

Thought, Feeling, and Purpose

A DECADE after the Harvard Divinity School's founding in 1816, William Ellery Channing spoke at the dedication of Divinity Hall. "We want more than knowledge," he said. "We want force of thought, feeling, and purpose . . . We want powerful ministers, men fitted to act on men . . . to make themselves *felt* in society." This aspiration—to combine education and action in pursuit of Veritas—has broadened over three centuries from "the serious, impartial, and unbiased investigation of Christian truth" advocated by early supporters to the robust academic and professional study of all five major faiths and their place in the world. Today, men and women with dozens of religious affiliations—or none at all—contribute to a community dedicated to courtesy, openness, and respect. The Harvard Divinity School is a pinnacle of pluralism in a complex global landscape.

In recent years, this community has opened more fully to students from across the University. Courses such as *Border Crossings: Immigration in America*, which included a spring break visit to Arizona last year, create opportunities for students to see the interplay of religion and other disciplines firsthand—one aspect of a revitalized undergraduate concentration in the comparative study of religion. At the same time, graduate students preparing for advanced research in religion and theological studies have a new option available to them—a joint PhD program offered by the Divinity School and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. From these and other courses of study emerge remarkable alumni who are ministering to members of their communities, including agnostics and atheists; applying their knowledge in fields ranging from business to law to medicine to public policy; and making important contributions to arts and culture, including award-winning novels and celebrated collections of poetry.

The broad interests of Divinity School faculty are manifest in programs and centers

committed to answering some of the most important questions of our time. How does the increasing diversity of religions in America influence our shared public life? What role does religion play in shaping the roles of women and men in public and in private? How do world religions and their interrelationships affect global conflicts? The Center for the Study of World Religions advances the exploration of classical traditions and contemporary trends, and the Religious Literacy Project provides educational resources intended to deepen public understanding of religion—and its HarvardX course, *World Religions Through Their Scriptures*, has attracted some 100,000 online learners from more than 180 countries to modules on Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism.

Under the leadership of Dean David Hempton, the Harvard Divinity School is also emerging as a powerful convener of experts from across the University. A new Professorship of Religion, Business Ethics, and the Economic Order—a cross-School venture with Harvard Business School—will advance scholarship related to business development and economic prosperity, and the recently established Religions and the Practice of Peace Initiative brings together scholars and practitioners to discuss how humanity might solve shared problems, build a more just world, and create sustainable peace. Knowledge is neither sought nor applied in a vacuum. Halting climate change, understanding and addressing inequality, extending and enhancing human life: these aspirations are matters of business, design, education, engineering, law, medicine—the list goes on. Deciding how we pursue them



is important; understanding why we pursue them is indispensable. The Divinity School helps to reveal the motives and values that guide so much of what human beings choose to attempt and hope to achieve.

For two hundred years, the Harvard Divinity School has changed as the world has changed, expanding its inquiry and influence, and deepening our understanding of what it can—and ought—to contribute to some of the greatest challenges of our time. It is a place of consideration and contemplation of those aspects of life that have given meaning to the lives of so many people throughout space and time. Together, we celebrate a bicentennial with renewed faith in the Divinity School's mission to illuminate, engage, and serve a world perhaps more in need of its expertise than ever before in its history.

Sincerely,