring of human existence. The Christian creed views human existence "not only in terms of the final norm of human conduct, which is expressed in the law of love, but also in terms of the fact of sin."(Robert Brown102)Christianity is not only a challenge to human beings to obey the law of love, but also a religion that deals with the problem of human violation of this law. Hence, to accept the Christian gospel means to be fully aware of this contradiction in which human beings both obey and violate the love ethic. Thus the Christian gospel recognizes the problem "of achieving justice in a sinful world as a very difficult task." (qtd. in Naveh 66)From such a paradoxical perspective,

⁷ John Benett, *The Contribution of Reinhold Niebuhr, Religion in Life* 6, 1 Winter 1937. p278

Christians have various options; among them was an authentic pacifism, in the form of Christian perfectionism. This sort of pacifism, which characterized early Christianity, disavowed politics. Its adherents did not pretend that they had discovered a method to eliminate sin and conflict and therefore had no political or social Utopian vision of the ultimate peace on earth. Contrary to this ascetic stance, most modern forms of Christian pacifism were heretical. They rejected the doctrine of human sin, absorbed the secular Renaissance faith in the goodness of man, and thus “have reinterpreted the Cross so that it is made to stand for the absurd idea that perfect love is guaranteed as simply victory over the world.”(Robert Brown 104) Niebuhr claimed that such a position is heretical not only as an interpretation that ignored the standards of the gospel but also as an illusion that ignored the realities of human existence.

Hence Niebuhr pointed out that pacifism was wrong because it provided an absurd interpretation of human conflict in history, which was never substantiated by any form of real experience. If we believe that people do not love each other only because we did not introduce the law of love persuasively or loudly enough, we hold an absurd conviction that could not be substantiated by experience. Niebuhr stated that instead of adhering to the doctrine of non-violence, it is better to support political strategies that, assuming human sinfulness, “seek to secure the highest measure of peace and justice among selfish and sinful men.”(Robert Brown 107)

To those pacifists who refused to resist tyranny because they refused to engage in violence, Niebuhr answered that any conflict in history is between relative sinners rather than between sinless angels and sinful demons. He emphasized that it was “sheer moral perversity to equate the inconsistency of a democratic civilization with the brutalities which modern tyrannical states practice.”(Robert Brown 102) Consequently, to those who refused to fight against the Axis powers because they viewed German aggression as a necessary product of the vindictive nature of the Versailles Treaty, Niebuhr repeated that, “political controversies are always conflicts between sinners and not between righteous men and sinners.”(Robert Brown 110)

3.2.2 Essence of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Criticism of Pacifism

At the end of the essay, “Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist,” Niebuhr stated his central concern. He reinterpreted the love ethic as a valid principle for both indiscriminate and discriminate criticism of human and historical phenomenon. As an indiscriminate principle, the law of love considers all forms of communities as incomplete, morally faulty, coercive and imperfect. But those who use this indiscriminate principle to claim that democratic nations had no right to resist tyranny because they were themselves imperialistic were irresponsible. Niebuhr said that “their argument would have meaning only if it were possible to achieve a perfect form of justice in any nation and to free national life completely of the imperialistic motive.”(Robert Brown 115) The law of love, as a perfect yardstick, transcends history and refutes any quest for perfection in history, including the pacifist command not to resist evil because of the presumption of perfectibility. Niebuhr’s argument seems more persuasive when he refers to the law of love as a discriminate criticism. He states that the balance of power, though inferior to the harmony of the

love ethic, has created some basic conditions of justice superior to anarchy at one extreme and tyranny at the other. There are relative values in history and a liberal democratic balance of power is one of them and this system, although imperfect, is superior to a racist and aggressive tyranny. Therefore, liberal democratic countries, though never perfect, should join together to stop the murderous violence of the Nazi. Christian moralism should learn from the error of World War I and never identify Christ with the cause of democracy. But “it is just as senseless when it seeks to purge itself of this error by an uncritical refusal to make any distinctions between relative values in history.”(Robert Brown 118)

3.3 Niebuhr’s Criticism of Scientism

Reinhold Niebuhr’s criticism of scientism, not science, targets primarily the idolatry of science as the almighty instrument of solving all problems and man’s efforts to become perfect and all-knowing. He justifies his criticism by showing the serious limitations of the scientific method in illuminating the issues which are essentially human and historical.

