

Renowned preacher and civil rights leader Gardner Taylor dies

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NEW YORK (BNG)—Gardner Taylor, an African-American Baptist pastor and civil rights leader dubbed the “prince of preachers,” died Easter Sunday, April 5, at age 96.

Taylor, pastor emeritus at [Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn, N.Y.](#), was a close confidante to Martin Luther King Jr. He and other younger ministers frustrated by the older generation’s reluctance to engage politically in the civil rights movement founded the Progressive National Baptist Convention, an important base of support for King’s work.



Gardner Taylor “The world has lost a giant of a man, who transformed America and the world for the better,” said James C. Perkins, president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention.

Perry Smith III, a longtime friend and former pastor, called Taylor “one of the world’s greatest preachers” and “the last of a kind.”

“Dr. Taylor was the greatest preacher of the 21st century,” said Tyrone Pitts, former general secretary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention. “He really was one of the people who helped to frame the civil

rights movement, and he was the soul of PNBC. He also was key in helping us to understand and appreciate the transformative and prophetic art of black preaching.”

Called by *Time* magazine the “dean of the nation’s black preachers,” Taylor was honored numerous times as one of America’s best pulpiteers. In 1996, Baylor University conducted a worldwide survey before listing him as one of the 12 most effective preachers in the English-speaking world.

Champion of religious liberty

In addition to his advocacy for civil rights, Taylor also was a passionate champion for the separation of church and state and religious liberty for all. The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty named him recipient of its J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty Award in 2010.

“Our nation as a whole, our commitment to religious diversity, and all those who advocate for real religious freedom are diminished by the death of Gardner Taylor,” said Welton Gaddy, president emeritus of the Interfaith Alliance and senior pastor at Northminster Baptist Church in Monroe, La.

“As a thoughtful and compassionate leader among Baptists, Dr. Taylor modeled true patriotism, preached as a prophet, pastored with wisdom, demonstrated the proper role of religion in politics, embodied the vision of Interfaith Alliance and, more personally for me, he was a mentor and friend.”

Taylor was born in 1918 in Baton Rouge, La., the grandson of former slaves, and grew up in the segregated South of the early 20th century. He graduated from the Oberlin College School of Theology in 1940 and began a lifetime of preaching and civil rights activism.

Taylor was pastor of the Concord Baptist Church 42 years, before retiring in 1990. He led the New York congregation to become a center of black

economic and political empowerment. In 2000, President Clinton awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Helped found the Progressive National Baptist Convention

In 1960, Taylor was nominated to unseat Joseph Harrison Jackson, the longest serving president of the National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., who advocated a gradual approach toward winning civil rights through the legal system instead of the activism adopted by King. Both factions declared their candidate the winner. Legal action was filed. Taylor and King supporters met in Cincinnati to organize the breakaway Progressive National Baptist Convention in November 1961.

The group was accepted into membership of the Baptist World Alliance in 1964. The BWA passed a resolution celebrating Taylor's 94th birthday in 2012.