

2017 Christian Scholars Conference

Reporting in from the 2017 Christian Scholars Conference (by Dale):

It was just a great event albeit filled with hard choices on which of multiple fascinating sessions to attend. Wednesday afternoon I was privileged to serve on a panel review led by **Greg Sterling** of Carl R. Holladay's magisterial *Acts: A Commentary*. Fellow panelists included John T. Fitzgerald from the University of Notre Dame and Margaret Mitchell from the University of Chicago. I don't mind saying I was a bit intimidated by such academic heavyweights, but Dr. Mitchell grew up in Old Greenwich, and so there was that.

Thursday morning **Brandon** facilitated a thought-provoking session on "Bridging the Divide: Addressing the Gap between the Church and the Academy" which included an excellent paper on "Politics and the Person in the Pew" by Jeff Peterson from the Austin Graduate School of Theology. Peterson gave truly helpful guidelines for learning to live respectfully and wisely with one another in our political differences (should you wish to read his paper, Brandon likely has a copy). During the same Thursday morning time-slot **Elaine** was the star of her session on "Dissent and Tradition in American Christianity" (Elaine never ceases to amaze). Then Greg Sterling closed the conference with his challenging Abraham J. Malherbe Plenary Address Friday morning on the state of Christian higher-education in America.

Among other notable panels and addresses, we were blessed to hear a remarkable and cautionary plenary address by **Shaun Casey** who served as U.S. special representative for religion and global affairs for the State Department during the Obama administration. The world-renowned theologian **James Cone** in a plenary address and several sessions spoke on the primacy of liberation, both spiritual and political, in Christianity. Perhaps the most cutting-edge session was that on "A Theology of Transgender" facilitated by Ken Cukrowski of ACU. It was heartwarming and, I might add, a great relief to hear in a Church of Christ setting a discussion of this matter so humane, enlightened and informed.

There were other highlights – the spiritually rich, evocative poetry of Greenwich Village's **Marie Howe** and the dazzlingly skillful emceeding by leading Lipscomb ethicist Lee Camp of Thursday evening's *Tokens* performance, a highly creative concert, part Garrison Keillor, part Thomas Merton, part The Grand Ole Opry. And then there were the more personal joys, the loving hospitality of **Randy and Jennifer Goodman**, a delightful lunch with **Ray and Ann Newton** who drove down from Bowling Green, Kentucky and happily catching up with **Alina Ernst** and with **Teresa Pecinovsky**, also meeting Teresa's husband John and five-month-old daughter Seona. And as a recurrent spiritual joy there was running into old friends, Stamford exodus members and people from all over who think of our church family with appreciation and spiritual gratitude. I don't travel a lot, so I'm always both surprised and deeply gratified by how many people have followed and feel blessed by our Stamford story.

CSC Report (from Brandon):

A brief word about some of the sessions I attended. Greg and Dale's session deserves a second mention if only because I want to brag on Dale a bit more than he would brag on himself. He sat at a table with folks who are at the top of their field, and I consider Dale to be at the top of his field of ministerial practitioners. There are not many others I could think of that would even merit a seat at that table, much less provide the engaging commentary that Dale provided. So good job, Dale!

As Dale said, the only problem was that there were too many great sessions in any given time slot. A complete list can be found here: <http://www.lipscomb.edu/csc/sessions>. A remarkable session I attended was entitled "The Restorationists Go Global: The Stone-Campbell Movement as a World Christian Tradition" which consisted of presentations on indigenous leaders of churches of Christ in Italy, Japan, and Zimbabwe. On Thursday I attended another great session entitled "Hearing Sonny's Blues" where black scholars looked at the short stories of James Baldwin (called "Sonny's Blues") and the blues as a musical genre to explore what it means to think about Christianity from the perspective of black folks today. Finally I attended an excellent "round table discussion" with Dr. Shaun Casey who, along with the presenters including a recent Yale Graduate Brian Michael Smith, provided helpful commentary and perspective on how faith functions in the public sphere.

These conferences function somewhat as a "Continuing Education" for ministers, except that what we learn there we hope to make accessible to the rest of the church. We would love to talk to you about it!