

# Biblical Scholarship at YDS: A Bicentennial Retrospective

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.

## Overview



When YDS was founded in 1822, its identity was linked to a surging “New Haven” theology, Professor Nathaniel Taylor’s progressive version of New England Calvinism. From early on, however, the School had a biblical studies presence that looked to larger currents of scholarship beyond regional Protestant controversies. Josiah Willard Gibbs Sr. came to Yale from Andover in 1824 and stayed on the faculty as Professor of Sacred Literature / New Testament Criticism and Interpretation for nearly 40 years. He set a tone of

careful exegesis that appropriated European modes of analysis that were new to the US, and he helped establish a high reputation for the School that has continued for more than 200 years in various disciplines related to the Bible field.

It took YDS some years to absorb new approaches in theology and Bible more fully. In the postbellum years, Timothy Dwight taught New Testament with his traditional exegetical approach despite increased student interest in critical inquiry. George Day in Old Testament was similarly indifferent to new questions arriving with the fierce winds of higher criticism. This confirmed an impression that YDS in the 1880s was a more traditional place than Harvard, Union, or the German theological centers. This changed with pivotal faculty hires starting in 1886.

As the Divinity School grew in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, benefactors established named professorships in the Biblical studies field. The first was the **Buckingham Professor of Sacred Literature** (later known as Buckingham Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation), with Timothy Dwight as the inaugural chair. Over the decades, the Buckingham endowment was followed by the **Holmes Professor of Hebrew Language and Literature**, the **Woolsey Professor of Biblical Literature**, the **Winkley Professor of Biblical Theology**, the **Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament**, and recently the **McDonald Agape Professor in New Testament and Early Christianity**.

Links to the Professorships:



[Buckingham](#)



[Claus](#)



[McDonald Agape](#)



[Holmes](#)



[Winkley](#)



[Woolsey](#)

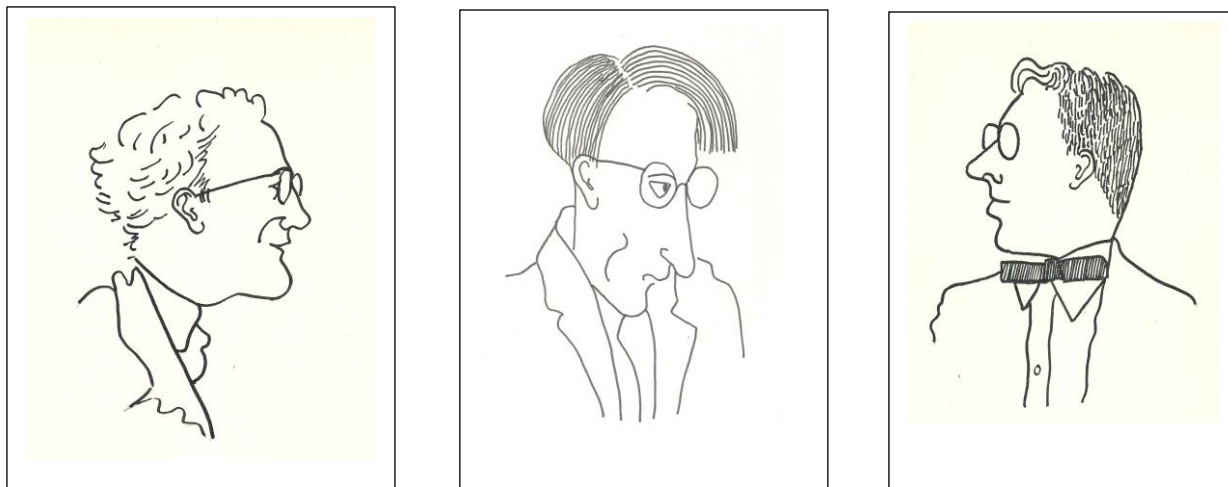
In the 1870s, George Edward Day, the first Holmes chair, was especially distinguished nationally for his leadership in Bible revision efforts, thus beginning Yale's long association with Bible translation over the next century. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with Timothy Dwight now Yale president, YDS made some pivotal Bible faculty hires—William Rainey Harper, Frank Chamberlin Porter, Benjamin Wisner Bacon, Frank Knight Sanders, and Edward Lewis Curtis—that modernized the curriculum and re-energized the School's national standing.



