

2017 ANNUAL REPORT



ISSACHAR FUND

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Friends

I want to thank our staff as well as project leaders and project participants for making 2017 such a wonderful year. As I reflect back on the year, I realize how many times I came away from events challenged in my thinking, and inspired by the commitment of so many to make a difference in this world. I am humbled by our partners' dedication to excellence and encouraged by the character they exhibit as they go about their work.

In the following pages you will encounter some program highlights from this past year, read summaries of recently completed projects, and gain a brief overview of upcoming projects we are funding.

Finally, at the end of this report, you will have the opportunity to learn more about a major internal transition we've undertaken, one that we are all excited about.

I hope you'll take a few minutes to read what follows. I am sure you will find it interesting and informative.

With gratitude for your friendship and support.

Kurt Berends
President
Issachar Fund



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

SCHOLARLY CONSULTATIONS

Virtuous Character: Common Values, Shared Visions

Amsterdam, July 2017



This program gathered 26 Christian and Muslim scholars, educators, and activists to talk about character formation. "Virtuous Character: Common Values, Shared Vision" turned out to be an invigorating, often inspiring, and sometimes humbling conversation between the world's two largest faith communities on a collection of key virtues each faith community professes including Mercy, Hospitality, Forgiveness, and Love. We also listened to presentations on the role of community in character formation, and challenges from globalization to formation. Some guests talked about specific pedagogical strategies for imparting formation, while other speakers explored how story or narrative has played a powerful role in passing on virtues in faith communities. The end result was a time of networking, new lessons learned, and a better understanding of how these two faiths might work alongside and learn from one another as we seek to shape communities where people of all faiths and none can flourish together.

(Co-sponsored with Templeton Religion Trust)

Total Project Cost: \$288,317

TRT Contribution: \$157,467

TIF Contribution: \$130,850



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

SCHOLARLY CONSULTATIONS

Social Scientific Study of Science and Religion,
May 2017 – March 2018

This program convened three consultation teams, each centered on a social science discipline—sociology (September 8, 2017); anthropology (October 21, 2017); and psychology/cognitive science (December 1, 2017). Each team, consisting of approximately 8-10 invited scholars, designed a strategy for expanding the range, and accelerating the pace, of research on all aspects of how people think about religion and science. The final result will be an interdisciplinary consultation of the team leaders to outline findings about current research; important next questions; key conversations, scholars, institutions, and disciplinary venues; best strategies for heightening the prominence of these questions in scholarly discussions; and the best strategies for impacting the public conversation. The goal of this program is to produce strategies and proposals that will result in a series of major grants from the Templeton Religion Trust for subsequent programs planned and run by The Issachar Fund that will seek to achieve the scholarly objectives outlined by the final consultation of team leaders.

(Co-sponsored with Templeton Religion Trust)

Total Project Cost: \$170,000

TRT Contribution: \$85,000

TIF Contribution \$85,000



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

SCHOLARLY CONSULTATIONS

African Stories of Hope

This program, initiated by The Issachar Fund, has engaged Emmanuel Katongole (Professor of Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, and founder of the Africa Great Lakes Initiative) and Bruce Buursma (a Pulitzer Prize nominated religion writer) to write a book on reconciliation and peace building in Africa. It will focus on the stories of Christians who have shown great courage working for peace in extreme environments of violence and conflict between neighbors. The book will be produced for a general readership African audience, and will be distributed throughout the networks of the Great Lakes Initiative and the Theological Book Network.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

SCHOLAR'S RETREAT

Mirror

Alfonse Borysewicz, Independent Artist

Borysewicz is an abstract artist based in Brooklyn who has won Guggenheim and Pollack-Krasner Foundation Fellowships, and who has mounted over two dozen solo exhibitions. Gregory Wolfe of IMAGE magazine has called him one of the most important religious artists since the mid-twentieth century. Two of his enduring inspirations are Byzantine/Orthodox iconography and Roman Catholic spiritual mysticism. His Issachar Fund Scholar's Retreat in Summer 2017 was called "Mirror,"

through which he hoped to "offer an opposition to our cultural iconoclasm, leading us not only to love God's goodness, but once again to see it." During his Retreat he completed four dozen works on paper, oil paintings, and works in wood. These included "Mary and Gabriel in Riza Cages" (traditional riza are metal covers that protected Byzantine icons;) and "Lectio-Stations" (inspired by the Catholic devotional practices of Lectio Divina and Stations of the Cross). Regarding Borysewicz's Lectio pieces, art critic Robert Lue has written, "Often rough, the Lectio works appear to be made from the remnants of some glorious icon, bringing together splinters of sacred imagery with the basic wood and metal of our physical domain in a way that is both tragic and gracefully matter-of-fact."



