

**WILLIAM GORDON ROSS**  
(28 July 1900 – 20 April 1990)

by

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*William Gordon Ross*

William Gordon Ross joined the faculty of Berea College in 1930, fresh with the Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) degree (now, the equivalent of the Master of Divinity degree) from Union Theological Seminary (1930). He also held a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree from Drury College (1926). During his tenure at Berea College, he completed the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Philosophy from Columbia University (1942). When Ross joined the Faculty of Berea College as Associate Professor of Philosophy and Bible in 1930, he initially taught courses in “Bible and English” in the then Lower Division (the Foundation-Junior High School) of the institution. In 1931, the College promoted Ross into the Upper Division or the College, where he continued to

teach for the remaining thirty-seven years of his tenure at the College. In 1933, Ross married Helen Reed Post. Helen also served the institution in several ways. She herself taught English part-time at Berea College for many years.<sup>1</sup>

Ross served as chairperson for the Department of Philosophy and Bible (later named the “Department of Philosophy and Religion”) from 1940 until his retirement in 1968.<sup>2</sup> During his lengthy tenure of almost four decades at Berea College, Ross taught courses in both philosophy and biblical studies: as examples, “Philosophical Ideals of Great Classics” and “The History and Literature of the Hebrews.”<sup>3</sup> In 1961, Ross received the Seabury Award for Excellence in Teaching, which attests to both the positive influence that he exerted on his students and the esteem in which his teaching colleagues held him.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, as noted by John B. Stephenson (seventh president of Berea College), “[f]or many years, Ross [also] provided leadership for the College’s worship program, serving, in 1937, as the first liturgist” in Danforth Chapel, which the College had constructed in 1937–38.<sup>5</sup> During his academic career, Wm. Gordon Ross published several books and many articles. He actively participated in the larger academy beyond Berea College, attending and delivering lectures or presentations during meetings of many academic organizations.

At Ross’s retirement in 1968, Willis D. Weatherford, Jr. (sixth president of Berea College) named Wm. Gordon Ross the first Emeritus William J. Hutchins Alumni Professor of Philosophy and Religion.<sup>6</sup> On 25 January 1969, during a testimonial dinner at which students and friends “honored Dr. and Mrs. Ross,” the College announced the establishment of the Helen and Wm. Gordon Ross Lectureship Fund,” the endowment that now supports the *Helen and Wm. Gordon Ross Lectureship on Religions, Spirituality, and Culture*<sup>7</sup> Although retiring in 1968, Ross continued his involvement with Berea College, even teaching part-time for many years. In 1982, the College awarded to Wm. Gordon Ross “the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters.”<sup>8</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See John B. Stephenson, "Memo to Members of the College and General Faculties and Retirees," Office of the President (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College, 23 April 1990), 1–2 (Special Collections and Archives, Hutchins Library: Record Group 9.40, Box 1; Record Group: Faculty and Staff; Subgroup: William Gordon Ross; William Gordon Ross Biographical Material, File 1-1, RG 9.40 [Wm. Gordon Ross]: Berea College; Berea, Kentucky).

<sup>2</sup> See John B. Stephenson, "Memo to Members of the College and General Faculties and Retirees," Office of the President (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College, 23 April 1990), 1–2 (Special Collections and Archives, Hutchins Library: Record Group 9.40, Box 1; Record Group: Faculty and Staff; Subgroup: William Gordon Ross; William Gordon Ross Biographical Material, File 1-1, RG 9.40 [Wm. Gordon Ross]: Berea College; Berea, Kentucky).

<sup>3</sup> See *Bulletin of Berea College and Allied Schools: General Catalog (1931–32)*, New Series, No. 81 (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College Press, November 1931), 119; *Bulletin of Berea College and Allied Schools: General Catalog (1932–33)*, New Series, No. 87 (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College Press, November 1932), 169; and *Bulletin of Berea College: Announcement of Courses, the College of Arts and Sciences (Upper Division and Third Year [Freshman] of Lower Division) (1937–38)*, New Series, No. 103 (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College Press, November 1937), 27–28.

<sup>4</sup> See *Berea Alumnus* 32, No. 1 (October 1961): 23. Also see James M. Powell, "Mountain Giants," *Berea Alumnus, Special Issue: A Salute to Appalachia* 39 (March-April 1969): 26–27.

<sup>5</sup> See John B. Stephenson, "Memo to Members of the College and General Faculties and Retirees," Office of the President (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College, 23 April 1990), 1–2 (Special Collections and Archives, Hutchins Library: Record Group 9.40, Box 1; Record Group: Faculty and Staff; Subgroup: William Gordon Ross; William Gordon Ross Biographical Material, File 1-1, RG 9.40 [Wm. Gordon Ross]: Berea College; Berea, Kentucky). Also see the following publications with respect to Danforth Chapel and John Stephenson: Lee Morris, *The Distinctive Danforth Chapel at Berea College* (Berea, Kentucky: Campus Christian Center, Berea College Press, 2006), 1–4; and Shannon H. Wilson, *Berea College: An Illustrated History* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 178–99.

<sup>6</sup> James M. Powell, "Mountain Giants," *Berea Alumnus, Special Issue: A Salute to Appalachia* 39 (March/April 1969), 26. See Willis D. Weatherford, Jr., "Letter to Dr. W. Gordon Ross," Office of the President (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College, 5 March 1982), 1–2 (Special Collections and Archives, Hutchins Library: Record Group 9.40, Box 1; Record Group: Faculty and Staff; Subgroup: William Gordon Ross; William Gordon Ross Correspondence, File 1-3, RG 9.40 [Wm. Gordon Ross]: Berea College; Berea, Kentucky). Also see the following information on Willis D. Weatherford, Jr.: Shannon H. Wilson, *Berea College: An Illustrated History* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 161–78.

<sup>7</sup> James M. Powell, "Mountain Giants," *Berea Alumnus, Special Issue: A Salute to Appalachia* 39 (March/April 1969), 26.

<sup>8</sup> Willis D. Weatherford, Jr., "Letter to Dr. W. Gordon Ross," Office of the President (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College, 5 March 1982), 1–2 (Special Collections and Archives, Hutchins Library: Record Group 9.40, Box 1; Record Group: Faculty and Staff; Subgroup: William Gordon Ross; William Gordon Ross Correspondence, File 1-3, RG 9.40 [Wm. Gordon Ross]: Berea College; Berea, Kentucky). Ross received this honor at the annual commencement ceremony on 23 May 1982.