



concept of myth. The clearest statement of Niebuhr's understanding of myth is as follows:

This is perhaps the most essential genius of myth, that it points to the timeless in time, to the ideal in the actual, but does not lift the temporal to the category of the eternal (as pantheism does), nor deny the significant glimpses of the eternal and the ideal in the temporal (as dualism does). When the mythical method is applied to the description of human character, its paradoxes disclose precisely the same relationships in human personality which myth reveals, and more consistent philosophies obscure, in the nature of the universe.²⁴⁷

It is only through myth then that we can talk meaningfully about the source of human existence that relates itself to and, at the same time, transcends history. Myth is the only way through which man's dialectical character of finiteness and self-transcendence can fully express itself.

. . . the biblical view of life is dialectical because it affirms the meaning of history and of man's natural existence on the one hand, and on the other insists that the center, source, and fulfillment of history lie beyond history. . . .

.....

. . . An ancillary theme of these essays is . . . the necessary and perennially valid contribution of myth to the biblical world view.²⁴⁸

The most concrete form in which myth expresses itself in Christian faith is the clarification of the meaning of human life by the Cross. The Cross gives history its proper

²⁴⁷ICE, p. 80.

²⁴⁸BT, pp. ix-x.

meaning by pointing out the source of meaning in God. Therefore, myth must be taken "seriously, but not literally."²⁴⁹ Here again the paradoxical nature of man is involved. If myth is taken literally, then it cannot satisfy man's infinite capacity for self-transcendence, because the source of myth is regarded as exclusively in history. If myth is not taken seriously, on the other hand, the meaningfulness of human life and history is jeopardized.

. . . it is important to take Biblical symbols seriously but not literally. If they are taken literally the Biblical conception of a dialectical relation between history and superhistory is imperiled; for in that case the fulfillment of history becomes merely another kind of time-history. If the symbols are not taken seriously the Biblical dialectic is destroyed, because in that case concepts of an eternity are connoted in which history is destroyed and not fulfilled.²⁵⁰

As the above quotation indicates, Niebuhr speaks of myth and symbol interchangeably. In so doing, he is vulnerable to Paul Lehmann's criticism that he fails to clarify the relationship between meaning and fact, knowledge and reality.²⁵¹ However, Niebuhr's intention needs to be understood. The Cross is a mythical expression of the faith that history is meaningful and also is waiting for the ultimate consummation of its meaning beyond history. It has already been

²⁴⁹NDM, II, 50.

²⁵⁰Ibid.

²⁵¹Paul Lehmann, "The Christology of Reinhold Niebuhr," Kegley and Bretall, editors, op. cit., p. 267.

seen how the Cross clarifies the meaning of history in history in the discussion of agape as the norm for human life. Our task now is to see how the Cross clarifies the meaning of history beyond history.

According to Niebuhr, the content of the Biblical myth of eschatology is embodied in three symbols: the Second Coming of Christ, the Last Judgment, and the Resurrection. These three symbols express the final consummation of the meaning of human history and life. Whether the Second Coming is Jesus' own or another, it is the full culmination of history which is, in essence, "a purging of human guilt and sin by divine judgment and mercy."²⁵² Thus, it symbolizes God's infinite concern for the good of man. And in so doing, it presents most dynamically God's sovereign power to transform this world and finally guarantees man's trust in God in the midst of the ambiguities of our world.

The Last Judgment symbolizes the following three points: (1) Christ is the judge of history; therefore, history is judged by its own essential character, and man is judged by his essential nature. (2) The distinction between good and evil will not be obscured at the end of history. (3) Finally, the Last Judgment indicates that history is not

²⁵²NDM, II, 288.



its own redeemer, because it is never free from ambiguities and contradictions.²⁵³

The resurrection of the body means three things. First, it denies any kind of dualism of the soul and the body. The Neo-Platonic dualism of good and evil in the individual and the world is rejected once for all. Instead, Christian faith affirms that man is both nature and spirit; therefore, he is the "organic unity of soul and body."²⁵⁴ This view of unity in man further implies that sin is not a product of his finiteness but arises from spirit.²⁵⁵ The resurrection of the body further means that it is a "justified hope," because man's radical freedom does not allow him to be completely in the flux of this world. He looks forward to the fulfillment of life beyond this life.²⁵⁶ But the ultimate fulfillment of this life cannot be accomplished by man himself. "God must complete what remains incomplete in human existence."²⁵⁷ Finally, the resurrection of the body expresses a "more social idea of human existence."²⁵⁸ It actually grew out of the social hope of the Jews. In the Old Testament the individual is always conceived of in

²⁵³Ibid., pp. 291-294.

²⁵⁵Ibid., p. 294.

²⁵⁷Ibid.

²⁵⁴BT, p. 292.

²⁵⁶Ibid., p. 297.