The Old Testament section of the RSV Committee. For more on this project [click here](#).

Starting in the 1930s, YDS was the scene of a monumental [Bible translation project](#). The School was headquarters for the Revised Standard Version Bible Committee, a group of 32 North American scholars who met at the Quad regularly from 1937 until after World War II, producing the RSV Bible. Overseeing this historic endeavor was YDS Dean Luther Weigle. As a religious education scholar, Weigle was not technically a Bible expert but an effective manager of the whole enterprise. Weigle proved to be an invaluable interdisciplinary campus presence—a bridge scholar between biblical studies and other disciplines. Others who have played a similar interdisciplinary role at YDS since then include David Bartlett, Carolyn Sharp, and Andrew McGowan—reflecting the School's commitment to examining the implications of scripture for Christian ministry and the contemporary church.

The mid-century years generated biblical studies acclaim on other fronts. The “Three Pauls” of the New Testament faculty—Paul Sevier Minear, Paul Schubert, and Paul William Meyer—had international fame as authors and teachers.



YDS Professor Roland Bainton’s caricatures of the “Three Pauls” – from left Schubert, Minear, and Meyer

In 1958, the arrival of Brevard Childs as Holmes Professor of Old Testament began one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s most renowned careers in biblical scholarship. His work in canonical criticism was known as a YDS signature theme until his retirement in 1999. The strength and continuity of the Bible faculty in the latter decades of the century was also seen in the work of Abraham Malherbe, Wayne Meeks, Leander Keck, and, joining with the 1971 affiliation of Berkeley Divinity School, R. Lansing Hicks. Old Testament scholar Robert Wilson’s YDS career spanned an extraordinary 48 years, ending with his retirement in 2020.

On the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, YDS expanded its biblical scholarly horizons with the arrivals of Adela Yarbro Collins, John Collins, and Harold Attridge, bringing a Catholic heritage to their work. In the last 20 years, the School has endeavored to take on a more global outlook, with fresh angles on postcolonial hermeneutics, literary criticism, and perspectives that include far greater attention to issues of race, power, class, immigration, and gender. Current endowed professorships are held by Laura Nasrallah, the Buckingham chair; Teresa Morgan, the McDonald Agape chair; and YDS Dean Gregory E. Sterling, the Claus chair.

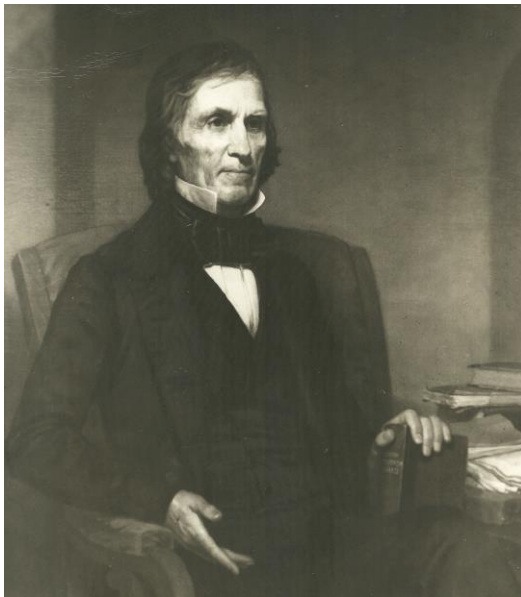
Today biblical studies at YDS, 200 years after the School’s beginnings, carries on its monumental tradition of interpreting the Christian scriptures in the broadest sense, with the study of classical biblical languages, the use of critical methods of interpretation and historical milieu, and regard for the theological and pastoral ramifications of the text.

## The Beginning Years

**Eleazar Thompson Fitch** was appointed Professor of Sacred Literature when the Theological Department at Yale was first established in 1822. Fitch focused primarily on homiletics when **Josiah Willard Gibbs Sr.** arrived in 1824 to take up the post of Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation.



Eleazar Thompson Fitch



Josiah Willard Gibbs Sr.

Born in 1790 in Salem, Massachusetts, Gibbs graduated from Yale College in 1809. He went on to study in Andover under Moses Stuart and returned to YDS in 1824, where he was on the faculty until 1861.

