

## Biblical Scholarship at YDS: A Bicentennial Retrospective – part 2

From an exhibit at the Yale Divinity Library, March–June 2023

Italicized text is from [\*“This Grand Errand”: A Bicentennial History of Yale Divinity School\*](#) (YDS, 2022) by Ray Waddle.

This page continues from [Part 1](#), an overview and descriptions of professors in the field of New Testament.

### Holmes Professors of Hebrew Language and Literature

The Holmes Professorship of Hebrew Languages and Literature was established in 1869 with a gift of \$25,000 from Waterbury, Connecticut-born philanthropist Samuel Holmes. George Edward Day became the first incumbent.

See also:

[Winkley](#)

[Woolsey](#)

### George Edward Day



The first Holmes Professor, George Edward Day, graduated from YDS in 1838 and went to Ohio to teach at the Lane Theological School in Cincinnati. *After fifteen years there, Day was hired at YDS as Hebrew professor in 1866, a critical period of post-war rebuilding for the School. Day was a translator and interpreter of renown, and by temperament reminded colleagues of his steady, meticulous predecessor Josiah Gibbs. “As a teacher he had the minuteness and details of an earlier generation, and at the same time an earnest desire that his pupils might be not only thorough but large and broad in their*

*learning,” said his colleague Timothy Dwight. Day was central to the work of revising the English version of the Bible by serving on the American Revision Committee when it started in 1871 and became its valued secretary.*

In 1888 Day became the first Dean of the Divinity School and in 1892 he and his wife Olivia Hotchkiss Day contributed funds to establish the Day Missions Library at YDS.

## Edward Lewis Curtis



*Edward Lewis Curtis (1874 BA) arrived in 1891 as Holmes Professor of Hebrew Languages and Literature, succeeding Day. He had studied in Germany and taught ten years at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, where “he had been battered by the ultraconservatives who were outraged by his claim that God loves all of His children alike.” Curtis’s deepest YDS impact came after 1905, when he was named acting dean and, despite failing health, steered the School through some difficult financial years.*

Notable publication: *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Chronicles* (New York: Scribner, 1910)

## George Dahl



Succeeding Edward Lewis Curtis as Holmes Professor in 1925 was George Dahl, who received his BA in 1908 and PhD in 1913, both from Yale. Dahl taught at YDS for more than three decades and was a valued member of the Old Testament section of Bible Revision Committee, which prepared the Revised Standard Version. He was also active in editorial work as director of *The Journal of Biblical Literature* from 1921 to 1941 and associate editor of *The Journal of Bible and Religion* from 1935 to 1945.

Notable publication: *Heroes of Israel's Golden Age* (New York: Macmillan, 1923)

A colleague and friend of Dahl at Yale was **Charles Cutler Torrey**, a prominent scholar and archaeologist who taught Semitic languages at Andover Theological Seminary (1892–1900) and Yale University (1900–1932).

Torrey’s papers ([Record Group 271](#)) are held at the Yale Divinity Library.



## B. Davie Napier



Born to missionary parents in China in 1915, Napier received his undergraduate degree from Howard College (now Samford University) in 1936 and attended Yale for his BD (1939) and PhD (1944). He joined the YDS faculty in 1949 and was named the Holmes Professor of Old Testament Criticism and Interpretation in 1956. From 1966 until 1971, Napier was professor of religion and dean of Memorial Chapel at Stanford University, then president of the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, from 1972 until his retirement in 1978. He returned to Yale 1980–1984 as Professor of Bible and Ministry.

Notable publication: *Song of the Vineyard: A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1962)

## Brevard S. Childs



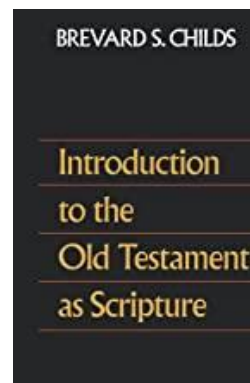
Brevard Childs (1923–2007) received a BA and MA from the University of Michigan in 1947, a BD from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1950 and a ThD from the University of Basel in 1955. He joined the YDS faculty in 1958, and succeeded B. Davie Napier as Holmes Professor. He was named Sterling Professor of Divinity in 1992 and retired in 1999.