²⁵⁸Ibid.

relation to his total society, because "the Messianic kingdom was conceived of as the fulfilment of a social process, first of all, of course, as the fulfilment of the life of Israel."²⁵⁹

In Niebuhr's understanding of the cure for sin, life in history is regarded as meaningful, but its meaning is fragmentary. Life is constantly redeemed in history, but its redemption is by no means complete in history. The meaning of life and history is fully realized beyond history. This conclusion can be further substantiated by the two well known Niebuhrian phrases: history as "an interim" between the First Coming and the Second Coming,²⁶⁰ and "sin is overcome in principle, not in fact."²⁶¹ The latter emphasizes the fact that human life is not emancipated from the ambiguous and tragic character of our present world. Man will continue to negate life by rebelling against God in spite of His loud "Yes!" to human life in Christ. The former underscores the sovereign goodness of God which ultimately overcomes human sin. And it is this paradoxical relation between God's grace and human sin that is the constant theme of Niebuhr's doctrine of man. His grasp of the infinite

²⁵⁹Ibid., p. 298.

²⁶⁰NDM, II, 48.

²⁶¹Ibid., p. 49.



scope of human sin makes him a realist.²⁶² His fervent faith in God who judges and redeems man in Christ keeps him from becoming a cynic. This rare combination of realism and faith makes Niebuhr a "Christian realist."

²⁶²Niebuhr's realism here can be defined as his attempt to take self-interest for granted and to seek, in the improvement of society, to work with men and political forces as he finds them (see Kenneth Thompson, "The Political Philosophy of Reinhold Niebuhr," Kegley and Bretall, editors, op. cit., p. 172 and Heschel, op. cit., p. 396).



CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

From our examination of the thoughts of Erich Fromm and Reinhold Niebuhr with regard to the doctrine of man, it is evident that they agree on many areas of concern, but disagree on their content. This concluding chapter seeks to present certain major similarities as well as irreducible differences of the doctrines of man of Fromm and Niebuhr. From this it will be possible to ascertain if Fromm's humanistic approach may contribute to the basic insights revealed by Niebuhr's doctrine of man and to discover what implicit or explicit critique the Christian concept of man, as interpreted by Niebuhr, makes upon Erich Fromm's concept of human nature.

A. Similarities and differences of Fromm and Niebuhr

1. Similarities of Niebuhr and Fromm

The similarities of the two men can be summarized as their passionate concern for the nature and destiny of man. They are convinced that our correct understanding of man creates a dynamic impact upon the quality of our present and future life. This basic similarity can be clarified by relating it to the three areas of their mutual concern: (1) the essential nature of man, (2) the discrepancy between



what man is and what he ought to be, and (3) the need for the restoration of man.

Fromm and Niebuhr agree that the basic characteristic of man is that although man is a creature of nature, he is also more than nature. Being in nature and beyond nature at the same time, he is not a static entity. Rather, he is a developing, growing, and moving mode of being. Man is becoming in a dynamic process. This means that man's life is a risk, for becoming means facing up to the threat that is present from every side. The failure to become, to risk oneself to the present and the future means meaninglessness, boredom, and nihilism.

This basic agreement with regard to the dynamic nature of man is seen in their attempt to do justice to the creative potentialities of man. For Fromm, it is quite clear that creativity is the primary potentiality of man. When the primary potentiality is thwarted, man feels frustrated and becomes regressive in his attempt to overcome the discomfort of frustrations. And, furthermore, man's creative potentialities go far beyond the realms of nature and ideologies. It is this conviction that compels Fromm to react to the psychology of Freud and the economic determinism of Marx. He wants very much to maintain that man is more than the helpless victim of his own id and an economic animal.



Man's creativity is such that neither Marx nor Freud can do justice to its true scope.

Contrary to the general view that Niebuhr overemphasizes sin, he clearly affirms the creativity of man. Equating human freedom with man's infinite capacity for self-transcendence, he maintains that it is impossible to define its content. His treatment of science and the search for justice illustrates this. Man has the creativity to establish a relatively just society. But, at the same time, there is no definite point where his creativity for justice is fully expressed. To define the content of justice is to impose undue limitations upon human creativity. Similarly in science no one can predict with precision what its achievements will be in the future. Therefore, Niebuhr would say that the traditional attempt to emphasize the omnipotence of God by pointing out man's inability to create life will prove to be bad apologetics. Such an attempt does not appreciate the infinite scope of human creativity and thereby, in the final analysis, fails to do justice to the Biblical concept of the omnipotence of God.

Furthermore, both relate human creativity to anxiety. For Fromm, to be human is for man to be alienated from himself and the world about him. Man is aware of the fact that the quality of his existence depends upon whether or not he will succeed in experiencing reunion with himself and the

world about him on a higher and conscious level. This awareness makes him anxious, because he knows that his life is a risk. Fromm thus describes man's life as a constant search for overcoming anxiety productively. Only the productive realization of man's potentialities enables him to regard anxiety as the basis of his creativity, not as a threat to be avoided at all costs. Niebuhr, too, maintains that anxiety is what makes man creative. Following Kierkegaard closely, he thinks that the uniqueness of man lies in the fact that he is both finite and infinite at the same time. This dialectical ontological situation makes man perennially anxious. Although he knows his finiteness, he cannot see the limits of his own freedom. Man can never be perfectly content with his ethical, cultural, and intellectual achievements, for his freedom transcends all of them. It is anxiety that compels man to search ever higher possibilities.

