Niebuhr is one of the most famous names in American theology. Indeed, as Douglas John Hall suggests in his foreword to this work, the Niebuhrs might well be considered ‘the royal family of Protestantism in America’ (p. xi). For the better part of the last four decades, William Chrystal has distinguished himself as the foremost expert on the early influences that shaped Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr, the most famous of these Protestant royals. *Niebuhr Studies* collects several of Chrystal’s articles, providing vignettes of the lives of significant figures in the Niebuhr story, especially in the period surrounding the First World War. As such, the title of the work should be taken not as designating a field of study but rather as pointing towards its own contents: a series of historical/biographical studies.

Five of the articles in the book are reprinted from earlier versions. One piece covers Reinhold Niebuhr’s activities during the First World War. This article traces out the development of Niebuhr’s patriotic stance, and sets this stance in the context of the young Niebuhr’s nascent, but ultimately unfinished realism. Another article outlines Gustav Niebuhr’s life and explores his influence on Reinhold and H. Richard in terms of Biblicism and denominational identity. A third article presents a biographical sketch of Samuel Press, a professor and ‘second father’ to Reinhold and H. Richard at Eden Seminary. Finally, a record of Chrystal’s Founders Day lecture at Elmhurst College explores the early intellectual, institutional milieu through which Reinhold and H. Richard emerged. In addition to these articles, the book also contains a reprint of an annotated bibliography of the early works of H. Richard Niebuhr. Chrystal has done Niebuhr scholars a service in gathering these previously printed pieces together. In addition to providing extensive citations of primary sources, Chrystal’s tone and analysis provide a useful alternative to the views contained in Richard Fox’s controversial biography of Niebuhr.1

However, the pieces that will be of most interest to scholars of the Niebuhrs will be the three new articles, two of which are on Walter Niebuhr, the elder brother of Reinhold and H. Richard, and one of which focuses on William Scarlett, an Episcopal Bishop and good friend to the Niebuhrs. The piece on Scarlett could stand on its own as a biographical sketch of a significant public theologian of the later Social Gospel era. Serving in Phoenix Arizona, Scarlett gained national attention for his advocacy of labour unions and fair working

---

conditions at the time of the Bisbee Deportation, an illegal state deportation of striking iron workers. Scarlett continued to work for progressive ends when he was later appointed as the Bishop of Missouri, and was able to befriend figures and exert political influence at the highest levels of American government. His passion for social justice was matched only by his ability to reach out to those of different political persuasions. Chrystal notes that he began work on Scarlett years ago at the prompting of none other than the arch-conservative Senator Barry Goldwater, who was a devoted parishioner of Scarlett’s. The ability to cross such political boundaries is reason enough to find this figure fascinating today.

The two articles on Walter Niebuhr trace out his remarkable and tragic life. The first piece serves as a sequel to Chrystal’s earlier one on Reinhold Niebuhr and the First World War. As it turns out, understanding Walter’s activities prior to and during the war is quite relevant to understanding the younger Niebuhr’s fervent patriotism. Walter began the war as a journalist with a special skill: the ability to speak fluent German; which allowed him to travel easily within Germany. By the end of his time behind the German lines he became deeply disenchanted with Germany’s cause. Upon return to the United States, he enlisted in the National Guard, and eventually helped to produce American war propaganda. Unfortunately, his German heritage and his time in Germany led to suspicion of his loyalties. He found himself under a government investigation and the subject of a whisper campaign that eventually culminated in charges of him being a ‘Kaiserite’. This brought an end to his burgeoning career, and reinforced a lesson for all of the Niebuhrs at the time: no one of German descent is beyond suspicion, and any compromise of patriotism will be punished. Reinhold and H. Richard’s activities during the First World War are usefully read now against this new background.

The second piece on Walter follows his post-war career in America and Germany as a silent film director. While history has largely forgotten his contributions, Walter’s films featured future stars like Rudolf Valentino, and reviews from the period note Walter’s directing prowess. At times, his work even came to overlap with that of his younger brothers. In the early 1930s, Walter directed a pacifist themed movie which was sponsored by Reinhold Niebuhr and Sherwood Eddie. Ultimately, however, this career too would end badly for Walter. While he appears to have been a master of silent film, by the 1930s Walter was deaf, and he was never able to transition to talking pictures with significant success. As has been known for some time, much of the frenetic pace of Reinhold Niebuhr’s activity after the 1930s was necessitated by his role in supporting Walter’s family. This filling in of the story of Walter allows for a clearer understanding of what was happening internally in the dynamics