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Robert T. Handy papers4492455

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Description is written in: English.

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Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary

3041 Broadway

New York, NY 10027

Telephone: (212) 851-5606

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URL: <https://library.columbia.edu/locations/burke.html>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary
Creator:	Handy, Robert T.
Title:	Robert T. Handy papers
ID:	4492455
Date [inclusive]:	circa 1930 -- 1986
Physical Description:	3 linear feet 3.0 linear feet; 7 boxes
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	Robert T. Handy (1918-2009) was a Union Theological Seminary Professor of Church History and Academic Dean and Adjunct Columbia University Religion Department faculty member, and published a history of UTS in 1987. The collection contains a typescript of Handy's History of Union Theological Seminary, as well as correspondence and administrative materials of organizations that Handy was involved in: the Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC) and Christian Action (CA).

Preferred Citation

Item description, UTS1: Robert T. Handy papers, c. 1930-1986, series #, box #, folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

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Biographical / Historical

Robert T. Handy was born January 30, 1918 in Rockville, Connecticut and educated at Brown University, where he received an A.B. in 1940, Colgate Rochester Divinity School (M. Div in 1943), and the University of Chicago (PhD in 1949). Handy was ordained as a pastor in 1943, and served as a pastor and army chaplain. He served as professor of church history at Union Theological Seminary from 1950 to 1986, when he retired from his position as Henry Sloane Coffin professor of Church History. In addition to his teaching duties, Handy also served

for a time as the Seminary's academic dean and as adjunct professor of Religion at Columbia University from 1973-1986. Handy wrote and edited numerous volumes on American religious history, including a history of Union Theological Seminary in 1987. Handy's work served the additional purpose of providing insight into the lives of faculty and students outside of their work with the Seminary. Handy also served as Secretary of the Fellowship of Socialist Christians and later Christian Action. Robert Handy died in January 2009 at the age of 90.

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Biographical / Historical

The Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC) was formed by Reinhold Niebuhr in the early 1930's. Niebuhr was committed to socialist ideas at this point in his life, and he created the FSC to unite like-minded Christians in an association that would both promote and practice socialist philosophies and economics. FSC's critical argument was that private ownership of major properties had to be replaced by social ownership. The group also argued that capitalist ideals were at odds with Christian ethics. While FSC specifically disassociated itself from Marxism, the group did recognize its debt to Marx and his economic ideas. The ideas of FSC were also put in practice by its members; they were to contribute all excess money (anything over \$8,000) to causes supported by the FSC, and to join other organizations, such as labor unions, which promoted socialist causes. All actions taken by FSC members were to be nonviolent, but they were to contribute time and effort to the cause. In addition to Niebuhr, the FSC attracted the efforts of Paul Tillich, John C. Bennett, and Joseph Fletcher. Niebuhr and Tillich particularly used the organization as a means of expressing their theology as well as their activism, and they played a major role in the development of the group's philosophy. At its height in the late 1940's, the group had some 1,200 members. They helped in the fight against the McCarthyism of the 1950's, as well as separating more clearly the Christian social action movement from Marxism. The group changed names twice over its life, from FSC to the Frontier Fellowship in the 1940's, and eventually into Christian Action, with Robert Handy serving as Secretary. Reinhold Niebuhr's stroke in 1952 effectively ended his involvement with the organization, and with his departure the group faded slowly. They remained active until 1956, when the group folded.

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Scope and Contents

This collection contains a typescript of Handy's History of Union Theological Seminary, as well as correspondence and administrative materials of organizations that Handy was involved in: the Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC) and Christian Action (CA).

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Arrangement

This collection is arranged in two series: Series 1: History of Union Theological Seminary; and Series 2: Organizations, which includes two subseries, 2A: Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC) and 2B: Christian Action (CA).

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Revision Description

PDF converted to EAD and description updated by Leah Edelman. 2022-04-26

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Access

All boxes in this collection are located offsite. Please note that requests for use of boxes held in offsite storage must be made three business days in advance.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The papers were donated by Robert T. Handy to the Burke Library in 1996.

Processing Information

Metal clips and staples were removed from materials and folded items were flattened. Acidic items were separated from one another by interleaving with acid-free paper as needed. Any items in an advanced state of deterioration were placed in Mylar envelopes. The collection was originally processed by Daniel Sokolow. In 2015, the collection was placed in new acid-free boxes and folders as part of the Henry Luce Foundation grant. It was at this time that Series 2 was created; originally, the Christian Action section and the Fellowship of Socialist Christians were two separate series; now they are subseries of a larger group. The finding aid was created by Daniel Sokolow in 1996; revised by Ruth Tonkiss Cameron in 2007; revised by Brigitte Kamsler with the support of the Henry Luce Foundation in 2015, and edited by Leah Edelman in 2022.

