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Gift endows interdisciplinary studies of theology and the environment at Yale

Rich Heffern | Dec. 10, 2010 Eco Catholic

The following is a press release.

NEW HAVEN, CT -A gift pledge of $3 million will endow a joint senior faculty appointment between Yale Divinity School/Berkeley Divinity School and the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in honor of H. Boone Porter, a Berkeley and Yale graduate, and his wife, Violet M. Porter.

The endowment promises to substantially enhance the interdisciplinary study of theology and the environment that has taken hold at Yale in recent years, culminating in the establishment of a joint degree program. The gift, finalized on Nov. 29, comes from the children of the Porters through the Porter Foundation. Boone Porter, who died in 1999, was a scholar, priest, writer, and environmentalist, and both he and his wife had a particularly significant impact on the life of the Episcopal Church.

Yale Divinity School Dean Harold Attridge said, "This gift from the Porter Foundation will ensure that the collaboration that has developed in recent years between Yale Divinity School and the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies will continue and expand into an even more fruitful partnership. The environmental challenges that we face involve not only scientific and technical issues, but also issues of fundamental values and moral commitments."

Peter Crane, Dean of the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, said, "We are delighted and humbled by the commitment of the Porter family and truly excited by the new opportunity to further develop the already-strong connections between religion and environmental stewardship at Yale."

"For Berkeley, this gift is not only an important contribution to addressing the urgent ecological issues of our day," observed Berkeley Dean Joseph Britton. "It also places the seminary in the forefront of theological education in the Episcopal Church, vividly demonstrating the larger horizon in a university divinity school."

Yale has been at the leading edge of the burgeoning religion/ecology synthesis and created the nation's first joint Master's degree program in religion and the environment. In recent years, several faculty with a faith/ecology focus have come to the University, and a number of major conferences on religion and the environment have been hosted by Yale. Divinity School alumni continue to be nationally prominent in the field.

Porter Foundation President Nicholas T. Porter, who graduated from both Yale College and the Divinity School and is a trustee of Berkeley Divinity School, said, "As a graduate of Yale College, Berkeley Divinity School, and Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, my father knew that his work and life was deeply shaped, informed and enriched by these great institutions. As a memorial to both him and my mother, we are delighted to be able to similarly enrich the lives and studies of future students of Berkeley and Yale."

"The field of religion and ecology is growing at a rapid rate," said Mary Evelyn Tucker, who has joint faculty appointments in the Divinity and Environment schools. "The Porter Chair is a sign of this growth and will be the

first such chair in the United States. It is an historic moment and a great contribution, not only to Yale Divinity School but to seminary education across the country and beyond."

In 1954 Boone Porter began a teaching career at Nashotah House, an Episcopal seminary near Milwaukee, WI, then was appointed the first tenured professor of liturgy at The General Theological Seminary in New York City. Later in his career he was editor of the weekly magazine The Living Church, a publication focused on the Anglican tradition. He also had a major role in the development of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. He graduated from Yale College in 1945, then earned degrees from Berkeley in 1950 and the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in 1996. In 1997 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Berkeley.

In addition to the endowment for a Porter professorship, the Porter family also donated Boone Porter's papers to Yale, working especially through H. Boone Porter III, a 1972 graduate of Yale College. They have been deposited in the Yale Divinity School Library, and document the fecundity of Boone Porter's lifelong commitment both to the church and environment.

Yale Divinity School and Berkeley Divinity School, a seminary of the Episcopal Church, began their affiliation in 1971. Berkeley maintains an independent board of trustees and dean, but both schools are located on the Yale campus at Sterling Divinity Quadrangle. Berkeley students receive Yale degrees, along with a diploma or certificate in Anglican Studies from Berkeley.

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