

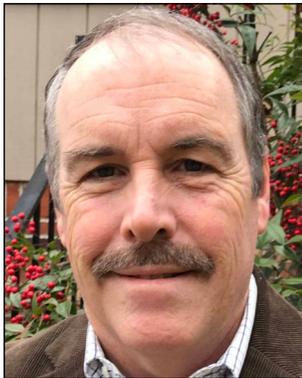
2017–2018 Luce Fellows announced

By *STEPHEN R. GRAHAM*

The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) and The Henry Luce Foundation, Inc., have named six scholars from ATS member schools as the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology for 2017–2018, the final class to be named during the program’s 25-year history.

Selected on the basis of the strength of their proposals to conduct creative and innovative theological research, the Fellows will engage in yearlong research in various areas of theological inquiry. The 2017–2018 Fellows constitute the 24th class of scholars to be appointed since the inception of the program in 1993, bringing the total number of Luce Fellows to 160. The program is supported by a grant from The Henry Luce Foundation, honoring the late Henry Luce III.

At the conclusion of their research year, the Fellows will gather at the annual Luce Fellows Conference to present and critique their work and to discuss with both current and past Luce Fellows how their work may impact the life of the church and the broader society. They will also present their findings for publication in popular religious journals.



Paul M. Blowers
EMMANUEL CHRISTIAN SEMINARY
AT MILLIGAN

*Visions and Faces of the Tragic
in Early Christian Literature
and Imagination*

Professor Blowers’s project addresses two key questions. First, it looks at how various early Christian authors initiated

a distinctively Christian “tragic vision” of human existence and therewith cultivated an emotional culture of compassion toward those who suffer “tragically,” interpreting tragic figures in both sacred history and

present Christian experience. Second is the broad use of the language of “tragedy” in historic and contemporary Christian discourse, as the church has grappled with problems such as humanity’s “original” ontological condition, the experienced randomness of evil and suffering in the world, or the perceived failure of a perfect system of divine retribution vis-à-vis human moral choices. The research has six thematic foci: (1) the positive as well as negative dimensions of early Christian engagement of Greco-Roman tragedy; (2) the development of “tragic mimesis” in patristic biblical interpretation, i.e., the ways that early Christian interpreters discerned and amplified tragic elements in biblical narratives; (3) exemplary autobiographical articulations of the “tragic Christian self” in Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine; (4) exemplary visions of the “tragic faces” in the foreground of the church (victims of poverty and disease; social parasites, etc.); (5) Christian reworking of the tragic emotions (especially “tragic pity”); and (6) the theological reconciliation of early Christian tragic vision with long-standing—and contemporary—doctrinal commitments to the providence and justice of the triune God.



Luke Bretherton
DUKE UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL

*A Constructive Theology
of Conversion*

Professor Bretherton’s project addresses two needs. The first is for a constructive theology of conversion. Conversion is

central to Christian self-understanding, but it has a bad reputation. For some, commitment to conversion through evangelism is considered to be opposed to a commitment to diversity and tolerance. Others argue that conversion through Christian mission is associated with colonialism. And in interfaith relations, proclamation that aims at conversion is posed as the enemy of dialogue that aims at understanding. All this suggests that a reconsideration of conversion is long overdue, he argues, particularly as it touches on contested issues such as the nature of free speech, pluralism, and secularity. The second need the project addresses is for a theological way of articulating a conception of change that encompasses the symbiosis between “soil,” “soul,” and “city.” As a focal image, “soil” denotes the ways we produce, distribute, and consume things to sustain life, and how human cultures either foster or degrade a just and generous common life with non-human ways of being alive. “Soul” stands for the interpersonal, emotional, existential, and spiritual conditions and possibilities of human flourishing. “City” signifies life together in political community and the structures and processes that undergird a common life. In response to the lack of a way of conceptualizing the symbiosis among them, Bretherton’s project examines conversion as a prism through which to reimagine a moral and political theology that simultaneously encompasses soil, soul, and city.



Emmanuel Katongole
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME
DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY

Who Are My People: Christianity, Violence, and Belonging in Sub-Saharan Africa

Who Are My People investigates three predominant forms of violence in sub-Saharan Africa: ethnic, religious, and ecological.

The driving assumption behind the investigation is that a crisis of belonging lies at the heart of postcolonial Africa. The crisis manifests itself through an endless reproduction of violence, which takes ethnic, religious,

and ecological forms. Professor Katongole’s overarching interest is theological: to locate the role that Christianity has played in the crisis, historically, critically, and constructively. More specifically, he will study the conditions, possibilities, and shape of communities, non-violent forms of social engagement and ecological models that Christian faith can nurture and sustain in the context of the crisis of belonging in Africa. The study will advance the scholarly conversation on World Christianity. Even as the southward shift in World Christianity has been noted, there is a crying need for in-depth scholarly analysis of the theologies and histories of Christianity in the Global South. In its methodology, analysis, and conclusions *Who Are My People* will model the kind of theological inquiry needed in the era of World Christianity.