Both Fromm and Niebuhr maintain that man is by nature a creative being. It is their insistence on this point that makes them vehement opponents of stereo-typed versions of Calvinism that deny the potentialities of man, because he is the victim of the Fall of Adam. Their mutual insistence on the creativity of man further leads to another point of agreement: their aversion to scientism. The methods of the natural sciences have produced our phenomenal technical achievements. But they have been deficient in generating



true wisdom in human affairs. It must be pointed out, however, that neither Niebuhr nor Fromm is opposed to science. After all, man is a creature involved in natural processes. There is a very significant portion of his life accessible to scientific inquiry. Their opposition is to the dogmatic assumption that the methods of the natural sciences are the only avenue to the understanding of the essential nature of man and to the solution of all of his problems. Niebuhr and Fromm share in common the particular concern to undercut prevailing scientific imperialism and to show the serious limitations of the scientific method in illuminating the uniqueness of man. For both, the uniqueness of man is in that which is not totally accessible to scientific investigation. Fromm defines the essential nature of man in terms of reason, imagination, and love, while Niebuhr defines it in terms of man's infinite capacity for self-transcendence.

Niebuhr and Fromm also maintain that the essential nature of man is not what he is now. They readily acknowledge the serious discrepancy between what man ought to be and what he is. Although they differ on its cause and nature, they nevertheless agree that the discrepancy exists and needs serious discussion. For both, the discrepancy expresses itself in the individual person's broken relationship with himself as well as with others. Under the conditions of pathological alienation (Fromm) or sin (Niebuhr),

man fails to remain what he essentially is and dehumanizes the lives of others with whom he comes into contact directly or indirectly.

Both Fromm and Niebuhr go on to say that it is man himself who is, in the final analysis, responsible for the dehumanization of man. For Fromm, it is caused by the lack of man's moral stamina as well as by a society that stifles and suppresses human creativity. For Niebuhr, man is always involved in sin by his radical freedom. Although they differ on the issue of how man is responsible for dehumanization, they nevertheless insist that he is. Thence they are committed to improving the quality of human life. The restoration of health consists of the humanization of man's life by allowing the creativity of man to express itself as fully as possible. For both men reject collectivism and individualism. The one without the other will seriously distort the true understanding of man. Individualism emphasizes man over against society. Collectivism overemphasizes society at the expense of the individual. Neither view, in Fromm's estimation, does full justice to the paradoxical relationship between man and society.¹

¹Thus, Kecskemati seems a bit unfair when he criticizes Fromm's emphasis of the willingness of the individual to submit himself to powers other than his own at the expense of the fear of being dominated (P. Kecskemati, "The All Powerful 'I,'" Commentary, 21, 1956, pp. 176-179).

Niebuhr, too, wants to avoid both individualism and collectivism. The scope of individualism is not sufficiently wide to fulfill man's self-transcendence. Man always seeks to go beyond his own self and to establish life with others. At the same time, the collective does not possess the same developed means of self-transcendence that the individual does. Collectivism simply cannot satisfy man's infinite capacity for self-transcendence. In its attempt to limit the scope of man's radical freedom, collectivism always suppresses man's creativity and thereby destroys his humanity.

While rejecting both collectivism and individualism, Fromm and Niebuhr agree that the basic cure for the sickness of man must take place in the context of human society. They have made full and serious analyses of our cultural and social crises and insist that the sickness of the individual cannot be separated from the sickness of his society. Man cannot become fully human apart from his relationship with other human beings in an open society. The open society is a democratic society. It is a society in which the governing and the governed can have significant influence upon each other. It is a society in which criticisms are not regarded as rebellion but as constructive attempts to make human life truly human. Therefore, they insist that it must be distinguished from American society plagued as it is by alienation, anomie, anonymity, and conformity.



While differing widely on their content, both Fromm and Niebuhr agree on the following areas of concern: (1) man has his own essential nature; (2) man's actual existence is different from what he essentially is; (3) man may be released to move in a direction different from, and superior to, that which characterizes him in his actual existence.

2. Differences of Niebuhr and Fromm

While in agreement on the areas of concern with regard to man, their disagreements are far more glaring than their agreement. But before going into this discussion in full detail, it is necessary to uncover a serious difference that exists in their presuppositions with regard to man. Fromm maintains with passion that man is alone in this world. His independence and freedom are based on his human creativity. Man becomes truly human only to the extent that he affirms his individuality as a total man in each of his relationships to the world, others, and himself. Man is made in man's image. In short, Fromm thinks that man is that which he makes of himself. This assertion about man as a free, self-conscious being who freely creates his own destiny is the explanation for Fromm's deep attraction to Zen Buddhism. He seems to think that Zen Buddhism is the best expression of atheistic humanism. It recognizes the uniqueness of man which, in his estimation, Marx and Freud do not fully appreciate. At the same time, it avoids the absurdity of

claiming the existence of a transcendent God from which Judaism and Christianity have not been able to escape. The concept of self-salvation of Zen Buddhism has made such a strong impact upon Fromm's thought that he ignores the basic difficulty that exists between this philosophy and his zealous desire for transforming society. Contrary to Fromm's position, it is far from clear that satori is compatible with his concept of social justice. Be that as it may, it seems quite clear that Fromm's position is best described as atheistic humanism which he expresses most clearly in his appropriation of Zen Buddhism.