*To generations of students, Childs was the great figure of Old Testament scholarship. He taught at YDS forty-one years, showing ways to read the Bible as sacred scripture by upholding the theological importance of the very shape of the canon. Childs was legendary as a YDS mentor and bibliophile. He shepherded many PhD students who went on to teaching careers.*

*His personal collection of 40,000 books was testimony to a life-long quest for broader perspectives on his chosen field. After joining the Yale faculty, he still found time to learn Akkadian, study Midrash, and investigate modern hermeneutical debates, all in pursuit of illumination in his own discipline. “To study Childs’ career is to learn that the scholarly life is a life of constant growth and development,” said Robert Wilson, a student, colleague, and longtime professor of Old Testament. Wilson said he and others would audit a Childs course three or four times just to watch a master teacher at work. When Childs died in 2007, at age eighty-three, he was remembered as one of the century’s most influential biblical scholars.*



Notable publication *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979)



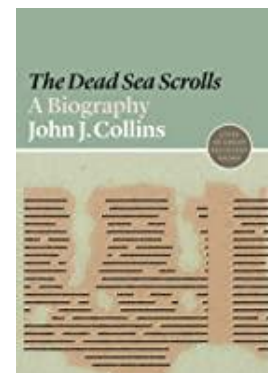
## John J. Collins



A leading scholar of apocalypticism, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Hellenistic Judaism, Collins was Holmes Professor from his arrival at YDS in 2000 until his retirement in 2021. Collins was born in Ireland and earned BA and MA degrees from University College, Dublin, and a PhD from Harvard University. He taught at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary (Illinois), DePaul University, and the University of Notre Dame before joining the University of Chicago faculty in 1991 prior to coming to YDS.

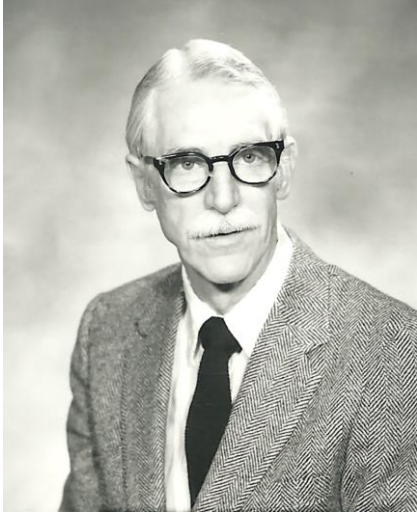
Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2018, Collins is described on that site having made “important contributions to the study of the Hebrew Bible and post-Biblical Jewish literature. His early work on the literary form of ‘apocalyptic’ broke new ground in the study of post-Biblical texts. His most important publications include his commentary on the Book of Daniel, a series of monographs on Jewish texts of the Second Temple period and their contemporary relevance, editions of fragments of Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as popular monographs.”

Notable publication: *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012)



## Other notable professors of Old Testament / Hebrew Bible

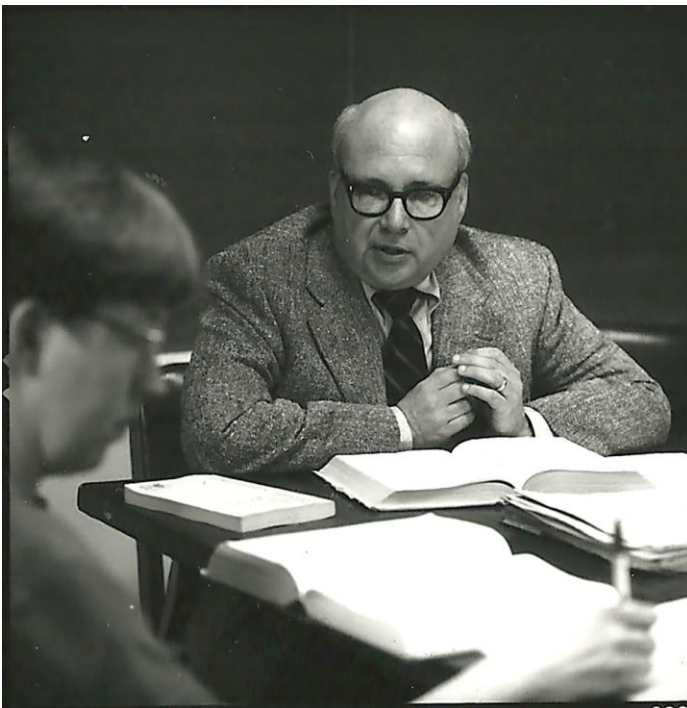
### R. Lansing Hicks



R. Lansing Hicks (1921–2008) received his BA in 1942 from Wake Forest University, a BD from the School of Theology at the University of the South in 1945, and his ThD. in 1954 from Union Theological Seminary in New York. He joined the faculty of YDS in 1971, following the affiliation between YDS and Berkeley Divinity School, and retired in 1990. He had been appointed to the Berkeley faculty in 1954 and then named full professor in 1958. As a biblical scholar, Hicks's interests lay primarily in the area of the Christian use of the Old Testament in its relation to the New Testament.