Catherine Keller
DREW UNIVERSITY
THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

Apocalypse After All? Planetary Crisis, Christian Hope

According to Professor Keller, at the turn of the millennium, the apocalypse narrative was culturally monopolized by a

powerful religio-political right pumped by hope for an imminent End. In this millennium, Christian endism has been succeeded on the stage of public apocalypse by climate ecology. It hopes to avoid the end—of the human *oikos*, our dwelling upon the earth. As the forecasts become steadily more dire, Keller maintains that theology must address a rapidly advancing version of secular apocalypse. Is it a manifestation of a western apocalypse habit in the guise of scientific fact? Or does the apocalyptic legacy—for all of its extremist and violent, religious and secular, deployments—need to be reconsidered? This project heeds the ancient warning as to the catastrophic effects upon the human and nonhuman earth of a lascivious empire of greed. Theology in the prophetic tradition no longer pits one social justice issue against another but heeds “the cry of the poor, the cry of the

earth," the mattering of Black lives, the crises of migration and Islamophobia, as now rapidly intensifying witnesses to a failing civilization. If hope—not optimism—is for the future of the *oikos*, it hopes against both capitalist and spiritual escapisms. It faces the apocalyptic threat of the earth's rising fever as challenge to and of Christian hope. The Bible names no "end of the world." Rather, Keller believes, apocalypse as dis/closure opens the chance that catastrophe can become catalyst. For an eschatology of the earth, hope, beyond certainties, alarms, and evasions, faces the impossible: in faith it participates in the *basileia tou theou*; in love it practices the new people, new city, new heavens and earth that become yet possible.



Marcia Y. Riggs
COLUMBIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Envisioning and Practicing Beloved Community in the 21st Century

Professor Riggs recognizes that partisan polarization characterizes both political and religious life in the United States today.

Throughout the 20th century, images of "the melting pot" and "the mosaic" have been used to guide our sociocultural, political conceptions of moral community. Many Protestant liberal and progressive Christian communities have interpreted these images through the theological image of Beloved Community. The image of Beloved Community originated in the philosophy of Josiah Royce, was given theological interpretation by Martin Luther King, Jr., and became popularized and embodied through political and religious coalitions during the civil rights movement of the sixties. Riggs believes that there is evidence that these types of coalitions are possible in the 21st century. Yet coalitions today are constantly under attack because of a distorted moral vision that lacks an authentic image of *e pluribus unum*. Images from popular speech and social traditions fuel acrimonious response to activism, such as the Black Lives Matter Movement, Every Town for Gun Safety, legalization of gay marriage, and legal battles over transgender bathrooms. Riggs will

retrieve images of moral community from the published works of African American women religious leaders and writers as basis for constructive envisioning and ethical practices of Beloved Community to refocus the moral vision of *e pluribus unum*.



J. Bradley Wigger
LOUISVILLE PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The Religious Imagination of Children

Professor Wigger's project is focused upon the religious imagination of children and puts three sources of research

in conversation: (1) theories of childhood cognition/imagination, (2) theological understandings of children, and (3) empirical information derived directly from children. He argues that prevalent understandings of childhood and children's faith are rooted in an often unrecognized Freudian-Piagetian developmental picture that itself is suspicious of religion. The young mind, in this view, is unable to differentiate fantasy from reality; the Id throws up fantasies (including "God") to compensate for frustrated desires. Development becomes stages of overcoming the egocentric, irrational mind. Here childhood and religion are problems to overcome, forms of "primitive" thinking. Wigger believes that such a view makes it too easy to devalue childhood thinking, imagination, or faith itself. When adopted in the practice of ministry, for example in education (in Sunday school or a theological seminary), learning is oriented to overcoming inadequate (irrational) thinking in favor of a more accurate (rational, realistic) way. Similar implications flow for other practices of ministry. Yet a theological vision suggests that something deep and powerful may already be at work in childhood, and this project hopes to lift up that vision and listen attentively to children themselves.

The Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology program was established to identify leading scholars in theological studies and provide them with the necessary financial

support and recognition to facilitate their work. Over the years, the program has developed a corps of scholars who provide theological studies with fresh insights and strong leadership, and who make significant contributions to the church and the wider audience of the general public. As this quarter-century tradition draws to a close, ATS extends its gratitude to the Henry Luce Foundation Inc. for its extraordinary contribution to theological scholarship and discourse.



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