

Protestant Seminary to Keep Positive Ties with Church

By Carl Bunderson



Dr. Mark Labberton. Credit: Fuller Theological Seminary

Pasadena, Calif., Mar 20, 2013 / 12:02 am ([CNA](#)).- Fuller Theological Seminary, a leading center for the formation of evangelical Protestant pastors, will continue to promote positive relations with the Catholic Church, according to its new president.

“Our reach is global...and at Fuller we want to be a catalyst for healthy global ecumenism,” Dr. Mark Labberton told CNA March 15.

Labberton is currently a professor of preaching at the Pasadena, Calif.-based seminary, and will take over as president of the school on July 1.

He succeeds Richard Mouw, who has served as Fuller's president since 1993.

He said that though there are tensions in Latin America between Pentecostalism and the Roman Catholic Church, he wants to promote good relations between the groups.

“One of Rich Mouw's emphases has been evangelical-Catholic dialogue and conversation, and I'm certainly hopeful that can continue.”

Labberton expressed a “great respect for the Roman Catholic Church” and said he is moved by its “expression, with all its tensions and challenges,” and by its “overarching unity.”

“The global response and attention given to the Pope's selection this week is itself obviously a palpable expression of that, and the fact is that there's no movement within Protestantism that could galvanize the global church in such a singular way.”

He is particularly encouraged that Pope Francis brings social justice concerns to the forefront of his papacy, while staying always connected to Christ.

Labberton said that putting aside Protestants' “acute anxieties around issues of power,” he has “great regard” for the Catholic Church, and finds it “very inspiring in many different forms.”

He is eager to “grow in and engage” his experiences of Catholic “leadership and worship,” he said.

He finds the prospect of becoming Fuller's president a daunting one, due both to the changes facing Christianity and education, and the legacy he has to fulfill.

The Protestant church in America, he said, is facing one of its “largest sea changes,” with redefinition of denominational structures and a “deep restructuring of what church means.”

Protestantism is facing “many more experiments” in non-denominational visions, he said, and so Fuller's graduates are facing a field that is “in some cases fractured, or being re-defined.”

“The thing that concerns me the most, is how does a seminary like Fuller contribute in the most meaningful way to the education of the Protestant church in all its various manifestations...”

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