

2018

# ANNUAL REPORT



ISSACHAR FUND

---

[www.issacharfund.org](http://www.issacharfund.org)

[info@issacharfund.org](mailto:info@issacharfund.org)

# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Our annual report shines a spotlight on some programs we hosted and projects we funded in 2018. It also highlights select media projects, including publications, our first venture into the realm of podcasts, and a small documentary film.

If you are interested in more details on these or any other Issachar Fund activities, I would encourage you to look at our [website](#).

As always, so much of what we seek to do requires partnerships, and I remain grateful for the many partners and friends we have, some new, others longstanding. The work highlighted in this report, as well as much work done behind the scenes, is a tribute to their dedication.

With Gratitude,

Kurt Berends  
President  
Issachar Fund



# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## Everything Happens

Kate Bowler, Divinity School, Duke University

The Issachar Fund partnered with Bowler to build out the *Everything Happens Project*, a podcast and [website](#) based on her New York Times bestseller, *Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved*. Bowler and her guests discuss life's most profound questions in a fresh public conversation about hope, courage, and resilience in the face of suffering and loss. Notable guests have included actor Alan Alda, memoirist Lucy Kalanathi, writer Barbara Brown Taylor, and novelist John Green. The podcast performs in the top 1% of podcasts and has already reached over 1,000,000 downloads. The project buildout helped Bowler develop a strategic plan and obtain major support from The John Templeton Foundation and The Lilly Endowment, among others.



Click below to listen to Kate's podcast.



[podcasts](#) ▶ [society & culture](#)

## Everything Happens

From North Carolina Public Radio

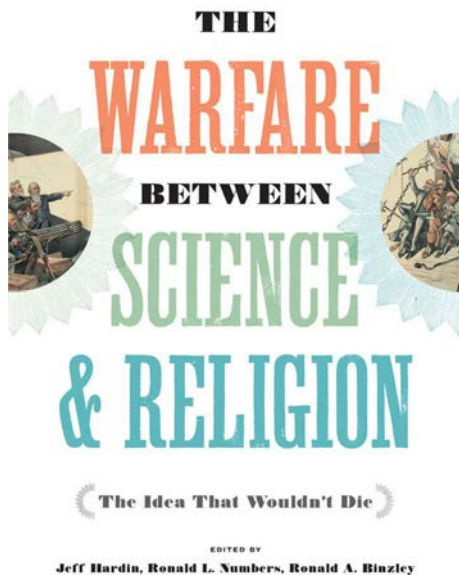
Life isn't always bright and shiny, as Kate Bowler knows. Kate is a young mother, writer and professor who, at age 35, was suddenly diagnosed with Stage IV cancer. In, warm, insightful, often funny conversations, Kate talks with people about what they've learned in dark times. Kate teaches at Duke Divinity School and is author of "Everything Happens (And Other Lies I've Loved)."



# PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

## The Idea That Wouldn't Die

Jeff Hardin and Ronald Numbers, University of Wisconsin-Madison



Why do North Americans continue to believe that science and religion are in perpetual conflict with each other, despite the fact that historians have demonstrated this is not the case? In May 2015, more than thirty historians, sociologists, philosophers, and scientists convened to wrestle with this question. They considered the origin of the conflict thesis, its reception, responses from faith leaders, and its continued prominence in public discourse. The fruit of their discussions has just appeared in the form of a major academic [book](#): *The Warfare between Science and Religion: The Idea That Wouldn't Die*, published in October 2018 by The Johns Hopkins University Press.

## Our Sentimental Poet? Mary Oliver in an Age of Excess

Debra Dean Murphy, West Virginia Wesleyan College

Mary Oliver's nature poetry won a Pulitzer prize and the National Book Award. It was also enormously popular—"Far and away, this country's best-selling poet," wrote the New York Times. But critics often dismissed her work as "sentimental." With support from an Issachar Fund program, Murphy dissects this claim in an award-winning academic article published this past year. Murphy argues that Oliver's most-criticized poems were more artless than sentimental, and that her best poems are untainted by sentimentality. The accusation itself, Murphy shows, is not only gender loaded—it is rarely leveled against men—but it also "can mimic the same affective indulgence it intends to call out."

Murphy's essay, "*Our Sentimental Poet? Mary Oliver in an Age of Excess*," won the 2019 Associated Church Press Award of Excellence for Critical Review. Follow the link [here](#), to read the article.



# SCHOLAR'S RETREAT PROGRAM

Co-sponsored by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

## The Information Therapist is In

Robin Hartman, Hope International University



In today's "post-truth" culture, it is harder for students to know how to evaluate credible sources. This complicates their learning by introducing high levels of information anxiety. Hartman's article, in Garrett Trott, editor, *The Faithful Librarian: Essays on Christianity in the Profession* (McFarland Publishing, forthcoming in 2019) guides librarians in how to recognize and allay information anxiety in students, and how to teach students coping strategies that will aid them in their search for truth and meaning.

