

## M.DIV. STUDIES IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

### Some Considerations

During the last three years SFTS, its Southern California Extension Center, friends and colleagues have engaged in numerous conversations about some form of M.Div. studies in Southern California in response to repeated requests and obvious needs. As "The Presbyterian Seminary of the West," SFTS must continue these conversations and begin to take concrete steps in response. Following are some general considerations.

#### A QUESTION OF EXCELLENCE

No one would argue with the assertion that whatever SFTS does in Southern California, especially in M.Div. studies, must be top quality. Faculty and Trustees would not even consider doing anything less. Programs here should be comparable to programs on campus and certainly as good or as better than other programs offered in this area by other institutions.

When we begin to look at the question, What is excellence in theological education? however, we have to deal with a wide range of issues that may call in question the assumptions behind the first assertion. Anyone who has studied comparative educational systems or looked at the history of theological education or observed ATS efforts to deal with creativity and relevance knows there are no adequate answers. Perhaps Kosuke Koyama was closest when he suggested we think about "the excellence of people."

I do not here want to enter into the polemics of this debate, nor do I want to cast any stones at the outstanding academic achievements of SFTS and the GTU. It is perhaps because of these achievements that SFTS has earned the right to continue to press forward to the frontiers of theological education. I will suggest, nevertheless, that our concept of excellence take into account the following elements.

#### A QUESTION OF RELEVANCE

We simply have to marvel at the cultural riches of the Los Angeles basin, represented not so much by its museums and institutions as by its peoples. The potential of this context, these peoples, and the churches in their midst for spiritual renewal, ministerial formation, and theological creativity can only be faintly emulated in our seminaries. We have to find a way to bring the Seminary to this context.

We have talked of theological education for or with the church leaders of this context, for few of them will ever go to San Anselmo, Princeton, or Chicago. We have also talked about the need of Anglo students, even more than others, to learn from the realities of the Los Angeles basin. To be relevant, our programs must be culturally specific and specifically multi-cultural, affirming each group's heritage and enabling each to engage others' heritages. To some extent the Anglos

will have to catch up to the others, learning a second or third culture and perhaps a second spoken language.

Doing theological education "in a new key," not geography or culture, is the final challenge. Some of the recent advances in biblical studies and other academic areas, which utilize social sciences rather than philosophy or psychology as their primary tools, would make more sense, not less, in the metro-urban context. Effective learning is closely allied with relevance, when involvement and reflection go hand in hand throughout the process.

#### A QUESTION OF RESOURCES

In recent years one of the critical questions for SFTS has been financial viability, and this concern naturally tends toward strengthening the center and trimming the periphery. The largest and wealthiest population base for "The Presbyterian Seminary of the West" lies in Southern California, however, and an even larger portion of its funding comes from this region. To continue to leave this constituency to the growth of other institutions would likely lead to further shifting of these funds to those institutions.

Even more important than funding is personnel: teachers and students. In terms of internships and contextual education based in multi-cultural congregations, communities, and ministries, Southern California offers the best resources in the country. The Synod of Southern California and Hawaii now has about 100 predominantly non-Anglo congregations, and Presbyterians play important roles in numerous educational, service, and government agencies here.

Resources must be invested to attract support. About three years ago Claremont received a grant of one million dollars for its urban studies programs, and they are about to get another larger grant for a new Korean-English program. Fuller's Office of Presbyterian Ministries has several staff members to look after Presbyterian students, relate to the presbyteries, and attract further Presbyterian funding. SFTS will probably have to make a much greater investment in order to attract the financial and personnel resources to respond to the challenge of Southern California.

#### A QUESTION OF TIMING

SFTS took the lead 25 years ago when it launched the S.T.D. program, which opened the frontier for degree-bearing, field-based continuing education for clergy. SFTS made another breakthrough with its M.A.V. for laypeople some 12 years ago. Among the new challenges not yet taken up by other institutions are decentralized Masters programs in Christian Education and Church Music. Those openings will probably be filled very soon by Fuller and perhaps also by Claremont, if SFTS does not lead the way.

The greatest pressure on us here has been for M.Div. education, which is still perceived to be the central task of theological education. In the past it was assumed that fulltime, residential programs were the norm, but family and work situations and economic realities make that approach less and less accessible to more and more candidates. In Southern California the majority of theological

students are commuters. So the option of contextual education becomes much more attractive, offering significant advantages over commuter schools.

This means that ministerial education needs to be made available in a variety of forms over a longer period of time in several locations. It must be made accessible to working people, as are many other college and graduate and technical programs. It may also need to be offered outside as well as within the established and accredited degree structures in order to be accessible to some church constituencies.

#### A QUESTION OF MODELS

Sooner or later we must look at models and designs. Fuller now operates five or six different kinds of extension education, but its M.Div. extension centers apparently do little more than transport the classroom experience to different locations for parttime students. Golden Gate Seminary of Marin County now offers a full M.Div. at its Garden Grove extension center, and ABSW does something similar at Covina. Westminster Seminary has produced a daughter seminary in Orange County, and several other seminaries are establishing beachheads in Southern California. There are rumors of 16 Korean seminaries in this region, most meeting in the evenings, none accredited...yet.

Perhaps it would be more useful to look at the models that SFTS already uses. The D.Min. collegium group and course work would be an excellent centerpiece for a contextual M.Div. program, and it could immediately be integrated into the Seminary's internship program along with academic work. Apparently the Network Ministries program in San Francisco already does this, as did the Level III program of the SFTS M.Div. in the 70's. Other useful components of current programs are intensive, two-day seminars, which require readings, papers, and projects. Another model is the extended period of residential studies, such as the D.Min. summer term on campus or the proposed January 1987 term at Pacific Palisades.

Many models around the world are described in Ministry by the People. One of the most impressive of those models is New York Theological Seminary, which offers a variety of degree and non-degree programs through evening and weekend classes and reaches more non-Anglo students than all ten Presbyterian seminaries combined, including Johnson C. Smith. Another model is the theological extension program of the University of the South, which utilizes special textbooks and a weekly seminar format and enrolls 6000 students in small groups across the country.

#### A QUESTION OF MISSION

Excellence in theological education must ultimately be defined in terms of mission, the mission of God's reign, the mission of the church, the mission of the Seminary. The Faculties of Divinity in Scotland have certainly produced some eloquent preachers, but the Scottish churches lack vitality, the laity are incredibly passive, and the youth are almost totally absent. Presbyterian seminaries in this country seem to do a creditable job of preparing professional pastors, capable of managing middle-class, mostly White congregations, but they have not equipped the church for urban, multi-cultural ministry among all classes and races.

If our mission is to be defined by Jesus' mission, we have to face the radical

challenge of the Gospel of God's Reign. We cannot afford to be naive about the tensions between an increasingly militarized culture and the call to peacemaking, an increasingly professionalized society and the priesthood of all believers, an increasingly hierarchial economy and "the option for the poor." But we must hear and seek to follow what God's Spirit is saying to the churches in our day.

Whether we think in spiritual, theological, or educational terms, the question of mission is also a question of integrity. What we believe and what we teach must be demonstrated by the way we live -- individually, corporately, institutionally. Any attempt to measure our present institutional structures, curricula, style, or results by Gospel standards and values might seem to be too judgmental and unproductive. A more constructive approach might be to spell out our mission and ask ourselves whether SFTS is moving toward greater faithfulness as a pilgrim institution.

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