

THREE SCHOLARS JOIN YDS FACULTY



EMILIE M. TOWNES, a pivotal player in construction of the field of womanist theology, has been named Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology at Yale Divinity School. She comes to YDS from Union Theological

Seminary, where she was the Carolyn Williams Beaird Professor of Christian Ethics.

Broadly defined, womanist theology is a field of theological and ethical reflection in which the historic and present-day insights of African American women are brought into critical engagement with the traditions of Christian theology. “Basically, it’s understanding that race, gender, and class are not only social categories but they are also theological categories, and using as a first step the ideas and concepts that are coming from black women’s lives to understand the focus of theology and ethics,” Townes explained in a recent interview.

Her first two major works, *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope* (Scholars Press, 1993) and *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness* (Abingdon Press, 1995), were seminal texts in the field. In *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health Care* and *A Womanist Ethic of Care* (Continuum Press, 1998), Townes develops an ethical argument for adequate health care based on empirical and scientific data.

Her goal in teaching is to move students beyond the strictly academic into a realm where words are wedded to belief and action. Says Townes, “In my teaching I want to get students excited about the notion that they’re not just here to get a Yale degree and and be able to hang it on their wall... they should be here thinking about what kind of contributions can they make to society... What are we doing that helps enhance the lives of all of us, as opposed to our own little idiosyncratic research interests.”

An ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches, Townes holds a B.A. from the University of Chicago, a D.Min. from the Divinity School at the University of

Chicago, and a Ph.D. from the joint Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary.

DENYS TURNER, a widely published University of Cambridge theologian, has been appointed the Horace Tracy Pitkin Professor of Historical Theology at Yale Divinity School. The appointment of Turner, a Roman Catholic, marks the end of a two-year international search for an eminent authority in historical theology.

For Turner, theology is a subject that can only be taken seriously if it acknowledges that it “engages with people in a way in which other subjects don’t”; that is, theology “only lives because there are people committed to believing.”

In Turner, YDS has a theologian who is deeply committed to the teaching enterprise and who considers it critical to his own learning because of the interaction with students: “For me, it’s the act of communication that actually stimulates thought.”

Since 1999, Turner has been the Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, following a career of teaching at several other universities in the United Kingdom. He has taught on a wide range of subjects, including contemporary philosophy of religion, metaphysics, ethics, political and social theory, medieval philosophy and theology, and the history of medieval mysticism. Earlier in his career, Turner focused his research on the relations between Christianity and political and social theory, particularly between Marxism and Christianity. Turner’s current area of concentration is the study of the traditions of Western Christian mysticism, with special emphasis on doctrines of religious language and selfhood, and on the links between the classical traditions of spirituality and mysticism, and the social and political commitments of Christianity. At some stage Turner hopes to be able to draw together the two main theological preoccupations of his academic career—the social-political and the mystical-spiritual—believing that neither profits in isolation from the other.



In *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), Turner argues for an account of human reason and Christian faith that entails the possibility of a purely rational proof of God’s existence. He is currently working on a short monograph on Julian of Norwich and sin, and on a larger study of the theology of the late medieval Carthusian Denys van Rykel.

Among Turner’s other books are *Faith Seeking* (SCM, 2002), *The Darkness of God* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), *Eros and Allegory* (Cistercian Publications, 1995), *Marxism and Christianity* (Blackwell, 1983), and *On the Philosophy of Karl Marx* (Sceptre, 1968).

Turner earned his doctorate at the University of Oxford, and his B.A. and M.A. at University College, Dublin. He has served as a member of the Executive Committee of the Catholic Institute for International Relations, the Committee for the World of Work of the Roman Catholic Conference of Bishops of England and Wales, the Laity Commission of the Roman Catholic Conference of Bishops of England and Wales, and the Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for England.

THOMAS H. TROEGER ’67 B.A. will now serve as J. Edward and Ruth Cox Lantz Professor of Christian Communication at Yale Divinity School following eleven years as the Ralph E. and Norma E. Peck Professor of Preaching and Communications at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver. His main task at Sterling Divinity Quadrangle will be to teach homiletics, or the art of preaching.

He compares learning to preach with studying a musical instrument: “When you’re learning an instrument you keep practicing scales, arpeggios, and exercises, and the first time you do a big sonata it’s kind of mechanical. But that’s all right. You can kind of put the parts together and then eventually you really get into the spirit of it.” This is an apt image for someone who is an accomplished professional musician. Troeger not only plays the flute, he is also a student of hymnody and a poet whose work appears in the hymnals of many denominations.

“I talk about what I call imaginative theology,” explains Troeger, “by which I mean the ability to draw on the symbols and stories and rituals and parables of the faith



tradition and of the symbols and stories that live in human beings from their contemporary culture and draw those together.” It is Troeger’s hope that his teaching will help preachers cope with some of the challenges facing the pulpit ministry in the 21st century,

among them: preaching in an age of electronic media; using “God speech” at a time when the feminine is increasingly a part of religious language; preaching in ways that reach across cultures as churches and congregations grow more diverse; offering sermons that are strong but also respectful of other faith traditions; encountering the megachurch phenomenon; and exploring the role religion plays in questions of medical ethics.

Troeger is a frequent contributor to journals and is also the author of more than a dozen books in the fields of preaching and worship, including *Imagining a Sermon* (Abingdon), *Borrowed Light: Hymn Texts, Prayers, And Poems* (Oxford University Press), *Ten Strategies for Preaching in a Multi-Media Culture* (Abingdon), and *Preaching while the Church Is under Reconstruction* (Abingdon). For three years he hosted the *Season of Worship* broadcast for Cokesbury. He has led conferences and lectureships in worship and preaching throughout North America and in Holland, Australia, and Japan.

Troeger is ordained in both the Episcopal Church and Presbyterian Church (USA) and holds a B.D. from Colgate Rochester Divinity School, a Doctor of Divinity degree from Virginia Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Sacred Theology degree from Dickinson College.