The serious limitation of any scientific method in dealing with the specifically human problems produces results in which the most significant facts about man and history are missed. This has led to the ironic outcome that an illegitimate extension of the scientific method has meant that the climax of an empirical culture is its blindness to some obvious facts. Moreover because these facts are either obscured or improperly measured, the hidden dogmas of modern scientism become powerfully operative to add still further confusion. What does Niebuhr believe to be the “facts” obscured and the hidden dogmas embraced by modern scientism? They are the “facts” or “realities” with which man qua man, rather than man as scientist, must daily deal and live. They are “the self’s freedom,” “the self-corruption of that freedom in self-concern,” and the “self’s ‘historical’ character.”(*Self and Dramas of History*, 128) It is, however, in the field of social and political analysis where the uncritical adoption of the scientific method has resulted in the spread of the worst confusion and sentimentality. The assumption that the dynamic stuff of history may be tamed, directed, and managed by the same methods used to control nature stems from the disastrous failure to make the sharp distinction between nature and history required by the uniqueness and freedom of the self. Niebuhr goes so far as to say that “almost all the misinterpretations of human selfhood and the drama of history in the modern day are derived from the effort to reduce human existence to the coherence of nature.”(*Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 199) An example of the banality into which this approach can descend was given by George Brock Chisholm, the director general of the World Health Organization. Chisholm wrote an article to show how science could help to develop human nature so that it would be capable of, and prepared for, world citizenship.

We need to learn, as children, that our natural urges are good; consequently we need to get rid of all the nonsense about original sin which prompts children to hate themselves. A still further root of evil is our insecurity, which manifests itself in

various forms of self-expression and aggressiveness. What is needed to eliminate this insecurity is to teach mothers how to treat their children with an uncritical love so that the security that comes with a sense of belonging might naturally arise and then be extended into the wider communities of life. (Harland 71)

In a scathing attack on this, Niebuhr writes: “It need hardly be stated that this prescription for the world’s ills is the most pathetic nonsense which has ever been preached in the name of science. It would be insignificant if it were unique. It is unfortunately typical.” (qtd. in Harland 71) We may wish to argue whether the apostles of “nursery salvation” are as typical as Niebuhr suggests, but there is no gainsaying the fact that they bring clearly to the fore the hidden dogmas of those whose approach to the problems of the self is determined by the assumption that man is to be understood as a piece of nature. It should be noted that the dogmas are the natural corollaries of this assumption and procedure.

The religious presuppositions which form the framework for most modern scientific examinations of the human scene contain two very dubious articles, which must be held responsible for most of the errors and illusions in these examinations: a) the idea of the perfectibility of Man and b) the idea of progress. (*Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 3)

It is scientism, not science, against which Niebuhr is inveighing, and his protest is made for the positive purpose of clearing the ground to the end that we may realistically approach the problems of human togetherness and the ultimate questions of what it is to be man.

It is thus obvious that Reinhold Niebuhr is centrally concerned with the better achievement of love and justice in society. His articulations against Christian liberalism remind us of a full picture of man’s nature which proves to be very helpful for us to take a right method to improve the quality of society we live in. He criticizes passive or extreme pacifism in order to provide us a more reasonable way to seek love and justice. And his treatment of scientism, not science itself, is a warning to us: do not pretend to be as perfect as God because we humans are sinners. In a word, Reinhold Niebuhr’s central concern is not sin, as Holtan P. Odegard and Hans Hofmann says, but love, of which he gives us an excellent elaboration in the second volume of his masterpiece *Nature and Destiny of Man*.

4. Reinhold Niebuhr’s Theory of Love and Justice

Reinhold Niebuhr’s central concern for love is more clearly expressed in his theory of love and the achievement of it in secular world; that is justice. He considers Christ as the norm of human nature defines the final perfection of man in history. But this perfection is not so much a sum total of various virtues of sacrificial love. And it is not attainable in history as a thought transcends an act. As an act in history, however, it cannot justify itself in history. In Niebuhr’s opinion, mutual love is the highest good from the standpoint of history. Only in mutual love are the social

demands of historical existence satisfied. The sacrifice of the interests of the self for others is psychologically impossible when life is conceived only in terms of nature-history. This paradox can have meaning only if the dimension of life is known to transcend historical existence. Mutuality is not a possible achievement if it is made the intention and goal of any action. Sacrificial love is thus paradoxically related to mutual love; and this relation is an ethical counterpart of general relation of super-history to history. Based on his theory of sacrificial love and mutual love, Reinhold Niebuhr interprets the salvation of man by God's Grace and his idea of justice.

