

II. A. The Origin and Growth of Doctor of Ministry Programs

In 1970 the American Association of Theological Schools voted to authorize its member institutions to award the Doctor of Ministry degree. The first standards for accrediting such programs were approved two years later. Thus the D.Min. is a relatively recent activity of theological schools: At the inception of our study in 1982, almost all programs were less than 10 years old. But the idea of a doctoral degree for professional ministry is as old as the Association itself. When the Association was incorporated in 1936, it confronted a great variety of program names and lengths in its new member schools. Some proposed to offer a four-year program with a doctoral name. Thus from the beginning the question of a professional doctorate was entwined with two others: What should be the length of the program of basic professional preparation for ministry? What is the proper nomenclature for ministerial degrees? The earliest reports of presidents and the Executive Secretary of the Association repeatedly raised these issues. [A recent dissertation by Robert George Duffett, The History and Development of the Doctor of Ministry Degree at the Minnesota Consortium of Theological Schools: 1957-1985, University of Iowa, 1986, contains an excellent chapter on the history of the D.Min. This Report has benefited greatly from Mr. Duffett's research and interpretation.]

In 1937, a committee was appointed to study these questions of program length and nomenclature. In 1942, the Association approved a report affirming the three-year Bachelor of Divinity as the basic theological degree but also approving in principle a doctoral degree to be built upon it. This doctorate, the action of the Association suggested, would be granted by the member schools corporately, rather than conferred by individual institutions. Throughout the period of the 1940s, an Association committee, under the leadership of Lewis Sherrill, prepared concrete proposals for a professional doctorate to be given nationally. Under these plans a national board of graduate professional studies would devise syllabi, bibliographies and examinations. Pastors would pursue the doctoral program, projected to take ten years of part-time study to complete, under the direct supervision of any accredited school of the Association that chose to participate. Though the nomenclature for this degree was never definitely decided, all of the possibilities considered were doctoral degree names.

As the Sherrill committee worked through several biennial periods, opposition to the idea of a centrally-administered doctoral program grew. In 1948, a plan similar to the Sherrill proposal in curricular form but omitting the idea of a national degree-granting board was submitted and approved by the Association in principle. The committee was instructed to continue the development of its proposal and to report back to the Association. Interest among institutions was waning, however, and in 1952 after nearly 20 years of debate and discussion, the Executive Committee, acting for the Association, voted

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to dismiss the committee and the question of the professional doctorate.

Though the Association convened committees during the 1950s to deal with doctoral concerns, their focus was largely on academic research doctoral degrees granted by seminaries. The idea of a professional doctorate did not, however, disappear. In the late 1950s, several seminaries on their own became convinced that theological education was ripe for major reform, and that a significant element of that reform should be the lengthening of the basic program of study to four years, and the raising of standards for ministerial preparation, so that these new four-year programs could qualify as doctoral-level work. Prominent among the leaders of these institutions was Ernest Cadman Colwell, who served as Dean of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, President of the University of Chicago, and then founding President of the School of Theology at Claremont. Colwell had worked at the University of Chicago with Robert Hutchins and had strong views about theological education that bore some resemblance to Hutchins' notions about the improvement of undergraduate education. He was convinced that higher education could be a more intensive experience and could lead to a higher level of educational achievement than contemporary program structures encouraged or permitted. With such goals in view, Colwell convinced the faculty at Claremont to replace its three-year B.D. program with a new four-year program that would presuppose introduction of theological studies at the undergraduate level and would lead to the achievement of a doctoral level of competence in four years. Claremont announced its new degree, called the Doctor of Religion (D.Rel.), in 1962. Two years later, the Divinity School of the University of Chicago announced its move to a four-year program, called the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.). In the same period, the Vanderbilt Divinity School announced that it would give a four-year professional doctoral degree, the Doctor of Divinity (D.Div.), to a select group of its students willing to pursue a four-year program; at the same time, Vanderbilt would continue to give the three-year B.D. to the majority of its students. Already underway was a different kind of professional doctoral program at San Francisco Theological Seminary, which offered a doctoral degree to practicing ministers who were willing to pursue seven or eight years of part-time study. San Francisco called its program the Doctor of the Science of Theology (S.T.D.).