Notable publication: *Forms of Christ in the Old Testament: The Problem of the Christological Unity of the Bible* (Evanston: Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1968)

### Robert R. Wilson



Robert Wilson received his undergraduate degree from Transylvania University and his BD and PhD from Yale in 1967 and 1972. He began teaching at YDS in 1972 and retired as Hooper Professor of Religious Studies and Professor of Old Testament in 2020 after producing books on Israelite prophecy, Deuteronomistic history, and sociology of Old Testament religion. In addition to his teaching at YDS and Yale College, he served two stints as chair of Yale's Department of Religious Studies, as Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at YDS for several years, and directed the dissertations of more than sixty future scholars.

Notable publication: *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977)



## Carolyn J. Sharp



Carolyn Sharp received her BA from Wesleyan University and her MAR and PhD from Yale. Sharp joined the YDS faculty in 2000 and was appointed Professor of Hebrew Scriptures in 2012. Since 2017 she has served on the faculty as Professor of Homiletics. Her research explores the poetics, narrative art, and theology of biblical texts as resources for homiletical theory and practice.

Notable publication: *The Prophetic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2019)

### Also teaching at YDS for a time:

**Christopher R. Seitz**, 1987–1997; Professor of Old Testament

Notable publication: *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: John Knox, 1993)

**Ellen F. Davis**, 1989–1996; Associate Professor of Old Testament

Notable publication: *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy* (Sheffield: Almond, 1989)

**Christl M. Maier**, 2003–2006; Associate Professor of Old Testament

Notable publication: *The Writings and Later Wisdom Books* (Atlanta: SBL, 2014)

## Currently on the Hebrew Bible faculty (2023):

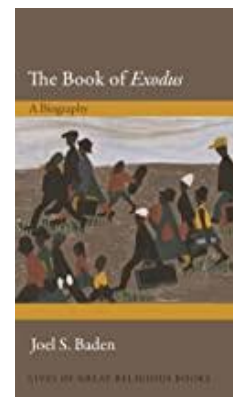
### Joel S. Baden



### Professor of Hebrew Bible

Baden received his BA in Judaic Studies from Yale in 1999, an MA from the University of Chicago in 2002, and PhD from Harvard in 2007. He joined the YDS faculty in 2007 and has particular interest in the Pentateuch and its composition, Biblical Hebrew as a language, and disability theory as it pertains to biblical studies.

Notable publication: *The Book of Exodus: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019)





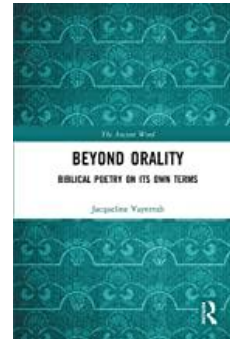
## Jacqueline Vayntrub



### Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible

Vayntrub received a BA in Judaic Studies from UCLA in 2005, an MA from Hebrew University of Jerusalem and PhD from the University of Chicago in 2015. She joined the YDS faculty in 2018 after teaching at Brandeis University for two years. Her areas of expertise include the Hebrew Bible, wisdom literature, biblical poetry and poetics, philology, and the history of biblical scholarship.

Notable publication: *Beyond Orality: Biblical Poetry on its Own Terms* (New York: Routledge, 2019)



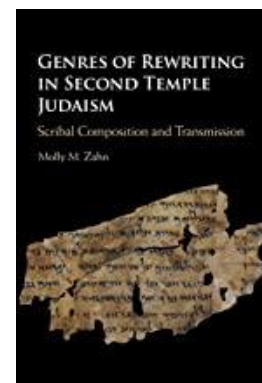
## Molly Zahn



### Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible

Zahn received her BA from the University of Minnesota in 2001, an MPhil from the University of Oxford in 2003 and PhD from the University of Notre Dame in 2009. She joined the YDS faculty in 2022 after teaching for fourteen years at the University of Kansas. Her research focuses on understanding how the scriptures of early Judaism, including but not limited to the texts that came to make up our Bibles, were composed and transmitted.