4.1 Niebuhr's Doctrine of Grace

In interpreting the doctrine of Grace, Reinhold Niebuhr is in agreement with the New Testament conception, especially the Pauline understanding of it. He says:

When we turn to the New Testament doctrine of Grace, more particularly to the Pauline interpretation of it, it becomes apparent that both facets of the experience of grace--the conquest of sin in the heart of Man on the one hand, and the merciful power of God over the sin which is never entirely overcome in any human heart, on the other--are fully expressed in the Pauline doctrine. (*Nature and Destiny of Man* 2:100)

In Reinhold Niebuhr's eyes, A. Schlatter describes the twofold aspects of the Pauline experience of grace with the right circumspection and impartiality:

He has a sense of sin, as including and comprehending all his actions, and yet at the same time and in the same consciousness he has a good conscience which is at peace with itself and is conscious of the normality of its actions. Both of these aspects of his consciousness are rooted and united in the awareness of the divine forgiveness and the sense of a righteousness which divine grace has imparted. (qtd. in Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man* 2:101)⁸

Grace represents on the one hand the mercy and forgiveness of God by which he completes what man cannot complete and overcome the sinful elements in all of man's achievements. Grace is the mercy of God towards man. Grace is, on the other hand, the power of God in man. It represents an accession of resources, which man does not have of himself, enabling him to become what he truly ought to be.

4.1.1 Grace as the Mercy of God towards Man

The first aspect of Grace lies in the fact that God has the resources and power which are not accessible to man. We can see the perfection of love in Christ, but it cannot be fully achieved by man. This divine Grace can only be considered as man's pursuit. The self is too completely its own prisoner by the vain imagination of sin to be able to deliver itself. Just as the truth of God which breaks the vicious circle of false truth, apprehended from the self as the false centre, can never be other than

⁸ A. Schlatter, *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament*, p.503

foolishness to the self-centered self until it has been imparted by grace and received by faith; so also the power which breaks the self-centered will must be perceived as power from beyond the self; and even when it has become incorporated into the new will, its source is recognized in the confession: "I, yet not I." (qtd. in Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man* 2:107)⁹

Yet a different problem confronts us in this confession. If divine grace alone were the source of the new life, Christian faith would be forced to accept a doctrine of divine determinism which would seem to imperil every sense of human responsibility. St. Paul did not hesitate to affirm, on occasion, the almost capricious character of the divine mercy. St. Paul told his audience: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (qtd. in Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man* 2:116-7)¹⁰ This statement of the relation of divine grace to human freedom and responsibility does more justice to the complex facts involved than either purely deterministic or purely moralistic interpretations of conversion.

Grace is God's, not our humans'. But we should be confident that we can and we will purge our will of sins, because God forbids with his Grace, which contains another aspect of the forgiveness of our sins.

'Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me' suggests that the new life is not an achieved reality. It accepts the divine grace that imputes Christ's perfection to the believers. This second meaning is supported by the words with which the passage continues: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (qtd. in Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man* 2:119)¹¹

Man's ability to judge himself is proof of a goodness in him which has final justification. But according to biblical faith the confession always runs: "I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the lord."(qtd. in Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man* 2:121)¹² Without the wisdom of God apprehended in faith, and standing partly in contradiction to human wisdom, men are never conscious of the seriousness of sin; for the judgment of God against their sinful pride and self-assertion is not perceived.

4.1.2 Grace as the Power of God in Man

Now that God is the source of man's new life, what should man do in this world? As man is closely connected with nature, while being endowed with the ability to transcend himself to some extent. Then can man perfect himself through efforts? Can he purge himself of sins? In Reinhold Niebuhr's opinion,

the real question is not whether we are able to achieve absolute perfection in

⁹ Gal. 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me."

¹⁰ Phil.2:12-13.

