

Gardner C. Taylor, dean of black preachers, dies at 96

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Gardner C. Taylor, widely considered the dean of the nation's black preachers and "the poet laureate of American Protestantism," died April 5. He was 96.

Carroll Baltimore, past president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, confirmed that Taylor died on Easter.

"Dr. Taylor was a theological giant who will be greatly missed," he said of the minister who received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2000.

Concord Baptist Church of Christ, the imposing, block-long, brick church where Taylor was pastor for 42 years, became a beacon of hope and vitality for many African Americans in Brooklyn, New York. When the church was destroyed by fire in 1952, Taylor defied naysayers by not only rebuilding the edifice but doubling its size.

Concord, one of New York City's largest churches, operated its own elementary school, nursing home, credit union, and million-dollar endowment used to invest in the community. But for more than four decades, it was Taylor who made Concord's pulpit "the most prestigious in black Christendom," wrote author and scholar Michael Eric Dyson.

Dyson said Taylor's preaching included brilliant metaphors and an "uncanny sense of rhythmic timing put to dramatic but not crassly theatrical effect."

Taylor also will be remembered for his key role in black Baptist history in connection with civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. In 1960, Taylor, King, and other black ministers split from the National Baptist Convention, USA, after a fierce debate over King's civil rights agenda, which many black clerics of the day thought was too politically liberal. Taylor and other King supporters formed the Progressive National Baptist Convention, of which Taylor was once president. —Religion News Service

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