

ROUGH DRAFT

CONFIDENTIAL

TALKING PAPER ON THE DIVINITY SCHOOL

Ministerial education is in a worldwide crisis. Historic funding strategies aren't working. Historic streams of preministerial candidates have dried up. In many denominations, historically autonomous seminary faculties have been superseded by politically dominated policy boards. The feminist movement has opened seminary doors to candidates not yet welcome as lead ministers in churches. Contributed services by members of religious orders are being displaced by more conventional salary arrangements.

For the Southern United States, where religion and religious leaders are still significant forces in the affairs of the polity, the crisis in ministerial education and ministerial leadership has become a crisis for the culture. As circumstances polarize seminaries into the disparate missions of doctrinaire fundamentalism on the one hand and social agency workers on the other, the shortage of young new moderate ministers grows.

It is time to revisit, in an updated way, the enduring model of ministerial education first introduced by Harvard University in 1736. In this model, the corporate responsibility for setting curricular and quality standards centered in a congregation of specialists from all domains of knowledge, of scientists and social scientists and humanists. Ministerial education, like doctoral education in the science today, was implemented by specialists in theology and church institutions under the policies and standards set by the entire university faculty.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, this sound and sensible model for ministerial education largely disappeared. Universities, such as Harvard, started other professional programs that required more autonomy. Overburdened by the necessity to govern too many professional programs, decentralization of authority became the practice. At the same time, impatient with the value neutral era of scientific inquiry and sometimes insistent upon the acceptance of (even unexaminable) premises of religious faith, universities opened largely autonomous divinity schools and denominations built seminaries far

away from universities where other professionals were educated. In no denomination were the seminaries placed a greater distance from universities than among the Southern Baptists.

In the 1980's, the unintended consequences of these once sensible decisions began to undermine the profession. Today, most divinity schools and seminaries are massively underresourced. In sharp contrast to the legal and medical professions, these programs are by in large housed in obsolete buildings. They are slow to adopt new technologies. They are incapable of funding massive expansions in library acquisition budgets. Scholarship support is not sufficient to anticipate the low stream of earnings. Inefficiencies abound.

Much like medical schools in the 1900's and law schools in the 1950's and business schools in the 1960's, divinity schools of the 1990's are seeking renewal by the abandonment of freestanding independent status and the renewal of their relationships with universities. Most of the new efforts are consortia in the neighborhood of universities or relative autonomous professional schools within universities.

Wake Forest seems ideally positioned to take this idea one step further. The challenge of the 1990's is to assure the intellectual independence of the education of ministers in an environment of faith. The challenge of the 1990's is to recruit and retain some of the best and the brightest for the ministry. Because Wake Forest is in a region where religion matters, because Wake Forest's professional schools are intentionally intimate and interdisciplinary, because Wake Forest has a heritage of commitment of education of ministers and a large sense of responsibility to the Southern polity, because Wake Forest has alumni and friends with the capacity to fund well a new effort in divinity education, because Wake Forest has in place the governance procedures that can allow the arts and sciences faculty to shape academic policy for ministerial education, because Wake Forest attracts undergraduate students who have a propensity for and capacity to lead in the service of value based non-profit institutions -- it is altogether logical that we should accept responsibility for leading a movement wherein there are closer linkages between undergraduate years and graduate ministerial education, where there is closer linkage between education for other arts and sciences professions and education for the ministry.

Accordingly, we at Wake Forest are taking a major step to appoint an interdisciplinary taskforce of the Wake Forest faculty, and to provide the resources for several consultants to work with this group, toward the objective of developing a proposal for a first professional degree for ministers within our graduate school of arts and sciences. This same taskforce will examine the possibility of a program that might allow students to gain both their undergraduate baccalaureate degree and their first professional degree in ministry within a six-year period, or alternately to achieve these dual degrees in seven years while incorporating six to twelve months of professional internship and voluntary service into their academic programs.

We were prepared to start a more conventional divinity school if new resources could be found fully to fund such a program at a level commensurate with our other professional schools and at an equal academic standard. Such resources were not forthcoming. We believe that the reason such resources were not forthcoming was that our specific program and its leadership were too vague. We were neither able to demonstrate how Wake Forest would overcome the difficulties faced by existing divinity schools and seminaries throughout the nation, nor were we able to communicate the exact character of the education that would be offered. With the appointment of this taskforce and the development of this exciting idea, an idea that comes from within and has received the enhancing endorsement of two highly respected theological educators, we hope to intrigue foundation and individual support. We will suspend active fund raising for the divinity school during this two-year period while our concept is developed.

There is no doubt that the concept of a divinity school is being kept alive at Wake Forest University because of a very strong commitment from President Hearn and the trustees. Wake Forest would not be considering a divinity school without this strong commitment. For those who wish Wake Forest to act more quickly, we can only say that the only way we know to meet with integrity the desire all of us have is to do it well, within a soundly based financial plan, and with the imagination and the courage and the faith that these times of crisis in ministerial education require. Wake Forest is committed to do more than a divinity school. We are committed to making an enduring difference in the education of ministers.