



## Yale Divinity School

409 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06515

### Professor Robert Wilson honored with festschrift

Colleagues, students, former students, and admirers of Robert Wilson, the Hooper Professor of Religious Studies and Professor of Old Testament, filled the Common Room on Oct. 29 to celebrate publication of a festschrift in honor of Wilson's four decades of scholarship in biblical studies.

More than a dozen individuals spoke at the celebration, giving testimony to the impact of Wilson's scholarship on them, both as author and teacher, and recounting stories, many humorous, about their interactions with Wilson as teacher, administrator, colleague or friend.

In characteristic fashion, Wilson was at the ready with his own vocabulary of choice: a dry wit and self-deprecating humor that for many must have smacked of vintage Wilson.

After listening to over 45 minutes worth of high praise, Wilson had the floor to himself and explained how, not infrequently, he is approached in various settings by former students who thank him for what he had taught them.

"They then proceed to quote from me some memorable thing that I said of which I have absolutely no memory any longer at all," said Wilson. "Sometimes it's something that makes sense to me. Sometimes it makes no sense at all and I think to myself, 'I have no idea what I meant by that.'"

"But they seem to have been richly blessed by it and I'm always happy when that happens. This is something of the mystery of teaching. What is learned is not always what was taught. Those things do once in a while get back together."

Wilson recited a long list of teachers, colleagues and students who have contributed to Hebrew Bible scholarship at YDS, including many current and former YDS faculty:

"It would be remiss of me at this point not to at least evoke the names of some of the people who contributed over the years to the Hebrew Bible program," said Wilson, "and all of them at one time or another have been my colleagues and together, as this collegial group, we have been able to have what I think to be quite a remarkable and extraordinary program in Old Testament and Hebrew Bible."

"This is an extraordinary group of people, unfortunately not all here at the same time. If they were here at the same time, we really would have quite a program," quipped Wilson. "But, fortunately, four or five or six at a time is enough."

He pointed to "collegiality where the distinctions between teachers and colleagues and where the distinctions between students and teachers blur" as being among the most delightful parts of education at a research university like Yale.



Professor Robert Wilson  
Photo by Justin Haaheim

“There is no way of knowing now how many students I have had the privilege of teaching, or trying to teach, here in the Divinity School. There are hundreds of them who sat through these very large introductory classes in Old Testament, as well as some large numbers in Yale College who have done the same thing.”



Festschrift audience in Common Room  
Photo by Justin Haaheim

Wilson arrived at YDS in the mid-1960s as a B.D. student, earning his degree in 1967 and going on to study for a Ph.D. in the Department of Religious Studies, which he received in 1972. From then on, Wilson’s entire academic career has been spent at Yale, first as an assistant professor of Old Testament, followed by appointments as associate professor, full professor and, finally, appointment as the Hooper Professor in 1991.

Not only has Wilson taught at YDS and in the Department of Religious Studies. He has also been very active as an administrator, including stints as associate dean of academic affairs at YDS, chair of the Department of Religious Studies, and director of graduate studies in the Department of Religious Studies, in addition to work on numerous committees over the years.

That service did not go unrecognized at the festchrift gathering. Provost Peter Salovey pointed to the many administrative roles played by Wilson during his four decades on the Yale faculty and said, “It’s always been known up on Prospect Street (at the Divinity School) or down on College Street (in the wider University) that if you want someone smart, patient, hardworking, and humble to pull an impossibly hard load, Bob is your man.”

The festchrift was organized by two former student of Wilson, John Ahn, who teaches at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, TX, and Stephen Cook, who is on the faculty at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, VA.

The festchrift publication is entitled *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson*. (T&T Clark, 2009). Ahn and Cook edited the volume, and many of the contributors were present at the celebration. The book is available through the [Yale Divinity School Book Supply](#).