The basic presupposition of Niebuhr's doctrine of man is diametrically opposed to that of Fromm. Niebuhr maintains with equal passion that God and man are interdependent realities. Neither can be defined properly without the other. Therefore, man neither creates his own destiny solely on his own, nor is his end solely in himself. He came into existence by the gracious and free act of God; therefore, he is constantly dependent upon Him. Niebuhr insists that we can never define man adequately, no matter how able he becomes, without referring to God.

It is clear then that for Fromm anthropology is nothing but anthropology, whereas for Niebuhr, anthropology presupposes a theology which points to a power that both transcends and completes the humanity of man. This position

of Niebuhr is based upon the paradoxical character of man as nature and spirit. Man as nature finds his finite character meaningful. Man as nature and spirit compels him to see meaning in the finite and to find the source of meaning beyond the finite. Therefore, man needs God who is both intimate and transcendent at the same time.

a) The essential nature of man

Although both Fromm and Niebuhr maintain that there is such a thing as the essential nature of man, they disagree on its content. Their disagreement, first of all, issues from their two different ways of arriving at the essential nature of man. Fromm arrives at it strictly by examining man's reason, imagination, and ability to love. "Know thyself" is his motto. Thus, he is convinced that although man's quest for meaning yields nothing from the cosmos but silence, he cannot escape the responsibility of deciding what he will do and become. The only source of man's self-knowledge, in his estimation, is man himself.

Niebuhr, on the other hand, never holds that man can attain authentic self-knowledge by looking into himself. Through reason man can attain the knowledge that he is both limited by nature and beyond nature. Reason also can inform him that his radical freedom has no principle in itself and is incapable of fulfilling itself. But Niebuhr goes on to say that this knowledge of himself as both limited and

limitless is far from complete. Man's authentic self-knowledge includes the fundamental Christian affirmation that he is the child of God. It is only through his original righteousness that man's authentic self-knowledge as the child of God is established. This affirmation is ultimately made possible by God's sacrificial love in Jesus Christ. Niebuhr thinks that through divine revelation, man is set in his place and knows his essential nature.

This necessitates the spelling out of the basic epistemological difference between Fromm and Niebuhr. Fromm considers any belief in a transcendent God as an authoritarian doctrine which suppresses the potentialities of man. As long as man depends upon God for his ultimate existence, he still is a regressive man having failed to develop his true potentialities. The basic instruments with which man uncovers his true self are reason, mutual love, and humanistic conscience. For Niebuhr, on the other hand, it is clear that man's authentic self-knowledge is possible only through faith, man's grateful response to what God has already done for him in Christ. Faith--man's ultimate trust in the infinite goodness of God--reveals that man, no matter how sinful he may be, still remains under God's care as His child.

Niebuhr's theological affirmation issues into their most conspicuous difference. This is in their concepts of freedom. For Fromm freedom means man's ability to break

ties with nature and to attain his productive potentialities. This freedom is contained within the self and does not in any way transcend it. Here Fromm's intention is clear. He wants to harmonize his idea that man is free and self-determined with his desire and concern as a psychoanalyst to find the orderliness which he believes exists in the human psyche.

Niebuhr's understanding of human freedom is more complex. The concept of freedom is the primary basis from which he criticizes alternative doctrines of man. Niebuhr's notion of freedom is not really a part of Fromm's intellectual outlook. For Niebuhr, human freedom is too great to be contained in man's contingent existence. Freedom compels man to look for an object of devotion beyond himself. To state our point differently, for Fromm freedom is the means by which man realizes his authentic selfhood that is rooted in humanity. For Niebuhr freedom is the power of self-transcendence which can be fulfilled only by the grace of God.

This basic difference can be further illustrated in their differing concepts of mystery and conscience. Niebuhr maintains that human life, due to its freedom, points beyond itself. In other words, life is a mystery, because where there is freedom, there always is mystery. Human freedom and life are such that they refuse to reduce meaning too simply to rational intelligibility. That part of life which

does not yield to a logical rational analysis must be expressed by what Niebuhr calls "permanent myth."²

Fromm rejects the mystery of which Niebuhr speaks; for him life is not ultimately mysterious at all. Rather, mystery is largely created by the lack of knowledge. Even if life should not disclose itself ultimately to reason in all aspects, mystery about life will have little significance when all the potentialities of man are productively fulfilled.

