

Former Luce Fellows gather to celebrate program's success

By STEPHEN R. GRAHAM

Sixty people gathered on Friday, November 22, in San Diego to celebrate the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology program, supported for a quarter of a century by the Henry Luce Foundation, and facilitated by The Association of Theological Schools (ATS).

Designed to support high-quality research by theological school faculty, the program named 160 Fellows from 55 different ATS schools for yearlong research in one of several areas of theological inquiry. For the scholars selected, their schools contributed a half-year of fully supported sabbatical leave and the Luce Fellowship program provided an additional half-year of sabbatical funding and research expenses. The program not only supported individual scholars in their work, but created a community of conversation among different disciplines and across theological perspectives that added richness and depth to the projects.



Henry Luce III (center) with the Fellows from the class of 2001–02.

HENRY LUCE III FELLOWS IN THEOLOGY

A follow-up grant to ATS from the Luce Foundation supported the celebration, along with a study to assess the program's impact, and exploration of possible next steps in the Association's support of theological scholarship.

Three Luce Fellows offered reflections on their fellowship years and the importance of theological scholarship for the future of theological schools, communities of faith, and broader publics.

Cheryl Bridges Johns, Robert E. Fisher Professor of Spiritual Renewal and Christian Formation at Pentecostal Theological Seminary and Luce Fellow in the class of 1996–97, reflected on “spaces” to pull away and dive deep into scholarship, time to bless and to receive grace,

and space to be generative in contrast to the “shallowness” of surrounding cultural pressures that can affect theological scholarship and theological education.

Katarina M. Schuth, Professor Emerita, Endowed Chair for Social Scientific Study of Religion (1991–2017) at St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity of the University of St. Thomas and Luce Fellow in the class of 2004–05, spoke about the relationships developed



27 different people served on selection committees during the 24-year program, including 14 Luce Fellows.

through the program. New Fellows, selected each January, met in the spring at the Luce Foundation office in New York City to get to know one another and to offer brief summaries of their projects. The new Fellows met again just prior to the fall Luce Conference to discuss their progress. The following morning, they joined the larger conference that also included the class of Luce Fellows, presenting their work from their nearly completed year of research, and the previous year's Fellows who joined the conversation one more time.

Mark D. Jordan, Richard Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Divinity at Harvard University Divinity School and Luce Fellow in the class of 2011–12, echoed both previous presentations, offering his reflections on the two sides of the fellowship: “the difficult, glorious solitude of writing” and “the company of fellow writers who teach.” Jordan noted that when he imagines a “Luce-like” program for tomorrow, he looks for ways to “fuse theological writing more fully, more intimately with theological teaching—in its many forms, for its many audiences.”

The Association’s work to assess the Luce Fellows in Theology program included a survey of Fellows to gather input about the implications of the Fellowship on their work. Many noted

the privilege of a fully supported year of relatively uninterrupted study. One Fellow noted “I experienced the most rewarding professional year of my life.” Another asserted that “the Luce Fellowship was the most remarkable and encouraging thing that has ever happened to me in academia.” A number of others named in various ways the opportunity for “collegial interaction with other Fellows.”

Turning to the future, Christine Roy Yoder, J. McDowell Richards Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Columbia Theological Seminary and Luce Fellow in the class of 2014–15, and Bruce Hindmarsh, Professor of the History of Christianity at Regent College and Luce Fellow in the class of 2006–07, outlined next steps in the exploration of possible future collaboration between ATS and the Luce Foundation in support of theological scholarship. Cochairs of the reinstated ATS Council on Theological Scholarship and Research, Yoder and Hindmarsh briefly outlined the program’s upcoming activities and invited those present to suggest persons to serve on the Council.

After dinner, Michael Gilligan, president emeritus of the Henry Luce Foundation, Margaret Boles Fitzgerald, board chair of the Henry Luce Foundation, and Daniel O. Aleshire, former executive Director of ATS, offered reflections on the program and the importance of theological scholarship. Through their roles at the Luce Foundation and at ATS, Gilligan and Aleshire collaborated on the



(l to r) Richard Mouw, Daniel O. Aleshire, Margaret Boles Fitzgerald, Michael Gilligan, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Stephen R. Graham visit at the celebration.

Fellowship program for nearly its full duration. Fitzgerald has served as chair of the Luce Foundation Board since 2002, and she was a regular attendee and participant at the Luce Fellows conferences each year since 2011.

Along with a few stories from their experiences with the Luce Fellows program, all three offered deep insight into the character and importance of the program. In addition,

they thanked not only the scholars for their important work, but also their schools for supporting theological scholarship.

The Association thanks the Henry Luce Foundation and its staff for the extraordinary and faithful support of theological scholars and scholarship through this program.



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