Mary and Gabriel in Riza Cages, 2017



Lectio-Stations, 2017



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

SCHOLAR'S RETREAT

Christ-like Virtues in Emerging Leaders

Co-sponsored by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

Karen Longman, Azusa Pacific University

Longman is Professor of Higher Education and the Director of the Ph.D. Program in Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University. She is one of the leading experts on faculty development in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, having previously served many years as the CCCU's Vice President for Professional Development and Research. For this project, she assessed how mentors, coaches, and sponsors influence and impact leadership development for women and persons of color within Christian higher education.



During her one-semester retreat, Longman completed five scholarly publications:

- "Looking Back and Looking Ahead: Major Contributors to Faith Integration in the Context of U.S. Christian Higher Education." In *Christian Mind in the Emerging World: Academic Faith Integration in Asian Contexts from a Global Perspective*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019.
- "Solidarity and Mutuality as an Ethic of Care with Students of Color." In *A Calling to Care*. Abilene Christian University Press, 2018.
- "Defining Moments: Aspects of a Four-Day Women's Leadership Development Institute that Changed Participants' Self-Perceptions of Leadership Capacity." In *Women's Leadership Journeys: Stories, Research, and Novel Perspectives*. Routledge, 2018.
- "Relational Responsibility as a Motivator for Women to Lead." *Journal of Leadership Studies*, Vol. 12, 2018.
- "How Organizational Culture Shapes Women's Leadership Experiences." *Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 8, 2018.



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2017 APPROVED GRANT HIGHLIGHTS

Putting Down Roots: Documenting Religious Approaches to Creation Care

Yonat Shimron, Religion News Service (RNS)

This grant funds an in-depth journalism series on religiously motivated activism on the issues of Creation Care. RNS produced 12 high-caliber profiles, features, and trend stories about the ways diverse religious congregations and organizations have tackled environmental concerns theologically and programmatically. These were republished by many of the 75 media outlets that subscribe to RNS, which include The Washington Post and USA Today. The grant will also fund one ReligionLink resource directory featuring at least 50 expert sources on religion and Creation Care that professional journalists can contact to expand and improve their coverage.

\$40,000; one year.

PUTTING DOWN ROOTS

RNS looks at religion and the environment

[Click to access the complete catalog of articles](#)



News

Controversial climate fix poses new question: Is geoengineering playing God?

July 16, 2018 13 Comments

(RNS) — Geoengineering can be controversial because it intentionally interferes with the climate system. Religious groups are now being invited to weigh in on...



News

Church goes 'wild' as believers and seekers head for the trees

July 3, 2018 8 Comments

OJAI, Calif. (RNS) — On a recent Sunday, 12 people walked silently among resilient, reborn wildflowers and then shared their thoughts, sang and prayed in a...



News

In the US, Muslims are making slow inroads toward a greener Ramadan

May 22, 2018 1 Comment

(RNS) — Stunning amounts of food waste produced in Muslim-majority nations during the holy month have led to a gradual awakening about Muslims'...



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2017 APPROVED GRANT HIGHLIGHTS

The PLANET Project

David Toole, Duke University

The PLANET Project is a collaboration of the Kenan Institute for Ethics and the Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions at Duke University. Environmental policy is plagued by a moral austerity—in the words of Pope Francis, it is an arena of “too many means and only a few insubstantial ends. . . . Decisions which may seem purely instrumental are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build.” The PLANET Project will pilot two programs at the intersection of ethics and environmental policy. The first will introduce structured discussions about ethics and ultimate human ends into environmental debates at Duke about building a new power plant fired by biogas from hog farms in the region. The second will pair contemporary policymakers who address environmental issues with policymakers who helped lead environmental success stories in the 1960s and 1970s for ethical reflection.

\$33,000; one year.



<http://dukeplanetproject.org>



HOME PEOPLE PROJECTS

We live in times of serious and daunting social, economic, and political challenges, in no small part because of unprecedented, human-induced shifts in natural systems. Response to these challenges requires social and political innovations.

The PLANET Project leverages resources at the Kenan Institute for Ethics and the Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions at Duke University to explore the opportunities environmental law and policy create as forums for innovation.

The project looks to create spaces in which ethical and normative matters—which are ultimately always matters of meaning—can surface and become an intentional part of decision making in the arena of environmental policy.



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2017 APPROVED GRANT HIGHLIGHTS

After Science and Religion: Involving Theology in Science-Religion Discussions

Peter Harrison, University of Queensland

This project is an ambitious attempt to rethink the theological foundations of contemporary science-religion discussions. It will bring together a core group of leading philosophical theologians, along with some scientists and historians, to reconsider how we presently conceptualize science and religion and to think through what difference such a reconsideration will make to the field. In seeking new theological foundations for religion and science discussions, the project will bring an entirely new dimension to the field, adding to insights already gained from dominant scientific, philosophical, historical, and sociological approaches. The initial symposium was held in Cambridge in April 2018.