The difference with regard to human freedom is illustrated also in human conscience. Since in Fromm's estimation, freedom is contained in the self, he can put his ultimate trust in "humanistic conscience" which is the true voice of humanity. For Niebuhr, however, Fromm's position seems overly optimistic and dangerously naive. Although Niebuhr maintains that conscience is a legitimate expression of original righteousness in the fallen world, it cannot, by itself, be powerful enough to be effective in the ambiguous realities of human life. The reason for this lies in human freedom. Since man in freedom transcends his conscience, he always uses it for the enhancement of his egotism.

²Niebuhr, Faith and Politics, op. cit., p. 16.

b) The sin of man

Niebuhr and Fromm are in complete agreement on the assumption that man is not what he ought to be. But on the issue of what is basically the trouble with man, they apparently disagree flatly. Fromm would have none of Niebuhr's assertion that man sins because he is free and that his freedom does not enable him to avoid sin. Fromm would call this basic presupposition of Niebuhr either irrational or nonsensical. His basic opposition can be stated thus: either man is responsible for something in which he can exercise the power of contrary choice, or he is not responsible at all. For if man cannot avoid sin, then in the last analysis, it becomes something other than free decision by man himself and therefore is no longer sin. What is involved in Fromm's objection is this: man is not accountable for something that he cannot avoid.

Niebuhr, on the other hand, makes it clear that for him the assertion that sin is inevitable but not necessary is far from being absurd. Though it makes little sense to analytical reason, says Niebuhr, common human experience substantiates its validity. Man invariably commits sin but also makes it the object of his thought. It is for this reason that man can never escape an uneasy conscience. Man judges himself and in the process finds himself responsible for his sin. For Niebuhr, man's radical freedom is such

that it makes impossible Fromm's simple assertion that man is not responsible for something he cannot avoid. Like man's self, sin is much more elusive and, in the final analysis, mysterious than Fromm seems to think. It does not allow Fromm's easy generalization.

Their basic disagreement on the propensity of man toward sin is most conspicuously expressed in their different concepts of guilt. For Fromm guilt carries nothing but negative connotations. The sense of guilt is caused by man's failure to realize his potentialities. It only gives man the conviction of wickedness and induces in him the feeling of total inability to do anything toward the humanization of man.

In fact, as soon as my deed is experienced as "sin" or "guilt" it becomes alienated. It is not I who did this, but "the sinner," "the bad one," that "other person" who now needs to be punished; not to speak of the fact that the feeling of guilt and self-accusation creates sadness, self-loathing, and loathing of life.³

In short, guilt must be gotten rid of by productively realizing man's potentialities.

Niebuhr rejects Fromm's concept of guilt for two reasons. First, guilt is not something that man can escape. Man cannot really assert himself, because his radical freedom has no principle of its own. Second, guilt is not

³HM, p. 128.

self-mutilation. Rather, it is essential for man to understand the grace of God that overcomes sin. For Niebuhr guilt is the result of man's awareness of the discrepancy between what he ought to be and what he really is. Without this recognition on the part of man, he is completely incapable of understanding God. This explains why Niebuhr vehemently criticizes any utopian understanding of human life and history as well as why he spends so many pages delineating the impact of sin. Only he who knows he is guilty, thinks Niebuhr, can appreciate what God has done for him in Christ.

These two points that Niebuhr raises against Fromm's concept of guilt compel us to conclude that they deal with two different dimensions of guilt. For Fromm, it is the result of man's thwarting of the potentialities of others and of himself. It is therefore a phenomenon of psychological disorders. For Niebuhr, on the other hand, guilt is primarily the result of the disruption of man's harmonious relationship with God. Niebuhr sees guilt in the human self as a defect and therefore finds it not amenable to therapy. The essential human self, in Fromm's estimation, is healthy and therefore capable of self-salvation, whereas for Niebuhr it shows the depths of sin that extend to the self.

These points of disagreement between Fromm and Niebuhr with regard to guilt enable us to see more clearly their serious differences on the origin of sin. Fromm

maintains that man's sin is directly related to his lack of self-appreciation. Man's trouble is that he does not overcome the discomfort of necessary alienation from nature, others, and himself by developing in himself "freedom to." Instead, he avoids the discomfort by pretending as if it did not exist, namely, by regressing to the state of pre-human existence. In this sense, man's trouble is that he thinks less highly of himself than he ought to think. It is this tendency that prevents him from productively realizing his potentialities.

* Niebuhr, on the other hand, maintains that sin is caused by man's strength, that is, his radical freedom. In his power of self-transcendence, man makes himself the center of all values. Sin is man's abortive effort to overcome the basic insecurity of human existence by establishing a security which is essentially incompatible with the character of human existence. Man pretends to be the source of his own security. Thus, man's trouble stems from his overestimation of himself and not the lack of self-assertion.

