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Finding Aid for
**Theological Discussion Group
Papers, 1934 - 1961**

Finding Aid prepared by: R. Clifton Bailey, 2007
Revised with additions by Ruth Tonkiss Cameron, 2008

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

Box Folder Contents

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | <p>What is Essential and Distinctive in the Christian Gospel for Today?
1st Meeting, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J., Feb 2-4, 1934</p> <p>Addresses:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Aubrey, Edwin E. What is Essential and Distinctive...</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Calhoun, Robert What is Essential and Distinctive...</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Horton, Walter M. What is Essential and Distinctive...</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">McGregor, Daniel What is Essential and Distinctive...</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Pauck, Wilhelm What is Essential and Distinctive...</p> <p>Administrative Papers of Henry Van Dusen:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Proposed Conference-Retreats of Younger Christian Thinkers</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Correspondence to members of Princeton Group, Feb 2-4, 1934</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Correspondence to the members of Retreat, Dec 1933 - Feb 1934</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Includes Memo re Program</p> |
| 1 | 2 | <p>Significance of Jesus Christ?
2nd Meeting, Drew Theological Seminary, Madison, N.J., Apr 27-29, 1934</p> <p>Addresses:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Hough, Lynn Harold I. Thinking in a Shaking World</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Branscombe, Harvie II. Jesus of History</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Miller, Francis P. IV. Significance of Jesus for Our Concept'...</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Bennet, John C. V. Relevance of the Ethic of Jesus for Contemp</p> <p>Administrative Papers:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Extract from letter from Steere, Mar 16, 1934</p> |
| 1 | 3 | <p>The Social Strategy of the Christian,
3rd Meeting, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT, Oct. 26-28, 1934</p> <p>Addresses:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Cavert, Samuel Resources of Churches for Economic Change</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Farmer, Herbert H. Strategy of Christians in Present Threat of War</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Henson, Francis A. Christian Attitude towards Marxist Strategy</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Van Dusen, Henry P. Limits of Compromise and Asceticism</p> <p>Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Correspondence to members, June 12 -Oct 12, 1934</p> |
| 1 | 4 | <p>The Christian Doctrine of Man,
4th Meeting, Yale D S, New Haven, CT, Feb 1-3, 1935</p> <p>Addresses:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Calhoun, R.L. Aspects of the Churches Thought about Man -History</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Vlastos, Gregory Brief Analysis of Human Nature</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Niebuhr, H. Richard Christian Doctrine of Man</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Paulk, Wilhelm Man as Saved</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Aubrey, Edwin Summary of Discussions</p> <p>Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Correspondence to members, Dec 14, 1934</p> |

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 SI, 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	Folder	Contents
2	2	<p>Christian Evangelism, 10th Meeting, Yale D S, New Haven, CT, Feb 4-6, 1938</p> <p>Addresses:</p> <p>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</p>
2	3	<p>The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, 11th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov 11-13, 1938</p> <p>Addresses:</p> <p>Kruse, Cornelius Philosophical Meaning of "Spirit" Branscomb, Harvey Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Spirit Moore, John M. Schedule of Meeting</p>
2	4	<p>The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, 12th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Feb 10-12, 1939</p> <p>Addresses:</p> <p>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</p> <p>Administrative Papers from John M. Moore:</p> <p>Correspondence and Schedule of Meeting, Jan 2, 1939 Correspondence re death of Ernest A. 'Syme' Yarrow</p>
2	5	<p>Nature, Grace, Sacraments, 13th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov 10-12, 1939</p> <p>Addresses:</p> <p>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</p> <p>Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen: Schedule of Meeting; Active Members, Oct 28, 1939</p>
2	6	<p>Nature, Grace, Sacraments, 14th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar 8-10, 1940</p> <p>Addresses:</p> <p>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</p> <p>Administrative Papers from Henry Van Dusen: Schedule of meeting, Feb 28, 1940</p>

Box 2: Theological Discussion Group 9th to 18th Meetings, 1937 – 42 (Cont'd)**Box 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 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 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)**Box Folder Contents**

[For 29th Meeting papers see archives of Yale D S, New Haven, CT]

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| 3 | 9 | 30 th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1948
Addresses:
Kruse, Cornelius Roman Religious Liberty & American Democratic Idea
Pauck, Wilhelm What is American in American Theology? |
| 3 | 10 | 31 st Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov, 1948
Address:
Cavert, Samuel Relations...Catholics and Protestants in America |
| 3 | 11 | 32 nd Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1949
Addresses:
Moore, John M. Authority in Protestantism
Steer, D.V. Protestant Piety Today |
| 3 | 12 | Reinhold Niebuhr, 33 rd Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov, 1949
Addresses:
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

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|---|---|--|
| 4 | 1 | 34 th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar 3-5, 1950
Addresses:
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 |
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[For 35th, 36th Meeting papers see archives of Yale D S, New Haven, CT]

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|---|---|--|
| 4 | 2 | 37 th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov, 1951
Addresses:
Thomas, George Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy
Wilder, Amos New Testament Kerygma...
Mullenburg, James Ethical Implications of the Covenant
Knox, John Place of Love in New Testament Ethics |
| 4 | 3 | 38 th Meeting, Yale D S, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1952
Addresses:
Miller, Francis Christian Ethics and Practical Politics |
| 4 | 4 | Address, American Theological Society meeting, April 1952
Ferm, Vergilius Mysticism and Faith in the Christian Tradition: |

[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, 40 th 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, 41 st 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, 42 nd 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
<i>[For 43rd – 48th Meeting papers see archives of Yale D S, New Haven, CT]</i>		
4	8	Christian Ethics, 49 th 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, 50 th 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	51 st Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1959 Addresses: Nelson, Robert Christian Theology and the Living Faiths of Men
4	11	Philosophical Theology, 52 nd 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)**Box Folder Contents**

4	12	The Trinity, 55th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Mar, 1961 Addresses: Van Dusen, Henry Trinity in Recent Thought Horton, Walter Objections to the Doctrine of the Trinity
4	13	56 th Meeting, Yale DS, New Haven, CT, Nov, 1961 Addresses: Steere, D.V. Ecumenical Encounter: European Protestant-Roman

Box 5: Theological Discussion Group, Undated Addresses, A - W

5	1	Undated addresses, A - C Bainton, Roland Sectarian Theory of the Church Bennett, John C. Obstacles before the Church – Internal Difficulties Brigham, Thomas Peace of the Gospel Christian, William Dilemma of the Liberal
5	2	Undated addresses, D - K Harkness, Georgia Protestant Faith and Ethical Action Knox, John Revelation of God in Christ
5	3	Undated addresses, L - N Miller, Randolph Empirical Method and Its Critics Minear, Paul Christian Hope and Eschatology Muelder, Walter Relation of Faith in Science to Faith in Religion Muilenburg, James Doctrine of Man in the Image of God Nash, Arnold Social Sciences in the Making of a Moral Judgment
5	4	Undated addresses, O - W Pauck, Wilhelm Dynamics of Protestantism Wilder, Amos Status and Content of Biblical Theology
5	5	Undated addresses, anonymous Buddhism: Nirvana and the World Evangelism in the USA Christian and Secular Hopes for Society Bible, Church and Tradition