\$20,000; one year.



The Renewal of Natural Theology: Academic Engagement and Church Outreach

Alister McGrath, The Ian Ramsey Centre, Oxford University



The core idea is to develop the concept of "natural theology" as a robust and productive interface between Christianity and the natural sciences, ideally adapted to holding together religious and scientific truths. The anticipated outcomes of this project, which will be based at the Ian Ramsey Centre, Oxford University are: (1) Encouraging of greater and more productive intellectual interaction between Christian theologians and natural scientists; (2) Helping Christian churches to engage with a scientific culture, particularly in developing apologetic approaches that build bridges between science and faith; and (3) Helping Christian churches to develop a "spirituality of nature" which is scientifically informed and capable of encouraging a positive and productive appreciation of the natural world. The core elements of

the project are appointment of a Postdoctoral Research Fellow who will focus on developing research in the field of natural theology, and international conference in 2020 dedicated to exploring natural theology from a variety of perspectives. The conference will include both academics and pastors to better address a range of questions concerning the plausibility and relevance of religious faith within a scientific culture.

\$254,755; two years.



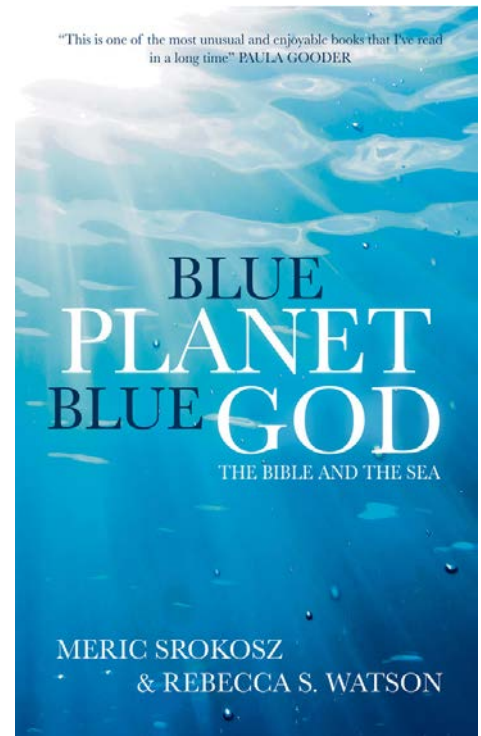
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2017 HIGHLIGHTS FROM EARLIER GRANTS

Blue Planet, Blue God: The Bible and The Sea

The Faraday Institute of Science and Religion, Cambridge

In 2014, the Donor Advised Fund made a \$67,614 grant to The Faraday Institute of Science and Religion, to support Rebecca Watson, a biblical scholar, and Meric Srokosz, an oceanographer, to write a book on a biblical theology of the sea for academic and broader audiences. This book, *Blue Planet, Blue God: The Bible and The Sea*, was published in 2017 by SCM press. A book launch was held at the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton (U.K.), a collaboration between University of Southampton and the U.K. Natural Environment Research Ruth Valerio, Director of Tearfund (a Christian anti-poverty organization based in the U.K.) recommends *Blue Planet, Blue God* as “a great way not only to understand more about our amazing blue planet, both theologically and scientifically, but also to be inspired to live in ways that look after it.”



January Series

Kristi Potter, Calvin College



In 2016 the Issachar Fund granted \$12,500, over two years, to Calvin College to bring high-profile speakers on technology, medicine and human dignity to the annual January Series lectures at Calvin College. The featured speaker in 2017 was Abraham Nussbaum, M.D., director of the adult inpatient psychiatric service at Denver Health, and assistant professor at the University of Colorado. Holder of advanced degrees in both medicine and theology, he is author of the acclaimed *The Finest Traditions of My Calling: Once Physician's Search for the Renewal of Medicine* (Yale University Press, 2016).



DONOR ADVISED FUND

2017 HIGHLIGHTS FROM EARLIER GRANTS

Science and Religion at Oxford: Peter Harrison Studentships

The Ian Ramsey Center, Oxford University

This is a scholarship program for graduate students studying religion and science, launched by a 2015 grant from the Donor Advised Fund. In 2017 graduate students Christopher Krall and William Richardson completed their Master of Studies in Science and Religion, under Alister McGrath, Idreos Chair of Science and Religion at Oxford University's Faculty of Theology and Religion. The grant of \$168,300, being paid out over three years, will continue to fund future students that are selected for this prestigious qualification.



