

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

Union Theological Seminary Archives 1

Finding Aid for

**Reinhold Niebuhr Papers, 1913 – 1997**



Credit to: Union Theological Seminary Records Series 18 Faculty,  
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:** Reinhold Niebuhr, 1892-1971  
**Title:** Reinhold Niebuhr Papers, 1913-1997  
**Inclusive dates:** 1913-1997  
**Bulk dates:** 1943-1968  
**Abstract:** Dodge Professor of Applied Christianity at Union Theological Seminary 1928-1960. Niebuhr's scholarship centered on Christian ethics as a means to articulate a Realist vision of American democracy. Collection contains his annotated typescripts and galley proofs of publications, correspondence with William Turner Levy, obituaries for Reinhold and Ursula Niebuhr, copies of Niebuhr's biography with underlining by President J. Carter and Niebuhr's Bible of 1913.  
**Size:** 4 boxes, 2.00 linear ft.  
**Storage:** Onsite storage  
**Repository:** The Burke Library  
Union Theological Seminary  
3041 Broadway  
Email: [burkearchives@library.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@library.columbia.edu)

### Administrative Information

- Provenance:** This small collection results from donations at various times including some items supplied by Professor Niebuhr during his tenure at UTS. The *Christian Realism and Political Problems* galley proofs were gifted by the sons of Charles Scribner in 1953. The personal correspondence to Professor Levy was purchased from Charles Apfelbaum in [197?]. June Bingham provided the copies of her Niebuhr biography annotated by President Carter in 1991.
- Access:** Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to [burkearchives@library.columbia.edu](mailto: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 with the exception of folder 19 in series 3, box 4, where items cannot be handled because of their fragility. Please consult acid free copies of this material in folder 18.
- Preferred Citation:** Item description, UTS1: Reinhold Niebuhr Papers, 1913-1997, series #, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

### Biography

Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr, the son of German immigrants Gustav and Lydia, was born on June 21, 1892 in Wright City, Mo. After graduating from Elmhurst College (1910) and the Eden Theological Seminary (1913), Niebuhr went on to earn his Bachelor of Divinity (1914) and Master of Arts (1915) degrees from Yale University. Ordained in 1915, Niebuhr served thirteen years as an Evangelical and Reformed pastor in Detroit, MI before joining the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. Two years later, in 1930, Niebuhr was appointed Union's Dodge Professor of Applied Christianity, a title he held for three decades until his retirement in 1960. Reiny, as he was known in the Seminary community, held open houses on Thursdays for students at his apartment, where there was much lively discussion about current affairs; these were informal gatherings over a keg of beer.

Niebuhr went from a staunch pacifist (1919), to favoring anti-Fascist resistance (1939). This one time American Socialist Party candidate for Congress (1930) moderated and became a proponent of New Deal legislation (1940). By 1940, Niebuhr resigned his membership in the American Socialist Party. Meanwhile his colleague, ethicist Harry Ward, expressed sympathy for Christian communism; the sharp intellectual divide between Niebuhr and Ward could be felt in the conversations students were having around campus.

Among Niebuhr's many associations was his friendship with farm worker activist Sherwood Eddy who in 1936 found himself arrested alongside Sam H. Franklin, a student of Niebuhr's, for daring to investigate allegations of sharecropper rights violations in Arkansas. From 1936 into the 1940s Niebuhr chaired the board of the Delta Cooperative Farm, which Eddy founded in an

effort to organize impoverished tenant farmers in the Mississippi Delta and to bridge across racial lines in the process.

Niebuhr came to believe that pervading sin contributed to the imperfection of human progress and, in turn, came to identify himself with Christian Realism. This outlook guided his vehement postwar opposition to the Soviet Union, while at the same time opposing military engagement in Vietnam and favoring recognition of the People's Republic of China.

Niebuhr was awarded numerous honorary doctorates, among which include an Oxford University Doctor of Divinity degree (1943); the Union Theological Seminary Archive holds the gown which Niebuhr was entitled to wear as a result. Between 1941 and 1966, Niebuhr was editor of the biweekly journal, *Christianity and Crisis*, and a recipient of Presidential Medal of Freedom (1964).

Although he taught at Union for another eight years, Niebuhr's health deteriorated markedly in 1952. Niebuhr passed away on June 1, 1971 in Stockbridge, Ma and was survived by wife Ursula (formerly Ursula Mary Keppel-Compton), whom he married in 1931, and their two children, son Christopher and daughter Elisabeth.

#### Sources:

- Bennett, John C. "Reinhold Niebuhr." *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/414557/Reinhold-Niebuhr>.
- Bowden, Henry Warner. "Niebuhr, Karl Paul Reinhold." *Dictionary of American Religious Biography* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 394-395.
- Cohn-Sherbok, Levinia. "Reinhold Niebuhr." *Who's Who in Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 221.
- Handy, Robert T. *A History of Union Theological Seminary in New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 174-176, 190-192, 232-234.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. Papers from the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress (Washington, D.C: Library of Congress, 2012), <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms009040>.
- Patton, Howard G. "Reinhold Niebuhr." Prepared for Religion Online by Harry W. and Grace C. Adams, <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=3279&C=2735>.
- Stone, Ronald H. "The Delta Cooperative Farm." *Professor Reinhold Niebuhr: A Mentor to the Twentieth Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 111-115.

