

The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries,
Union Theological Seminary, New York

Union Theological Seminary Archives 1

Finding Aid for

H. Richard Niebuhr Papers, 1925 - [1950?]

WE LIVE BY FAITH OR FROM INSIDE THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY					
Reasoning about human existence in a community which stands before God					
PROLOGUE	PART I	PART II	PART III	PART IV	EPILOGUE
	<u>The Deity of God</u>	<u>Human Bondage</u>	<u>Div. Action & Human Re-</u>	<u>Catholic</u>	
	Beginning	Rebellion	sponse	<u>Vision</u>	
	with God	against God	Responsibility	Unity in	
			before God	in God	

Credit to: UTS1: H. Richard Niebuhr Papers, 1925-1950, box 1, and folder 1,
The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Finding Aid prepared by: Maksim Astashinskiy, 2012

Reviewed and updated by Brigette C. Kamsler January 2015 with financial support from the
Henry Luce Foundation

Summary Information

Creator: H. Richard Niebuhr, 1894-1962
Title: H. Richard Niebuhr Papers, 1925-[1950?]
Inclusive dates: 1925-[1950?]
Bulk dates: 1943-1948
Abstract: H. Richard Niebuhr was president of Elmhurst College, 1924 – 1927; *Sterling Professor* of Theology and Christian Ethics, 1954-1962 at Yale University (faculty since 1931); best known for conglomerating neo-orthodoxy, realism and Christian existentialism. Collection contains 13 typescript essays, schematically divided into 4 sections.
Size: 1 box, 0.25 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:** No evidence of provenance has been traced. However it may be assumed that this material was acquired by The Burke Theological Library between the passing of H. Richard Niebuhr (1962) and of Reinhold Niebuhr (1971).
- 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, UTS1: H. Richard Niebuhr Papers, 1925-1950, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography

Helmut Richard Niebuhr, the younger brother of Reinhold Niebuhr, was born in Wright City, MO on September 3, 1894 to German immigrants Gustav and Lydia. After graduating from Elmhurst College (1912) and Eden Theological Seminary (1915), Niebuhr spent a year reporting for a newspaper in Lincoln, IL and another two years serving as an Evangelical and Reformed pastor in St. Louis, MO before earning his Master of Arts degree from Washington University (1917). Niebuhr subsequently returned to Eden for a three-year teaching appointment as an instructor in the fields of theology and ethics.

After completing his brief tenure at Eden, Richard followed his brother Reinhold to Yale University where he earned his Bachelor of Divinity (1923) and Doctor of Philosophy (1924) degrees. In 1924, 30-year-old Richard accepted his alma mater's presidency; he served as Elmhurst College's chief administrator from 1924 through 1927, before returning to Eden once more. Four years into his second tenure on Eden's faculty, Niebuhr was awarded Yale University's prestigious Sterling Research Fellowship to study in Germany at the Universities of Berlin and Marburg. Having proven himself a bona fide scholar, in 1938 Richard was promoted at Yale to the rank of full professor and by 1954 was elevated to that institution's most distinguished faculty post when he became its *Sterling Professor* of Theology and Christian Ethics.

Although Richard was not perceived to be as polemical a figure as Reinhold, the younger Niebuhr was nevertheless outspoken in his own right as he articulated a neo-orthodox vision of ethical Realism. In conversation with the ideas of Kierkegaard, Troeltsch and Barth, Niebuhr historicized the Christian faith and favored reinterpreting the tradition in the light of present-day experience. Niebuhr continued to believe in the enduring relevance of creedal and biblical Christianity, while himself professing a critical form of orthodoxy.

As a Christian ethicist Niebuhr did not shy away from expressing his confessional leanings, although he strived to avoid apologetics. His particular brand of existentialism revolved around correcting accepted orthodoxies without ever proposing how one would venture to replace them. Between 1934 and 1961 Yale Divinity School, Drew University, Princeton University and the College of Preachers hosted the Theological Discussion Group for the East Coast, a biannual weekend gathering of esteemed theologians — like Henry Van Dusen, Paul Tillich, James Luther Adams and the Niebuhr brothers — delivering presentations and commenting on one another's work. The Burke Library Archive owns several [addresses](#) given by Richard at this august retreat, where he was a regular attendee for some time.

