



Charles H Talbert

(March 19, 1934-November 21, 2021)

Charles Talbert was born in Jackson, MS to Carl and Audrey Talbert. He spent his earliest days in Louisville, KY, where his parents attended classes at Southern Seminary. He completed high school in Bessemer, AL, where his father was a Baptist pastor, and Charles was quarterback on a championship football team. He entered Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham, AL, with the intention of pursuing a career in law. He abandoned that pursuit and rather enrolled as a student at Southern Seminary, where he had spent his early childhood. After completing a MDiv at Southern Seminary and PhD at Vanderbilt with Leander Keck, Charles accepted an invitation to join the faculty at Wake Forest University in 1963, where he taught 33 years. There he earned a reputation as a beloved but demanding teacher (as no doubt student anecdotes on social media following reports of his death will reveal). In 1996, at the age of 62 when many are initiating a transition to retirement, Charles and Betty moved to Waco TX where Charles would serve as Distinguished Professor of New Testament in Baylor's Department of Religion for another 15 years, until a debilitating stroke forced his retirement.

Charles was a productive scholar whose many publications shaped the discipline of New Testament studies. Swimming against the tide, he argued that the canonical Gospels fit the form and function of various kinds of ancient *bioi* (*Literary Patterns, Theological Themes, and the Genre of Luke-Acts*, 1974; *What is a Gospel?* 1977). At first a lone voice in the wilderness, today that view (with requisite refinements) demands consideration, and in some quarters, enjoys a certain consensus. His Reading commentaries charted a new path in commentary writing that tended less to source-critical issues and more to the literary shape and theological message of the text's final form in its larger Greco-Roman context. His publications were models of the lucid brevity that he so admired in other scholars' writings and expected in his own students.

At Baylor he served as first or second reader on twenty-eight dissertations, twenty-two of which were subsequently published as monographs. His former students hold teaching and ministry positions across North America and beyond.

Charles was also a person of deep faith and personal piety. Though his training as a biblical scholar occasionally created tensions with his Baptist denomination, he never abandoned his Baptist roots (though when he interviewed at Baylor he confessed he would like to stay as close as he could to the Baptist ‘flame’ without getting burned!). He was no sectarian, however, but rather embraced a large and ecumenical vision of the church. He was, for example, only the second Protestant to serve as President of the Catholic Biblical Association.

From the time they met on the campus of Vanderbilt, Betty Weaver Talbert was Charles’ constant companion through life’s journey. An accomplished scholar in her own right (holding a PhD in history from UNC-CH), she co-founded a counseling center in Winston-Salem, NC and finished her professional career as director of spiritual formation at Baylor’s Truett Seminary. Charles is survived by Betty and two children, Caroline and Richard, and two grandchildren, Emily and Rachel, of whom he was immensely and justifiably proud!

Charles had a keen—at times, even wicked—sense of humor. His pearls of aphoristic wisdom, known as “Talbertisms” to his Baylor colleagues, were ready at hand for any occasion. In addition to the aforementioned virtue of “lucid brevity,” we were admonished about the “law of unintended consequences” before any important faculty vote. We were instructed to practice the “inner coherence of research and teaching” in our efforts to negotiate demands of classroom and writing, and we were taught to complain about administrators who required faculty to “make bricks without straw.” Early to bed, early to rise, makes one healthy, wealthy, and wise was not original to Charles, but those who knew his work habits know it was an aphorism he lived by.

Charles Talbert lived long and he lived well; he died on November 21, 2021, in Winston-Salem, NC. He was both scholar and gentleman. Charles was a wonderful colleague and cherished friend. And he will be sorely missed by all those who knew and loved him.

Mikeal C. Parsons

Baylor University