#### **Collection Scope and Content Note**

In contrast to the main collection of Niebuhr's papers at the Library of Congress, this small and varied collection was donated to The Burke Library by different individuals and at varying times.

The bulk of the collection consists of Niebuhr's annotated typescripts and galley proofs of his major publications, followed by a sequence of correspondence with William Turner Levy. An accumulation of separate gifted items completes the collection, which is organized in 3 series:

- **Series 1: Writings, 1944-1953 (3 boxes, 1.50 lin. ft.)**

This series contains annotated typescripts and galley proofs, multiple drafts with corrections of some of Niebuhr's published work, namely: *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, "Human Destiny and History", *The Self and the Dramas of History*, *Christian Realism and Political Problems*, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, and *The Irony of American History*.

Today, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* is published as a two volume work: Volume 1 is titled "Human Nature" and Volume 2 is titled "Human Destiny. Please note that "Human Destiny and History" is Volume 2 of *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. In the Union Archive's holdings the annotated typescript for "Human Destiny and History" appears in sequence after the annotated typescript for *The Nature and Destiny of Man*.

The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation. New York: C Scribner's Sons, 1943.

<http://clio.cul.columbia.edu:7018/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=4648958>

"Human Destiny and History", Vol. 2, in: The Nature and Destiny of Man.

The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of its Traditional Defence [sic]. New York: C Scribner's Sons, 1944.

<http://clio.cul.columbia.edu:7018/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=2709127>

The Irony of American History. New York: Scribner, 1953.

<http://clio.cul.columbia.edu:7018/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=2043646>

Christian Realism and Political Problems New York: Scribner, 1953.

<http://clio.cul.columbia.edu:7018/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=2087799>

The Self and the Dramas of History New York: Scribner, 1955.

<http://clio.cul.columbia.edu:7018/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=4648961>

- **Series 2: Correspondence, 1939-1988 (1 box shared with Series 3, 0.25 lin. ft.)**

A small group of personal typescript letters to Professor William Turner Levy touches on a range of subjects and people such as T. S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling, but also covers Niebuhr's writings and plans. These are supplemented by copies of some letters, 1939-1972, to individuals including John C. Bennett held at the Library of Congress.

- **Series 3: General, 1913-1997 (1 box shared with Series 2)**

This series contains a varied group of items, including the Bible given to Niebuhr as a remembrance of his ordination, obituaries of both Reinhold and Ursula Niebuhr, and photocopies of the pages from Niebuhr's biography *Courage to Change* by June Bingham, which show passages underlined by President Jimmy Carter in 1976.

Notes relating to an Exhibition on Niebuhr in which Tony Byrnes, Burke Library Cataloger wrote to Dr. M. Gatch, Burke Library director, about Niebuhr's relationship to T.S. Eliot complete the collection.

**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.

The collection was updated and revised in 2015 as part of the Henry Luce Foundation grant.

**Further Sources**

The Library of Congress holds the main collection of papers for Reinhold Niebuhr. For more information, please see [this website](#).

The Burke Library offers a number of other collections related to the people and topics covered in Niebuhr's collection. Of note are the [Sam and Dorothy Franklin Papers](#), the [Harry Ward Papers](#), and the [Helmut Richard Niebuhr Papers](#). For information on other collections, please see the [Burke Library Archives website](#).

## Contents list

### Series 1: Writings, 1944-1953

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
1	1	1-18	Nature and Destiny of Man [annotated typescript]
1	1	19-37	Human Destiny and History [annotated typescript]
1	2	1-14	Self and the Dramas of History [annotated typescript]
1	2	15-20	Christian Realism and Political Problems, New York, 1953 [annotated typescript] [Fragile] Galley Proof Annotated
1	2	21-25	Children of Light and Children of Darkness, [NY, 1944?] [annotated typescript]
1	3	1-9	Irony of American History [annotated typescript]

### Series 2: Correspondence, 1939-1988

2	4	1-9	Prof William Turner Levy, NYC, 37 typed, 1950- 1968
2	4	10-11	Bulk to John C Bennett, 1939- 1972 [Photocopies from LOC]
2	4	12	Christopher Niebuhr from Hans Christoph Von Hase (UTS 1934), 1987
2	4	13	Ursula Niebuhr from Hans Christoph Von Hase (UTS 1934), 1988 [Photocopy]

### Series 3: General, 1913-1997

3	4	14	Photocopies-Niebuhr's Biography Courage to Change, by June Bingham, underlining by President J. Carter, 1976
3	4	15	Ursula Niebuhr Obituaries
3	4	16-17	Notes and Titles for Exhibition
3	4	18	Consultation Copies: Ernst Von Harnack typescript biography by Anna Harnack Copies of Decorations by Harnack 1945 Letter Professor John Brown Mason to Niebuhr 1957
3	4	19	<b>[Restricted - Fragile Originals of Copies in f18]</b>
3	3	20	Reinhold Niebuhr Ordination Gift Bible, 1913