

ATS becomes supporting member of The Conversation US

By BRUCE WILSON

Thanks to the generosity of Lilly Endowment Inc., The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) is now a supporting member of The Conversation US (TCUS)—an organization that works with academic researchers to produce and promote knowledge and evidence-based journalism to the public at large.

The grant will support system-wide membership for ATS to access benefits such as professional development for scholars and metrics on reach and social media engagement for each member school. Funding will also support TCUS editorial capacity, partnership management, visits to ATS schools, and participation in ATS events by TCUS leadership and senior religion and ethics editors.

Other benefits include:

- Potential partnerships between members schools' communications teams and the TCUS university relations staff
- Opportunities for professional development and mentoring for ATS scholars to write for the broader public through The Conversation
- Presence of TCUS staff at selected ATS gatherings that would be deemed appropriate for working with different constituency groups
- A combination of potential events, podcasts, and videos produced by The Conversation to highlight theological scholars and the important work they do
- Access to aggregated metrics on reach, republication, and engagement through social media.

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TCUS will work with the ATS staff to develop a specific program of professional development and mentoring opportunities that could include:

- Monthly video conferences
- Attending ATS gatherings and holding workshops, seminars, and meetings with academic leaders and prospective authors
- Visits to key campuses where there are a significant number of prospective contributors
- One-on-one mentoring for selected scholars

“This grant to TCUS will further the Lilly Endowment’s interest in supporting fair and accurate portrayals of the role religion plays in the United States and around the world,” said Christopher L. Coble, Lilly Endowment Inc.’s vice president for religion. “We are pleased that TCUS is making the important work and insights of religion scholars, accessible to wide audiences.”

Since 2016, TCUS has partnered with the Lilly Endowment to create a new channel of evidence-based content about religion, faith, and ethics, launching the Ethics + Religion section on The Conversation’s website. The need for this section is based on the fact that, despite the centrality of faith and religion to so many Americans’ lives and the role religion is playing in the world’s geopolitics, there remains a shortage of high-quality analysis in the media and a deficit in public understanding of scholarship and research in religion and ethics. The Conversation’s approach to evidence-based journalism, with articles written by scholarly experts and edited by journalists,

directly addresses this “knowledge gap” in the media and public understanding.

TCUS Senior Religion and Ethics Editor Kalpana Jain has commissioned, edited, and published hundreds of articles, drawing on contributions from more than 250 scholars from universities and colleges, and she has reached an audience of more than 12 million. To expand its coverage even more, TCUS can now engage scholars from ATS member schools who represent some of the leading experts in important fields of religious scholarship. In addition, TCUS would leverage The Associated Press and Religion News Service—partners in the Lilly Endowment-funded Global Religion Journalism Initiative—in its approach to professional development for ATS.

TCUS has helped scholars of religion and ethics build larger public profiles and learn how to better communicate with the general public. Some of the most-read articles have helped to build understanding on theology,

morality, and the origins of different faiths. The articles have boosted the profile of religion and ethics in other media. Top republishers of this content have included *Smithsonian Magazine*, *Salon*, *Quartz*, *Newsweek*, the World Economic Forum, *The Guardian*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. Having all content distributed on The Associated Press wire has made an enormous impact, especially in print newspapers across the US.

“Our continuing partnership with Lilly Endowment Inc. is helping us to dramatically advance our overall mission as well as our efforts specifically to become the go-to platform for scholars of religion, theology, and ethics who seek to share their perspective and knowledge even more broadly with the public at large,” said Bruce Wilson, chief innovation and development officer at TCUS.



Bruce Wilson is Chief Innovation and Development Officer at The Conversation US in Boston, Massachusetts.