

Remembering Dr. Ward Gasque

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It is with great sadness that we announce the death of W. Ward Gasque, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at Regent College and a long-respected scholar on the Acts of the Apostles. Ward died in Vancouver on December 29, 2020. He was eighty-one years old.

Ward was a founding member of Regent's faculty, teaching New Testament at the College for twenty-two years. As unofficial Dean of the College's inaugural summer school, he

oversaw Regent's very first academic offerings, also serving as its original Registrar and, later, the first E. Marshall Sheppard Professor of Biblical Studies. James M. Houston, the College's founding Principal, recalls, "Ward was our first recruit in the founding of Regent, hired to travel widely to mobilize interest in Regent's summer schools, even before the one-year diploma. He was pivotal to its founding."

Ward was a gifted teacher, leading a range of courses in New Testament studies. He pioneered Regent's Marketplace courses, encouraging students to consider how thoughtful biblical scholarship could impact daily life and work. Regent President Jeff Greenman reflected, "Ward was a tireless champion of the emerging vision of biblically serious, intellectually rigorous, and truly holistic theological education for the whole people of God." His commitment to the laity dovetailed with his wife Laurel's passionate advocacy for theology and the arts, and together they had a profound influence on the College's commitment to lay education and integrative theology.

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Serving both scholarly and popular audiences, Ward’s publications include *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (1989) and *Sir William M. Ramsay: Archaeologist and New Testament Scholar* (1966). Ward served as Editor for the *New International Bible Commentary* and contributed numerous articles to the *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, *The Anchor Bible*

Dictionary, *New Dictionary of Theology*, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, as well as a wide range of journals. Ward served as an Editor at Large for *Christianity Today* and for Regent’s quarterly journal, *CRUX*.

Ward was unendingly hospitable. With Laurel, he delighted in welcoming students and scholars into their home for delicious meals and stimulating conversation. He was generous with time, attention, and support, remembering students’ names and the particulars of their lives for decades after they left Regent. “There are a few people that loom large in your life because they believed in you, loved you generously, and did all they could to help you succeed. Ward did that for me, and for many others,” recalled alumnus Soo-Inn Tan (MDiv ’84, ThM ’86). Ward’s sense of humour and resounding, joyful laugh was a hallmark of the College.

Ward was born in Conway, South Carolina. Despite rambunctious early years, by his final year of high school he was organizing Bible Studies, youth rallies, and missions trips. He attended Wheaton College, focusing on Biblical Studies and leading youth groups at local Brethren assemblies. While leading a Bible study, he met Laurel; they were married in 1961, beginning a lifelong partnership building the Kingdom and serving the church.

After Wheaton, Ward completed a Master of Divinity at Fuller Seminary, where he was urged to pursue a doctorate. Responding to this encouragement, he decided to commit his life to research and service that would be of use to

both the academy and the church. At the University of Manchester, Ward completed his PhD under eminent biblical scholar F. F. Bruce. Prompted by the Spirit and a well-honed sense of adventure, Ward and Laurel moved to Vancouver to serve at the nascent Regent College.

Ward's penchant for innovation was the driving force behind his work at Regent and beyond. In 1979 he became the founding President of New College Berkeley, nurturing a dual commitment to intellectual rigour and transforming faith. In 1990 he became Provost of Eastern University in Philadelphia, followed by a stint as Academic Dean at Toronto's Tyndale Seminary. In 1998 he took on his final academic post as President of the Pacific Association for Theological Studies in Seattle. Following his work in academia, he served the Richmond Chinese Alliance Church in Vancouver, BC, first as English Pastor and then as Pastor for Education and Outreach.

Ward's writings reflect his commitment to the whole church. In addition to celebrating his Plymouth Brethren heritage and the ministry of laity, he consistently advocated for the importance of women in church leadership. In 2011 Ward was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award from Christians for Biblical Equality, recognizing his "lifetime of courage, sacrifice and vision in advancing a biblical basis for gift-based ministry." Ward was honoured with a Festschrift volume in 2014, *Serving God's Community*, edited by Soo-Inn Tan and Susan Phillips.

Longtime friend and colleague Carl Armerding, former Principal of Regent College, wrote upon Ward's death, "It was Ward who encouraged not just the early Vancouver committee, but people around the world, to capture a vision that would someday become Regent. His work will follow him as long as Regent continues."

Ward is survived by his wife, Laurel, and their daughter, Michelle.