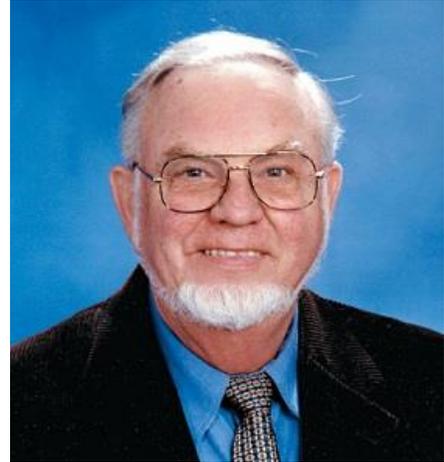


Birger Albert Pearson (1934–2025)

It is with heavy hearts that we announce the passing of our friend and colleague, Birger Albert Pearson. Pearson passed away on April 16th, 2025 at the age of 90.

Pearson was born in California in 1934. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Classical Languages from Upsala College in East Orange, NJ in 1957 and received his Master of Arts in Greek from UC Berkeley two years later. In 1962, Pearson earned his Bachelor of Divinity in Biblical Studies and Theology from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, and six years later he completed his doctorate in New Testament and Christian Origins from Harvard University under the advisement of Helmut Koester.



Pearson served as a professor in the Department of Religious Studies at UC Santa Barbara from 1969 to 1994, where he taught courses in Early Christianity, the New Testament, Hellenic Judaism, Hellenistic Religions, Gnosticism, Coptic language and literature, the Hebrew Bible, Nordic Religions, and Theory of Religion. During his long career as an educator, Pearson also taught students at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Harvard University, the Episcopal Theological School, Harvard Divinity School, Duke University, Uppsala University, the Graduate Theological Union, UC Berkeley, and Lund University.



Pearson contributed significantly to scholars' understanding of the development of Christian Gnostic. Pearson argued that these so-called 'heretical' group originated from Second-Temple Jewish sectarian movements, particularly Jewish mystics. Pearson is also known for his significant translation and editing contributions to the *Nag Hammadi Library in English*, the first full English translation of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic scriptures found in the Egyptian desert. This translation is still of great value for Early Christian scholars today.

During his career, Pearson published several monographs (including the ubiquitous textbook, *Ancient Gnosticism*), contributed to a number of edited volumes, wrote articles in both English and Swedish, and published over 185 book reviews. He was an active member of the Society of Biblical Literature, in which he served in leadership roles for over two decades, and he served as a member of nine editorial boards.

Pearson's knowledge of Nordic languages and his involvement in international congresses meant that his scholarship served as an important bridge for American and international scholars.

While we are saddened by his recent passing, we are comforted knowing that Pearson spent his life committed to his passions of research and teaching.

Future details will be provided about the memorial service. The Department of Religious Studies is collecting photos and memories of Pearson, which can be sent to dszimmerman@ucsb.edu.