

## DOCTORAL THESIS

### **Pride, experience and transcendence: a critical evaluation of the feminist critique or Reinhold Niebuhr's theology of sin**

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## ABSTRACT

In this study I explore the feminist critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's theology of sin, both to understand what the Niebuhrian and feminist understandings of sin talk about, and to see whether or not, or to what extent they are tenable in theory and in practice. Niebuhr's feminist critics argue that Niebuhr's claim of pride as the primary human sin fits only with men's experience; women's sin, they contend, is not self-inflation but self-loss. While I acknowledge the value of Niebuhr's feminist critics' interpretation of sin, this study provides a Niebuhrian response to the feminist critique. My main contention is that by overemphasizing women's sin of passivity, some feminist theologians go too far to deny women's capability of committing sin actively against others and the divine in both socio-moral and religio-theological aspect. The total rejection of the applicability of pride to women's situation, I contend, undermines the profoundness of the feminist critique.

I firstly give detailed expositions of Niebuhr's theology of sin and the feminist critique of Niebuhr's theology of sin respectively. The main discrepancies between the Niebuhrian and feminist understandings of sin will be laid out. Then I respond to some feminist criticisms by pointing out that the feminist misreading of Niebuhr on the topics of pride, the self, love, justice and the family is prevalent. I also question the two presuppositions of the feminist critique—the idea of women's innocence and the spirit of secularity. These two presuppositions, I argue, contain in them some insoluble dilemmas that cause trouble for understanding women's secular and religious experience. Lastly, I try to pull the insights of Niebuhr and his feminist critics together to form a more integrated view of women's sin.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One: Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology of Sin</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1 A Profile of Niebuhr's Life and Thought	9
1.1.1 The Defense of Transcendence	11
1.1.2 The Defense of Relatedness/Immanence	15
1.1.3 Conclusion	18
1.2 Scientific Worldview and Mythology	19
1.2.1 Limitations of Social Sciences	19
1.2.2 Coherence, Meaning and Myth	22
1.3 The Myth of Fall	29
1.3.1 Human Being's Dual Nature	29
1.3.2 The Origin of Sin	31
1.3.3 Freedom and Responsibility	34
1.3.4 Conclusion	38
1.4 Human beings as Sinners	39
1.4.1 The Sin of Pride	39
1.4.2 The Sin of Sensuality	43
1.4.3 Collective Sin	45
1.4.4 Conclusion	48
1.5 Grace, Sin and Realism	49
1.5.1 Grace as Power in and over Humanity	49
1.5.2 Christian Realism	51
1.5.3 Conclusion	55
<b>Chapter Two: The Feminist Critique of Niebuhr's Theology of Sin and the Reconstruction of the Doctrine of Sin from Women's Experience</b>	<b>56</b>
2.1 Reconstructing Theology: A Paradigm Shift	58
2.2 Women's Experience and the Sin of Pride	65
2.2.1 Valerie Saiving	65
2.2.2 Judith Plaskow	69
2.2.3 Daphne Hampson	73
2.2.4 Susan Nelson (Dunfee)	77
2.2.5 Conclusion	80
2.3 The Re-visioning of the Doctrine of Sin	81
2.3.1 Celebrating Womanhood	81
2.3.2 The Horizontalizing of Sin	87
2.3.3 Conclusion	94

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<b>Chapter Three: A Niebuhrian Response to the Feminist Critique</b>	<b>96</b>
3.1 The Two Dimensions of Pride	97
3.2 “The Self” Revisited	103
3.2.1 Niebuhr’s Dialectical Understanding of the Self	103
3.2.2 Self-realization, Self-love and Self-worship	107
3.2.3 Conclusion	113
3.3 Love, Justice and the Family	114
3.3.1 The Relation between Love and Justice	114
3.3.2 Does Niebuhr Promote Private Idealism?	118
3.3.3 Conclusion	124
3.4 Conclusion	125
<b>Chapter Four: The Problems with the Feminist Critique: Methodological and Worldview Considerations</b>	<b>126</b>
4.1 The Methodological Problem with the Appeal to Women’s Experience	127
4.1.1 Historical Conditioning of Women’s Experience	127
4.1.2 The Role of Experience: An Epistemological Reflection	132
4.2 The Presuppositions of the Feminist Critique	138
4.2.1 The Idea of Women’s Innocence	138
4.2.2 The Spirit of Secularity	141
4.2.3 Conclusion	145
4.3 Women and Pride	147
4.3.1 Self-loss and Secret Pride System—Karen Horney’s Psychoanalytic Analysis	147
4.3.2 Far from Angels	151
4.3.3 Conclusion	155
4.4 Conclusion	156
<b>Chapter Five: A Critique of the Secular Feminist theologians’ Denial of Divine Transcendence</b>	<b>157</b>
5.1 Sin, Transcendence/Immanence and the Divine	158
5.1.1 Sin as a Theological Concept	158
5.1.2 The Secular Feminist Conceptualization of the Divine	162
5.2 The Critique of Secular Feminism	168
5.2.1 The Theoretical Inadequacies of the Secular Model of Radical Immanence	168
5.2.2 Transcendence and Immanence—Mutually Exclusive?	175
5.3 Retrieving Transcendence from Women’s Experience	179
5.3.1 Experience and Faith	179
5.3.2 A Return to Transcendence	182
5.3.3 My Sin is Forgiven: Several Christian Women’s Experience of Theological Sin	189
5.4 Conclusion	195
<b>Chapter Six: Reconstruction: toward an Integrated Model of Sin</b>	<b>196</b>
6.1 A Critical Reception of the Feminist Critique of Niebuhr’s Theology of Sin	197
6.1.1 The Strengths of the Feminist Critique	197

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6.1.2 The Threat of Dilemmas	201
6.1.3 Conclusion	206
6.2 A Preliminary Exploration of An Integrated Model of Sin	208
6.2.1 Niebuhr's Model of "Equality of Sin and Inequality of Guilt"	208
6.2.2 The Dialectics of Sin	212
6.3 Conclusion	219
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>222</b>
<b>Curriculum Vitae</b>	<b>234</b>