

Popular scholarship: Luce Fellows' books bring theological issues to the public eye

Since its inception in 1994, the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology program has funded more than 100 scholars to conduct intellectually rigorous research projects that emphasize the interdisciplinary character of theological scholarship and education. While the majority of the projects are written for other academics, some have served to bring theological issues to the public eye.



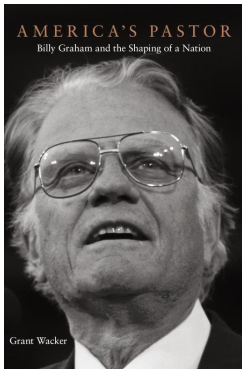
The Luce fellowship enables each Fellow to conduct yearlong research in one of several areas of theological inquiry. Fellows present their findings at a yearly conference and in scholarly books and periodicals. In addition, each is required to submit an article to a popular magazine to encourage making his or her scholarship accessible to wider audiences. This requirement has yielded at least 28 articles in publications such as *Christian Century*, *Christianity Today*, *America*, *Commonweal*, and *The New York Times*.

In 2000, Mark Toulouse of Emmanuel College of Victoria University wrote a series of seven articles for *Christian Century* that offered a retrospective of the twentieth century on topics such as feminism, the major wars, civil rights, and the Great Depression. Other popular topics

in *Christian Century* have included funeral practices, covered by Thomas Long of Candler School of Theology of Emory University; the “spiritual but not religious,” covered by Linda Mercadante of Methodist Theological School in Ohio; and issues of eugenics and the misuse of embryos, addressed by Amy Laura Hall of Duke University Divinity School.

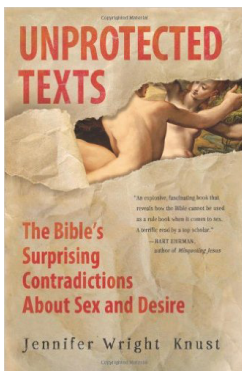
Some scholars go beyond the popular magazine requirement to publish books for seminary students, for pastors, and for the general public.

The most recent popular publication coming out of the Luce Fellows program is Grant Wacker’s *America’s Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation*, released in November 2014 by Harvard University Press. “More



than a conventional biography,” the Press explains, “Grant Wacker’s interpretive study deepens our understanding of why Billy Graham has mattered so much to so many. . . . The enduring meaning of his career, in Wacker’s analysis, lies at the intersection of Graham’s own creative agency and the forces shaping modern America.”

According to Wacker, of Duke University Divinity School, “Graham’s name was once a household word, but with the passing of the post-World War II generation, he too gradually faded into obscurity.” Wacker reports that by 2010, his students “had little idea that at one time Billy Graham had ranked as the most influential evangelical preacher in America, if not the entire world. For the better part of five decades, Graham’s reach rivaled that of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Pope John Paul II.”

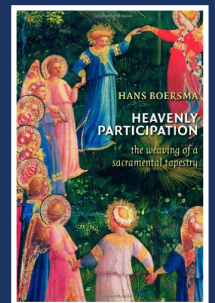
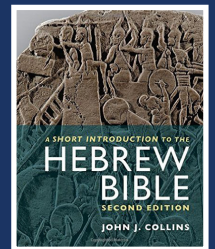
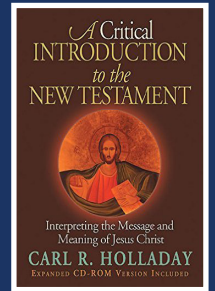
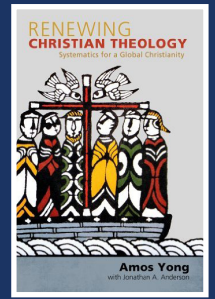


In *Unprotected Texts: The Bible’s Surprising Contradictions about Sex and Desire*, published in 2011 by HarperOne, author Jennifer W. Knust tackles the big questions that dominate current debates about monogamy, polygamy, homosexuality, gender roles, and sex. According to the publisher, Knust “directly and pointedly takes on widely

shared misconceptions about sex, arguing that the Bible cannot—and should not—serve as a rulebook for sexual morality, despite popular claims to the contrary. From the Song of Songs’ lyrical eroticism to the rigid sexual rules of Leviticus—and everything in between—Knust parses the Bible’s contradictory, often surprising messages.” Knust, of Boston University, says of the book, “When writing *Unprotected Texts*, I kept the people I know and care about at the front of my mind, from the members of my church in Boston, to the members of the church in Maine that ordained me, to my undergraduate students, who are curious about everything and come from every background imaginable. My goal was to make

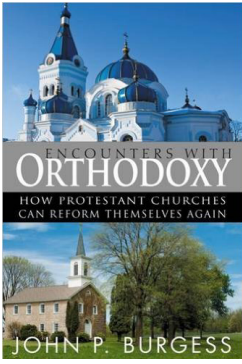
The Luce program has yielded a number of treasured seminary texts, such as Amos Yong’s *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity* (Baylor University Press, 2014), Carl Holladay’s *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ* (Abingdon Press, 2005), and John Collins’ *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress Press, 2007).

Others were conceived with pastors in mind. Hans Boersma, of Regent College, wrote *Heavenly Participation: the Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* as a “wake-up call” for western Christianity (Eerdmans, 2011). He urges Catholics and evangelicals to return to a view of theology as more of a spiritual discipline than an intellectual pursuit.



biblical scholarship as accessible as possible but without compromising precision or cutting corners.” She adds, “This is a serious topic that has been troubling religious communities in the United States for some time, and I hoped to broaden the conversation in such a way that the rich complexity of the biblical witness could be more thoughtfully engaged.”

John P. Burgess, of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, has written for a combined audience of pastors and lay-people. His *Encounters with Orthodoxy: How Protestant*



Churches Can Reform Themselves Again, published in 2013 by Westminster John Knox Press, is the product of nine months of immersion in everyday Orthodox life in Russia. He visited monasteries and parishes, made pilgrimages to holy sites, participated in the rhythms of the church year, and experienced popular piety. Burgess

says, “My encounters with a religious-cultural tradition very different from my own North American Protestantism forced me to rethink basic questions of Christian faith and practice: What is ritual all about? What makes a person or a thing “holy”? Do ascetic practices matter? What does it mean to receive Christ in the eucharist?”

Burgess’ “inner ecumenical dialogue,” he says, was “written primarily for Protestant pastors and laypeople who look to other Christian and religious traditions as they seek to renew their own churches and religious life.” But, he adds, “it could also be helpful to Orthodox priests and laypeople who are curious about what draws some Protestants to Orthodoxy yet makes them hesitant to convert.”

Other publications have been written for seminary students and pastors, bringing a practical perspective that can be readily applied to congregational ministry.

A comprehensive [bibliography](#) of the Luce Fellows, which is updated annually, currently includes 437 entries of both scholarly and popular publications.



Applications for the program are accepted throughout the fall each year, and the fellows are announced each March.