## The Development of Humility in Leaders

Peter Hill, Biola University

This will be a popular, reader-friendly book on how cultivating humility can enhance leadership effectiveness in any organizational context. Hill, a social psychologist, leads a major study of humility, funded by a John Templeton Foundation grant. The fifteen-scholar project team includes psychologists, business leaders, and philosophers exploring the role of humility in four leadership contexts: corporations, religious organizations, student groups, and humanitarian agencies. They have found that effective leaders acknowledge their limitations, have little concern for status, and share credit for accomplishments. This book will apply these findings, and the results of other recent studies of humility, to practical leadership problems in everyday situations. To view further information on the project, click [here](#).



# GRANTS

## Research Scholarship Grants Awarded in 2018

### Gratitude

Mona Siddiqui, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh



Both Islamic and Christian traditions emphasize the importance of divine gift-giving and gratitude as the appropriate human response. Yet few scholars have studied the theology of gratitude and its role in the religious life. This two-year project is a theological, philosophical, and political exploration of the theme of gratitude in Christianity and Islam. Its central aim is to understand the moral basis of gratitude across religious traditions and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. It convenes three international academic conferences and two smaller workshops focused on more practical, community-based concerns. The best papers from the conferences will be published in an edited academic book which will be the first of its kind.

### The Theology of the Quantum World

Mark Harris, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh

Quantum mechanics is foundational in physics, and its differences from classical physics have often inspired theological and religious reflections. However, the science is notoriously difficult, and it has undergone major changes since first entering the popular imagination. As a result, theological engagement with the subject has been patchy at best. This project—a workshop, an edited book, and an academic monograph—will help theologians, clergy, and philosophers better understand the science. It will also point to areas of the science that might yield great theological riches, and show how to use the science for more responsible and insightful theological and philosophical reflection.



# GRANTS

## Research Scholarship Grants Awarded in 2018

### **The Role of Spirituality in the Life of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu**

Tinyiko Maluleke, University of Pretoria



*Prophet's Chamber Project of the Nagle Center for World Christianity at Calvin University.* Nelson Mandela, working in the political realm, and Desmond Tutu, working in the church realm, both became synonymous with the “new South Africa project” in the 1990s. Together they helped lead the old South Africa out of its colonial, apartheid past, and to forge a new nation out of disparate, divided and warring peoples. Though there are numerous biographies of both men, most focus more on politics than religion, and none look at the two men comparatively. This book will trace the similar religious and spiritual influences on both men. It will recover the role of spirituality in how they came to envision a new South African future, and how they never lost hope despite years of opposition and setbacks.

### **Wrestling with Life: Analytic Theology and Biblical Narratives**

Eleonore Stump, St. Louis University

This project used philosophical and theological analyses of the foundational cultural biblical narratives to address deep questions of human flourishing. Toward that end, Professor Stump coordinated a workshop for 14 scholars at Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem. The participants included Jewish and Christian scholars representing nine different countries and a number of diverse academic specialties. Feedback from this meeting indicates that this line of enquiry is not only feasible but exciting and fruitful. The participants' post-workshop evaluations were universal in their enthusiasm for what they learned. A website including lectures and videos from the conference can be found [here](#).



# GRANTS

## Scholarly Dissemination Grants Awarded in 2018

### Faith and Leadership Dissemination Project

Leadership Education Program, Duke Divinity School, Duke University

To more widely disseminate what is learned from our projects, the Issachar Fund launched a partnership with Duke University's *Faith & Leadership*, an online media outlet with a strong track record of reaching pastors, lay people and church leaders. *F&L* publishes new content on their website every two weeks, and also sends out a daily email called "News and Ideas" which curates news about church and the world. In this partnership, *F&L* staff will produce stories based on Issachar-sponsored projects, both past and present. The first articles featuring Issachar projects will appear in early 2019. To read more about *F&L*, or to view their current content, click the heading below.



### Theological Book Network Operations Grant

Jeff Clark

The Theological Book Network (TBN) is the premier organization for disseminating academic resources to Christian institutions in the Majority World. Over the past decade, TBN has shipped more than 2 million volumes to more than 600 institutions around the world, and done so at a fraction of what it would cost these institutions to purchase the volumes on their own. TBN builds library capacity for college and graduate schools that makes classroom education and research scholarship possible. To read more about the Theological Book Network click [here](#).





# GRANTS

## Scholarly Dissemination Grants Awarded in 2018

### The Kwame Bediako Projects

- 1) Kwame Bediako: A Biographical Documentary. James Ault and The Outreach Foundation.
- 2) Kwame Bediako: The French Theses: Translation and Publication. Sara Fretheim, University of Edinburgh.