The independent action of these four institutions caused consternation in the Association in the mid-1960s. There were several different strands in the controversy that ensued. The announced goal of Claremont, Chicago and Vanderbilt, the three seminaries that had instituted a four-year doctoral program as a first or basic theological degree, was the reform and upgrading of theological education generally. Institutions that had fewer resources or less formidable reputations than these three were concerned that a new standard for a "first-class" theological degree would be set that they could not meet. For others, the issue of parity of nomenclature was most prominent. Some law schools had recently begun to award a doctoral degree (the

J.D.) for first-level professional work. By comparison, reasoned some seminaries, the Bachelor of Divinity suggested preparation at an elementary level. Some institutions that wanted to abandon the B.D. favored the move to a master's degree. A few favored doctoral nomenclature for the three-year program, and others joined the experimenting schools in wanting to see the basic program lengthened to four years. In general, the schools that had longest been members of the Association and were generally viewed as strongest favored retaining the B.D. nomenclature or the move to four-year programs. Institutions that had joined more recently, in general, favored the three-year program and master's nomenclature. To adjudicate these sharp differences among schools about program length and degree nomenclature, a new round of committees was appointed. In 1966, the Commission on Reference and Counsel proposed a compromise: The basic three-year degree should be retained, with schools given the choice whether to use the B.D. or a master's designation. The Commission further suggested that only schools that met the highest standards for the basic degree be allowed to use the master's nomenclature. It also recommended that a subsequent committee draft standards for a professional doctoral degree. A committee was appointed to carry out this assignment, chaired by Seward Hiltner, who had engineered the successful nomenclature compromise.

The Hiltner committee met often and worked energetically. It held national hearings, and produced a proposal for standards for the professional doctorate. As envisioned by the Hiltner committee, the degree would be a demanding undertaking. Qualifications for admissions would be set high, and there would be language requirements as well as comprehensive exams and other demonstrations of the ability to use secular and theological disciplines in reflection on the practice of ministry. Schools granting the professional doctorate would have to submit examples of their comprehensive examinations and copies of dissertations and project reports in order to receive and retain accreditation to give the degree. At the 1968 Biennial Meeting at which it was presented, the Hiltner report met considerable protest. The standards it proposed were softened at a number of points, and finally the whole report was reduced to use as guidelines rather than accreditation standards. Prominent in the opposition to the Hiltner report were the experimenting schools, who found the standards proposed far too limiting and specific, and the suggested accreditation procedures an unwarranted constraint on their right to develop their programs. Further, though the Hiltner committee did not rule out the four-year basic program, it clearly favored the professional doctorate as a pursuit for ministers already in practice. Thus, the three experimenting schools that viewed their four-year programs as efforts in reforming the basic theological degree had further reason to oppose the Hiltner report.

Since the Hiltner effort had failed to settle the question of the nature of the professional doctorate, another committee was appointed, with Krister Stendahl of Harvard Divinity School as chair. This

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committee was to deal directly with the question of whether the professional doctorate should become the first theological degree. No members of the Hiltner committee were appointed to serve on the Stendahl committee; a sign of the bitter debate that the debate on the Hiltner proposals had engendered.

The Stendahl committee issued its report in 1970. Its first recommendation was that the three-year degree should remain as the standard. For this degree it proposed the uniform nomenclature Master of Divinity. (This recommendation was passed without debate, though the matter of first degree nomenclature had been the source of deep controversy only four years before.) The Stendahl committee further recommended that schools with strong academic resources be authorized to grant a professional doctorate, the D.Min, if they chose to do so. This degree, according to the report, should be conceived as a program of four or more years with "its own integrity" built on the A.B. degree. It was portrayed as a degree for candidates for ministry who show unusual promise for pastoral ministry. Though the emphasis of the Stendahl report was clearly on the D.Min. as a basic theological degree for especially able candidates, the report also directed schools to devise ways for holders of the B.D. or M.Div. degree to obtain the professional doctorate if they could qualify to do so. The Stendahl committee did not propose standards for the professional doctorate, but suggested that a committee be convened to do this.

