

Influential book publisher William Eerdmans Jr. dies at 97

by [Dawn Araujo-Hawkins](#) in the [December 16, 2020](#) issue



(Courtesy photo)

William Eerdmans Jr., who led the independent religious publishing house Wm. B. Eerdmans for more than 50 years, died on November 13 at age 97.

He began working at Eerdmans, which his father founded in 1911, at age 13. During his tenure as president and publisher, which began in 1963, Eerdmans initiated a series of innovations, including books by Catholic and Jewish authors, books on race and gender, and books for children.

It was also under his leadership that the family-owned company published antiapartheid books during the South African apartheid years—including the first book by Desmond Tutu in the US market. When Eerdmans later became enamored of Russian theology and literature, he oversaw the translation of a number of important Russian works into English.

In a statement from the publishing house, its longtime editor in chief, Jon Pott, recalled Eerdmans's passion for his work.

"Bill's command of his field was impressive, and his singular publishing achievements were many and great," Pott said. "He knew his work, but he also thoroughly relished it, from restaurant idea to finished book, from dizzying first authorial encounter to plunk of the final product on his overburdened desk."

Eerdmans retired in 2014 and became chairman of the board. His wife, Anita Eerdmans, succeeded him as publisher and president.

At the time, he said, "I'm ever grateful for the lot that has fallen to me, that of following my father in steering this company to the prominence it has enjoyed at the hands of its authors, fellow workers, and the world near and far of booksellers and publishing colleagues."