Summary Information

Creator: Henry P. Van Dusen, 1897 - 1975
Title: Theological Discussion Group Papers, 1934 - 1961
Inclusive dates: 1934 - 1961
Bulk dates: 1934 - 1961
Abstract: The Theological Discussion Group, meeting twice yearly in weekend retreat initially at Yale University, included Reinhold Niebuhr, Richard Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Henry Van Dusen, James Luther Adams, Georgia Harkness and many other leading Christian thinkers. Papers were presented and critiqued, and issues concerning the evolution of Christianity and the modern world discussed. Typescript discussion papers and administrative records.

Size: 5 boxes, 2.25 linear feet
Storage: Onsite storage
Repository: The Burke Library
Union Theological Seminary
3041 Broadway
New York, NY 10027
Email: burkearchives@library.columbia.edu
Administrative Information

Provenance: This collection is a compilation from two sources in the Burke Library: Initially papers from Union Seminary Administrative records Series 9F whose original source was President H. P Van Dusen’s papers after 1963 and the contents of a formerly unprocessed restricted access box of papers (Cage RK55T391).

Access: Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to burkearchives@library.columbia.edu, or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.

Access Restrictions: The collection is unrestricted to readers. Certain materials, however, are in a fragile condition, and this may necessitate restriction in handling and copying.

Preferred Citation: Item description, box #, and folder #, MISC: Theological Discussion Group Papers, 1934 - 1961, The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries, at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

Organizational History

The [East Coast] Theological Discussion Group was started in 1934 by Henry Pitney Van Dusen at the time when he was Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at UTS and continued until the early 1960s. The aim of this long lived discussion group, in the words of Van Dusen, was to “discover what is essential and distinctive in the Christian gospel for today” by a process of debate around chosen themes.

The recurrently attending theologians of this group were Reinhold Niebuhr, Richard Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Henry Van Dusen, James Luther Adams, Georgia Harkness, Wilhelm Pauck, John Knox, Edwin Aubrey, Douglas Steere and Cornelius Kruse among others. The group chose a topic for the year and would meet twice yearly to present papers concerning that topic at a weekend retreat. A critic was chosen for each presentation. Topics include: Church and Politics, Humanism, American Corruptions, Redemption, War, Eschatology, etc.

While most of the meetings were held as weekend retreats at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, CT, some were held at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey and College of Preachers in Washington D.C.

Collection Scope and Content Note

This collection contains mainly the typescript addresses presented to the Theological Discussion Group. It includes a small amount of administrative correspondence including lists of members, which are included with the folders of addresses given at the retreats to which they refer. A number of undated or anonymous papers within this collection appear to originate from the group or to have circulated among members of the group.
The collection has been retained in the original chronological order of the discussion group meetings. Administrative papers are retained with the meeting session to which they refer. Dated papers are followed by a sequence of undated papers and finally a small number of anonymous papers also undated. 42 of the total of 55 meetings are covered here. For papers and meetings not covered in this collection, please see Yale Divinity School archives http://webtext.library.yale.edu/xml2html/divinity.043.con.html

**Processing**
Materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes. Acidic items were separated by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed.
## Contents list

**Box 1: Theological Discussion Group 1st to 8th Meetings, 1934 - 37**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1   | 1      | What is Essential and Distinctive in the Christian Gospel for Today?  
1st Meeting, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J., Feb 2-4, 1934  
Addresses:  
  - Aubrey, Edwin E.  
  - Calhoun, Robert  
  - Horton, Walter M.  
  - McGregor, Daniel  
  - Pauck, Wilhelm  
Administrative Papers of Henry Van Dusen:  
  - Proposed Conference-Retreats of Younger Christian Thinkers  
  - Correspondence to members of Princeton Group, Feb 2-4, 1934  
  - Correspondence to the members of Retreat, Dec 1933 - Feb 1934  
  - Includes Memo re Program |
| 1   | 2      | Significance of Jesus Christ?  
2nd Meeting, Drew Theological Seminary, Madison, N.J., Apr 27-29, 1934  
Addresses:  
  - Hough, Lynn Harold  
  - Branscombe, Harvie  
  - Miller, Francis P.  
  - Bennet, John C.  
Administrative Papers:  
  - Extract from letter from Steere, Mar 16, 1934 |
| 1   | 3      | The Social Strategy of the Christian,  
3rd Meeting, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT, Oct. 26-28, 1934  
Addresses:  
  - Cavert, Samuel  
  - Farmer, Herbert H.  
  - Henson, Francis A.  
  - Van Dusen, Henry P.  
Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:  
  - Correspondence to members, June 12 - Oct 12, 1934 |
| 1   | 4      | The Christian Doctrine of Man,  
4th Meeting, Yale D S, New Haven, CT, Feb 1-3, 1935  
Addresses:  
  - Calhoun, R.L.  
  - Vlastos, Gregory  
  - Niebuhr, H. Richard  
  - Paulk, Wilhelm  
  - Aubrey, Edwin  
Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:  
  - Correspondence to members, Dec 14, 1934 |
Box 1: Theological Discussion Group 1st to 8th Meetings, 1934 – 37 (Cont’d)