+ The basic disagreements with regard to sin lie in different understandings of the nature of the human self. For Fromm the self is complete in itself, whereas for Niebuhr the self is infinitely transcendent and cannot fulfill itself. Therefore, Fromm interprets sin solely as man's inhumanity to man, whereas Niebuhr regards sin primarily as

man's rebellion against God. For the latter, man's inhumanity to man is the derivative of the previous sin of his disrupted relationship with God.

c) The cure for the sickness

Their difference in regard to the nature of sin becomes even more glaring as we look at their concepts of the cure of sin.

(1) The source of the cure

Here again the difference stems from their conflicting concepts of the self. For Fromm, the individual is conceived as possessing positive qualities that should be realized under appropriate conditions. This view is most obvious in his identification of humanity with God. God is not a symbol of power which transcends man but of man's own powers. Man, in order to cure his sickness, must know that he is his own God and live accordingly. The source of the cure lies solely in man himself.

For Niebuhr, however, the self is not complete in itself. But in his search for fulfillment, man inevitably pretends to be the source of his own existence. So man by himself can never be finally released from bondage into new life. The source of the cure must be something that can do justice to the dialectical character of nature and spirit. This is agape. It alone can be related and transcendent at the same time. It both judges the sin of man and gives him

a new incentive to redirect his life. In agape, man is brought face to face with the wretchedness of his sin and, at the same time, knows the grace of God that overcomes sin by putting human sin upon Himself. The basic disagreement with regard to the source of the cure is the difference which is inevitable between a Christian theologian and an atheistic humanist.

(2) The nature of the cure

Fromm's understanding of the nature of the cure is a qualitative improvement of man's three-fold relationship with himself, others, and nature. When man relates himself to a self (either his own or another's) productively, he experiences mutual enrichment of common humanity. When man treats himself and others as human and is treated by others as human, mutual respect and concern will be developed through the conviction that all men are wrapped up together in common humanity. Fromm emphasizes that the cure for the sickness of man takes place in the framework of man's relationship to himself and others. In short, man's salvation must be both individual and social. Man's relationship to nature is equally important for the restoration of his health. Man must firmly establish his transcendent character in his relation to nature. He must assert himself as the creator and manipulator. He must make sense of nature. He must rule over it, instead of being ruled by it. Thus, the

cure for man's sickness takes place in two different levels-- the human and the natural.

Furthermore, for Fromm man's perfect achievement of the three-fold union is a historical possibility. Fromm can even conceive of people whose realization of their productive potentialities is such that they now experience no destructive urge of any kind within their psycho-spiritual structure. St. Francis of Assissi and Mahatma Gandhi may be cited as good examples. In fact, it is this conviction of the perfectibility of man that leads Fromm to develop such long-range and concrete psycho-spiritual, economic, political, and cultural proposals for the good society in which man's creative potentialities are fully realized to the extent that every individual can assert his own identity and allow others to do the same.

Niebuhr, on the other hand, insists that the salvation of man, as far as his worldly life is concerned, is much more ambiguous than Fromm's estimation of the cure indicates. And, furthermore, contrary to Fromm, he insists that human life is finally completed not in history but beyond history. Salvation in this world for Niebuhr means essentially God's assurance that human life is meaningful despite evil forces that seem to negate entirely the meaningfulness of human existence. It is supremely expressed by Paul, who writes, "whether we live, we live unto the Lord. Whether we die, we

die unto the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:18). It is a life under grace that both judges and redeems life. That is to say, this life under grace does not liberate man from sin and guilt. Nor does salvation primarily mean harmony, reason, and open relationship between man and man. Rather, it is a life which is constantly judged, forgiven, and renewed by the gracious mercy of God. Interestingly enough, Niebuhr's understanding of man's salvation in history is best expressed by Paul Tillich, his close friend.

"You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. . . . Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!" If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed. In that moment, grace conquers sin, and reconciliation bridges the gulf of estrangement.⁴

Niebuhr emphasizes the ambiguous relationship of sin and grace in human life, because he is aware of the harsh reality that man's highest achievements, even at the pinnacle of grace, are always stained with sin. To underscore this point, it is sufficient for us to recall Niebuhr's analysis of spiritual pride. Even Luther, who understood so well the Pauline affirmation of salvation by faith, committed the sin of spiritual pride by believing that he had the truth over

⁴Paul Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 162.

against the demands of the peasants. No individual and no human group can claim a divine dignity for its moral and intellectual achievements. When one is convinced that he has the truth and nothing but the truth, then he denies the affirmation that God alone has sanctity. It is not possible for man either to know the truth fully or to avoid the error of pretending that he does. The ultimate knowledge of man under grace is that he has partial truth but not the whole truth. Man is saved by grace through faith alone.

Contrary to Fromm, Niebuhr does not have any final blueprint for society. For him society always involves dealing with proximate problems.⁵ To deal with proximate problems, we need to understand the nature of power as coercive force. The kind of power necessary for social existence is coercive force that restrains man's selfishness from controlling the dynamics of society. In other words, power plays the negative role of control rather than the positive role of creating productive dynamics in society as seen in Fromm's thought. This aspect of Niebuhr's thought is definitely related to his understanding of human sin and creativity. Since man's creativity and sin are infinite in scope, any concrete and detailed proposals we make for our future society will be of little value. We cannot predict

⁵Bennett, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Contribution . . . ," op. cit., p. 84.

in what forms human sin and creativity will express themselves. Thus, detailed blueprints for the good society will eventually prove to be irrelevant and useless.

