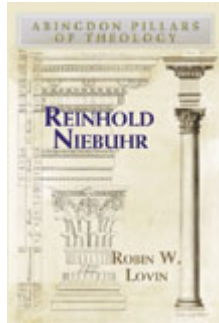


CIRCUITRIDER *Reviews*



Reinhold Niebuhr (Abingdon Pillars of Theology)

by Robin W. Lovin (Abingdon Press 2007 ISBN 9780687646128)

\$12.00,,,,,,now \$8.40...30% discount until May 15, 2008

Reviewed by Patricia Farris, Senior Minister, Santa Monica First United Methodist Church in Santa Monica, CA.

Reinhold Niebuhr (Abingdon Pillars of Theology) by Robin W. Lovin

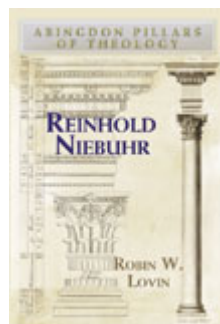
Niebuhr scholar and Professor of Ethics at Southern Methodist University, Prof. Robin Lovin has written this short, elegant introduction to the work of Reinhold Niebuhr for the Abingdon "Pillars of Theology" series. Designed primarily for college and seminary students, this slim volume would also be an excellent resource for adult and young adult studies in the local church or in campus ministry. Chapters examine such basic Niebuhrian concepts as "Immoral Society," "Human Nature," and sin, "Faith and History," "Christian Realism" and so forth, placing Niebuhr's work in the social, economic, political and theological contexts in which he wrote. Each chapter concludes with helpful and evocative discussion questions.

The evolution of Niebuhr's thinking, in response to world events and in conversation with other theologians including Karl Barth and others, makes for a fascinating read. The dilemmas with which he wrestled are no less pertinent today. His reflections on society, justice, social change, Christian vocation, the prophetic voice take on powerful resonance especially in this long season of political campaigning. Students and congregants wrestling with issues of faith and politics would be greatly assisted by this examination of Niebuhr's thought. As Prof. Lovin notes, Niebuhr's understanding of

“Christian realism” must be held in tension with the insights of Black liberation theology and feminist/womanist theologies which responded to him. It is that very conversation which could, in this political moment, provide a fruitful framework for exploring issues of faith, race, and gender stirred up by the current presidential race.

Few in the pews, or in seminary classrooms for that matter, might realize that the “Serenity Prayer,” made popular by 12-Step Groups, was in fact written by Niebuhr in 1948 as he prepared worship for the congregation near his summer home in Massachusetts. Even our current UM Hymnal attributes it to “Anonymous.” But seen as coming from Niebuhr’s soul and pen, a result of decades of reflection and praxis, the prayer moves beyond a plea for discernment in addressing personal dilemmas and demons. It becomes a prophetic call for faithful Christian vocation in the face of complex global realities all the while painfully cognizant of the limits of human power. Such prayer leads to a vocation of Christian witness in social and political life which, as Lovin notes, can help create the kind of hopeful, pluralistic Christian realism out of which Niebuhr himself lived and wrote.

In the face of recession and a troubled economy, global warming and environmental peril, war and the AIDS pandemic, contemporary Christians would be well served to ponder again the work and witness of Reinhold Niebuhr. His work urges Christians and the church to define and claim our voice in the public arena. Faithful and prophetic witness rooted and grounded in true Christian hope are needed now more than ever. We are grateful to Prof. Lovin for this important contribution to the life of thoughtful faith and faithful living.



BUY NOW