

David Bartlett, who sought to revitalize the Bible for liberal churches, dies at age 76

**Bartlett was both pastor and professor, “a single career that integrated the two roles,” a colleague observed.**

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [November 22, 2017](#) issue



David Bartlett. Photo courtesy of Columbia Theological Seminary.

David L. Bartlett, perhaps best known for coediting the 12-volume *Feasting on the Word* commentary series, died October 12 at age 76. He had suffered two strokes last summer, according to his colleagues.

An ordained American Baptist pastor, he served several churches and taught preaching and New Testament before retiring in 2005 from Yale Divinity School. He then took another role as professor at Columbia Theological Seminary until 2012.

“David’s training as a minister and scholar became the defining feature of his career: he was a pastor and a professor,” wrote Greg Sterling, YDS dean, in a tribute. “These were not separate careers, but a single career that integrated the two roles.”

Sterling praised Bartlett as “a model Christian, a first-rate human being.”

In a 1981 *Century* article, “Biblical scholarship today,” Bartlett noted that while scholarship “from the context of the historical-critical method has greatly enriched the intellectual storehouse of historical-critical scholars, it is not so clear that that material has greatly affected the faith of the faithful or the preaching of the churches.”

While concern for history—“what happened as well as with what was proclaimed and written”—is a crucial part of biblical study, it is not enough to unlock the meaning of scripture, he wrote. “Further, for Christian interpreters of scripture, the fundamental claim which needs to be explored and interpreted is the claim that the Word became flesh, not that the Word became text.”

Bartlett, whose books include *Between the Bible and the Church* (1999), [was featured on Preachers on Preaching](#), a podcast hosted by the *Christian Century*, in May 2016.

“So many of my friends have had the job of trying to take theologically conservative people and shake up their views of the Bible,” he said. “My job has been to take theologically liberal people and revitalize the Bible, and say that we can take this as a major resource in our faith.”

*A version of this article, which was edited on November 9, appears in the November 22 print edition under the title “People: David L. Bartlett.” Articles mentioned from before 1998 can be searched for by logged-in magazine subscribers via the*

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