

## CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATES!

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...that you may know what is the hope of [our] calling...

(Ephesians 1:18).

This is a time of acknowledgement and celebration. The first commencement (1642) among BTI schools, of the then Harvard College, saw graduates referred to as “commencers” under then President Henry Dunster. This was in view of the prospect of their entering upon a life of learning, collegiate discipline, and corporate piety. The first graduation theses were printed up as *New Englands First Fruits* (London, 1643). They reflected current theological issues at this third institution of higher learning in the then British Empire. How do we commence 366 years later?

Life in New England was an uncertain affair at that first “BTI” commencement. Not only did settlers face a “clash of civilizations” in an encounter with the indigenous population, disease and natural calamity were as real as the uncertainties they attributed to Spanish and French intentions to the south and north. (See Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community and War*, 2006.) Our uncertainties may not be quite similar, but they are equally intense. The workshop with Joseph Montville (George Mason University) at Boston University and the Walker Center on “*A Journey in Peace-Building*,” and “*The Healing of Memories*” in September helped to shape work in this academic year on Religion and Conflict Transformation in the context of global uncertainties. The positive role of the seminary in cultures of fear was raised up by Marshall Ganz and Richard Parker (both of the Kennedy School, Harvard), in addressing the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in October of Andover Newton with the theme of “*Advancing the ‘Beloved Community’: People, Power and Change.*”

Community and the nature of the church were topics in the sixteenth century and remain so today – and not just the differences between Plymouth and the Bay Colony! In this 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the Boston Roman Catholic Archdiocese, the faculty Task Force on Ecclesiology, under the leadership of Fr. Michael Fahey (Boston College), helped guide us through 18 months of reflection on the Faith and Order document, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, hosted by Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. And issues of ecclesiology, culture and community were subject of intense theological and missiological reflection in additional settings, including the Costas Consultation in Global Mission, this year with keynote Albert Borgmann (“*Technology and Mission: Proclamation, Social Justice and Global Engagement*”), evident in the screening of James Carroll’s *Constantine’s Sword* at Boston University and in the roundtable discussion at Harvard Divinity School, “*The Politics of God – A Dialogue Among the Children of Abraham*” (Rastafarian, Jewish, Muslim and Christian).

Political life was no more certain then than it is today: The Great Civil War (1642-6) broke out across England with implications for the colonies. Stuart and Anglican Charles I was captured (to lose his head in 1649), a period followed by the Interregnum and rule of Oliver Cromwell. Similarly, the run up to the American presidential elections of 2008 is seeing this nation debate not only the controverted issues of war and the economy, but that of race – central to the talk by Don Shriver (Union Theological Seminary, author of *Honest Patriots: Loving a Country Enough to*

*Remember its Misdeeds*, 2005) and panel at Episcopal Divinity School, “*Race in America: Barack Obama’s Speech on Race as a Lens for America’s Political Agenda.*” Likewise, this year also saw the completion of Katrina Browne’s documentary “*Traces of the Trade*” (Episcopal Divinity School). Space does not permit reflection on additional topics such as religion and ethnicity, economics or the environment.

International relations and church life in the sixteenth century were embroiled in a clash of civilizations. This also finds its counterpart today: Issues of religion and international affairs were the concern of programming at the Center for International Affairs and Justice,” Boston College, at Harvard Divinity School as well as other BTI schools. The BTI workshop in Korea, “*Reconciliation in Korean Church and Society,*” is built around the idea of learning from others in these regards. Our ministry is set in the context of learning to live in light of the hope and vision that we and others nurture together. Political and institutional uncertainties draws us to the phrase, frequently lifted up by Raymond Helmick, S. J., “Do not fear, because I am with you.” (Joshua 1:9); this is an idea that is central to ministerial training.

Training for ministry in the mid-sixteenth century witnessed a growing revolution in understanding and pedagogy, only to increase in pace by the time Leonard Hoar took over from Charles Chauncy as Harvard’s third president. Soon a new psychology and spirit of empiricism would become influential in the academic world. It is no different today, whether we wrestle with the social-psychological issues surrounding “*Forgiveness and Reconciliation,*” as we did with youth through Gordon-Conwell’s Center for Urban Ministerial Education or in such relational and legal settings as “*Facilitating the Re-entry of Sex Offenders*” back into our churches and communities after incarceration, both aspects of BTI programming in October and November. The topic of sexuality takes us into the summer with the Inter-Religious Center for Public Life – BTI co-sponsored conference on, “Covenant, Community and Sexuality,” at Andover Newton and Hebrew College. And all of this is shaped by the on-going discussions of science and theology, challenges in the training of religious leadership as evident at the recent AAAS conference held in February in Boston.

Leadership in biblical and hermeneutical studies continued to come from faculty throughout the consortium, yet names like those of Daniel Harrington and Richard Clifford of Weston Jesuit School of Theology continue to stand out for the ways they give leadership to national and international hermeneutical work surrounding the New Testament and Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. Education for religious leadership today is shaped, as then, by our understanding of what is truly important in the face of fear. It is given form by political context and hermeneutical debate. The new sciences and deepened historical perspective shape this hermeneutics as much as detailed textual and linguistic work.

Finally, ministry today as in the sixteenth century is shaped by good rhetoric, by good rhetorical models. Academic year 2007-2008 saw the passing of such models for ministry such as Krister Stendahl (HDS) and Sonia Belcher (HC) As commencers in a life of learning, collegiate discipline, and corporate piety, it is our hope as instructors and staff in the BTI schools that this year’s graduates become models for ministry in our common future (II Corinthians 5: 16-21).