

IRA JAY MARTIN, III
(2 September 1911 – 25 November 1983)

by

Jeff B. Pool, Ph.D.
Eli Lilly Chair in Religion and Culture
Professor of Religion
Berea College
Department for Studies of Religions and Spirituality
Berea, Kentucky



Ira Jay Martin, III

Ira Jay Martin, III joined the faculty of Berea College in 1944.¹ He held several academic degrees: the Bachelor of Philosophy (Ph.B.) degree from Brown University (1933); the Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) degree from Andover-Newton School of Theology (1936); and the Doctor of Theology (Th.D.) degree from Boston University (1942).²

Ira Martin received ordination as a Baptist. Prior to accepting the academic position at Berea College, as an ordained Baptist minister, he had served several Baptist churches of the Northern Baptist Convention (NBC) (later, the NBC changed its name to “American Baptist Churches/U.S.A.”) in New England as pastor for close to one decade: Woolwich Baptist Church in Maine (1934–35); the Baptist Church in Littleton Common, Massachusetts (1936–41); and First Baptist Church in Athol, Massachusetts (1941–44).

Martin joined the faculty of Berea College as Instructor of Philosophy and Religion in the then Lower Division of the College. On the basis of his superior performance at the College and his extensive participation in the larger academy, Martin received regular promotions and academic recognition at the College: promotion from Instructor (1944–46) to Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religion (1946–50); promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion (1950–54); promotion from Associate Professor to Professor of Philosophy and Religion (1954–66); and, finally, appointment to a named professorship, one of only a few such professorships in the College at the time, the Henry Mixter Penniman Professorship of Philosophy and Bible, a chair that he held until his retirement (1966–77).³

Ira Martin published several books and participated fully in the larger academic study of religions and spiritualities. He regularly attended meetings of the national professional organizations to which he belonged, both delivering presentations and engaging in the governance of those organizations. He served as Vice-President for the National Association of Biblical Instructors in 1963. Then, in 1964, after that organization expanded its scope, changed its name to “the American Academy of Religion,” and incorporated, Martin served as the first president of that influential national professional organization for studies of religions and spiritualities.⁴

In 1937, Ira J. Martin had married Ethel Virginia Augenstein.⁵ Ethel held the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree from Denison University and the Master of Religious Education (M.R.E.) degree from Andover Newton School of Theology. Prior to their move to Berea College, Ethel worked alongside Ira in the churches where he had served as minister in New England. She also participated extensively in professional organizations in the field of Christian education. After moving to Berea, Ethel also held a position as Assistant to the Pastor at Union Church in Berea.⁶ When Ira Martin retired from Berea College in 1977,⁷ in recognition of and appreciation for the service and many achievements of both Ira and Ethel Martin, friends, former colleagues, and other generous donors established the Ethel and Ira J. Martin Memorial Scholarship for Students Entering Christian Service.⁸



Ethel and Ira Martin

ENDNOTES

¹ Photograph of Ira J. Martin, III, courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, Hutchins Library, Berea College (Berea, Kentucky).

² See *Bulletin of Berea College: General Catalog (1944–45 and 1945–46)*, New Series, No. 135 (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College Press, November 1931), 83, 140 (Berea College, Hutchins Library, Special Collections and Archives).

³ See “Martin, Ira Jay, III,” in *Who’s Who in America*, 39th ed., vol. 2, 1976–1977 (Chicago, Illinois: Marquis Who’s Who, 1977), p. 2035 (Berea College Archives, Record Group No. 9.00, Box No. 51, Subgroup: Faculty and Staff; Folder, RG 9.0, “Martin, Ira J.,” Box 51) (Berea, Kentucky: Hutchins Library, Berea College); “Ira Jay Martin, III, Faculty Data Sheet,” pp. 1–2 (Berea College Archives, Record Group No. 9.00, Box No. 51, Subgroup: Faculty and Staff; Folder, 1.1, “I. J. Martin Biographical,” RG. 9.32–I, Berea College Archives, Record Group 9.32, Box 1, Folder 16 / Record Group: Faculty and Staff / Subgroup: Ira Jay Martin; Series 1: Biographical) (Berea, Kentucky: Hutchins Library, Berea College); and Willis D. Weatherford, Jr., “Memo to Members of the General Faculty and Retired Members,” (Berea, Kentucky: Office of the President, Berea College, 28 November 1983), 1–2 (Berea College Archives, Record Group No. 9.32, Box No. 1, Subgroup: Faculty and Staff; Folder, 1.1, “I. J. Martin Biographical,” RG. 9.32–I, Record Group: Faculty and Staff / Subgroup: Ira Jay Martin; Series 1: Biographical) (Berea, Kentucky: Hutchins Library, Berea College).

⁴ See “Martin, Ira Jay, III,” in *Who’s Who in America*, 39th ed., vol. 2, 1976–1977 (Chicago, Illinois: Marquis Who’s Who, 1977), p. 2035 (Berea College Archives, Record Group No. 9.00, Box No. 51, Subgroup: Faculty and Staff; Folder, RG 9.0, “Martin, Ira J.,” Box 51) (Berea, Kentucky: Hutchins Library, Berea College); and “Ira Jay Martin, III, Faculty Data Sheet,” pp. 1–2 (Berea College Archives, Record Group No. 9.00, Box No. 51, Subgroup: Faculty and Staff; Folder, 1.1, “I. J. Martin Biographical,” RG. 9.32–I, Berea College Archives, Record Group 9.32, Box 1, Folder 16 / Record Group: Faculty and Staff / Subgroup: Ira Jay Martin; Series 1: Biographical) (Berea, Kentucky: Hutchins Library, Berea College). Also see the following information from the American Academy of Religion itself: “History of the American Academy of Religion” (<https://www.aarweb.org/AARMBR/Who-We-Are-/History.aspx>); and “Presidents of the AAR” (<https://www.aarweb.org/AARMBR/Who-We-Are-/AAR-Presidents.aspx>).

⁵ Photograph of Ethel and Ira J. Martin, III, courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, Hutchins Library, Berea College (Berea, Kentucky).

⁶ See “Martin, Ira Jay, III,” in *Who’s Who in America*, 39th ed., vol. 2, 1976–1977 (Chicago, Illinois: Marquis Who’s Who, 1977), p. 2035 (Berea College Archives, Record Group No. 9.00, Box No. 51, Subgroup: Faculty and Staff; Folder, RG 9.0, “Martin, Ira J.,” Box 51) (Berea, Kentucky: Hutchins Library, Berea College); “Ira Jay Martin, III, Faculty Data Sheet,” pp. 1–2 (Berea College Archives, Record Group No. 9.00, Box No. 51, Subgroup: Faculty and Staff; Folder, 1.1, “I. J. Martin Biographical,” RG. 9.32–I, Berea College Archives, Record Group 9.32, Box 1, Folder 16 / Record Group: Faculty and Staff / Subgroup: Ira Jay Martin; Series 1: Biographical) (Berea, Kentucky: Hutchins Library, Berea College); and *Berea Citizen* (Berea, Kentucky: 7 December 1944).

⁷ See *Berea College Catalog: 1977–1979*, Series 34, No. 4 (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College Press, September 1977), 170 (Berea College, Hutchins Library, Special Collections and Archives).

⁸ See *Berea College Catalog: 1985–1987*, Series 43, No. 4 (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College Press, September 1985), 185 (Berea College, Hutchins Library, Special Collections and Archives).