Box  Folder Contents
1 5  A Study of Our Knowledge of God,  
5th Meeting, Yale D S, New Haven, CT, Nov 1-3, 1935  
Addresses:  
  Horton, Walter M.  Revelation  
  Bainton, Roland H.  Authority and Religious Knowledge  
  Moore, John M.  Scientific Method and Religious Knowledge  
  Steere, Douglas V.  Role of Mystical Experience in Religion & Morality  

Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:  
  Correspondence and Schedule of Meeting, Mar 5, 1935; Oct 18, 1935  

1 6  The Christian Philosophy of History,  
6th Meeting, Yale D S, New Haven, CT, Feb 7-9, 1936  
Addresses:  
  Thomas, George  Can we Believe in Progress?  
  Mackay, John  Historical & Supernatural Elements in Christianity  
  Tillich, Paul  Marxist View of History  
  Niebuhr, Richard  Reflections on the Christian Theory of History  

Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:  
  Correspondence to members, Mar 25, 1936; Schedule, Dec 11, 1935  

1 7  The Church,  
7th Meeting, Yale D S, New Haven, CT, Nov 6-8, 1936  
Addresses:  
  Pauck, Wilhelm  Historical Conceptions of the Church  
  McGregor, Daniel  Catholic Conception of the Church  
  Miller, Francis  Church and World Community  
  Van Dusen, Henry  Functions of the Church  
  Bainton, R.H. Comments on W. Pauck’s Paper  
  Pauck, Wilhelm  Idea of the Church in Christian History, pt.1+2  

Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:  
  Correspondence to the members, Oct 9, 1936  

1 8  The Church and Politics,  
8th Meeting, Yale D S I, New Haven, CT, Jan, 1937  
Addresses:  
  Cavert, Samuel  Church and State Arising From American History  
  Kruse, Cornelius  What Strategy to Adopt With Reference to Fascism?  
  Harkness, Georgia  What Strategy to Adopt With Reference to Democracy?  

Box 2: Theological Discussion Group 9th to 18th Meetings, 1937 - 42

2 1  The Problem of God,  
9th Meeting, Yale D S, New Haven, CT, Nov 5-7, 1937  
Addresses:  
  Bixler, J.S.  Three Contrasts in Contemporary Thought about God  
  Niebuhr, Reinhold  Transcendence of God  
  Bennett, John C.  Problem of Evil
Box 2: Theological Discussion Group 9th to 18th Meetings, 1937 – 42 (Cont’d)

Box 2

2 2 Christian Evangelism,
10th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Feb 4-6, 1938
Addresses:
Niebuhr, Richard  Christian Evangel and Social Culture
Mackay, John A.  Universal Element in Christianity
Steere, Douglas V. Evangelism and Christian Fellowship
Moore, John M.  Memorandum Slip

2 3 The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,
11th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov 11-13, 1938
Addresses:
Kruse, Cornelius  Philosophical Meaning of “Spirit”
Branscomb, Harvey  Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Spirit
Moore, John M.  Schedule of Meeting

2 4 The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,
12th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Feb 10-12, 1939
Addresses:
Steere, Douglas  Holy Spirit (God and Man)
McGregor, D.A.  Holy Spirit and the Church
Tillich, Paul  Holy Spirit and the General Concept of Spirit
Calhoun, Robert L.  Holy Spirit in the Trinity
Van Dusen, Henry  Memorandum

Administrative Papers from John M. Moore:
Correspondence and Schedule of Meeting, Jan 2, 1939
Correspondence re death of Ernest A. ‘Syme’ Yarrow

2 5 Nature, Grace, Sacraments,
13th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov 10-12, 1939
Addresses:
Bixler, J.S.  Problem of Nature and Grace …
Horton, Walter M.  Nature and Grace in Catholic Theology
Bainton, Roland  Grace and Nature in Christianity
Corwin, Virginia  Modern Protestant View of Nature and Grace

Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:
Schedule of Meeting; Active Members, Oct 28, 1939