Notable publication: *Genres of Rewriting in Second Temple Judaism: Scribal Composition and Transmission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020)



## Eric D. Reymond

Senior Lecturer II, teaching Biblical languages.

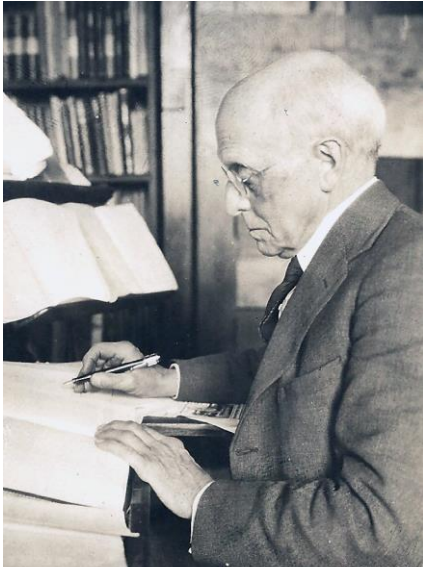
## Gregory Mobley

Visiting Professor of the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Congregational Settings, who joined the YDS faculty with the affiliation with Andover Newton.

## Winkley Professors of Biblical Theology

The Winkley Professorship of Biblical Theology was established in 1885 through a gift from Henry Winkley of Philadelphia. Winkley was an importer of chinaware in New York and Philadelphia. He was not married and divided his fortune among various educational institutions that he considered worthy, including Yale Divinity School. The first incumbent of the professorship was John E. Russell from 1885 to 1889.

### Frank Chamberlin Porter



*Frank Chamberlin Porter (1886 BD, 1889 PhD) became Winkley Professor of Biblical Theology in 1891. Years before others did, he mapped out the emerging “demythologizing” debate about “the Jesus of history vs. the Christ of faith.” Students regarded the gentle Porter as a “fine example of modern critical Christian scholarship: fair, candid and withal reverent.”*

Notable publication: *Messages of the Apocalyptic Writers: The Books of Daniel, Revelation, and some Uncanonical Apocalypses* (New York: Scribner, 1905).

### Millar Burrows



Burrows received his BA from Cornell University, a BD from Union Theological Seminary NY and his PhD from Yale. He taught at Tusculum College and Brown University before joining the YDS faculty as Winkley Professor of Biblical Theology in 1934, where he taught until 1958. At the time the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, Burrows was Director of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem (now the William F. Albright School of Archaeological Research). He was among the first scholars to see the Scrolls and quickly became involved in their study and publication. In addition to his scholarly writings, Burrows published a number of books that had broad popular appeal, including *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, which reached the best-seller lists in 1955.

Millar Burrows' papers ([Record Group 71](#)) are held at the Yale Divinity Library.



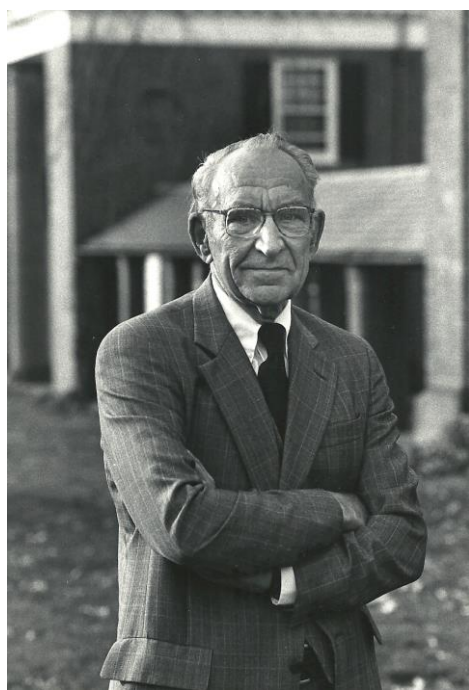


Spring at Akabah

At left, a photograph from the album documenting Millar Burrows' trip to Palestine in 1936.