Kwame Bediako was a theologian, Presbyterian minister and founding Rector of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute for Theology, Mission and Culture in Akropong, Ghana. During his life and career Bediako did perhaps more than anyone else to persuade Western theologians and mainstream Western theological institutions that African theology was not an exotic minority specialization but an essential component in a developing global Christian discourse.

This project consists of two small grants in support of:

- 1) A 48-minute [video documentary](#) (password: "Kwame") highlighting the significant contribution that Bediako made to how we now understand global Christian mission.
- 2) Publication by Brill, a major European academic press, of an English translation with commentary of Bediako's early master's and doctoral theses on Negritude literature. This book will provide crucial interpretational insight into Bediako's later Christian writings.



### KWAME BEDIAKO: His Life and Legacy (48:00)

9 months ago

Shortened version for Sunday school use.



# GRANTS

## 2018 Highlights From Earlier Grant-Funded Projects

### **Christian Flourishing in a Technological Age**

Jens Zimmermann, Trinity Western University/Regent College



This three-year collaboration between scholars from Canada, UK, USA, and Germany will provide a comprehensive theological assessment of the impact of recent technology on human nature. The project will: establish a modern theological anthropology in continuity with classic Christian theology; evaluate visions of human flourishing represented by technological enhancements, from social media to bio-genetics to transhumanism; and provide a theologically grounded Christian perspective on human flourishing in this technological age. Research will be published in scholarly and popular print and internet media. The initial workshop was held June 2018 at the University of British Columbia. This led to an academic conference in December 2018 at the University of Oxford: "Being Human, Being a Person: Contemporary Perspectives in Philosophical and Theological Anthropology." See [www.christianflourishing.com](http://www.christianflourishing.com).

### **International Dialogues to Promote Religious Tolerance for Peaceful Co-existence in Zanzibar**

Celestin Musekura, ALARM Inc. (African Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries)

There is a rising tide of radicalization and religious violence in Tanzania, and the epicenter of the conflict is Zanzibar Island. Using lessons learned from ALARM's successful Interfaith Dialogues in Coastal Kenya, this 12-month project will train and mobilize 130 religious leaders, educators, women, and young people in Zanzibar to reach out to their communities and create networks of people committed to promoting and practicing peaceful co-existence. The project held its initial cohort training in July 2018 and had its first follow-up meeting in September 2018. To read more about ALARM, click [here](#).



## 2018 Highlights From Earlier Grant-Funded Projects

### **After Science and Religion: Involving Theology in Science and Religion Discussions**

Peter Harrison, University of Queensland



In July, the fourth and final consultation for After Science and Religion was held in Oxford. This project, which launched two years ago and received subsequent support from Templeton World Charitable Foundation, is a robust attempt to examine what shape the science and religion conversation might take when it is filtered through the lens of philosophical theology. Harrison assembled a stellar line-up of scholars, including Charles Taylor, David Bentley Hart, Rowan Williams, Michael Northcott, John Milbank, David Schindler, Janet Soskice, David Wilkinson, Bernard Lightman, Michael Hanby, Knut Alfsvågand, Tom McLeish, and others. The meetings have been engaging, challenging, and fruitful. Four books are scheduled to come from the first round of this project.

Paul Tyson's, *Seven Brief Lessons on Magic* (taking its inspiration from Carlo Rovelli's *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*) is currently in the final editorial phases. This book, which draws upon the discussions and papers present at the first meeting, outlines the four different ways of understanding the metaphysics of nature. Additional publications are planned.



# OPERATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

## Website

In 2018 we went live with our updated website which now features our new Guiding Questions, the Jim Blankemeyer video “Reflection’s on Life’s Questions,” and a more extensive selection of our current and past projects. Our intention with these changes was to offer further insight into who we are and what we do, as well as to better share our work with our audience. To view the website, please click [here](#).

Honing our website to tell our story and share our work will be an ongoing process. Our new partnership with *Faith & Leadership* is part of a strategy to connect our work to a broader audience - by optimizing the tools we have, evaluating our projects for learning objectives, and understanding how to connect those objectives to the right audience. We have built this strategy into our framework by adding a communication objectives section into our grants and program evaluation form, and continually assessing our ongoing projects for content to share weekly. This process has already helped us to engage more actively with our projects and to follow up on outputs and outcomes thoroughly. It is changing the way we view our work, and has brought an exciting perspective into our development.

## Social Media Engagement

To better connect with our partners, feature their work, and expand our audience, we have a new Twitter account. This has become a helpful tool for finding content and viewing the current activity of our partners and friends. To follow us on Twitter, click [here](#).