The Stendahl report was accepted with only a few changes, though these changes were to prove highly significant. Chief among them was the amendment of the proposal that the D.Min. degree be conceived as a program built on the A.B., by the substitution of "M.Div." for "A.B." For consistency then, references to the D.Min. as a four-year degree were removed from the report. Thus the D.Min. was established as an advanced degree. Though schools were by no means prohibited from giving it in sequence with M.Div. studies, it was adopted as a separate undertaking, built on the normative M.Div., rather than as an improved, upgraded form of basic professional preparation. The reform efforts of the experimenting schools had come to a somewhat paradoxical end. Their professional doctoral programs were now officially authorized; further, the Stendahl report stressed their right to experiment, a right they had strongly felt the Hiltner report would have foreclosed. But their basic motive, the reform of foundational theological education, was contradicted by the portrayal of the D.Min. as a second or advanced degree. Evidence in published reports and correspondence suggests that the experimenting schools did not think at the time that they had lost very much in the amendments to the Stendahl report. Dean F. Thomas Trotter of Claremont, for instance, wrote in the Christian Century [July 15, 1970: 861] that the "persistent efforts" of Claremont and the other doctorate-granting schools "have paid off." He and others predicted that the D.Min. as a basic degree would become prevalent and that the D.Min. as a form of advanced pastoral studies would be developed only as a matter of fairness to ministers who had earned the B.D. before the establishment of the D.Min.

Those who predicted the rapid development of in-sequence D.Min. programs were, of course, wrong. As Marvin Taylor of the Association of Theological Schools reported in 1976 ["Some Reflections on the Development and Current Status of the D.Min.," Theological Education 12, Summer: 211-278], very little of the rapid early growth in D.Min. enrollments is accounted for by in-sequence programs. In 1975, for instance, only 499 students, or about 14% of the total D.Min. enrollment of 3710, were pursuing the degree in-sequence, and more than half of those were enrolled in only two schools -- Claremont and Union in Virginia. Union in Virginia was, in fact, the only institution in addition to Claremont and Chicago to have replaced its basic three-year program with a four-year Doctor of Ministry program. A number of institutions offered an in-sequence option in connection with a D.Min. program designed primarily for those in ministry, but most such programs enrolled only a few in-sequence students. By the time of our survey in 1984, four-year, in-sequence programs had virtually disappeared. Chicago, Claremont, Vanderbilt, and Union in Virginia had all decided to give the three-year M.Div. as the basic ministry degree. One-third of the institutions replying to our survey had at one time offered the D.Min. in-sequence, but only a handful of these (six programs of 64 reporting) still offered an in-sequence option.

In retrospect it is difficult to recapture the perspectives that created such strong differences between those who advocated the professional doctorate in-sequence and those who argued that it was better offered as an advanced degree for those already in ministerial service. Though some of the later polemical literature implies that those who advocated the in-sequence pattern may have had more "academic" concerns, and the other group more "practical" ones, a careful reading of materials from the 1960s does not support such an interpretation. In fact, the Hiltner committee, which favored the in-ministry D.Min., also proposed stringent academic standards. One of the objections of the experimenting schools to the Hiltner report, in fact, was that the proposed standards seemed too heavily influenced by the requirements for the Ph.D. In a similar vein, the Stendahl report, which advocated the in-sequence pattern as the primary D.Min. form, argued vigorously for a more "professional" conception of theological education for ministry. Thus it does not seem possible to distinguish the two groups on the basis of "academic" and "professional" emphases. Both, in fact, were very much caught up in the 1960s movement to reconceive theological education as professional education.

