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THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
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105 Seminary Road
San Anselmo, CA 94960
415.451.2800
www.sfts.edu

SFTS Contact
Holly Woolard
Communications Associate
415-451-2823
hwoolard@sfts.edu

Wickeri joins elite group as GTU Distinguished Lecturer

SAN ANSELMO, Calif., Nov. 18 – Dr. Philip Wickeri, the Flora Lamson Hewlett Professor of Evangelism and Mission at San Francisco Theological Seminary, delivered the 2009 Graduate Theological Union's Distinguished Faculty Lecture on Nov. 17 at the Pacific School of Religion Chapel of the Great Commission in Berkeley.

Wickeri, whose lecture was entitled, "Awkward and Alive: Secularization and Religion Reconsidered," is just the fourth SFTS professor to receive this honor, joining Benjamin Reist, Anne Wire and Lewis Mudge. Nominations are accepted from all GTU member schools, one nomination per school (individual schools are not allowed to nominate their own faculty), and the final selection is made by the Council of Deans of GTU member schools.

"It's a high honor," said Dr. Elizabeth Liebert, SFTS dean and vice president for academic affairs.

Speaking before a packed chapel, Wickeri was surrounded by SFTS and GTU faculty, students, many from outside the seminary communities and even a Nobel Prize winner. Besides the honor, the lecture served as a goodbye for Wickeri, who will be moving to Hong Kong in January to serve on the staff of the Anglican Province of Hong Kong (Sheng Kung Hui) as advisor to the Archbishop on Theological and Historical Studies.

"Debates over secularization in Europe and North America in the 1960s gave way in the early 1970s to discussions about the persistence of religious belief, and the rise of both new and traditional forms of religion, including Christianity, in the Global South and other parts of the world," Wickeri pointed out during his lecture. "Today, religious choice is inevitably a reflection, reaffirmation or rejection of some version of the secular. For individuals and communities, the choice involves coming to terms with other religious possibilities."

According to Liebert, Wickeri sees things that others overlook because of his range of experiences.

“His long experience in China and his work with worldwide ecumenical bodies make him particularly qualified to speak on this topic,” Liebert said. “He has a unique perspective on the ways that the secular and religion interact in various places in the world.”

Dr. Eduardo Fernandez, S.J. of the Jesuit School of Theology, responded.

A reception took place in the Pacific School of Religion's Bade Museum.

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