Divinity Library Special Collections ([Record Group 71](#))

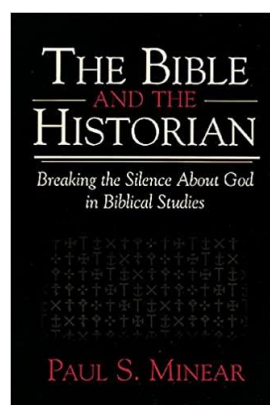
## Paul S. Minear



*Paul Minear was one of the "Three Pauls" of the YDS New Testament faculty of international fame during the mid-twentieth century. Minear taught at YDS from 1956 to 1971 after coming from Andover Newton Theological School. His twenty-three books and nearly 100 articles included a final one published when he was 100, a year before his death in 2007.*

Minear was a member of the committee that produced the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. His successor as Winkley Professor, Dean Leander Keck, wrote of Minear: "He was creative. ... He was clearly acquainted with trends and so on but he went his own way. He was very much interested in the use of language and imagery. Where other people were worried about myths, he would say, 'Okay, it's a myth but what is being communicated here?'"

Notable publication: *The Bible and the Historian: Breaking the Silence About God in Biblical Studies* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002)

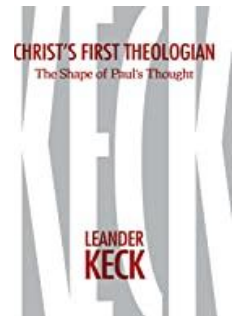




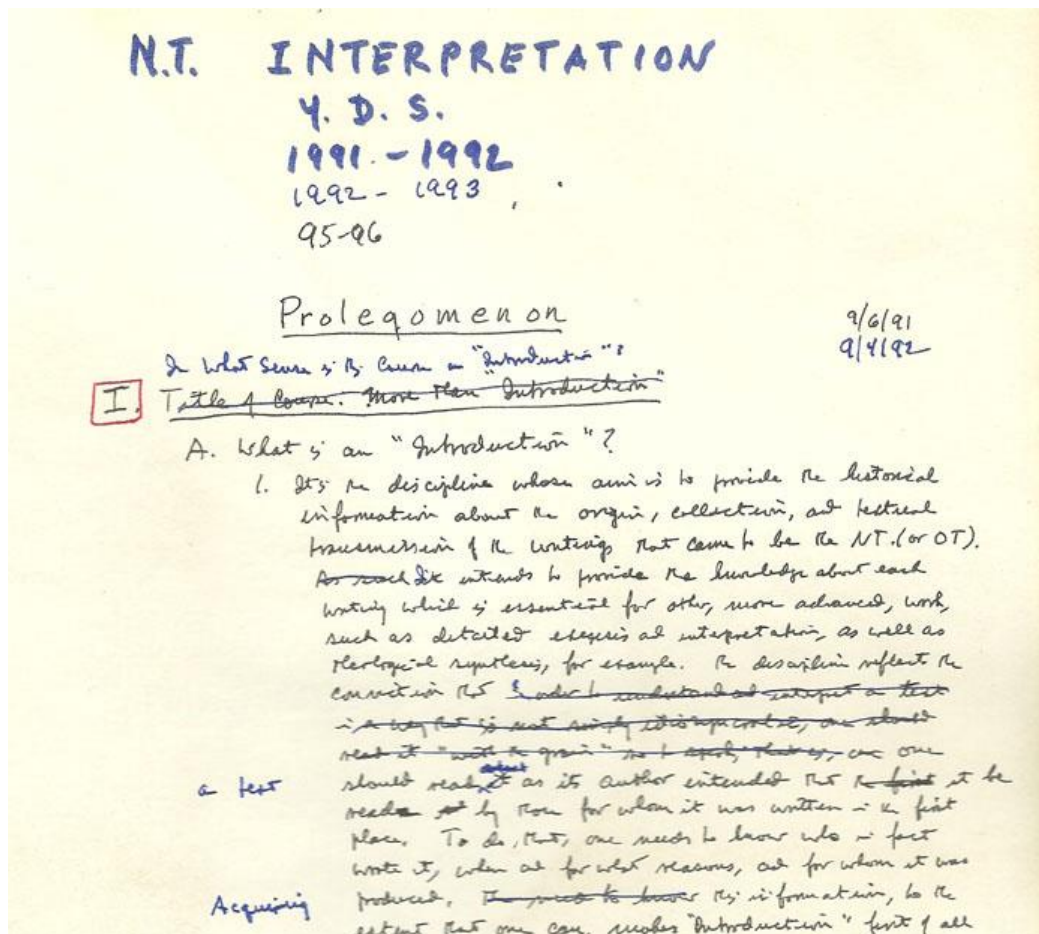
Keck received a BA from Linfield College, BD from Andover Newton Theological School, and PhD from Yale. He taught at Wellesley College, Vanderbilt Divinity School, and Emory University before coming to YDS, where he was Dean from 1979 to 1989 and Winkley Professor of Biblical Theology from 1979 until his retirement in 1998.

