

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

Union Theological Seminary Archives 1

Finding Aid for

Paul Ehrman Scherer Papers, 1923 – 1968



Credit to: UTS2: Union Theological Seminary Records, Faculty Portraits,
The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Finding Aid prepared by: Brigette C. Kamsler, July 2015
With financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation

Summary Information

Creator: Paul Ehrman Scherer, 1892-1969
Title: Paul Ehrman Scherer Papers
Inclusive dates: 1923-1968
Bulk dates: 1923-1932
Abstract: Lutheran, professor of homiletics, author, and one of America's best-known preachers. Collection contains sermons, correspondence, newspaper clippings, ephemera and diaries.
Size: 8 boxes, 4.00 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: Exact provenance unknown. Because Scherer worked at Union Theological Seminary for a number of years, it is believed the material was donated by him or his family.
- 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: Paul Ehrman Scherer Papers, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Biography

Paul Ehrman Scherer was born on June 22, 1892 in Mount Holly Springs, Pennsylvania to mother Alice Melvina Catherine (Ehrman) Scherer (1864-1941) and father Melancthon Gideon Groseclose Scherer (1861-1931), who was also a Lutheran preacher. The family moved to South Carolina as Paul was young, and he attended the College of Charleston, South Carolina, graduating in 1911 and again in 1913 with an MA. Paul received a BD from the Mount Airy Theological Seminary in 1916.

Paul Scherer was appointed Assistant Pastor at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Buffalo New York, serving there from 1916-1918, and then Assistant Professor at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mount Airy in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from 1918-1920. During this time frame, Paul married Lillie Fry Benbow in Buffalo on September 4, 1919; together they would have two daughters. Paul's reputation as one of America's best-known preachers came from his position as Pastor at the Holy Trinity Church in New York City, a post he held from 1920-1945.

Paul left his position at Holy Trinity Church to focus on teaching, leaving his post on the Board to become Associate Professor of Homiletics at Union Theological Seminary (UTS) from 1945-1947, and being promoted to Brown Professor of Homiletics at UTS from 1947-1960. The high quality of Scherer's biblically and theologically oriented preaching and teaching made significant contributions to his students and colleagues during his 15 years at Union. Scherer also worked at Union during its "golden age," when Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, James Muilenburg, Wilhelm Pauck and Cyril Richardson were all professors.

According to Willis Stanley Gertner, who interviewed Scherer for his dissertation in 1967, Scherer said he:

...Began to teach homiletics without an adequate concept of the principles of interpretation. It was as a theological professor at Union Seminary in New York that he began to wrestle most seriously with the problems of hermeneutics. The situation forced

him to restudy the methods to discover what biblical interpretation really is and what governs it. His associates in the area of biblical theology were of inestimable value to him during this struggle, particularly James D. Smart, Union Seminary's first professor of hermeneutics, and Samuel Terrien, professor of Old Testament. Scherer and Terrien together produced the commentary on Job for *The Interpreter's Bible*. Terrien did the introductory and exegetical portion and Scherer did the exposition.

Scherer reached a higher level of theological maturity during his years as professor at Union Seminary. He became an extremely competent biblical theologian, and as such began to deplore his earlier sermons as superficial and lacking in biblical and theological depth. As a teacher of homiletics, Scherer attempts to impart an attitude of confidence toward Scripture as a means by which God can speak, and an awareness of the creative presence of God in Christ.

Paul Scherer left Union Theological Seminary in New York City to be a Visiting Professor at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia from 1960-1961, followed by Visiting Professor in Homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1961-1967. Paul Scherer died on March 16, 1969.

Throughout his life, Paul Scherer earned a number of honorary degrees, including a DD from Roanoke College, 1923; LL.D. from the College of Charleston, 1935; Litt.D. from Wittenberg College, 1936; Heidelberg College, 1955; and L.H.D. Gettysburg College from 1939.

