

Lights Go Down, but Legacies Last

Peter Paris and Jack Stewart Retire from PTS Faculty

by **Barbara A. Chaapel**

Jack Stewart and Peter Paris won't soon forget the dinner honoring their retirements in May. At six o'clock as faculty and staff colleagues gathered in the Main Lounge, the lights went out!

The dining hall staff quickly adapted, sending the salmon and beans to Westminster Choir College for cooking and the potatoes to the Torrances' oven at Springdale. Food service director Amy Ehlin lit table candles, smiling all the while, and President Torrance tried hard to project his voice while welcoming the guests sans microphone.

By the time the electricity burst back on to applause an hour later, the gathering was in an appropriately festive mood to say

farewell to two beloved faculty colleagues.

After dinner, Geddes Hanson paid tribute to Stewart, his colleague in the Practical Theology Department. He welcomed Stewart's three sons and their families, quipping to Stewart, PTS's associate professor of ministry and evangelism, "Your family does not have to carry the weight of evangelism for the Presbyterian Church."

Hanson spoke of Stewart's two academic loves: church history and spirituality. When



Left to right: Maureen and Jack Stewart, Morag and Iain Torrance, and Adrienne Daniels Paris and Peter Paris

he joined the faculty in 1992, Stewart organized a conference on Charles Hodge, and with Jim Moorhead edited *Charles Hodge Revisited*. At the end of his teaching career, he cotaught a course on Hodge and Karl Barth with his colleague and Westminster College [in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania]

roommate, Dan Migliore. “Jack’s tenure at Princeton was bracketed by his interest in Hodge’s ‘Princeton Theology,’” Hanson said. “What drew Jack to Hodge was Hodge’s concern for the church, and issues that were facing the church of his time. Theology was the function of Hodge’s pastoral concern, as it was of Jack’s.”

Stewart’s other deep interest, Hanson said, is spirituality. Stewart offered a course on spirituality for church leaders and 145 students registered. A pastor in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for fifteen years before coming to PTS, Stewart taught his students that lay people are the primary caregivers in congregations, not ordained ministers. Once when his grandson was sick, he flew back to Michigan and found the deacons from his former church sitting and praying by the boy’s hospital bed.

Addressing friends and colleagues for the last time, Stewart remembered his Old Testament professor at Westminster College who invited him to go to Palestine. “I’d never been more than 100

miles from home, so I took a quantum leap in going,” Stewart said. He met Palestinian friends who “taught me what it was like to live in an oppressed culture”; thus began an interest in the world church that took Stewart and his students to Jerusalem, Bosse (Switzerland), St. Andrews (Scotland), Malawi, South Korea, South Africa, and Egypt. (“He should have had a chair in peripatetics,” joked Hanson.)

Stewart related a story of Charles Hodge sitting at the deathbed of his professor Archibald Alexander. “‘It has been the greatest privilege of my life to have brought you forward,’ said the dying theologian to his student, before he began to cry and kissed him.” Stewart continued, “It has been the greatest privilege of mine to have brought a few students forward in ministry in communities around the world.”

The honor fell to Dan Migliore to speak on behalf of the faculty about Peter Paris. A native of Nova Scotia, Paris has held the Elmer G. Homrighausen Chair of Christian Social Ethics at PTS since 1985. Migliore spoke of the excellence of Paris’s teaching, his distinguished scholarship, his fine administrative skills, and his personal integrity and grace. He reminded faculty colleagues that Paris taught a course on Aristotle, examining



Photo: Emily Dumler

The Stewart clan



Photo: Emily Dumler

Peter Paris with his family

the qualities of virtue, character, and friendship. “Aristotle would have recognized Peter Paris as a truly virtuous person, concerned with the common good, and one who knew the meaning of friendship,” said Migliore.

“And one virtue Peter possesses that Aristotle did not—a smile to greet everyone and a hearty laugh. Peter made joy a part of his theology!”

Migliore also highlighted Paris’s concern for justice. “Peter is a strong advocate for justice in all things, and a peacemaker,” Migliore said. “His unassuming personality is steadfast and unmovable in support of what he believes.” Migliore compared Paris to two of the greats in American theological ethics. “Like the Niebuhr brothers [Reinhold and H. Richard], Peter has spent his entire adult life teaching Christian ethics in theological schools, with a deep faith in God and

a prophetic critique of all idolatries,” he said. “For Peter, Jesus’ call to love of neighbor shatters all conventional definitions of the love of neighbor.”

Paris has also served as the Seminary’s liaison with Princeton University’s African American Studies Program, and Migliore credited him with building and strengthening bridges between the two institutions. Migliore called Martin Luther King Jr., in whose honor Paris helped establish an annual lecture at the Seminary, a compatriot of Paris. “Peter is a persuasive heir and interpreter of King’s tradition of nonviolence,” he said. “Like King, he is active in nonviolent resistance to the evils of poverty in the midst of affluence, and of idolatry to wealth, nation, or religion. Peter has shared Martin Luther King’s dream with us at Princeton Seminary.”



Photo: Emily Dumler

Jack Stewart (left) celebrates with colleagues

For his part, Paris thanked the PTS community for its support after the death of his wife, Shirley, and after his later marriage to Adrienne. He will “miss the annual experience of meeting new

students and advising Ph.D. students.” He hopes that in the not-too-distant future, African American studies will be a fully legitimate academic field. “If I have a legacy, it would be that Martin Luther King Jr. would continue to be honored as a theologian in this Seminary, worthy of being taught alongside all the other theological giants.”

The evening ended with laughter, applause—and some tears. President Torrance presented gifts of a weathervane to Stewart and a reading lamp and rocking chair to Paris—both gifts, it was learned on the sly, that the recipients wished for—and pronounced the benediction over a community come to the end of another academic year, and for two of its members, of an academic career. ■