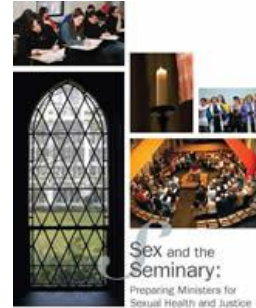


## Sex and the Seminary?

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

The release of a report entitled "[Sex and the Seminary](#)" is certain to attract attention — which is no doubt why the report was produced in the first place. In this case, the report is an attempt to push the sexual revolution through institutions designed for the training of ministers. As "[Sex and the Seminary](#)" makes clear, many liberal institutions joined the sexual revolution long ago.

The report was released January 8, 2009 by the "Sexuality Education for the Formation of Religious Professionals and Clergy" project, which is jointly sponsored by [Union Theological Seminary in New York City](#) and the [Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing](#) in Connecticut. As might be expected, the report calls for an overhaul of how issues of sexuality are treated within the seminary curriculum.



"At the time when many denominations and faith communities are embroiled in sexuality issues, there is an urgent need for leaders who understand the connections between religion and sexuality," the report announces.

Then:

*Seminaries are not providing future religious leaders with sufficient opportunities for study, self-assessment, and ministry formation in sexuality. They are also not providing seminarians with the skills they need to minister to their congregants and communities, or to become effective advocates where sexuality issues are concerned.*

As a reading of the report reveals, the entire project is really about turning seminaries into agencies for a liberal and revisionist sexual agenda. As the analysis in the report demonstrates, some of these schools embraced those agendas long ago — and in a big way.

The study was conducted by Kate M. Ott, study director for the project, with assistance from many others. Among those most frequently acknowledged is [Rev. Debra W. Haffner](#), director of the [Religious Institute on Sexual Morality, Justice, and Healing](#). Debra Haffner's name will be recognized immediately by anyone involved in issues of sexual controversy in recent decades. She is an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister, but previously she served as chief executive officer of [SIECUS](#), the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, and, among other positions, as an official with Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington. She has been pushing a radical sexual agenda for a long time.

Thirty-six seminaries cooperated with the study — almost all on the liberal side of the theological divide. These schools were measured in light of the "Criteria for a Sexually Healthy and Responsible Seminary" document that had been "developed by a multifaith group of seminary educators, administrators, and sexuality educators."

The report found virtually all of the seminaries deficient to some degree. The report lamented the fact that half of the schools "do not have policies for full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons" and over 60% "do not have full inclusion policies for transgender persons."

While the report calls for a thorough restructuring of seminary education, it also calls upon the [Association of Theological Schools](#) in the United States and Canada [ATS], the main accrediting agency for theological schools to require accredited schools to make sexuality issues (in terms of "sexual justice") standards for accreditation. The

Religious Institute also pledged to “work with ATS member schools as they advocate for changes in and contribute to revisions of the ATS Standards for Accreditation scheduled for 2012.”

Well, we have been warned.

The report makes for riveting reading. Almost half of the schools queried indicated that worship experiences in chapel at least occasionally focused on gay, lesbian, or bisexual experiences. Seven of the 36 schools also offered worship focused on transgender issues.

Consider this section of the recommendations:

*Seminaries also must assure a supportive environment for sexuality-related issues. Seminaries must have anti-discrimination, sexual harassment, and full inclusion policies that reflect sexual and gender diversities. It was a welcome surprise that almost 9 out of the 10 seminaries have anti-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation, and half have such policies for transgender students, staff, and faculty; other seminaries, unless prohibited by their faith traditions, should implement such policies. In addition, seminaries must provide opportunities for worship and advocacy that reflect the diversity of sexuality issues students will encounter in their ministry.*

All this adds up to a huge effort to redefine what is normative in theological education, but the larger agenda is to remove the churches as obstacles to the deconstruction of biblical sexual morality.

Obviously, many of these schools have already joined that bandwagon. They long ago abandoned biblical authority and the Gospel and transformed Christianity into a form of sexualized paganism. The “worship” practices revealed in the report suffice to establish that point.

If nothing else, this report underlines the great divide that now exists among America’s theological schools. There is good reason to ask whether any shared basis of accreditation is possible, given the depth and significance of this divide. Time will tell, but the aim is clear — to put seminaries committed to a normative biblical morality on notice that such schools may for a time be tolerated, but the standards will push schools toward “inclusion” of “sexual and gender diversities” among students, staff, and faculty.

The moment regional accrediting agencies or the ATS moves in that direction, the writing on the wall will be clear. Sanity may yet prevail, but “[Sex and the Seminary](#)” is a sign of where the liberal schools want to see theological education, the church, and the society go.

No doubt, schools committed to biblical authority and confessional integrity must do a better job of preparing ministers to understand the issues of sexuality. But the goal must be to inculcate knowledge of and commitment to a biblical model of human sexuality centered in the glory of God and obedience to God’s Word. We must also train pastors to be compassionate in teaching and applying God’s revealed truth. These goals are not, however, the goals or recommendations of “[Sex and the Seminary](#).”

“Together,” the report concludes, “we can assure that future religious leaders will indeed be pastors for sexual health and prophets for sexual justice.” If you understand what those words mean, you will see that statement for the threat that it is.