The factors that eventually proved most influential in shaping the development of the D.Min. and in influencing particular institutions to join one side or the other of the debate were two that were noted but not stressed during the debate: The competitive position of certain schools versus others; and the growing demand for continuing education for ministers. Competition seems to have functioned in two ways. First, smaller schools and those that had only recently gained accreditation felt themselves at a competitive disadvantage as they faced the prospect of a few schools offering a four-year, doctoral-level degree as basic preparation for ministry. A number of

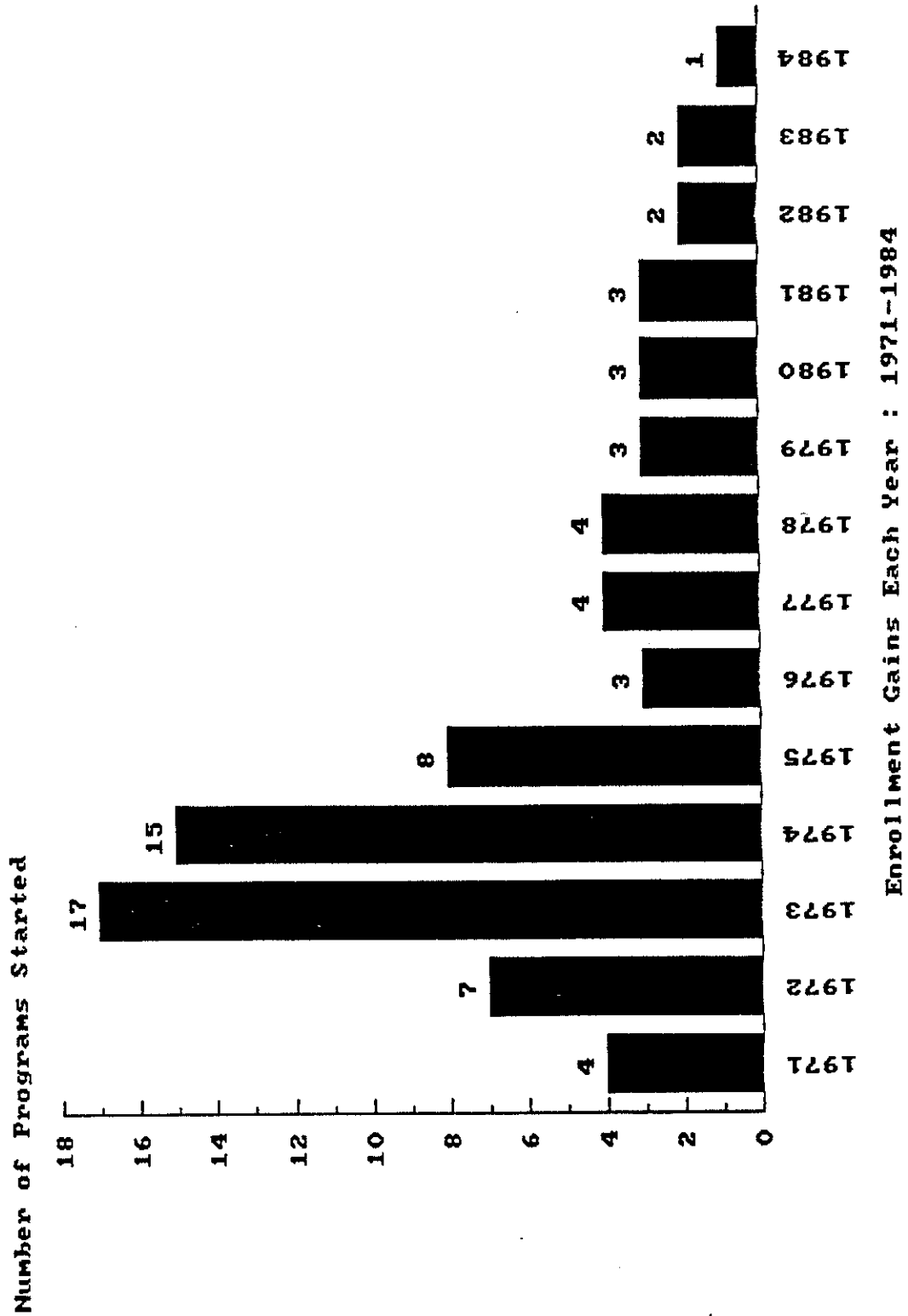
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these institutions joined those who argued for the professional doctorate as a one-year, in-ministry degree, not because they intended to give the one-year degree, but because they feared the consequences of the four-year doctorate becoming a new norm. The second effect of competition on these schools was to push some of them later to create at least a small in-ministry program, primarily because other institutions in their denomination or region were doing so. It is also clear that the strength of the continuing education movement as a factor was underestimated at the time. Though in 1968 there was little enthusiasm for the Hiltner Committee's proposal of a professional doctorate that was primarily an advanced professional degree, less than ten years later the majority of Protestant schools in the Association were offering such a degree. When asked in 1984 why their institutions had begun in-ministry D.Min. programs, almost all the responding chief executives said that the major factor had been either direct requests from graduates and other constituency groups, or a more general sense that the church needed and wanted continuing education programs of good quality that the seminary could provide.