*Gibbs was YDS professor of sacred literature for more than three decades, devoting himself to the scrupulous pursuit of classical knowledge. He considered all sides of a linguistic argument and avoided dramatic pronouncements.*

*He was one of the earliest U.S. scholars to make use of German biblical research—in a sense he was ahead of his time, a “German scholar who had landed on American soil a little too early to be understood by more dogmatic men,” Timothy Dwight the younger wrote. His most famous pupil, Horace Bushnell, borrowed Gibbs’s ideas on language and forged his own world-changing theories about religious education. Gibbs, father of pioneering Yale chemist Josiah Willard Gibbs, Jr., was not indifferent to the world outside the classroom. He applied his translation skills in the Amistad saga in 1839, an episode that won global sympathy for the abolitionist cause.*

**Next: Buckingham Professors of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation**



## Buckingham Professors of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation

The Buckingham Professorship of Sacred Literature was established in 1858, named after its benefactor, Connecticut Governor William A. Buckingham. Timothy Dwight became the first incumbent.

### Timothy Dwight

Timothy Dwight (1828-1916) joined the faculty at YDS in 1858 and went on to serve as President of Yale from 1886 to 1898. He was the grandson of Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) who served as President of Yale from 1795 to 1817.

*Raised in Norwich, Connecticut, Dwight entered YDS to study with Nathaniel Taylor and became a popular tutor*

*of undergraduates. Post YDS, he studied New Testament in Germany, returning in 1858 to find the School in a downward spiral: Taylor had died, and the other founding professors were soon to follow. Dwight was hired and set about reviving YDS with fundraising and genial high spirits despite the Civil War. His Divinity teaching continued until, almost inevitably, he was appointed Yale president in 1886. He would be the last clergyman to lead the College.*



### George Barker Stevens

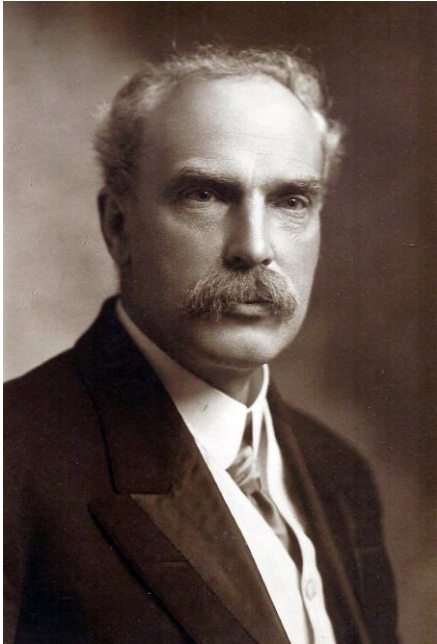
Following Timothy Dwight as Buckingham Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation was George Barker Stevens.

Born in upstate New York in 1854, Stevens graduated from the University of Rochester in 1877. He received his BD from YDS in 1880 and was minister at a Congregational Church in Buffalo and a Presbyterian Church in Watertown, N.Y. before starting his PhD studies at Syracuse University. After graduating from Syracuse in 1883 he spent a year studying in Germany before

joining the YDS faculty as professor of New Testament in 1886, serving in that capacity until 1895. He then became Dwight Professor of Systematic Theology until his sudden death at age 52 in 1906. Continuing the tradition YDS faculty involvement in Bible translation work, Stevens produced his own paraphrase of Paul's Epistles in 1898.



## Benjamin Wisner Bacon



Benjamin Wisner Bacon (1881 BA, 1884 BD), a Congregational minister, became New Testament professor in 1896, despite Professor George Park Fisher's fear that young Bacon was too outspokenly liberal. He soon became the Buckingham Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation, retiring in 1928. The grandson of Leonard Bacon, and a former Yale football standout, he was a popular campus preacher-lecturer and author on Gospel theology.