¹¹ Gal.2:20

¹² Cor 4:4

history, for even the most consistent perfectionist sects do not deny that human life remains in process. The question is whether, in the development of the new life, some contradiction between human self-will and the divine purpose remains. The issue is whether the basic character of human history, as it is apprehended in the Christian faith, is overcome in the lives of those who have thus apprehended it. (*Christian Realism and Political Problems*, 124)

That question would seem to find one answer in logic and another in experience. It is logical to assume that when man has become aware of the character of his self-love and of its incompatibility with the divine will, this very awareness would break its power. Furthermore, this logic is at least partially validated by experience. Repentance does initiate a new life. But the experience of Christians through the ages refutes those who follow this logic without qualification. The sorry annals of Christian fanaticism, of unholy religious hatreds, of sinful ambitions hiding behind the cloak of religious sanctity, of political power impulses compounded with pretensions of devotion to God, offer the most irrefutable proof of the error in every Christian doctrine and every interpretation of the Christian experience which claim that grace can remove the final contradiction between man and God. The sad experience of Christian history shows how human pride and spiritual arrogance rise to new heights precisely at the point where the claims of sanctity are made without due qualification.

It is important to emphasize that the two sides of the experience of grace are so related that they do not contradict, but support each other. To understand that the Christ in us is not a possession but a hope, that perfection is not a reality but an intention; that such peace as we know in this life is never purely the peace of achievement but the serenity of being completely known and all forgiven. Such awareness will not destroy moral ardor or responsibility. Rather, it is the only way of preventing premature completions of life, or arresting the new and more terrible pride which may find its roots in the soil of humility and of saving the Christian life from the intolerable pretension of self-proclaimed saints who have forgotten that they themselves are sinners.

Thus conceived, man remains sinful even with God's forgiveness. But God forbids us to be sinful, how can we live any longer therein. We should not let God down. We should try to perfect ourselves in payment of God's love and his forgiveness of our sins. This is the hope Reinhold Niebuhr finds for us sinful men. Then what is the relative perfection or approximation of love that man can achieve in the secular world? Reinhold Niebuhr's conception of justice gives us a good answer.

4.2 Niebuhr's Doctrine of Justice

Reinhold Niebuhr's narration of justice is put in relation to love from the Christian perspective. He considers the relation as a dialectical one.

Love is both the fulfillment and the negation of all achievements of justice in history. Or expressed from the opposite standpoint, the achievements of justice in history may rise in indeterminate degrees to find their fulfillment in a more perfect love and

brotherhood; but each new level of fulfillment also contains elements that stand in contradiction to perfect love. (*Nature and Destiny of Man* 2:246)

Realizing the paradoxical relation between justice and love, we are obliged to achieve justice in indeterminate degrees without forgetting the fact that no achievement is perfect fulfillment of love. Analyzing the realities of history in terms of this formula will throw light upon aspects of history. Higher realizations of justice can be possible only if it were based on the knowledge that such realizations are both approximations of and contradictions to the ideal of love.

The paradoxical relation between justice and love is expressed on various levels. In that analysis it became apparent that mutual love is the highest possibility of history in the sense that only such love is justified by historical consequences. At the same time such love can only be initiated by a type of disinterestedness that dispenses with historical justification. The love commandment is therefore no simple historical possibility. The full implications of the commandment illustrate the dialectical relation between history and the eternal.

In order to clarify the complexities in the relation of justice to love Niebuhr considers them in two dimensions: the dimension of rules and laws of justice and the dimension of structures of justice. The difference between these two dimensions obviously lies in the fact that laws and principles of justice are abstractly conceived, while structures and organizations embody the vitalities of history.

4.2.1 Laws and Principles of Justice

Reinhold Niebuhr considers all systems, rules and laws governing social relations as instruments of mutuality and community, as well as approximations of, and positive contradictions to, the ideal of brotherhood.

Systems and principles of justice are the servants and instruments of the spirit of brotherhood in so far as they extend the sense of obligation towards the other, (a) from an immediately felt obligation, prompted by obvious need, to a continued obligation expressed in fixed principles of mutual support; (b) from a simple relation between a self and one other to the complex relations of the self and the others; and (c) finally from the obligations, discerned by the individual self, to the wider obligations which the community defines from its more impartial perspective. (*Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2:248)

Different people take different perspectives on common problems. Thus various conceptions of a just solution to the problem emerge. Those various conceptions can be synthesized into an impartial one. If not, society would be anarchy of rival interests until power from above subdued the anarchy. Different interests may indeed clash to such a degree that no arbitration of the conflict is possible, in which case the conflict is ended either by the victory of one side or the other, or by the submission of both to a superior coercive force.

