

ALUMNI AND GUESTS GATHER FOR CONVOCATION AND REUNIONS

by Gustav Spohn '73 M.A.R.

YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL'S Convocation and Reunions 2005 was a time for renewing old acquaintances, making new friends, taking care of alumni business, worshiping, and attending lectures and concerts. Much transpired, but among the most lasting images will certainly be those of the family of Sam Todd '84 M.Div. seated in the front rows of Marquand Chapel as classmates and friends remembered him a service entitled "Mourning a Loss, Celebrating a Life."

Todd was just 24, five months short of graduating from YDS, when he disappeared in New York City in the early morning hours of New Year's Day 1984 after a night of celebration with his brother Adam and friends. Despite street-by-street searches of Manhattan by family, friends,



The Reverend Julie Kelsey '80 M.Div. and Ron Evans '70 B.D. were among the guests honoring Professor David Kelsey during a luncheon on the Tuesday of Convocation and Reunions week.

and classmates, his placement on the New York City missing persons list, and numerous newspaper articles about the disappearance, Todd has never been found.

At the October 10th service, the opening day of Convocation and Reunions, Sam's other brother, John, offered the family's gratitude for the support of the Yale Divinity community and recalled the "figurative search" the Todd household went through in trying to reassemble Sam's memorabilia "into a person who made sense of this incomprehensible hole in our life."

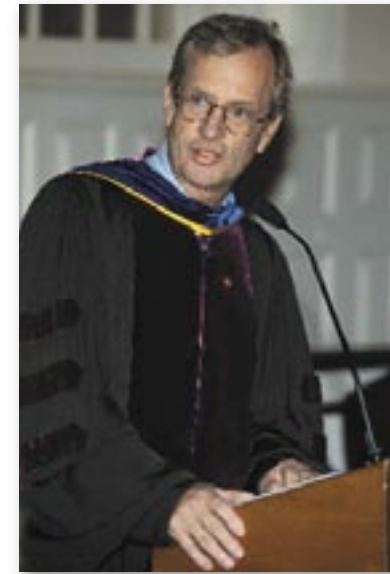
Members of the Yale Divinity classes of 1984, 1985 and 1986 participated in the service and performed a powerful speech choir, "The Darkness is Not Dark," written by classmate Steven Bonsey '84 M.Div., '87 S.T.M. Integrating song and spoken word, the choir recounted the search for Sam Todd among the homeless in the streets of Manhattan, the Bowery, Times Square, and Pennsylvania Station—interspersed with references to the parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin, passages from *Revelation* and *Ezekiel*, and texts from anti-colonialist writer Franz Fanon.

Yale Divinity School has established The Samuel Arthur Todd Scholarship Fund in memory of the young jazz enthusiast and candidate for the Presbyterian ministry. Scholarships will be awarded to students who "exemplify the spirit of Sam Todd by showing a deep interest in ministries committed to social justice, to empowerment of people, and to peace."

The Convocation component of the week's events commenced with the delivery of the distinguished Beecher lectures by Harry S. Stout, the Jonathan Edwards professor of American religious history. His three lectures were on the topic "Preaching Morality in America's Civil War," based on research conducted for his new book, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the American Civil War* (New York: Viking/Penguin). His lectures told a sobering story of how both sides in the nation's bloodiest war enlisted God on "their side" with the help of the churches, part of a "web of lies, suppression, and evasion" that "bear witness to the power of war to corrupt."

"Northern and Southern clergy no less than northern intellectuals fell victim to the sheer power of patriotism following Sumter," Stout asserted. "The capitulation of the clergy, North and South, to their nation states' political and military agenda would prove devastating... North and South would enlist them for the task of the sacred legitimation necessary to mount a mutually 'defensive' war that would be just in the eyes of God."

This year's Taylor lectures were written by William P. Alston, professor emeritus of philosophy at Syracuse University, on the topic "Divine Mystery and Our Knowledge of God." Due to limitations on Alston's travel necessitated by health concerns, the lectures were read by Nicholas



Professor Skip Stout offered this year's distinguished Beecher lectures.

Wolterstorff, the Noah Porter professor emeritus of philosophical theology at Yale Divinity School. Delivered in the form of what Alston termed "an Hegelian dialectical triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis," he analyzed the writings of Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, Paul Tillich and John Hick to probe whether human concepts can or cannot truly apply to God. What emerged was an Alston synthesis that allows for the ability of human concepts to achieve "a close approximation to truth" when applied to God—an ability that Alston called "crucial" to the Christian life.

Robin Eames, Anglican Primate of Ireland and chair of the Lambeth Commission, offered the Pitt lecture, sponsored by Berkeley Divinity School. Eames lamented the turmoil within worldwide Anglicanism caused by disagreement over such controversial issues as homosexuality in the Western world, polygamy in contemporary Africa, and the ordination of women bishops in the Church of England. In an address entitled "Where Now for World Anglicanism?," he stressed the need for an agreed-upon "level play-

ing field" for "considered exchange" among competing interests, and posed the question, "What is all our division and argument doing to the first priority given to the Body of Christ—namely, the witness to a Gospel of salvation, compassion and care for a world of desperate need?"

The Institute of Sacred Music brought Janet R. Walton, professor of worship at Union Theological Seminary, to present its annual Kavanagh lecture. Walton spoke on the topic *Ritual Action* → ← *Global Action*, raising the question of whether the work she and other liturgists engage in matters. It can and should, she suggested, by adapting innovative and nonhierarchical worship forms that bring rituals more into the daily lives of worshipers and challenge injustices in the wider society.

"We are not skilled in hearing one another and speaking in our own name as an integral part of our regular worship services," observed Walton. "But when indignities are faced, when real freedom is felt, hope lives, something happens. We are brought to the brink of chaos face-to-face with the living God. Our work does matter. It can change the mess of this world."

Preachers during Convocation and Reunions week included Sharon E. Watkins '84 M.Div., who was elected general minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) earlier in the year; Martin Copenhaver '80 M.Div., senior pastor of Wellesley Congregational Church in Wellesley, Massachusetts; Clayton Thomas '90 M.Div., assistant professor of spirituality and ethics in medicine in the

College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University; and Shelley D. B. Copeland '00 M.Div., executive director of the Capitol Region Conference of Churches in Hartford, Connecticut.

In keeping with tradition, the reunion component of the event brought together alumni from a number of classes to catch up on news, revisit old times, and consider pressing issues of church and world as identified in lectures, worship services, and less formal venues. The Classes of 1950, 1955, and 1980 celebrated milestone reunions. Three cluster reunions were held for the Classes of 1964, 1965, and 1966; 1984, 1985, and 1986; and 1999, 2000, and 2001. Dinners, teas, cocktail parties, and luncheons—including a



Letty M. Russell and Pamela Haller '85 M.Div. preside at the Sam Todd memorial service.

luncheon in honor of Professor David Kelsey—provided a time for conversation and relaxation.

One alumnus, Richard Wilke '55 B.D., commented in his acceptance speech at the Tuesday evening Awards Banquet that he had not returned to campus since his commencement exercises 50 years ago. He, along with 25 of his classmates and guests, celebrated their