In 1951 Richard published *Christ and Culture*, a widely acclaimed response to secular culturist critiques of Christianity, in which he relied on biblical models to account for how Christians have historically interacted with society, including those who withdrew themselves entirely from it. In his 1960 work on *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* Niebuhr asserted that, unlike polytheism and henotheism, monotheism is the locus of a unique value system that equalizes relations between humanity and God as a result of humankind having to establish a covenantal relationship with the very God held responsible for its salvation.

In advance of his formal retirement, admirers of Richard had hoped that he would synthesize forty-years of his thinking into one final major work. Regrettably, before any such project could be undertaken, Niebuhr had passed away from a sudden and fatal heart attack in Greenfield, MA on July 5, 1962, while vacationing in his summer residence. Niebuhr was survived by wife Florence Marie Mittendorff (1895-1989), whom he married in 1920, and their two children, daughter Cynthia and son Richard.

Sources:

Bowden, Henry Warner. "Niebuhr, Helmut Richard." Dictionary of American Religious Biography 2nd edition (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 392-394.

"Rev. H. Richard Niebuhr Dead; Authority on theological Ethics." *New York Times* Obituary, July 6, 1962 (accessed from the Elmhurst College website), <http://media.athletics.elmhurst.edu/documents/H.RichardObit.pdf>

Handy, Robert T. A History of Union Theological Seminary in New York (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 189-190.

"Helmut Richard Niebuhr." Encyclopædia Britannica Online, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/414555/Helmut-Richard-Niebuhr>

"Christianity and Cultures: Transforming Niebuhr's Categories." Insights: The Faculty Journal of Austin Seminary, Fall 1999 (accessed from www.religion-online.org), <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=517>

Ottati, Douglas F. "God and Ourselves: The Witness of H. Richard Niebuhr." The Christian Century, April 2, 1997, (accessed from www.religion-online.org), <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=75>

Collection Scope and Content Note

This small collection consists of a non-chronological sequence of 13 essays, which are thematically organized into 4 schematic groups. These four groups are:

- “The Deity of God” (3 essays in folder 2)
- “Human Bondage” (4 essays in folder 3)
- “Div[ine] Action and Human Response” (4 essays in folder 4)
- “Catholic Vision” (2 essays in folder 5)

Please note that the UTS Archives do not hold the Prologue, Epilogue and the four Forwards to this essay collection

Dates of the typescript essays were sourced from the published anthology. The bracketed dates are those of the anthology’s publication and do not necessarily attest to when the essay was drafted or published.

“The Ego-Alter Dialectic to the Conscience” was an essay published in the *Journal of Philosophy, Inc.* and “War as the Judgment of God,” first published in *The Christian Century*, is reprinted in “War in the Twentieth Century: Sources in Theological Ethics,” ed. Richard B. Miller (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992)

Processing

Metal clips and staples were removed from materials and folded items were flattened. Materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes. Acidic items were separated from one another by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed.

In 2015, the collection and finding aid were updated as part of the Henry Luce Foundation grant.

Further Sources

The main collection of H. Richard Niebuhr papers is at Andover-Harvard Theological Library: <http://www.hds.harvard.edu/library/bms/bms00630.html>.

The Burke Library offers a collection for the Theological Discussion Group, the finding aid for which is [available online](#). The Burke Library offers a number of other collections related to the people and topics covered in this group. For more information, please see the Burke Library Archives website.

Contents list

Box	Folder	Contents
		Essays, 1925-[1950?]
1	1	Copy of Annotated Cover Essay list, 2 Copies
1	2	Value Theory and Theology, 1937 Nature and Existence of God, 1943 Utilitarian Christianity, 1946
1	3	Man the Sinner, 1935 Disorder in the Church of God [1948?] Towards the Independence of the Church [1935?] Towards a New Other-Worldliness, 1944
1	4	Ego-Alter Dialectic and the Conscience [1945?] Responsibility of the Church for Society [1946?] Evangelical and Protestant Ethics [1950?] War as the Judgment of God [1942?]
1	5	Gift of Catholic Vision, 1948 Doctrine of Trinity and Unity of the Church, 1925