2 6 Nature, Grace, Sacraments,
14th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar 8-10, 1940
Addresses:
Van Dusen, Henry  Nature, Grace, Incarnation
Harkness, Georgia  Nature as the Vehicle of Grace
Zabriskie, A.C.  Nature, Grace, and the Sacraments
Mays, Benjamin  Nature, Grace, and Community

Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:
Schedule of meeting, Feb 28, 1940
Box 2: Theological Discussion Group 9th to 18th Meetings, 1937 – 42 (Cont’d)

Box 2 Folder Contents

2 7 Eschatology, 15th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov 8-10, 1940
Addresses:
    Kraeling, Carl  Pre-Christian Eschatology
    Knox, John  New Testament Eschatology
    Calhoun, R.L.  Time, Eternity and the End of History
    Tillich, Paul  Eschatology and Personal Destiny

Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:
    Schedule of Meeting, Oct 31, 1940

2 8 Eschatology, 16th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar 7-9, 1941
Addresses:
    Bainton, Roland  Types and Times of Christian Eschatology
    Piper, Otto A.  The Idea of Progress and Christian Eschatology
    Niebuhr, Richard  Kingdom of God and Eschatology
    Cavert, Samuel  Eschatology and Ethical Decision

Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:
    Schedule of Meeting, Feb 28, 1941
    Correspondence to members, April 15, 1941

2 9 Christian Ethics, 17th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov 7-9, 1941
Addresses:
    Knox, John  Old Testament Ethics
    Branscomb, Harvie  Ethical Principles of the Gospels
    Van Dusen, Henry  Moral Authority of Jesus
    Aubrey, Edwin  Christian and Philosophical Ethics

2 10 Christian Ethics, 18th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar 6-8, 1942
Addresses:
    Niebuhr, Richard  Types of Christian Ethics
    Horton, Walter  Law and Grace
    Thomas, George F.  Love and Justice: Perfection vs. Compromise
    Moore, John M.  Christian Ethics and Civil Society

Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:
    Schedule of meeting, Feb 26, 1942

Box 3: Theological Discussion Group 19th to 33rd Meetings, 1942 - 49

Box 3 Folder Contents

3 1 19th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov 13-15, 1942
Chicago Group Addresses:
    Pauck, Aubrey,
    Harkness, Knox:  Preaching as an Expression of the Ethical Reality

New Haven Group Addresses:
    Calhoun, Bainton,
    H.R. Niebuhr  Central Christian Affirmations

Princeton Group Addresses:
    Greene, Mackay,
    Thomas, Wicks  II. Bases of Christian Beliefs
Box 3: Theological Discussion Group 19th to 33rd Meetings, 1942 – 49 (Cont’d)

Box 3 Folder Contents

3 1 (Cont’d) New York Group Addresses:
Tillich, Cavert,
McGregor, R. Niebuhr,
Van Dusen Present World Situation and Christian Message, drft.1

3 2 20th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, May 7-9, 1943
Addresses:
Tillich, Paul Present World Situation and Christian Message, drft.2
Knox, John First Draft of Chapter IV
Thomas, George Some Christian Affirmations
Greene, Theodore III. Reasonableness of Christianity
Van Dusen, Henry Dilemma of the Modern World

[For 21st Meeting papers see archives of Yale D S, New Haven, CT]

3 3 War, 22nd Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1944
Addresses:
Ferre, Nelse F.S. Relation of the Church to the War…
Van Dusen, Henry Christian Faith and War

3 4 Redemption, 23rd Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov, 1944
Addresses:
Thomas, George F. Creation and Redemption
Harkness, Georgia Redemption and Personal Destiny

3 5 Redemption, 24th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1945
Addresses:
Bennett, John Meaning of Redemption in Personal/Social Life
Dun, Angus Atoning Work of Christ
Pauck, Wilhelm Issues in the History of the Doctrine of Redemption

3 6 The Church’s View of Itself, With Special Reference to Problem of Christian Unity, 25th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov 9-11, 1945
Addresses:
Van Dusen, Henry Nature of Christian Unity
Niebuhr, Richard Norm of the Christian Character of the Church
Bennett, John C. Limitations of the Church—Inherent and Accidental

3 7 26th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1946
Addresses:
Wedel, Theodore Some Anglican Views on the Church

[For 27th Meeting papers see archives of Yale D S, New Haven, CT]