Conditions Governing Use

Some material in this collection may be protected by copyright and other rights. Information concerning copyright, fair use, and reproduction requests can be consulted at Columbia's Copyright Advisory Office.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Christian socialism
- Handy, Robert T.
- Fellowship of Socialist Christians
- Christian Action

Burke Library record group:

Union Theological Seminary Archives: UTS 1, papers of faculty and students

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Collection Inventory

Series 1: History of Union Theological Seminary, 1986

Physical Description: 0.5 linear feet 0.5 linear feet; 1 box

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is arranged in received order.

Scope and Contents

This series contains a typescript of Handy's History of Union Theological Seminary. The copy appears to be one from late in the editing process. Handy's tenure at Union as a member of both the faculty and the administration gave him particular insight into the critical issues affecting the Seminary during his time. Handy also illuminated the events of other eras of Union's past, such as the Briggs and McGiffert trials around the turn of the twentieth century. Handy's exhaustive research in the UTS archives provided the basis for a history that built on the work of earlier scholars of the Seminary's history, including the volumes by former UTS president Henry Sloane Coffin and faculty members G.L. Prentiss and Charles R. Gillett.

Title/Description

Instances

Manuscript, Chapters 1-10 and Notes, 1986

box 1.1

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Series 2: Organizations, circa 1930 -- 1963

Physical Description: 2.5 linear feet 2.5 linear feet; 6 boxes

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This series is open for research.

Arrangement

This series is arranged in two subseries: 2A: Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC); and 2B: Christian Action (CA).

Scope and Contents

This series contains correspondence and administrative materials of organizations that Handy was involved in: the Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC) and Christian Action (CA). One of the outside interests of the UTS faculty was the Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC), the brainchild of Handy's UTS colleague Reinhold Niebuhr, who formed the organization in the early 1930's. The FSC would later evolve into Christian Action, with Robert Handy serving as Secretary.

Subseries 2A: Fellowship of Socialist Christians (FSC), circa 1930 -- 1951

Physical Description: 1 linear feet 1 linear foot; 2 boxes

Conditions Governing Access:

Conditions Governing Access

This subseries is open for research.

Arrangement

This subseries is arranged roughly chronologically.

Scope and Contents

This subseries contains correspondence from the organization, as well as some administrative documents such as minutes and reports, and several files on the Frontier Fellowship (which seems to have been either a later incarnation of the FSC, or an offshoot). These FSC materials were not directly produced by Handy; the FSC files were passed on to the Christian Action administration and to Handy as Secretary of Christian Action.

Title/Description	Instances	
Correspondence A-R, 1932 -- 1936	box 2A.1	
Correspondence S-Y, 1932 -- 1936	box 2A.2	folder 1-4
Correspondence: Form Letters, 1933 -- 1936	box 2A.2	folder 5
Administration: Lists, circa 1930 -- 1939	box 2A.2	folder 6
Administration: Minutes, 1933 -- 1935	box 2A.2	folder 7
Published Materials, 1935 -- 1936	box 2A.2	folder 8
Principles and other Administrative Documents, circa 1930 -- 1939	box 2A.2	folder 9
Frontier Fellowship: Correspondence, 1948 -- 1951	box 2A.2	folder 10
Frontier Fellowship: Administration, 1948 -- 1951	box 2A.2	folder 11

Subseries 2B: Christian Action (CA), 1951 -- 1963

Physical Description: 1.5 linear feet 1.5 linear feet; 4 boxes

Conditions Governing Access:**Conditions Governing Access**

This subseries is open for research.

Arrangement

This subseries is arranged alphabetically.

Scope and Contents

This subseries contains correspondence from Christian Action, which was a later incarnation of the FSC. Also included are administrative materials and files specific to the New York Chapter.

Title/Description	Instances	
Administration, 1951 -- 1955	box 2B.1	folder 1-4
Conference, Newsletters and Publicity, 1951 -- 1955	box 2B.1	folder 5

Correspondence: A-G, 1951 -- 1955	box 2B.1	folder 6-7
Correspondence: H-So, 1951 -- 1955	box 2B.2	
Correspondence: Sp-Z, Unidentified and Form Letters, 1951 -- 1955	box 2B.3	
New York Chapter Minutes, Reports, Administrative Information and clippings, 1952 -- 1963	box 2B.4	

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