Reinhold Niebuhr believes that the achievements of democratic societies refute this pessimism, which demonstrates the purely negative conception of the relation of

government and systems of justice to the ideal of brotherhood. History reveals adjustments of interest to interest without the interposition of superior coercive force to be possible within wide limits. The capacity of communities to synthesize divergent approaches to a common problem and to arrive at a tolerably just solution proves man's capacity to consider interests other than his own. Nevertheless, the fact that a synthesis of conflicting interests and viewpoints is not easy and may become impossible under certain conditions is a refutation of a too simple trust in the impartial character of reason. It would be as false to regard rules and principles of justice as merely the instruments of the sense of social obligation, as to regard them merely as tools of egoistic interest.

In Niebuhr's analysis, laws and systems of justice, however, do have a negative as well as a positive relation to mutual love and the brotherhood. They contain both approximations of and contradictions to the spirit of brotherhood. They are merely approximations because various members of a community tend to take advantage of each other, or to be more concerned with their own weal than with that of others. Because of this tendency all systems of justice make careful distinctions between the rights and interests of various members of a community. A harmony achieved through justice is therefore only an approximation of brotherhood. It is the best possible harmony within the conditions created by human egoism.

The validity of the principle of equality on the one hand and the impossibility of realizing it fully on the other illustrates the relation of absolute norms of justice to the relativities of history. The positive relation of principles of justice to the ideal of brotherhood makes an indeterminate approximation of love in the realm of justice possible. The negative relation means that all conceptions of justice embody some elements contradictory to the law of love.

4.2.2 Structures of Justice

To Niebuhr, this two-fold character of the relation of the principles of justice brotherhood is more clearly and apparently demonstrated in the structures of justice. He considers that the structures of justice are constituted by three elements: the unity of vitality and reason, the coercive and organizing power of government and the balance of power. In Reinhold Niebuhr's opinion, no human community is a simple construction of reason. All are harmonies of human vital capacities. They are governed by power. The social power has two aspects: the organizing power of government and the balance of power.

Just as the principles of justice, the structures of justice also contain both approximation of and contradiction to love. Since there are various possibilities of so managing and equilibrating the balance of social forces in a given community, justice can approximate a more perfect brotherhood in varying degree. Yet each principle of communal organization—the organization of power and the balance of power—contains possibilities of contradicting the law of brotherhood. The organizing principle and power may easily degenerate into tyranny. It may create a society in which the freedom and vitality of all individual members are impaired. On the other hand, the principle of the balance of power is always imbued with the possibility of anarchy.

Niebuhr always bases his thought on his view of human nature. He thinks that the importance of power in social organization is based on two characteristics of human nature: one is the unity of vitality and reason; the other is man's persistent tendency to regard himself as more important than anyone else and to view a common problem from the standpoint of his own interest. The first characteristic speaks of a fact that an individual or collective will pursue egoistic purposes with all vital resources he is accessible to. Thus restraints on these purposes must be equally armed with all available resources. The second characteristic suggests that man should turn to legal authority in order to prevent one person from taking advantage of another. But there is no legal authority that does not imply sanctions or the threat of coercive action against recalcitrance.

In Reinhold Niebuhr's eyes, human brotherhood is imperiled by two, and possibly three, forms of corruption. 1. Will seeks to dominate will. Imperialism and slavery are proper examples. 2. Interests come in conflict with interests and thus the relations of mutual dependence are destroyed. 3. Sometimes the self, individual or collective, seeks to isolate itself from the community and to disavow communal responsibilities. Isolationism is a case in point.

The problem of being dominated by some other man is avoided most successfully by equilibrium of powers and vitalities. No other moral or social restraints ever succeed completely in preventing injustice and enslavement. Thus we can consider equilibrium of vitality as an approximation of brotherhood within the limits of conditions imposed by human selfishness. But balance of power is not brotherhood itself. An equilibrium of power results in tension. All tension is potential conflict. The principle of the equilibrium of power is thus a principle of justice when it prevents domination and enslavement; but it is a principle of anarchy as its tensions, if unresolved, result in overt conflict. Human society therefore requires a conscious control and manipulation of the various equilibria that exist in it.

