

Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. (1940-2014)

Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., died on Friday, February 7, 2014, after an extended battle with cancer. Up until the end, he remained a model for how a human being can confront mortality with gratitude for life.

Dan was born on July 19, 1940, in Arlington, MA. He was a Boston College High School student from 1954-1958, and entered the Society of Jesus in September of the latter year. He received his BA in classics and philosophy in 1964 and an MA in philosophy in 1965 from Weston College/Boston College. He received his PhD in Near Eastern languages and literatures from Harvard University in 1970. His BD/MDiv is from Weston Jesuit School of Theology/Boston College, granted in 1971. After teaching for a year at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, IL, in 1971-1972, he spent the remainder of his academic career as Professor of New Testament at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, MA, which was reaffiliated with Boston College in 2008 as part of the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. After a brief stint in 1971 as Assistant Editor of *New Testament Abstracts*, to which he had been contributing since 1962, he became the general editor of the journal in 1972, and remained in that capacity until he was no longer able to continue in October 2013 (*NTA* was the last thing he wanted to let go). He served as president of the Catholic Biblical Association of America in 1985-1986. In addition to the CBA, he was a member of the Society of Biblical Literature and the Society for New Testament Studies. He was a frequent lecturer at professional conferences, universities, summer Scripture institutes, and parish adult education programs. He carried out weekend pastoral duties at St. Agnes Church in Arlington, MA, from 1971-2013, and also at St. Peter's Church in Cambridge, MA, from 1991-2013. He served on various boards of educational institutions, including the Advisory Board on Catholic-Jewish Relations for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (from 1988), and convened the New Testament section of the Boston Theological Institute for nearly thirty-five years.

How does one sum up in a few paragraphs the immense contributions Dan Harrington has made to biblical scholarship, his church (both globally and locally), and his school (Weston

Jesuit/Boston College School of Theology and Ministry)? A number of fine tributes already exist (e.g., by Jim Martin, S.J.), which I highly recommend for a fuller portrait of Dan as teacher, scholar, and priest. My words of remembrance come from having worked side-by-side with Dan for almost three decades on *New Testament Abstracts*. Though my background was different, Presbyterian and nonordained, we forged a comfortable and fruitful collaboration that extended from 1986 until his death.

Dan was the author of nearly 60 books, some 225 articles and essays, more than 250 book reviews, and over 150 essays on Sunday Scripture texts for *America* magazine (2005-2008), as well as the editor of (and contributor to) the *Sacra Pagina* commentary series on the New Testament (1988-2007), and, while doing all of this, also writing 50,000 abstracts and 25,000 book notices for *New Testament Abstracts* (see <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/3348>). It is apparent that one of Dan's greatest gifts was his tremendous capacity for sustained, productive academic work. This would already be rather obvious from his output with regard to *NTA* alone. It crosses over into the remarkable when one adds to that incredible tally the reams of books, articles, and reviews. Moreover, Dan also carried a regular course load, even though by rights he could have received a reduction. Typical for Dan, he was usually found moving in the other direction, adding to his normal load with an additional course in Aramaic or Intermediate Greek. Besides all of this mainly academic work, Dan fulfilled weekly pastoral duties at local parishes, where in homilies his great technical knowledge was transformed into insights about the biblical text that laypeople could appreciate.

Most admirable (not to say amazing) is that Dan seemingly accomplished all of this activity effortlessly. Further, you always got the sense that Dan really enjoyed what he was doing. I've only met a couple of people in academia who did not seem to get the point of sabbaticals—Dan was one (Jonathan Z. Smith is the other). If memory serves, Dan had two sabbaticals (I'm not sure they were for the full academic year) during the years we worked together. Both times, with the exception of two several-weeks-long trips to Israel and China, he continued to come to the office each day to work on *NTA* and otherwise carry on his usual activity of writings books, articles, reviews, dictionary and encyclopedia entries, homilies, magazine columns, and so

forth. In the years before computers became standard equipment in academic offices, Dan would write his books out longhand, on pads of eight-and-a-half by eleven inch ruled yellow paper. These pages would then be turned into typed sheets by a secretary. For a mere mortal to see this process (i.e., writing without rewriting) was to discover another great gift that Dan possessed, which might be expressed as lack of self-doubt, or, knowing exactly what he wanted to say and how he wanted to say it. Given the volume of writing that Dan managed to publish and the weight of responsibilities he carried with regard to a number of different constituencies, it not only seems that he resolved that this was the way he had to do things, but that he possessed the intellectual wherewithal and personal determination to pull it off. On several occasions that I was aware, and undoubtedly more that I was not aware of, Dan would receive a book review invitation in the afternoon mail, get the book from the library, and in a day or two send back the completed review along with his formal agreement to do it! This is just one of many examples of Dan's legendary abilities of concentration.

One might think that such a person would be too driven to have time for others or for anything beyond his own academic pursuits. His pastoral work already demonstrates the falsehood of the first assumption. And with regard to things nonacademic, Dan seemed to know baseball, basketball, football, and hockey (he was a goalie in high school) as well as he knew the Bible—both the players and the statistics, at the collegiate or professional level. As in most other matters, he outpaced me by far with his detailed knowledge. Dan knew all the ins and outs of “sports-talk radio.” Most mornings began at *NTA* with a rundown of the previous day's scores or some prognostication about what was coming up. Dan somehow also found time to watch TV, where sports, of course, would figure. But he could also discuss the latest villain in this or that crime show.

Dan was an unassuming man who was both extraordinarily capable and unfailingly generous to others. One of my favorite memories is of two very accomplished friends of mine each expressing to me, on different occasions, the admiration they had for each other. The second person I am thinking of here, sadly now also gone, is François Bovon. On more than one occasion, with the appearance of another volume of François' Luke commentary or another

volume of his essays at the *NTA* office, Dan would say to me: “This is magnificent! How does he do it?” And at some other time, at François’ home in Cambridge, more or less the same words were expressed by François for some new publication of Dan’s: “This is great! How does he do it?” These two scholars were renaissance-like in the scope of their interests and abilities.

As he reflected on his own life and career in the months before his death, more than once Dan told the story about the advice he had received as a young man to “do what you love and you’ll never work a day in your life”—Dan believed that he accomplished that goal.

In the years since his cancer diagnosis in the spring of 2009, Dan worked virtually unabated until he finally had to slow down in the summer of 2013. Prior to that time he participated in a variety of therapies, some experimental and innovative, that gave him a good amount of extra time. In one of his last books, *Witnesses to the Word: New Testament Studies Since Vatican II* (2012), he thanks the staffs of the oncology units at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, MA, and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, “without whose care this book never would have been written.” Unlike many, I’m sure, Dan confronted his circumstances without self-pity. More than once he returned to the *NTA* office from one of his many appointments with his caregivers with some piece of good news, and declared: “Lucky me!”

I will miss Dan every day for the rest of my life. I am grateful for everything he taught me, and most of all for his friendship for all these years.

Chris Matthews

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