

Walter Barnes Tatum, Class of 1956

Barnes Tatum made the most of his years here at Murphy. He began playing football and baseball, but suffered a head injury in football that caused permanent injury to his left arm, hand, and leg. His injury did not impair his desire to lead and contribute to Murphy, as he remained active in many clubs: Key Club, M Club, Spanish Club, Ushers' Club, and the Forensics Team. He served as a locker monitor and also in the Student Government, being elected as treasurer for the senior class. Barnes was also selected for membership in the National Honor Society.

After leaving Murphy, he earned his BA at Birmingham-Southern College, and continued his education at Duke University, earning his BD and Ph.D. in 1966. He used these degrees to pursue a university teaching career beginning at Huntingdon College in Montgomery (1966-73) and then moved to Greensboro College where he served as professor of primarily Biblical Studies and Hellenistic Greek (1973-), Dean (1983-87), interim president(1984), Director of the Honors Program(1987-1992), Department Chair(2000-2004). He was honored with multiple faculty awards and with a named professorship, and the Jefferson-Pilot Professor of Religion and Philosophy Professor in 1991 and retained the title after retirement as Emeritus status. He later added an MLS (1991, University of North Carolina at Greensboro) to his collection of degrees.

He was the author of multiple works on Jesus that are used as texts in many religious studies programs. Considered a global expert on the portrayal of Jesus in movies, Barnes participated in international religious conferences and worked as commentator for American Movie Classics, the History Channel, E-O Television (Netherlands), the BBC, and Public Radio; and as a consultant to Franco Zeferelli's and Mel Gibson's films about Jesus. He belonged to and held offices in multiple professional organizations and served the communities in which he lived through his church, and through other activities, most notably race relations during the period of integration by serving on the Greensboro City Council to oversee the integration process, and by leading colloquiums and conferences for black and white civic leaders in Montgomery, work that was recognized by the United African American Society. He also got involved in his children's schools (PTA president), and was an adult officer in his local YMCA's Indian Guides and Princesses youth program.

We are proud to include this internationally respected Biblical scholar to our Hall of Fame.