

9/15/09, Obituary Notice for Lewis S. Mudge

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Lewis Seymour Mudge, Jr., a leading Christian theologian, professor, and ethicist died September 11, 2009, at his home in Berkeley, Calif., at the age of 79, weeks short of his 80th birthday. The Rev. Dr. Mudge was Robert Leighton Stuart Professor of Theology Emeritus at the San Francisco Theological Seminary (SFTS) in San Anselmo, California, and the Graduate Theological Union (GTU), in Berkeley. He devoted most of his professional life to ecumenical dialogue within the Christian Church and interfaith discussions among Christians, Jews and Muslims. In his long career, he published more than 12 books, and has come to be regarded as one of the foremost ecumenical theologians and theological ethicists of our day. Former General Assembly Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church, USA, Clifton Kirkpatrick said Mudge “was probably the greatest ecumenist in the Presbyterian Church (USA) in our time.” His most recent book entitled The Gift of Responsibility: The Promise of Dialogue Among Christians, Jews and Muslims (2008) promotes interreligious dialogue among the peoples of the three Abrahamic faiths to find a common ground for mutual understanding and collective action in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States and the on-going strife in the Middle East.

From 1975-1987, Mudge was Dean of the Seminary and Professor of Theology at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. On the faculty of Amherst College from 1962 to 1976, Mudge served as Minister to the College as well as professor and chair of the Philosophy and Religion Department. During this time, he was also actively involved in the civil rights movement, leading students to the South for voter registration and joining Dr. Martin Luther King in the famous march in Selma, Alabama. From 1965 to 1976, Mudge and his family lived in the Emily Dickinson Homestead, now the Dickinson Museum, owned by Amherst College, where his wife, Jean McClure Mudge, served as resident-curator. On a sabbatical leave from Amherst College in 1973-1974, Mudge studied contemporary philosophy with Paul Ricoeur at the Husserl Archive, Paris. Afterward, he wrote the introduction to selected works of Ricoeur’s, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, widely used throughout the world. Mudge launched his professional career at the headquarters of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, where he served as Secretary of the Department of Theology from 1957-1962. In

the ecumenical movement, he was well known as a chair and drafter of many statements in support of church unity and greater interreligious understanding.

James A. Donahue, President and Professor of Ethics at the GTU, commented, “Lew Mudge was a pioneer in his theological thinking about ecumenical and interreligious education. His intellectual work in Social Ethics and on the present economic situation will not go unfinished. We are so grateful for all that Lew has given us.”

Mudge was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1929 to the Rev. Lewis Seymour Mudge, Sr. and Anne Evelyn Bolton. He was educated at the Haverford School, and received his B.A. *summa cum laude* from Princeton University in 1951. At Princeton, he served as editor-in-chief of the Daily Princetonian. As a Rhodes Scholar, he read theology at Oxford University (1951-1954). He returned for a year of study at Princeton Theological Seminary, and was ordained into the Presbyterian ministry in 1955. In 1961, he received his doctorate from the Department of Religious Studies at Princeton University. He has twice been a scholar at the Center for Theological Inquiry in Princeton.

Mudge was a gifted teacher and influenced countless colleagues and graduate students through his writings, ideas and his generous dedication to his students’ work. David Siegenthaler, a GTU doctoral candidate and Planner with the National Park Service at Yosemite, said he’d lost a “coach, mentor, provocateur, encourager, champion and friend.

“He introduced me to a broader field of responsibility ethics and the current debates with ecumenical circles . . . He displayed a sensitivity to and appreciation for all voices, even in cases when limited political agendas seem to frustrate and sometimes impede progress toward organizational unity. His influence will remain a force for change, and an encouragement to pursue companionship with each other, long after his passing.”

“He delighted in propelling ideas and machines,” said son Bill Mudge, referencing his father’s love of flying small airplanes and sailing his boat on San Francisco Bay. In addition, he was a talented amateur photographer, deeply enjoyed classical music, and also followed professional football and baseball. “Lew’s interests and talents were deep and wide. He could tell you the latest sports scores in the same breath as advocating for a new ethic in support of the well-being of humankind,” said his son-in-law Jim Mittelberger, MD.

In addition to Jean, his wife of 52 years, Lew Mudge is survived by three children, Robert S. Mudge of Washington, D.C., William M. Mudge of Mesa, Arizona, and Anne E. Mudge of Oakland, California; and four grandchildren, Alison, Benjamin, Lillian and Isaac. Memorial services will be held at the Nassau Church in Princeton, New Jersey at 11:00 a.m. on October 19, and at the First Presbyterian Church, San Anselmo, California, at 11:00 a.m. on November 28.