Notable publication: *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (New York: Macmillan, 1909)

Below, from the Divinity Library's Special Collections, YDS student Reinhold Riemer's notes from Bacon's course "Christological Epistles" 1916–1917 ([Record Group 121](#))

*Christological Epistles*

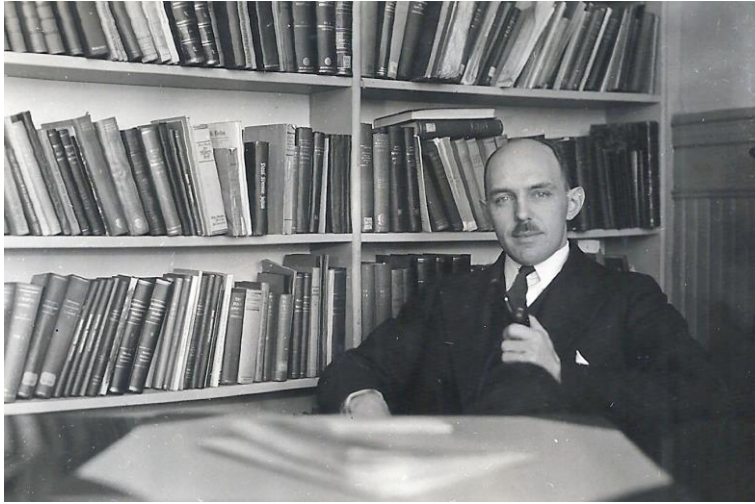
Prof. Bacon  
1916-1917  
Oct 4, 1916

To follow systematically Eph. & supplement for comp. epistles. Gal. Rome & Cor. go on in the main system of Paul's doct as against Judaism. In later part of his career Paul associates by Gentile the problem. Hellenism - a merged theology that is the predecessor of Apollonius in interpretation apart from how the great things in his magis epistle. In the 7th. The power of X the main theme; the emphasis of significance of X as redemptive as argument also the religion & system that are penetrating Rome.

The 7th. ep's supplement Paul's idea by giving us his theology. Then they become & fundamental doctrine. This idea of generation, the strategy before under logos category. 4th gospel adopts logos doctrine. With next cent it becomes the supreme theology. Paul does not yet adopt the logos term. He does use term wisdom. Father of 2nd cent make wisdom & logos identical. Why slow to adopt logos theology the reason is e.g. under Philo. Philo & Platonism is 1st & a philosopher. If the writer not philosopher & does not so soon adopt the term. Furthermore logos has no redemptive formation & X's last. It is sent forth fr. God to accomplish redemptive purposes. The synoptic list as Rome says has the apocalyptic doct. In the main, Paul's truth has nothing of preexistence. Now then any preexistence in any synoptic list as there is in Paul.

The preexistence doct comes to light gradually

## Carl H. Kraeling



Carl H. Kraeling succeeded Benjamin Wisner Bacon as Buckingham Professor of New Testament, serving on the faculty from 1928 to 1950. Like his YDS colleague Millar Burrows, who was the Winkley Professor of Biblical Theology, Kraeling was a scholar of the Dead Sea Scrolls. President of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) from 1949 to 1954, Kraeling was known for his publications on the synagogue and the Christian chapel of Dura-Europos. He founded the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literature at Yale in 1947 and served as its chairman for three years before leaving to join the faculty of the University of Chicago.

Notable publication: *Anthropos and Son of Man: A Study in the Religious Syncretism of the Hellenistic Orient* (New York: Columbia, 1927)

## Paul Schubert

*Paul Schubert, born in Germany and with PhDs from Bonn and Chicago, taught at YDS from 1949 to 1969. Before his retirement, this Buckingham Professor was honored with a festschrift, Studies in Luke-Acts (1966), edited by Leander Keck and Louis Martyn.*

Notable publication: *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* (Berlin: Topelmann, 1939)

Below, from the Divinity Library's Special Collections, Schubert's address "Christ and History" delivered at YDS in 1955 ([Record Group 30](#)).



## Christ and History

(1)

The opening service of this Divinity School is for all of us <sup>(an occasion of ~~keen~~ <sup>keen</sup> expectations, even though the</sup> <sup>for new students</sup> orientation period) just ended, may have both sharpened and dulled our keenness. But more than that it is both the celebration and the beginning of our common life and task <sup>(during the coming year)</sup> as we face the community of entering and returning students.

