AAAS AWARDS 10 “SCIENCE FOR SEMINARIES” GRANTS

Funds pilot programs that integrate science into core theological education

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) today awarded grants to 10 Christian seminaries for pilot programs integrating science into core theological curricula.

The following institutions will receive grants to cover the cost of faculty, campus-wide events on the relevance of science to theological education, science resources, guest speakers, and more:

- Andover Newton Theological School – Newton Centre, Massachusetts
- Catholic University of America – Washington, D.C.
- Columbia Theological Seminary – Decatur, Georgia
- Concordia Seminary – St. Louis, Missouri
- Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg – Pennsylvania
- Howard University School of Divinity – Washington, D.C.
- Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University – Berkeley, California
- Multnomah Biblical Seminary – Portland, Oregon
- Regent University School of Divinity – Virginia Beach, Virginia
- Wake Forest University School of Divinity – Winston-Salem, N.C.

Curricula with integrated science for at least two core theological courses (such as those in systematic theology, biblical studies, church history, and pastoral theology) will be developed by each school and implemented over the next two years. This integrated approach will bring science into the core of seminary theological education, impacting individual seminaries as well as the ministries in which graduates serve. Science-focused, campus-wide activities will complement these courses, and resources from the project will be made available to interested seminaries as the project unfolds.

AAAS will provide additional science resources, including a series of short science-education videos appropriate for use in these courses. To support participating faculty, the project will help to recruit scientist-advisors from nearby science research institutions and faculty mentors with experience integrating science into seminary classes.

In addition to the high quality of these 10 schools’ proposed projects, the selected group includes geographic, denominational, and demographic diversity, including groups that are significantly underrepresented in the current science-religion dialogue, such as a renewal-oriented seminary (Regent University School of Divinity), and a predominantly African-American seminary (Howard University).
The AAAS project, long-recommended by AAAS advisers and carried out in consultation with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), reflects the fact that “many people look to their religious leaders for guidance on issues relating to science and technology, even though clergy members may get little exposure to science in their training,” said Jennifer Wiseman, director of the AAAS Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion (DoSER).

A joint 2013 survey conducted by AAAS and sociologists at Rice University found that some Christians (particularly Evangelicals) are more likely than the general public to consult a religious leader or fellow congregant if they have a question about science. “The Science for Seminaries project aims to equip religious leaders with a solid scientific foundation from which to address congregant questions,” Wiseman said.

The project was officially launched in 2013 when the ATS invited its network of seminaries to submit Letters of Interest for potential pilot programs. Twenty-eight LOIs arrived from throughout the United States and Canada, representing the breadth of the ATS ecclesial families (Mainline Protestant, Conservative Protestant, and Catholic/Orthodox), and indicating broad interest in the program.

Science for Seminaries will also organize conferences for Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Conservative/Evangelical Protestant seminaries to further the reach of the project by disseminating the resources and experience gained through its pilot programs. Science resources will also be archived online at www.ScienceforSeminaries.org.

“Through strategic engagement with theological schools, faculties, and students, Science for Seminaries should have a positive impact not only on theological education, but on the broader publics served by the schools and their graduates,” said Stephen R. Graham, senior director of programs and services at the Association of Theological Schools.

Building on AAAS’s long-standing commitment to relate scientific knowledge and technological development to the purposes and concerns of society at large, DoSER facilitates communication between scientific and religious communities.

This project was made possible through the support of AAAS and a grant from The John Templeton Foundation.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is the world’s largest general scientific society and publisher of the journal Science (www.sciencemag.org) as well as Science Translational Medicine (www.sciencetranslationalmedicine.org) and Science Signaling (www.sciencesignaling.org). AAAS was founded in 1848 and includes 261 affiliated societies and academies of science, serving 10 million individuals. Science has the largest paid circulation of any peer-reviewed general science journal in the world, with an estimated total readership of 1 million. The nonprofit AAAS (www.aaas.org) is open to all and fulfills its mission to “advance science and serve society” through initiatives in science policy, international programs, science education, public engagement, and more. For the latest research news, log onto EurekAlert!, www.eurekalert.org, the premier science-news Web site, a service of AAAS.