*Regarding Paul, he wrote, “His thought was never easy to understand, and is even harder to explain convincingly. His mind was nimble enough that he did not repeat himself, and his convictions were deep enough that he did not avoid the hard religious questions that engage us still. It should not surprise us, then, that we too can become theologians by engaging his thought.”*

Notable publication: *Christ's First Theologian: The Shape of Paul's Thought* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2015)



Below, an excerpt from Keck's notes for the first session of his Introduction to New Testament courses at YDS, from his papers held in the Divinity Library Special Collections ([Record Group 256](#))





## Woolsey Professors of Biblical Theology

The Woolsey Professorship was established in 1889 from a sum of \$50,000 furnished to the Yale Corporation by “four gentlemen who desired that their names should be withheld.” Named after Theodore Dwight Woolsey, Yale President 1846–1871, the Woolsey Professorship was established with an orientation toward Yale undergraduate and PhD students rather than the Divinity School, but its incumbents have been considered integral to the YDS faculty.

### William Rainey Harper



William Rainey Harper, the first incumbent of the Woolsey Professorship, was specifically cited by its benefactors who noted his effective teaching methods across the Yale campus in their proposal, “The undersigned (all but one alumni of Yale) being interested in the progress of the University, and informed of the evident growth among the undergraduates of a desire for more thorough study of the English Bible, especially under the inspiring instruction of Professor Harper... are deeply convinced of the value of introducing a regular course of Biblical instruction into the College curriculum....”

*Harper (1875 PhD), a prodigy who finished a Yale PhD at age nineteen, joined the faculty in 1886 and brought fresh enthusiasm to ancient languages and historical criticism. Harper was a dynamic presence in New Haven, but he stayed only five years; he became the first president of the University of Chicago in 1891.*

### Frank Knight Sanders



*Born in 1861 in Sri Lanka to American missionary parents, Sanders joined the Yale College faculty in 1889 to teach Semitic languages. He was a popular professor and YMCA assembly speaker who had visions of building a great biblical languages facility someday that would straddle both YDS and the College.*

Sanders was recruited to be Dean of YDS in 1901 but, newly installed, he found himself consumed not by the pursuit of a visionary biblical studies center but by everyday administrative duties. And he soon discovered that YDS was running a deficit. Building repairs further burdened the expense sheet. These cross-purposes led to a financial crisis. The man who had hoped to lead YDS and Semitic languages to greater glory resigned the next year “with the keenest regret.”

The Frank Knight Sander Papers ([Record Group 122](#)) are held at the Yale Divinity Library.

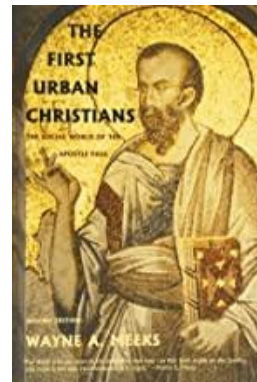


## Wayne A. Meeks



Woolsey Professor Wayne A. Meeks was called “a dear friend of the Divinity School for many years” by Dean Greg Sterling in a tribute at the time of Meeks’ recent death. Meeks taught in the Religious Studies Department at Yale University from 1969 until his retirement in 1999. Sterling noted that “in partnership with Abraham Malherbe, a member of our faculty, Wayne put the social history of early Christianity on the map for New Testament studies globally. The two trained a group of exceptionally talented students who have had notable careers of their own.”

Notable publication: *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983)



Meeks’ papers (([Record Group 269](#)) are held at the Yale Divinity Library.

Succeeding Meeks as Woolsey Professor of Religious Studies was **Dale B. Martin**, who specialized in New Testament and social and cultural history of the Greco-Roman world. The current incumbent of the Woolsey chair is **Stephen Davis**, who specializes in the history of ancient and medieval Christianity, with a special focus on the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East.

**Next: [Bible Revision and Translation Activities at Yale Divinity School](#)**

For more exhibits highlighting aspects of Yale Divinity School’s history, see: <https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/exhibitions>.

Exhibit curated by Martha Lund Smalley, with assistance from Ray Waddle and Dean Emeritus Harold Attridge.