

From at least some of his discussions of it, what Niebuhr means by saying, "Sin is overcome in principle but not in fact" is that the true meaning of history has already been "disclosed" by "the revelation of divine sovereignty," but that "the fulfillment of that meaning" by "the full establishment of that sovereignty" has not yet taken place (*Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics*: 135).

But, then, *his* distinction between "in principle" and "in fact" seems to function in somewhat the same way as Bultmann's distinction between "indicative" and "imperative." One difference, perhaps, is that Niebuhr may be more pessimistic than Bultmann about the imperative's being realized even by those who (in *Bultmann's* other very different sense of the distinction!) now have the possibility in fact as well as in principle of realizing it. I say "perhaps," however, because Bultmann doesn't say enough to confirm that he is more optimistic (or less pessimistic) about this than Niebuhr. The main point, so far as he is concerned, is that God's grace through the event of Jesus Christ as mediated by the present proclamation of the church again and again makes possible in fact a new life of faith working through love, notwithstanding our sin. In that sense, he is clearly an optimist. But, then, even Niebuhr seems to be "optimistic" in *that* sense.

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