The major differences concerning the cure of sin in history are best expressed in their conflicting views of love as the true norm of human life. Though Fromm maintains, as does Niebuhr, that love is the norm of human life, it is to be underscored that the love of which he speaks is mutual love. The basis of love for him is the common humanity of man. This is why self-love and love for others are interpreted as identical. And yet, since common humanity always begins with one's own subjective experience of his own humanity, the starting point of mutual love is in the self. Therefore, in Fromm's view, one who does not love himself cannot love others either. Self-love is always postulated as the root of love for humanity. The real disease of man is the lack of self-love, not its excess. Fromm further maintains that perfect mutual love is attainable in history. Man can love himself and others in such a way that in his act of love he is liberated from selfishness which is really a form of self-hate. This perfect balance of man's self-love and love for others is accomplished by men like St. Francis of Assisi and Mahatma Gandhi.

Niebuhr, on the other hand, insists that love as the norm of human life is sacrificial love, an "impossible

possibility." It is the fruit of God's reconciliation with men. Agape can prevent mutual love from degenerating into a powerful instrument of the enhancement of man's egotism by reminding him of his true norm. Although agape cannot justify itself in history, it is relevant to history in its ability to keep mutual love both mutual and loving. In the light of the Cross, we can understand that all men are equally sinful. From this realization comes the spirit of forgiveness and tolerance which liberates man from ugly self-righteousness, narrow dogmatism, and cynical relativism. Agape further enables man to be passionately concerned with justice. For Niebuhr, justice is always derived from agape, although it is not identical with it. And, finally, agape teaches us to live with frustrations without sinking into cynicism or despair. It enables us to affirm that although we are perplexed by mysteries of life, in the Cross we know that we are ultimately safe in Him who loves us. Agape can and does overcome partially human sinfulness in history. What is implied in all this is Niebuhr's conviction that man cannot love others merely by loving himself. It is impossible to make a clear-cut distinction between self-love and selfishness as Fromm tries to do. For the root of the sickness of man lies in man's attempt to make himself the center of all values. And he who has the center of values in himself finds it unable to love others as he loves himself. Thus,

on the nature of love, Fromm and Niebuhr are diametrically opposed to each other. Their disagreement can be stated thus: self-love for Fromm is the basis for love of fellow men. Whereas for Niebuhr love of fellow men is the by-product of genuine self-giving.

The final aspect of their differences on the nature of the cure is its locus. For Fromm it is absolutely clear that the cure for the sickness must take place here and only here. He has no interest in anything that is beyond this life. His stance is wholly consistent with his basic presupposition that man is alone in the universe and therefore responsible for his own self-creation. For Niebuhr, however, the telos of history means its fulfillment beyond history. It is the perfect reign of God over all things. Here all thinking and speaking must cease. Man can accept the telos of his life and history only in an obedient faith which is the loving answer to God's personal turning to men. It is here that Fromm and Niebuhr totally reject each other's view. For Fromm, Niebuhr's reliance upon God's grace shows that he has not sufficiently outgrown the mentality of medieval man. No wonder, Fromm would say, Niebuhr cannot have concrete plans for our future society. The reason for it does not lie in his realism but in his failure to attain "freedom to" fulfill his innate potentialities. Niebuhr's point is that man's freedom is so radical that even man himself cannot

articulate its full scope. To define man's creative potentialities as concretely as Fromm does is to commit the danger of imposing undue limitations upon it. Man's radical freedom can hardly be limited to Fromm's concept of "freedom to." According to Niebuhr, man is always aware of the transcendent, although he cannot fathom its nature. Fromm's proposed cure cannot satisfy this aspect of man because of its narrow scope. Even if man could attain perfect harmony with nature, others, and himself, in Niebuhr's thinking, he would still ask, "Why must my life always aim at this three-fold union?"

B. Personal views

In our definition of the problem for investigation, it was stated that this dissertation would seek to ascertain whether Fromm's humanistic approach may contribute to the basic insights revealed by Niebuhr's doctrine of man; to discover what implicit or explicit critique the Christian concept of man, as interpreted by Reinhold Niebuhr, makes upon Erich Fromm's concept of human nature. Since in the previous section irreducible differences as well as similarities between their doctrines of man were brought to light, our discussion now turns to this particular problem. The criteria for our judgment are two: (1) internal coherence and (2) common human experience. We shall discuss in detail what these two criteria of judgment mean.

1. Internal coherence

Internal coherence means the orderly organic relationship between the basic principle of thought to the whole of the thought. Therefore here it is necessary to review the principle of the doctrines of man of Fromm and Niebuhr and to see how consistently each principle is maintained throughout their anthropologies.

