

Deaths

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Robert W. Funk, the New Testament scholar who founded the controversial Jesus Seminar, died September 3 at his home in Santa Rosa, California, of lung failure. He was 79. After academic stints that included the chairmanship of Vanderbilt University's religion department and the position of executive secretary of the Society of Biblical Literature, Funk organized in 1985 a group of 75-100 scholars who assessed which sayings in the canonical and apocryphal Gospels most likely came from the historical Jesus. Jesus was not the self-proclaimed messiah of end times, the group said, but "a wisdom teacher whose parables proclaimed the arrival of God's kingdom," according to the Web site of the seminar's Westar Institute. Voting with colored balls (black for no) and making its conclusions public, the group welcomed press coverage, partly in an effort to counter claims about the Bible by fundamentalist preachers. "Much of what we were concluding would not have been that controversial within mainline scholarship had it been kept in official journals, monographs and conferences," said John Dominic Crossan, a co-leader of the group.

Katrina Swanson, 70, one of the "Philadelphia 11," the first women ordained as Episcopal priests in a contested, news-making ceremony 31 years ago, died August 27 of colon cancer at her home in Manset, Maine, said her Episcopal priest husband, George Swanson. It took a few years for the 11 to become fully accepted as priests. But four years later, Katrina Swanson became the first woman rector in the New York metropolitan area, serving at St. John's parish in Union City under John Shelby Spong, then a bishop of Newark, New Jersey. Katrina Swanson had wanted to join the clergy since her teenage years, but she knew it was not permitted. Still, in 1967, she consulted with her father, Bishop Edward Randolph Welles II. Welles eventually ordained her in 1974 after her six years of private study. After her ordination, her husband made her an assistant priest at his church in Kansas City, Missouri, but the bishop there, Arthur Vogel, made him fire her. The same bishop later disciplined her for three months, threatening a church trial over her ordination. She retired to Maine with her husband in 1996.

Influential preacher and theologian **John Rowan Claypool IV**, 74, who served Southern Baptist churches as pastor in four states before becoming an Episcopal priest in 1986, died at a hospital in Decatur, Georgia, on September 3 from complications of multiple myeloma, a cancer of the bone marrow. Author of 11 books, mostly on grief and recovery, Claypool delivered the prestigious Lyman Beecher Lectures in Preaching at Yale University in 1978. He retired as rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in 2000 after 13 years there. In retirement he served part-time as theologian-in-residence at Trinity Episcopal Church in New Orleans, then as associate priest at an Episcopal parish in Atlanta. But Claypool, who earned his undergraduate degree at Baylor University and his theological degree at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, did not abandon his Baptist roots. At his death he was serving as visiting professor of preaching at Mercer University's McAfee School of Theology (which partners with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship). "John Claypool touched our souls," said Mercer president Kirby Godsey. "Amidst our wounds and our triumphs, his voice became for us the voice of God."

Religious broadcaster **Oswald C. J. Hoffman**, 91, voice of *The Lutheran Hour* from 1955 to 1988, died September 8 in St. Louis after a brief illness. Ordained a Lutheran minister in 1939, Hoffman served the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for 70 years in a varied career that made him a religious ambassador to foreign dignitaries and presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Nixon. At his last public appearance in July, he addressed the 88th convention of the International Lutheran Laymen's League, which kicked off the 75th anniversary celebration of *The Lutheran Hour*.