According to Niebuhr, the principles of government stand upon a higher plane of moral sanction and social necessity than the principle of the balance of power. Without the principle of government, balance of power degenerates into anarchy. The principle of government is a more conscious effort to arrive at justice than the latter. It is important to recognize that government also contains an element which contradicts the law of brotherhood. Rulers may abuse his power in two ways. Firstly, it may be used as the tool of dominion which one portion of the community exercises over the whole of the community. Secondly, the government would generate the imperial impulse of one class or group within the community; if its pretensions are not checked. It would be tempted to destroy the vitality and freedom of component elements in the community in the name of order. It would identify its particular form of order with the principle of order itself, and thus place all rebels against its authority under the moral disadvantage of revolting against order. This is the sin of idolatry and pretension, in which all governments are potentially involved. The majesty of the state is legitimate in so far as it embodies and expresses both the authority and power of the total community over all its members, and the principle of order and justice as such against the peril of anarchy. The legitimate majesty of

government is acknowledged and affirmed in the Christian doctrine of government as a divine ordinance.

Both balance of power and the principle of government have contradictions to brotherhood. Then what is the ideal justice? Reinhold Niebuhr takes the democratic justice as the answer. He says that:

The development of democratic justice in human society has depended upon some comprehension of the moral ambiguities inherent in both government and the principle of the equilibrium of power. It is the highest achievement of democratic societies that they embody the principle of resistance to government within the principle of government itself. The citizen is thus armed with constitutional power to resist the unjust exactions of government. He can do this without creating anarchy within the community, if government has been so conceived that criticism of the ruler becomes an instrument of better government and not a threat to government itself. (*Nature and Destiny of Man* 2:268)

Niebuhr speaks highly of the achievement of democracy. In his eyes, various schools of thought do not fully apprehend the potential peril to justice in the principle of government and balance of power. Usually he who comprehends the moral ambiguities of the principle of government does not understand the danger of anarchy. And those who try to avoid anarchy are indiscriminate with the claims of governments. Thus the democratic achievements are worthy of our praise and thinking. To Reinhold Niebuhr, history is destined to go forward towards the aim of avoiding both anarchy and tyranny, while against the peril of understanding only one side of the problem.

Reinhold Niebuhr's interpretation of God's grace and his idea of justice can be understood as his elaboration of the achievement of love from the spiritual and secular aspects of human world. He tries to advocate man to tremble for God's power and live in serenity under God's mercy. God has the power and resources which are inaccessible to man, who is deeply involved in the sin of pretending to be as God, the centre of himself and the world. But God forgives man. Thus Reinhold Niebuhr thinks that man should live in serenity with the reverence for God's power and love for God's mercy. This is made more concrete in his idea of justice. He considers justice as both approximations of and contradictions to love. In Reinhold Niebuhr's mind, justice is the highest fulfillment of love in secular world which is full of man's egoism, the tendency to consider himself as more important than others and concern more for himself than others. In a word, what Reinhold Niebuhr really concerns is to remind man of his sinfulness and encourage him with the possible achievement of love and justice in society.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, Reinhold Niebuhr's ideas are based on two cornerstones: the nature of man on the one hand and love and justice on the other. In order to solve social problems, Niebuhr usually turns to his theory on sin in order to vindicate his

criticism of the moral and secular optimism in his era. But we should not jump to the conclusion that he is preoccupied with sin. Rather, his criticism and all he has done through his life aim at the final achievement of love and justice in society.

We can not deny the fact that men are deeply immersed in his sin, which has been explicated clearly by Niebuhr from three aspects: pride of power, intellectual pride and pride of virtue. Realizing such sins, what shall we do? According to Reinhold Niebuhr's opinion, we should live in serenity under God's grace. That is to say we should try to perfect ourselves and improve the society in which we live. But does God really exist? It is still a question unresolved. Man's assumed perfection must have a divine source. Man has been preconditioned as a creature endowed with both the finiteness and the creativeness. Considering such a precondition, we should try to recognize such finiteness and creativeness and then try to perfect ourselves, convinced with the existence of God or something like him.

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