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

The National Clergy Project on End-of-Life Care: Developing a Clergy Training Intervention

Michael Balboni, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute



This project, funded by a 2015 DAF of \$150,150 to the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, is designed to analyze the results of a major survey of national clergy on their engagement with end-of-life issues, and to develop and pilot a clergy educational curriculum on end-of-life care. In 2017, the program formed a racially and ethnically diverse group of clergy leaders who met throughout the year planning a clergy training on serious illness and end of life care. The program then piloted a half day training seminar among 25 Boston clergy. The program also continued its research and analysis program with three additional publications:

- "Seeking and Accepting: U.S. Clergy Theological and Moral Perspectives Informing Decision Making at the End of Life." *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, Vol. 20 (2017)
- "United States Clergy Religious Values and Relationships to End-of-Life Discussions and Care." *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, Vol. 53 (2017).
- *Spirituality, Religion and The Culture of Medicine: From Evidence to Practice*. Oxford University Press, 2017.



<https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/rshm/national-clergy-survey-health-care-end-life>



TRANSITIONS

The Issachar Fund exists to channel the philanthropy of our founder and benefactor, Jim Blankemeyer, into programs that address his deepest concerns. For several years now, those concerns have been focused on issues and topics at the intersection of science and religion.

But recently it has become clear to all of us that Jim's deepest concerns reach beyond the intersections of science and religion as they are traditionally understood. Through several months of collaborative discussion, it became increasingly clear that Jim's approach to the world is best understood as a question-asking approach. The goal of his philanthropy is to open up space for people to ask their deepest questions about truth, meaning, purpose, and human flourishing.

Jim Blankemeyer, Reflections on Life's Questions



TRANSITIONS

The result of our discussions is this new, more holistic framework for our work:

Vision

The humble pursuit of the truth about God and creation.

Mission

The Issachar Fund partners with scholars, leaders and organizations that seek religious and scientific truth, learning from and contributing to the ideals, values, knowledge and practices of our increasingly multicultural society.

Two Foundational Questions

- How do we seek and know what is true and real?
- Is there a best or right or true way to live?

For centuries philosophy was understood not simply to be a quest for knowledge, values, reason, and wisdom. Philosophers believed their quest for knowing was indelibly tied to how one lived one's life. To embrace a philosophical tradition was to make a commitment to a way of life, and that way of living gave meaning to one's words and learning.

Our two Big Questions bear this in mind. We believe that knowing (the focus of Question 1) is related to living (the focus of Question 2). And while we will advocate research and will pursue learning guided by multiple sub-questions that flow from our Big Questions, we do so recognizing that what we are after is fundamentally linked together. The kind of people we are will inform both the questions we ask and the answers we find.

Through these two questions, The Issachar Fund seeks a form of learning that moves beyond simply collecting information, and towards forms of learning and understanding that contributes to the enrichment of communities of faith and the flourishing of society.



TRANSITIONS

Our DNA

We encourage collaboration, innovation, and learning by fostering research on key questions, sharing relevant information across funded projects and programs, and by networking likeminded individuals and organizations.

Strategic Priorities

Our strategic priorities will reflect our DNA. They will be implemented through a combination of internally designed and run programs, grants recommended to our Donor Advised Fund, and, at times, the intentional combination of these two activities.

• Solicitation of Work through Specific Research Questions

We will continue to initiate and run programs in the future, and we also invite scholars and organizations to reach out to us with their ideas. To facilitate that, we have developed a series of sub-questions that speak to our current priorities within each of our two Foundational Questions:

> Foundational Question #1: How do we seek and know what is true and real?

- What does nature tell us about God, and what are the limits to what nature can say?
- What can we learn about what is true and real from religious sources of knowledge?
- What is the nature of the human person?
- How do social, cultural, biological, and psychological factors influence what we believe is true?

> Foundational Question 2: Is there a best or right or true way to live?

- How does the Christian vision contribute to our varied understandings of human flourishing?
- What constitutes human flourishing in light of modern technological developments?
- How do we interpret sacred texts and practices in order to learn what is true and good?
- How can the practices of faith communities provide insight into how people might live and flourish?



TRANSITIONS

- Communication and Dissemination

We will be intentional about communicating with appropriate audiences the findings and conclusions of our projects. This will go beyond simply publicizing our projects—it will involve opening broader lines of communication between ourselves, our partners, and our target audiences about the kinds of positive change we seek.

- Connections

Building networks is a critical yet often overlooked element in fostering change. New ideas do not take hold in a vacuum. New practices need an expanding network of partners and practitioners if changes are to take hold.

- Project Evaluation

In addition to assessing the degree to which our projects achieve their immediate objectives, we will develop learning objectives for our projects. We will then foster open feedback loops with our partners about lessons learned and logical next steps towards achieving identified longer-term goals.

Concluding Thoughts

Our goal in this new understanding of our mission is to set a direction that honors Jim Blankemeyer's intent and addresses his deepest concerns. We hope to clear space for asking the deepest human questions, and in doing so stimulate fresh ways of thinking that help us visualize alternative frameworks for communities in which human beings of all faiths and none can flourish together.