3 8 28th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1947
Addresses:
Kuhn, Helmut Bible and Non-Christian Knowledge of God
Anonymous Notes
### Box 3: Theological Discussion Group 19th to 33rd Meetings, 1942 – 49 (Cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Meeting Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Addresses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3 9 | Mar, 1948    | Yale DS, New Haven, CT | Kruse, Cornelius: Roman Religious Liberty & American Democratic Idea  
                  Pauck, Wilhelm: What is American in American Theology? |
| 3 10| Nov, 1948    | Yale DS, New Haven, CT | Cavert, Samuel: Relations...Catholics and Protestants in America |
| 3 11| Mar, 1949    | Yale DS, New Haven, CT | Moore, John M.: Authority in Protestantism  
                  Steer, D.V.: Protestant Piety Today |
| 3 12| Nov, 1949    | Yale DS, New Haven, CT | Horton, Walter: Doctrine of Man II: Salvation  
                  Thomas, George: R.N.’s Doctrine of Man-Creature, etc.  
                  Niebuhr, Richard: Reinhold Niebuhr’s Interpretation of History  
                  Bennett, John C.: Reinhold Niebuhr’s Theological Ethics |

### Box 4: Theological Discussion Group 34th to 55th Meetings, 1950 - 61

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Meeting Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Addresses</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 4 1 | Mar 3-5, 1950| Yale DS, New Haven, CT | Thomas, George: Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy  
                  Wilder, A.N.: Modern Crisis Reflected in Contemporary Poetry  
                  Wilder, A.N.: Patterns of Belief in Modern Literature |
| 4 2 | Nov, 1951    | Yale DS, New Haven, CT | Thomas, George: Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy  
                  Wilder, Amos: New Testament Kerygma…  
                  Muilenburg, James: Ethical Implications of the Covenant  
                  Knox, John: Place of Love in New Testament Ethics |
| 4 3 | Mar, 1952    | Yale DS, New Haven, CT | Miller, Francis: Christian Ethics and Practical Politics |
| 4 4 | Apr, 1952    | American Theological Society meeting | Ferm, Vergilius: Mysticism and Faith in the Christian Tradition |

[For 29th Meeting papers see archives of Yale D S, New Haven, CT]  
[For 35th, 36th Meeting papers see archives of Yale D S, New Haven, CT]  
[For 39th, 40th Meeting papers see archives of Yale D S, New Haven, CT]
Box 4: Theological Discussion Group 34th to 55th Meetings, 1950 – 61 (Cont’d)

Box Folder Contents
4 5 Humanism, 40th Meeting, College of Preachers, Washington D.C., Nov 6-8, 1953
Addresses
Nelson, W.S. Types of Humanism
Greene, Theodore Humanistic & Anti Humanistic Elements in Modern Culture
Bainton, Roland Man, God, and the Church in the Renaissance
Administrative Papers: Participant list

4 6 American Corruptions, 41st Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1954
Addresses
Zabriskie, A.C. Some American Corruptions of the Christian Hope
Wedel, Theodore American Corruptions of the Meaning of the Church
Dinkler, Erich The European View of the American Crisis...
Miller, Francis American Corruptions: Meaning of Being a Christian

4 7 Biblical Hermeneutics, 42nd Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov, 1954
Addresses
Dinkler, Erich Principles of Biblical Interpretation
Schubert, Paul Context... Bible: Rev., Kerygma, Church, Tradition
Wilder, Amos Myth and Symbol in the New Testament
Wilder, Amos Supplement: Cognitive Element in Religious Symbol
Wright, G. Ernest Unity of the Bible

[For 43rd – 48th Meeting papers see archives of Yale D S, New Haven, CT]

4 8 Christian Ethics, 49th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1958
Addresses:
Wilder, Amos Basis of Christian Ethics in the New Testament
Thomas, George Christian Ethics and Political Realism

4 9 Christian Ethics, 50th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Oct, 1958
Addresses:
Wright, Ernest Cult and History in the Old Testament
Davies, Horton Non-Episcopal Protestantism & Liturgical Movement
Reissig, Herman What Should Christians Seek in Foreign Policy?

4 10 51st Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1959
Addresses:
Nelson, Robert Christian Theology and the Living Faiths of Men

4 11 Philosophical Theology, 52nd Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov, 1959
Addresses:
Smith, John E. The Problem of a Christian Philosophy
Moore, John M. Philosophical Analysis and its Bearing upon Theology

[For 53rd, 54th Meeting papers see archives of Yale D S, New Haven, CT]
### Box 4: Theological Discussion Group 34th to 55th Meetings, 1950 – 61 (Cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12 The Trinity, 55th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1961</td>
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### Box 5: Theological Discussion Group, Undated Addresses, A - W

<table>
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<th>Box</th>
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<tbody>
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