Emory's Witte Named to McDonald Professorship

Contact: Elaine Justice, 404-727-0643, elaine.justice@emory.edu
Contact: April Bogle, 404-712-8713, abogle@law.emory.edu

Emory University law professor John Witte Jr. has been named the university's Alonzo L. McDonald Family Professor on the Life and Teachings of Jesus and their Impact on Culture for the spring of 2006.

As the McDonald professor, Witte will deliver a series of lectures on the life and teachings of Jesus. He also will teach a course on religious liberty open to students in Emory's law and theology schools, and to graduate and undergraduate students in the arts and sciences.

Witte will deliver his first McDonald lecture, "Freedom of a Christian: The Protestant Contributions to Modern Religious Liberty and Human Rights," at 4:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 9, at Emory's Cannon Chapel. The event is free and open to the public.

"Professor Witte is a world-class scholar on law and religion, one who sets the pace for other scholars in this important field with his prolific writing, prodigious research output, outstanding oratory skills and unmatched leadership abilities," says Russell E. Richey, dean of Emory's Candler School of Theology, which is housing the McDonald chair. "We are delighted to have him accept this appointment and contribute to the reputation of this distinguished McDonald chair."

The McDonald chair is funded through the McDonald Agape Foundation, directed by Alonzo L. McDonald, an Emory alumnus and trustee emeritus. McDonald has had a distinguished career in business, government and academia. He established the foundation more than 10 years ago to support Christ-centered activities. The purpose of the chair is to further study on the person of Jesus and his influence on all aspects of life for believers, non-believers and followers of other religions.

According to McDonald, "there is not a chair on the general subject of 'the life and teachings of Jesus and their impact on culture' at any university in North America. The chair is not aimed at promoting Christianity but rather at exploring the person and impact of Jesus."
Appointments to the chair are open to scholars and artists from any discipline, and presentations may be done as lectures, demonstrations or performances.

Previously, the McDonald chair brought distinguished scholars from a variety of disciplines to Emory for several days to meet with students and give a series of lectures on aspects of Jesus and culture. Past McDonald visiting professors included: historian Jaroslav Pelikan, composer and conductor Alice Parker, biblical scholar Wayne Meeks and Judge John T. Noonan. This year the professorship has expanded to encompass an entire semester and includes an interdisciplinary class as well as the lecture series.

The chair appointment adds to Witte's long list of achievements. An expert on the history of marriage, legal history and religious liberty, Witte has published 18 books and 120 articles, and delivered more than 150 public lectures at universities throughout North America, Europe, Israel and South Africa. He has been selected eight times by Emory law students as Most Outstanding Professor. He founded the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Religion (CISR) in 2000 with a $3.2 million grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The CISR, which merged with Emory's Law and Religion Program in the fall of 2005 to become the Center for the Study of Law and Religion (CSLR), has drawn hundreds of major scholars as project leaders, participants and lecturers, including former President Jimmy Carter and renowned religious historian Martin E. Marty.

In his role as researcher, Witte has directed eight major multi-year research projects and a dozen smaller projects, and raised some $7 million for these efforts.

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Emory University is known for its demanding academics, outstanding undergraduate college of arts and sciences, highly ranked professional schools and state-of-the-art research facilities. For more than a decade Emory has been named one of the country's top 25 national universities by U.S. News & World Report. In addition to its nine schools, the university encompasses The Carter Center, Yerkes National Primate Research Center and Emory Healthcare, the state's largest and most comprehensive health care system.

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