

Abraham J. Malherbe (1930–2012)

Abraham J. Malherbe, the Buckingham Professor of New Testament Criticism and Literature Emeritus at Yale Divinity School, died suddenly and unexpectedly from an apparent heart attack on Friday afternoon, September 28, at his home in Hamden, CT.

A member of The Society of Biblical Literature for over fifty years, Abe was a highly productive scholar who made major contributions in several areas. He is best known for his work in relating early Christianity, especially the Pauline tradition, to the Graeco-Roman world. He made contributions both to Hellenistic moral philosophy and to the ways in which early Christians were influenced by it. His work on *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition* (1977) and *Moral Exhortation: A Graeco-Roman Sourcebook* (1986) made a number of important texts available to the wider range of scholars. His justly famous “Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament” (ANRW) may hold the distinction for being the most cited forthcoming article in the history of NT studies. Both before and after its appearance, this article provided a framework for NT scholars to think about how to appropriate Hellenistic moral philosophy. Abe did this in detail in several of his own books, especially *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophical Tradition of Pastoral Care* (1987), *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (1989), and his Anchor Bible Commentary, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (2000). He was working on the Hermeneia commentary on the Pastorals when he died.

Abe’s strong interest in Paul’s letters led him to give special attention to the theory and practice of writing letters in the Greek and Roman worlds. Prompted by this research he edited *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (1988), a valuable resource for students of epistolography and rhetoric. He was one of the first to call attention to the importance of social history in his *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (1977, 1983). Some of his earliest scholarly work was in patristics, including several articles in the 1960s from his dissertation on Athenagoras. In 1978 he and Everett Ferguson published *Gregory of Nyssa, Life of Moses: Translation, Introduction, and Notes*. Abe’s collected essays spanning over fifty years (1959–2012) are scheduled to appear next year in Brill’s *Novum Testamentum Supplements*. Abe’s remarkable range of scholarship and depth of learning are powerfully evident in these essays. The esteem in which he is held as a scholar is evident in two *Festschriften: Greeks, Romans, and Christians* (1990) and *Early Christianity and Classical Culture* (2003).

Abe was an active member of both SNTS (Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas) and the SBL, with his own research often closely linked to the programs and activities of both groups. His research on ancient epistolography, both the Cynic letters and the epistolary theorists, was intimately linked to the work of SBL program units on Paul and on epistolography. Similarly, the impetus for the formation of the SBL’s Hellenistic Moral Philosophy and Early Christianity Section and its work on friendship came from Abe, who wanted the Society to form a collaborative group that would give close attention to ancient texts, both pagan and Christian, treating

them in their own right as well as in relation to each other. His vision of a multidisciplinary group of scholars, diverse in their training and methodological presuppositions, was one of the key factors that led the Society to become more interdisciplinary in its approach to early Christianity, with increasing numbers of classicists and ancient historians now actively participating in the SBL's annual and international meetings.

Abe was born in Pretoria, South Africa, on May 15, 1930. After graduating from high school he spent several years working as a surveyor and then a draftsperson in the Electrical Supply Commission of South Africa. He came to the United States in 1951 to attend Abilene Christian University where he received his bachelor's degree *magna cum laude* in 1954. While he was at ACU he met and married Phyllis Melton. They had three children: Selina, Cornelia, and Jan. From Abilene Abe went to Harvard where he earned both an S.T.B. in 1957 and a Th.D. in 1963 under the supervision first of Arthur Darby Nock and then of Helmut Koester following Nock's death. He also spent a year at the University of Utrecht working on the Corpus Hellenisticum project with W. C. van Unnik (1960-61). In 1957 Abe and Pat Harrell co-founded *The Restoration Quarterly*, a scholarly journal associated with Churches of Christ. The journal has not only survived but has also become the standard scholarly venue for Abe's religious tradition.

Abe returned to Abilene Christian University where he held a faculty position in the New Testament and Early Christianity (1963-69). He went back to Harvard as a visiting scholar in 1967-68 and then left Abilene for Dartmouth (1969-70). During his first year at Dartmouth, Abe attracted the attention of Nils Dahl, who was instrumental in bringing him to Yale Divinity School in 1970. In 1981 he succeeded Dahl in the Buckingham professorship and served on the faculty with distinction until his retirement in 1994.

Besides being a prolific publishing scholar, Abe was a beloved teacher and mentor. Through his passion for the learned ministry and his instinctive pastoral gifts, he exercised enormous influence on hundreds of ministerial students over the years. His students have gone on to a wide range of successful careers. Especially interested in nurturing the professional development of numerous young scholars, he was unfailingly generous with his time in reading and critiquing their work and introducing them to other scholars with similar interests. There are multiple scholarships in his name, a testimony to the personal friendships that many had with him. He and Phyllis dedicated a great deal of their time and resources to support the Whitney Avenue Church of Christ, as well as a number of other churches in the area, including the First Baptist Church in New Haven where Abe and Phyllis attended in recent years.

A memorial service will be held on October 27 at 10:00 a.m. in Yale Divinity School's Marquand Chapel.

John Fitzgerald, Carl Holladay, and Greg Sterling