As has been stated repeatedly in the discussion of Fromm's doctrine of man, the principle of his thought is the dialectical relationship between man and society or between identity and community. Man is to realize his creative potentialities in order to become a free, independent, self-defining person. But, at the same time, man grows only through interaction in his community. His growth takes place in the context of language, sets of values, and other necessary elements for human life with which his community provides him. Thus, man influences the quality of his community; society determines the quality of man's life. Is Fromm successful in maintaining this principle consistently throughout his discussion of man? This question has already been answered negatively in the discussion of Fromm's anthropology and needs no rehearsal here. It suffices here to point out that Fromm fails to show the impact that man and society create upon each other in the areas of man's sickness and the cure for it. In most cases, Fromm discusses

separately what man does to society and what society does to man. But nowhere does he spell out the complex and dialectical relationships that exist between man and community.

I would go one step further to say that the principle of Fromm's thought does not support what he really wants to affirm in all of his writings: "I believe in the perfectibility of man."⁶ His principle says that the individual and his community must constantly affect each other and go beyond what they have inherited in order for them to remain truly human. Men influence their community and the community, in turn, influences them. This dialectical relationship is an indefinite process. What the principle of Fromm's thought can say is that man can progress indefinitely as long as his community is conducive to the development of his potentialities and as long as he is able to make his own contribution to his community so that it, too, grows constantly. But it does not allow Fromm to say that man is perfectible. In short, there is no stage in the dialectical relationship where one can say confidently, "Here we see the fullest realization of human and cultural potentialities."

~~✱~~ The principle of Niebuhr's doctrine of man is the paradoxical relationship between man's creatureliness and his infinite capacity for self-transcendence. It is this

⁶BCI, p. 192.

paradox that underlies his whole doctrine of man. Thus, man is interpreted as a being who finds his finite existence meaningful and seeks the source of his meaning in a realm beyond this world. Sin is man's attempt to give his finite existence divine sanction in radical freedom. The cure for sin is regarded as the clarification of meaning in this world and the completion of the meaning beyond history by the gracious act of God. Indeed, the paradoxical nature of the limited and limitless character of man is basic to every aspect of Niebuhr's doctrine of man. Niebuhr is successful in maintaining the principle of his thinking consistently throughout his whole discussion of man.

X However, one weakness of Niebuhr has to be mentioned. Niebuhr's primary emphasis in his discussion of sin falls upon the sin of the powerful individual and of collective man. Except in The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, he does not relate the paradoxical character of man as nature and spirit to the sin of the weak individual. To be sure, the impact of the sin of such a powerful individual as Henry Ford and the collective evil of Stalinism and Nazism was extremely strong during Niebuhr's most creative years. And in view of the fact that his thought has been developed largely in dialogue with world events, his relative indifference to the sin of sensuality is quite understandable and must not be unduly emphasized. And yet, from the perspective

of a balanced anthropology, it must be admitted that he does not apply his principle to the sin of the weak as consistently as to the sin of the powerful.

The second question to be asked with regard to Niebuhr's principle is whether or not it can support the basic intention of his thought. The basic intention of Niebuhr's doctrine of man, as has been pointed out, is to direct our attention to the infinite grace of God that finally overcomes human sin. Man's radical freedom, it must be recalled, is infinite but has no principle of coherence within itself. It compels man to look for the presence of the eternal in life and history. God's grace fulfills and does not destroy man's yearning for the true meaning of his existence. It is in man's discovery of the gracious God of Jesus Christ that his infinite capacity for self-transcendence and God's grace dynamically intersect. [Man is both finite and infinite; therefore, he must find his finite existence meaningful and have the source of meaning beyond himself. God fulfills both needs of man by revealing Himself in Jesus Christ, particularly in his Cross. Thus, it is safe to conclude that Niebuhr's principle does justice to what he seeks to affirm in his anthropology.

2. Common human experience

Since it is, in the final analysis, unavoidable that all but highly technical arguments are finally settled in

terms of common human experience, we shall examine how successfully Fromm and Niebuhr relate it to all aspects of their doctrines of man. The purpose of this section is two-fold: (1) to clarify what is common human experience in the areas of man's essential nature, sickness and restoration and (2) to examine whether or not the doctrines of man set forth by Fromm and Niebuhr seriously take it into account and, furthermore, illuminate and clarify it.

What is common human experience in terms of the essential nature of man? It may be defined as man's immediate awareness of the mystery of existence and of the qualitative difference of man's life from all other forms of existence on earth. The former can be equated with Tillich's ontological question: "Why is there something why not nothing?"⁷ Such experience is neither rational nor irrational; it is a-rational. It antecedes man's reasoning. It is man's awareness of his encounter with a reality that is not commensurate with himself. Obviously, it is ambiguous, but nonetheless man is aware of it. It belongs to man's self-consciousness, though it is not something objective or cognitive. It is an "ontological aporia."⁸ This ontological and ambiguous

⁷Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 163.

⁸The phrase is coined by Frederick Herzog, Understanding God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 41.