~~Since the occasion is a celebration and with all its community~~ we must ~~do~~ With the Fourth Gospel we call Christ our Teacher and our Lord; and we are right; for so he is. ~~But we~~ also remember his words, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven". But among all the communities & communities such as ours have a special task, namely to prepare ourselves for special commitment and <sup>(one another)</sup> <sup>its members</sup> to prepare ourselves for that service to which our Lord has called us or shall call us.

As a community we are also members of a university community. <sup>special</sup> Academic freedom and ~~academic~~ responsibility are not identical with the freedom and responsibility to which X is calling us, but the special it is our special privilege and calling ~~to learn~~ to understand and their ~~position~~ relationships, and to live and work accordingly.

~~A topic which exemplifies this relationship is the~~  
~~This relates an understanding of this relationship~~

Our topic, Christ and History, affords lends itself; in fact, it requires such treatment; whatever one's <sup>historical</sup> academic or theological christological notions perspectives may be. Christ and History are eminently proper



## Nils Alstrup Dahl

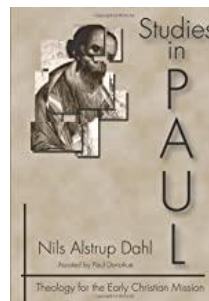


Nils Alstrup Dahl (1911–2001), Paul Schubert's successor as Buckingham Professor, was born and educated in Norway. He was Professor of New Testament at the University of Oslo from 1946 to 1965 before coming to YDS, where he was on the faculty until 1980.

Dahl's YDS colleague Abraham Malherbe wrote in *Reflections* in 1980: "Professor Dahl is no narrow specialist. He has worked most extensively in the Gospels and the Pauline letters and is writing an eagerly awaited major commentary on Ephesians. The Festschrift recently published in his honor is entitled *God's Christ and His People*, signaling his abiding interest in Christology and ecclesiology, but as the editors of the volume note, his contributions

go far beyond these two areas. In addition to his basically exegetical studies, he has engaged in the theological and hermeneutical discussions of the last three decades, made important contributions to textual criticism and the history of the NT canon, explored the history and interpretation of Jewish and Christian Scriptures, closely examined such newly discovered materials in the areas of the history of religions as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gnostic writings from Nag Hammadi."

Notable publication: *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977)



## Abraham J. Malherbe

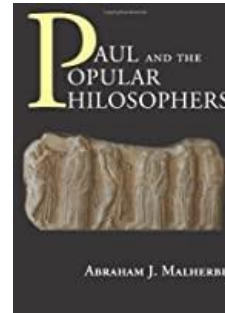


Born in Pretoria, South Africa in 1930, Abraham Malherbe came to the United States in 1951 to attend Abilene Christian University. After receiving his BA, he went to Harvard, where he earned an STB in 1957 and a ThD in 1963. He taught at Abilene Christian University from 1963 to 1969 and at Dartmouth for one year before coming to YDS in 1970, where he was appointed Buckingham Professor in 1980 and served until his retirement in 1994. Achieving international prominence in his field, Malherbe was best known for his work in Hellenistic moral philosophy and early Christianity, especially the Pauline tradition.

In a tribute at the time of Malherbe's death in 2012, his colleague Prof. David Bartlett wrote:

“Abe Malherbe was the embodiment of an ancient ideal, the Christian scholar. His scholarship is known by everyone who studies New Testament as he helped bring early Christian literature into conversation with the Hellenistic philosophical writings and helped us to think about the church in its social and intellectual context... At the same time he was deeply devoted to the life of the church. Through the years I have been impressed by how many pastors remember Abe as a major influence on their calling and their careers...”

Notable publication: *Paul and the Popular Philosophers*  
(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989)



## Adela Yarbro Collins



Prof. Malherbe’s successor as Buckingham Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation, Adela Yarbro Collins, was the first woman tenured in New Testament on the YDS faculty. She received her BA from Pomona College and her MA and PhD from Harvard. Prior to teaching at YDS from 2000 until her retirement in 2015, Yarbro Collins taught at the University of Chicago Divinity School, the University of Notre Dame, and McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. She is the 2022-2023 President of the Society of Biblical Literature. Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2020, Yarbro Collins is described on that site as “an internationally renowned and respected scholar of the New Testament. She has contributed

importantly and influentially to the academic study of religion through historical-critical work on early Christian apocalypticism, the Book of Revelation, the Gospel according to Mark (her major Hermeneia commentary appeared in 2007), ancient messianic beliefs, and feminist biblical scholarship.”

