

MEET PTS



PROFESSOR COLE-TURNER'S DEDICATES CAREER TO THE INTERSECTION OF FAITH AND SCIENCE

As Dr. Ron Cole-Turner, our H. Parker Sharp Professor of Theology and Ethics, heads into his final semester teaching at the Seminary, he reflects on his 25 years at PTS. In that time, his work has contained two major focuses, and a little bit of Indiana Jones adventure—he once helped a controversial scientist escape from a group of hostile reporters at an academic conference! Our community is grateful for all the ways that Dr. Cole-Turner's scholarship, wisdom, and humility have helped shape our institution and its students.

When Dr. Cole-Turner arrived at PTS in 1996, he had already been writing about the intersection of faith and science, and that continued to be his niche in Pittsburgh. For his first 10 years here, he provided our school and the world with timely research and theological reflection on the scientific questions of the day: genetics, biotechnology, and cloning. In the classroom, he not only introduced students to many of these questions for the first time, but he helped them participate in conversations about the ethical dimensions of new technologies.

Around 2006, as Dr. Cole-Turner's scientific studies shifted to human enhancement and “transhumanism,” his theological emphasis turned to one all-encompassing question: Can Christianity offer an overarching story of humanity, from its origins to its destiny? A story that is faithful not only to the Christian tradition, but to evolutionary science and cutting-edge technologies that point to our future? This was uncharted territory not only for him, but for the entire field of theology, for it required such acute and detailed knowledge of science.

Over the last 15 years, Dr. Cole-Turner has not definitively cracked the case on perhaps the most difficult question our species can ask. But his work has been fruitful in both his own life and his students' development.

“Confronting the arc of humanity theologically has increased, not diminished, my conviction of the enduring validity of the claims of creedal orthodoxy,” he explains. “It is a profound and haunting question, for which the Incarnation into evolving humanity provides a daring answer.”

Dr. Cole-Turner had the chance to explore this question and answer with a group of students last fall in a seminar-style class called Humanity in a Scientific Age. Jon Mathieu, an M.Div. student who took the course, says, “I usually called this class Cyborg Theology. And it actually was that—and also Theology of Evolution, God's Image, the Incarnation, and Technology. Every week I was excited to learn from Dr. Cole-Turner.”

After this semester, Dr. Cole-Turner will take a sabbatical, hopefully in sunny California. He will continue his academic work, turning to a new area of study: religious experience. He will do so with the gratitude, support, and love of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

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