Successive revisions in the Standards for accrediting the D.Min. mark the fate of the in-sequence option and other early ideas about the D.Min. The 1972 version, and the further revision in 1974 that was part of the redrafting of the Standards for all degrees, incorporated many of the compromises that brought the D.Min. into being. Both in-sequence and in-ministry forms were permitted. Both emphases of the Stendahl report -- on the professional nature of the degree and on high standards of excellence -- were retained. The next major revision, in 1984, displayed major changes: Language that suggests that the degree is intended only for the most promising was removed, as were references to such academic features as library research. Standards for in-sequence programs, by now almost extinct, were eliminated. Many of the key ideas of both the Hiltner and Stendahl proposals were, in other words, absent from the new Standards.

As suggested in the foregoing account, the D.Min. grew very rapidly. Figure I shows the rapid growth in the number of programs. By 1974, only four years after the approval of the degree and two years after the issuing of the first standards, over half of all programs currently in existence were already begun. Growth in enrollments is more difficult to analyze, since enrollment tabulations for in-sequence and in-ministry programs were not kept separately before 1975. But the pattern in available enrollment data is similar to the pattern of program development: Enrollment in in-ministry programs in 1975, 3211 students, is almost exactly half of enrollment in 1984, 6721 students. Half of the growth in enrollment in in-ministry programs, in other words, was accomplished in the first five years; the other half has been stretched over a period twice as long. Though enrollment has increased every year, there is no clear pattern in that growth: Since 1975, as shown in Table I, annual gains have fluctuated between 542 and 207 students, and growth rates between 17% and 3%. Although the highest figures are found at the beginning of the period and the lowest

Figure I
Number of D. Min. Programs Started Each Year
1971-1984



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at the end, there is considerable oscillation in both numbers and rates in between.

TABLE I Total Enrollment in D.Min. Programs

	<u>In-sequence and In-ministry</u>	<u>In-ministry Only</u>	<u>Gain From Previous Year</u>
1984		6721	207 (3%)
1983		6514	336 (5%)
1982		6188	276 (4%)
1981		5912	361 (7%)
1980		5551	224 (4%)
1979		5327	494 (10%)
1978		4833	342 (8%)
1977		4491	239 (6%)
1976		4252	542 (17%)
1975	3710	3211	544
1974	3176		718
1973	2456		918
1972	1540		862
1971	688		

Why did so many schools move so quickly to offer the newly-authorized degree? We have already suggested a major reason, the one most frequently given by the institutions we surveyed: Both seminaries and churches were newly aware of the desirability of continuing education for clergy and the D.Min. seemed to offer a framework for disciplined and demanding continuing education. As already noted, some institutions were moved to establish D.Min. programs by direct requests from graduates and other clergy groups; others acted out of a more general sense that there was a need for and growing clergy interest in continuing education. A smaller number of institutions admits to having had institutional motives, in addition to or rather than educational ones: To generate income, to offset falling enrollments in the M.Div. program, or to "keep up" with other, competing institutions that recently established D.Min. programs. One president in the last category, for instance, wrote that his institution was afraid it would be viewed as less concerned than other seminaries of the denomination about clergy in local churches if it failed to develop a D.Min. program. A few institutions report that the major motive for establishing a D.Min. program was to provide new experiences or stimulus for faculty, to help generate a new kind of research, or to offer a distinctive "alternative" to the majority of D.Min. programs. In the main, however, public demand and an interest in providing continuing education of good quality are the major announced reasons that schools so quickly adopted the degree. Though less widely acknowledged, economic and demographic conditions probably also played

a part. Inflation hit seminaries hard in the early 1970s and caught most institutions by surprise. At the same time there was widespread fear that post-Vietnam War enrollments would drop. Both factors probably made the prospect of a new, student and income producing program more attractive.

