

American families, white and black, has vastly worsened. The federal government, he contends, has still done little to help. In some respects, as in its long failure to increase income tax deductions for dependents, Washington has made matters worse. In three Harvard lectures reprinted here, Moynihan needles liberals for showing more concern for individual self-fulfillment (including "freer" sexuality) than for the overall health of families; and he takes conservatives to task for their claims that welfare aid has hurt rather than helped families. Moynihan offers a modest set of palliatives (e.g., work programs for welfare mothers, tax relief for poor families, stricter enforcement of drug laws). His larger point, however, is that society's neglect of problem families is itself a policy—and a bad one at that.

**THE ESSENTIAL
REINHOLD NIEBUHR**

edited by Robert
McAfee Brown
Yale, 1986
264 pp. \$19.95

George Kennan once said that he doubted any less sanctimonious man ever wore clerical cloth. Claimed variously by liberals and neoconservatives, traditional theologians and liberation theologians, Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) remains America's most influential religious thinker of the 20th century. In this selection of essays and addresses, Brown, a former Niebuhr pupil and professor emeritus of theology at the Pacific School of Religion, presents Niebuhr on a variety of topics: Political pieces discussing man's "essential freedom" and democracy, such as "The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness," are balanced with his theological essays, including "Man's Nature and His Communities" and "Optimism, Pessimism, and Religious Faith."

To Niebuhr, the doctrine of Original Sin remained the one empirically verifiable doctrine of Christian faith. Politically, he underwent gradual changes throughout his life. The crimes of Stalin and Niebuhr's misgivings about Marxism led him to attack communism as vigorously as he had once condemned capitalism; yet he never quite shed his socialist views. He was a dweller in paradox, describing himself as an "unbelieving believer" and love as the "impossible possibility." But faith kept him from being crippled by life's ambiguities: "Show us what we ought to do," reads one of Niebuhr's prayers. "Show us also what are the limits of our powers and what we cannot do."