He also published eight books during his lifetime, including: When God Hides, 1934; Facts that Undergird Life, 1938; The Place Where Thou Standest, 1942; For We Have This Treasure, 1944; Event in Eternity, 1945; The Plight of Freedom, 1948; Love Is a Spendthrift, 1961; and The Word of God, 1965.

Sources:

Gertner, Willis Stanley, "Paul E. Scherer: Preacher and Homiletician," Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation at Wayne State University, 1967.

Handy, Robert T. *History of Union Theological Seminary in New York*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Union Theological Seminary Alumni Directory, 1836-1970, available online at:

<http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?clio6122000>.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The collection contains sermons, a travel diary and correspondence. The majority of the collection consists of sermons, both in bound volume format and loose. The bound volumes contain the sermons by original date given, but also show when the sermon was given on other dates past the original. There are obvious additions, notes and re-writes throughout the volumes. The loose materials are largely the same; however they also include correspondence, newspaper clippings and pamphlets throughout the sermons. The material is organized by date, however it was more difficult to tell whether the dates were when the sermon was originally written, or a later date.

The travel diary is from 1926 and the pages are mostly empty. Within the diary is a list of places visited in Naples, a postcard, and a ticket on the ship Majestic on the White Star Line.



White Star Line Ticket, UTS1: Paul Ehrman Scherer Papers, box 8, and folder 3,
The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

The correspondence is from various universities, organizations and churches, with which Scherer was involved. These include Vanderbilt University, Princeton Theological Seminary, the Pi Kappa Phi Fraternity, the publisher Hodder and Stoughton Limited, and Southern Methodist University. The topics covered within the letters are both personal and professional. Also included are programs, mailings, and newspaper clippings.

Processing

Metal clips and staples were removed from materials and folded items were flattened. Materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes. In 2015 the collection was fully processed for the first time as part of the Henry Luce Foundation grant. At this time, boxes were condensed and loose materials were taken out of binders.

Further Sources

The Burke Library contains a number of other collections related to Scherer's work in homiletics and preaching, as well as the people he worked with for years. For more information, please see the [Burke Library website](#).

The Kentucky State Archives houses a collection of Scherer's papers and consist of the Mullins Lectures at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville. These lectures concern preaching and are from 1957. For more information, please see their website.

Princeton Theological Seminary contains four collections that include Scherer material; for more information, please [follow this link](#).

Contents list

| Box | Folder | Contents |
|-----|--------|---|
| | | Sermons: Bound Volumes |
| 1 | 1 | May-December 1923 |
| 1 | 2 | December 1923-March 1924 |
| 1 | 3 | April 1924-November 1924 |
| 1 | 4 | November 1924-April 1925 |
| 2 | 1 | April-November 1925 |
| 2 | 2 | December 1925-May 1926 |
| 2 | 3 | June 1926-February 1927 |
| 2 | 4 | March-November 1927 |
| 2 | 5 | November 1927-June 1928 |
| 3 | 1 | September 1928-March 1929 |
| 3 | 2 | March 1929-January 1930 |
| 3 | 3 | January 1930-October 1930 |
| 3 | 4 | November 1930-May 1931 |
| 4 | 1 | May 1931-January 1932 |
| 4 | 2 | January-June 1932 |
| 4 | 3 | Romans, Evening Sermons, 1922 |
| 4 | 4 | Sunday Morning, Mid-Week and Sunday Evening, Lenten Talks, 1923 |
| | | Sermons: Loose |
| 5 | 1 | September 1932-June 1934 |
| 5 | 2 | September 1934-June 1936 |
| 6 | 1 | September 1936-March 1939 |
| 6 | 2 | June 1941-December 1943 |
| 6 | 3-4 | 1934-1954 |
| 7 | 1 | June 1941-December 1943 |
| 7 | 2 | January 1944-September 1945 |
| 7 | 3 | 1947-1960 |
| 8 | 1 | 1933-1960 |
| 8 | 2 | [193?]-1965 |
| | | General |
| 8 | 3 | Travel Diary, 1926 |
| 8 | 4-5 | Correspondence, 1959-1968 |
| 8 | 6-7 | General, 1961-1965 |