Notable publication: *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia Commentary Series; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007)



## Laura Nasrallah

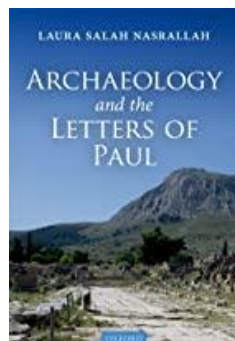


The current incumbent of the Buckingham professorship is Laura Nasrallah, who joined YDS in 2019 from Harvard. A graduate of Princeton University, Nasrallah earned an MDiv and ThD from Harvard University. She taught at Occidental College (Los Angeles) before joining the Harvard faculty in 2003.

At the time of her arrival, *Yale News* reported that “Nasrallah’s research brings together New Testament and early Christian literature with the archaeological remains of the Mediterranean world, and focuses particularly on issues of empire, gender, and race and ethnicity.”

Notable publication:

*Archaeology and the Letters of Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)



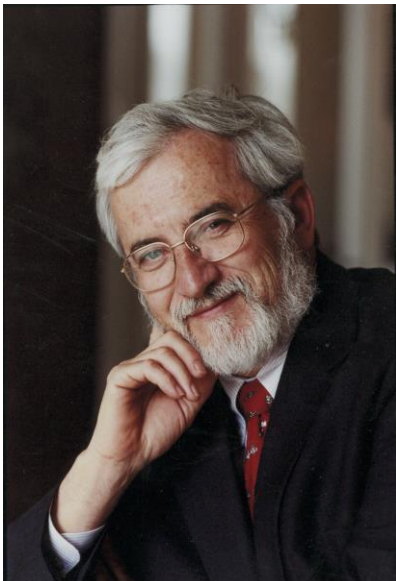
**Next: Lillian Claus Professors of New Testament**



## Lillian Claus Professors of New Testament

The Lillian Claus Professorship of New Testament was established in 1985 through a gift from Miss Lillian Claus of Ridgewood, Queens, New York. Its first incumbent was Bruce D. Chilton who taught at YDS from 1985 until 1987. He was followed by Susan R. Garrett who taught at YDS from 1988 until 1995.

## Harold W. Attridge



Harold Attridge received his BA from Boston College in 1967 and went on to study at the University of Cambridge as a Marshall Scholar before beginning his doctoral studies at Harvard. He completed his PhD in 1975 and had a three-year term in the Harvard Society of Fellows before teaching at the Perkins School of Theology at South Methodist University from 1977 to 1985 and at the University of Notre Dame from 1985 to 1997, where he also served as the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters. He joined the YDS faculty as Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament in 1997 and served as Dean of the Divinity School from 2002 to 2012 before returning to teaching as a Sterling Professor until his retirement in 2020.

Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2015, he is described on that site as a “scholar of ancient religion and philosophy whose publications exhibit tremendous range, including studies of popular Greek philosophy, Hellenistic Judaism, the New Testament documents (with a special focus on the Gospel of John and the Letter to the Hebrews), and the Coptic library found at Nag Hammadi.”

Notable publication: *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia Commentary Series; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989)

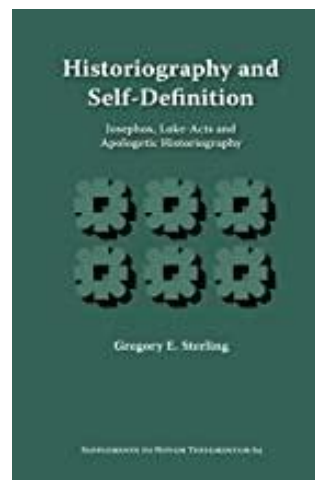


## Gregory E. Sterling



Sterling received his bachelor's degree in Christianity and History from Houston Baptist University in 1978 and completed post-baccalaureate studies in classics at Houston Baptist the following year. He received an MA in Religion from Pepperdine University in 1980 and an MA in Classics from the University of California, Davis, in 1982. In 1990, he completed his doctoral studies in Biblical Studies with a specialization in the New Testament at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Sterling joined the faculty at the University of Notre Dame in 1989 as a Visiting Assistant Professor and became a regular member of the faculty in 1990, earning promotion to Associate Professor in 1995 and to Professor of Theology in 2000. He became Dean of the Graduate School at Notre Dame in 1997 and served in that role until coming to Yale in 2012 as Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament and Dean of the School.

