

Fred B. Craddock, preeminent preacher, dies at age 86

by [Celeste Kennel-Shank](#) in the [April 1, 2015](#) issue

Fred B. Craddock, a preeminent teacher and practitioner of preaching, died March 6 at age 86 in Blue Ridge, Georgia. He had been ill with Parkinson's disease.

[Craddock taught preaching](#) at Emory University's Candler School of Theology from 1979 to 1994. His influential books included *As One Without Authority* and *Overhearing the Gospel*.

Thomas G. Long, who followed Craddock as the Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler, said that mainline Protestant preachers around the country have been affected by his style.

"Fred was in some ways an ironic presence because he neither looked nor sounded like the powerhouse he was; he was a short man with a high voice," Long said. "But his words were absolutely compelling."

Many preachers imitate him, though he was inimitable, said Long, speaking the day after preaching at Craddock's funeral at Cherry Log (Georgia) Christian Church, where Craddock was minister emeritus.

"He'd pause more than most preachers do," Long said. "He'd imply that a dialogue was taking place even when he was the only one talking."

In 1996 Baylor University placed Craddock among the 12 "most effective preachers in the English-speaking world." On its 25th anniversary in 2010, *Preaching* magazine created its own list of the 25 most influential pastors in the pulpit in America during its existence as a publication; Craddock was 16th. His 1985 book, titled *Preaching*, was fourth on the publication's list of the 25 most influential preaching books in that same period.

"Craddock's book (like the author himself) has influenced a generation of young preachers to discover the power of inductive approaches and the use of story in preaching," Michael Duduit of *Preaching* wrote. He added that it "probably has been the most widely used preaching text in seminary classrooms in the past 25 years."

In [a 2003 article](#) for the *Century* on Ash Wednesday, Craddock wrote that “if the liturgical movements of the Christian community at some time and place seem not to move or stir, bending no knee, bowing no head, drawing no tear, lifting no heart, the intent of the liturgy is not served by abandoning it. Rather, one is better advised to join the assembly of others who struggle with their faith and in their faith, and in this company pray together.”

Craddock was born in Humboldt, Tennessee. He graduated from Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1953 and earned a doctorate from Vanderbilt University in 1964. He was ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and taught at Phillips, affiliated with the Disciples denomination.

“In Fred, genuine greatness paired with rare humility,” Sharon Watkins, Disciples general minister and president, wrote on [her blog](#). “In story after personal story, a man of impeccable integrity and genuine caring emerges—a man who took the Gospel seriously.” —Christian Century

*This article was edited on March 17, 2014.*