

Richard Niebuhr, theologian and teacher, dies at age 90

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Richard Reinhold Niebuhr, a theologian and influential teacher, died February 26 at age 90.

He began teaching at Harvard Divinity School in 1956, the school noted in announcing his death, and retired as professor emeritus.

He was author, among other works, of the book *Experiential Religion*.

He was the son of theologian H. Richard Niebuhr, author of *Christ and Culture*, and father of Gustav Niebuhr, a religion journalist who now teaches at Syracuse University.

In a *Christian Century* article published in 1960, "The problem of preaching at Easter," Niebuhr wrote that "it is a relatively easy thing to muse on the story of the first Easter, for it is not Easter as such that is a scandal," even to modern people. "The difficulty arises at the juncture in which the humanity of Christ and our own humanity are equated or not equated, at the juncture in which we either do or do not recognize ourselves in him and him in ourselves."

What is required is the image of Christ as the one "in whose own humanity our own image is reflected and simultaneously freed of its distortions," he wrote. "Unless the gospel is uttered in such a way that it evokes in us not only a sense of our individuality but also of our humanity, there is little point in dwelling on the Christ who is for us."

In his 1965 contribution to the series "How I am making up my mind," he wrote: "The work of the theologian is not simply to clarify the logic of faith by abstracting it from this complex human world but rather to steady faith by sharpening its expressiveness and practical efficacy in this complex world."

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