Notable publication:  
*Historiography and Self-Definition: Josephus, Luke-Acts, and Apologetic Historiography*  
(Leiden: Brill, 1997)



**Next: McDonald Agape Professor in New Testament and Early Christianity**

## McDonald Agape Professor in New Testament and Early Christianity

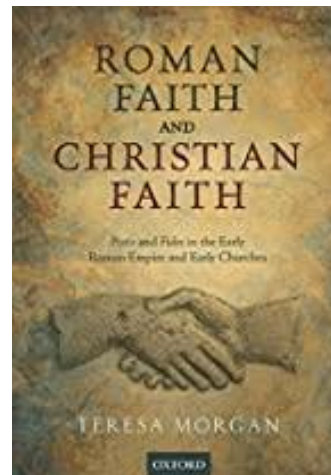
The McDonald Agape Professorship in New Testament and Early Christianity was established in 2019 with support from the McDonald Agape Foundation.

### Teresa Morgan



The first incumbent of the McDonald Agape Professorship is Teresa Morgan. Morgan studied classics at Cambridge University, theology at Oxford, and violin and viola in London and Cologne. She joined YDS in 2022, having taught Greek and Roman history at Oxford since 1998. Her research includes the history of ideas and the social and cultural practices and institutions that shape and are shaped by them. Renowned for her work in New Testament and Early Christian Studies, Morgan has made major contributions to a deeper understanding of *pistis*, or faith, in the ancient world, as well as literate education in Hellenistic and Greek culture.

Notable publication: *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)



**Next: other notable professors of New Testament and current faculty**



## Other notable professors of New Testament who taught at YDS:

**Paul W. Meyer**, 1954-1964; Associate Professor of New Testament

Notable publication: *Word in this World: Essays New Testament Exegesis and Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004)

**Luke Timothy Johnson**, 1976-1989; Associate Professor of New Testament

Notable publication: *Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula: Scholars, 1977)

**Richard B. Hays**, 1981-1991; Associate Professor of New Testament

Notable publication: *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale, 1989)

**Jeremy F. Hultin**, 2003-2012; Associate Professor of New Testament

Notable publication: *The Ethics of Obscene Speech in Early Christianity and its Environment* (Leiden: Brill, 2008)

## Currently on the New Testament faculty:

### Michal Beth Dinkler

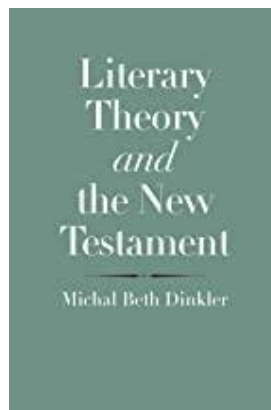


### Associate Professor of New Testament

Dinkler received her BA and MA from Stanford University, an MDiv from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and her ThD from Harvard. She was a Teaching Fellow at Harvard and Instructor in Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University before joining the YDS faculty in 2014.

Treating a range of literature both within and external to the New Testament canon, Dinkler's work consistently argues that literary theory can reshape the complex hermeneutical discussions that animate New Testament /Ancient Christianity studies and its adjacent disciplines.

Notable publication: *Literary Theory and the New Testament* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019)



## Yii-Jan Lin



### Associate Professor of New Testament

Lin received her BA from Pomona College, MA degrees from the University of Chicago and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and her PhD from Yale. She taught at the Pacific School of Religion before joining the YDS faculty in 2016.

Professor Lin specializes in textual criticism, the Revelation of John, critical race theory, gender and sexuality, and immigration. Her examines how metaphors of race, family, evolution, and genetic inheritance have shaped the goals and assumptions of New Testament textual criticism from the eighteenth century to the present.

Notable publication: *The Erotic Life of Manuscripts: New Testament Textual Criticism and the Biological Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016)



**Next: [Old Testament / Hebrew Bible at YDS](#)**

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.