

Robert Kraft, Religious Studies

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DEATHS

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Robert Kraft

Robert Alan Kraft, the Berg Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences, died on September 15 after a battle with cancer. He was 89.

Born in Wolcott, Connecticut, Dr. Kraft obtained his BA in philosophy from Wheaton College in Illinois in 1955. Two years later, he earned an MA in biblical literature (New Testament), also from Wheaton, then went on to receive a PhD in the history and philosophy of religion, specializing in Christian origins, from Harvard University in 1961. He served as an assistant lecturer at the University of Manchester in the U.K. before joining Penn's faculty in 1963, as an assistant professor of religious thought. From 1965 to 1966, he was a visiting lecturer at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia; meanwhile, at Penn, he was promoted to associate professor in 1968 and became a full professor in 1976. From 1992 to until his retirement and assumption of emeritus status in 2003, he was the American Berg Professor of Religious Studies.

From the time he received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1969, Dr. Kraft was a leader in his field. At Penn, Dr. Kraft was a pioneer in using computers for the humanities (*Almanac* March 20, 1980 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v26pdf/n27/032080.pdf>)), specifically the computerization and digitization of ancient Jewish scriptures in Greek and papyri and related documents in the Penn collections. He also made important contributions to the study of history and literatures of Judaism in the Greco-Roman period (particularly the Septuagint and Old Greek translations), Coptic texts, as well as updating and expanding the "Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament." He received several grants from the University Research Foundation to support this work, continuing well into the 2000s. Dr. Kraft served as a member of Penn's University Council, and, outside of Penn, held key roles with several learned societies. He was president of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2006 after holding several other administrative roles in the organization over the preceding decades. Additionally, he co-founded the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins in 1963, chaired the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas in 1971, and was a member of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, the American Society of Papyrologists, and the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center, among others.

Dr. Kraft is survived by his wife, Carol; his daughter, Cindy (Ken); his sons, Scott (Nadine), Todd, and Randy Sr. (Tina); his grandchildren, Alison (Tim), Jonathan, Kristin, Pierce (Charley), Randy Jr, Stephanie, Natalie, Gabrielle, and Beatrice; his brothers, Charles (Marguerite) and David (Stephanie); and his sister, Sharon (Peer).

A celebration of Dr. Kraft's life will be held at a later date. Donations in his memory can be made to the Wolcott Historical Society, PO Box 6410, Wolcott, CT 06716, or to the Society of Biblical Literature, at <https://www.sbl-site.org/membership/giving.aspx> (<https://www.sbl-site.org/membership/giving.aspx>).