The D.Min. has had markedly more appeal in some quarters than others. Almost all institutions offering the degree and clergy taking it have been Protestant. The D.Min. has had most impact among Presbyterians. Presbyterian seminaries all offer the degree, and two of the four largest programs are in Presbyterian schools. Several other mainline denominations have also been fairly heavily involved, though no other denomination has enrolled as many of its clergy as have the Presbyterians. Episcopal institutions are an exception to the Protestant pattern: Only three Episcopal seminaries offer the D.Min., and two of these programs were begun rather recently. Schools in denominations that can be classified evangelical or conservative, and interdenominational schools that serve an evangelical constituency, did not, for the most part, offer the D.Min. during the degree's early years, but increasing numbers of such institutions have begun to offer it and, as will be recounted later in detail, the rate of growth in the total number of such programs and in their enrollment has been rapid. For the most part, Roman Catholic institutions and clergy have avoided the D.Min. There are only two accredited Roman Catholic programs, and the numbers of Roman Catholic clergy in Protestant programs are very small. Nor are Canadians much involved in the D.Min.: The degree is granted in Canada at two sites, but both programs are small and few Canadian ministers cross the border to participate in D.Min. programs. Though two of the three predominantly Black seminaries offer the degree, Black clergy have not pursued the D.Min. in large numbers.

The reasons for the participation and non-participation of different groups in the D.Min. vary a good deal, and in some cases are difficult to establish with certainty. The Episcopal seminaries, we were told, had among them an informal agreement that no seminary would offer the D.Min. by itself, that is, without the cooperation of some other institution or group of institutions; this agreement was ended only a few years ago. The growth of the D.Min. in Canada may have been slowed by the decision of the United Church of Canada to support only two programs (though one of these, at the Toronto School of Theology, was a joint venture of a group of institutions). The reasons for the Presbyterians' special enthusiasm for the D.Min. are debated later in this report. One view is that the Presbyterian attraction to the D.Min. is related to that denomination's historic emphasis on a learned ministry. Another interpretation is that the Presbyterians benefited from the presence of extraordinarily able program organizers in two of their institutions at the time that the D.Min. was approved. (One of the Presbyterian seminaries that supports a large D.Min. program, San Francisco, was, as noted above, offering an advanced professional doctorate long before the D.Min. was approved in 1970.) The most common explanation for the lack of Roman Catholic interest in the D.Min. is that the degree does not fit easily into the Roman Catholic

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Church's system of clergy education and deployment. The late start among many evangelical institutions in establishing D.Min. programs is due at least in part to the fact that a number of these institutions have only recently joined the ATS and there confronted the possibility of offering this new degree.

In the year on which our study focused, 1983-84, we counted 77 accredited programs offered by 83 institutions. Tabulating the number of D.Min. programs is tricky: At any moment, one or more new programs has just been announced, several may be in abeyance, and others are entering into new, joint sponsorship arrangements. (Even the ATS has no definition of when a program formally comes into, or goes out of, existence. Some programs are listed in ATS documents and directories as soon as they are announced, others not until they are at least provisionally accredited.) Very few programs, once begun, have gone out of existence. In several cases, programs have "died" when the sponsoring institution changed form or merged with another institution; in a few other cases, ATS has ordered an institution to suspend giving the D.Min. when it has deemed faculty and other resources inadequate to support the program; and one or two programs have faded away because enrollments dropped below acceptable levels. But our survey yielded information about only one thriving program whose faculty voted to end it because they did not feel that its demands were consonant with their primary educational mission. Nor, as we recount in the last section of our Research Report, do many institutions predict that they will cease giving the degree in the foreseeable future. Though growth in the numbers of D.Min. programs and of students enrolled has slowed somewhat, the D.Min. appears to be well established in North American theological education.