

incident with one of his beloved grandchildren. Then he will make a connection to activities at the GTU by reporting on an endowment gift or a programmatic initiative that is building steam. Good things are happening here, Riess tells the audience, and the GTU is making a positive difference in the world. His hopeful enthusiasm makes you want to be part of the action.

In many ways Riess's accomplishments as president of the GTU reflect the principles of process theology, which was the subject of his doctoral dissertation: an emphasis on becoming over stasis, a belief in the benefits of pluralism and diversity, and a conviction that divine reality is always at work in the depth of human experience for the ultimate triumph of beauty and goodness. The Graduate Theological Union is fortunate to have had such a leader for such a time as this! ♦

Arthur Holder is professor of Christian Spirituality at the GTU and served as the school's dean and vice president for academic affairs from 2002 to 2016.

Please join the GTU Board of Trustees in honoring the remarkable legacy of Dr. Riess Potterveld by contributing to the

Potterveld Fund for Interreligious Education and Scholarship

Under the leadership of President Potterveld, who will retire on June 30, 2018, the Graduate Theological Union has become one of the premier institutions for interreligious theological education in North America. While the GTU has long been an innovative center for ecumenical and interfaith scholarship, the blossoming of the GTU as a hub of innovative interreligious dialogue and education during Dr. Potterveld's presidency has been extraordinary.

Please help the GTU celebrate Riess Potterveld's legacy and build on the foundation established under his leadership by making a gift to the Potterveld Fund for Interreligious Education and Scholarship.

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Thank You for Joining Us!

For more about President Riess Potterveld's accomplishments, public events related to his retirement, and the Potterveld Fund for Interreligious Education and Scholarship, visit www.gtu.edu/potterveld-retirement.

Ancient Texts, Fresh Insights

Alumna of the Year Virginia Burrus brings the wisdom of the past to bear on today's challenges

When Dr. Virginia Burrus (MA, '84; PhD, '91) was a GTU student, she sought to help the school find ways to celebrate its unique nature as a hub of religious pluralism and scholarship. Along with other doctoral students, she advocated for the first GTU commencement ceremony. (Previously GTU graduates were recognized only at the commencements of member schools with which they affiliated.) She also encouraged the GTU to begin publicly honoring the good work its graduates were doing, which led to Dr. Margaret Miles being named the GTU's first alumna of the year in 1991.

Virginia Burrus never imagined she would accept the award she helped establish. "I never dreamed I'd be honored in this way," she reflected at the GTU alumni reception at the AAR-SBL Annual Meetings in November. "All kinds of things have come to pass that I couldn't have envisioned twenty-six years ago, including wonderful surprises like being named alumna of the year. So I am very grateful indeed."

Today, Virginia Burrus is the Bishop W. Earl Ledden Professor of Religion and director of graduate studies at Syracuse University in New York. She came to Syracuse in 2013, after more than two decades on the faculty at Drew University.

Throughout her scholarly career, Burrus has explored how ancient traditions speak to contemporary issues. "I've always tried to ask what these old texts might have to say to me, and to whatever concerns I bring to them. I try to hear new things. I'm not coming to the texts expecting to hear only patriarchy or dominion language, even though I take these critiques



Virginia Burrus in Petra, Jordan

very seriously. But I'm not interested in apologetic work or defending the tradition either. So I don't tend to be primarily in a critical or defensive stance, but instead try to listen for new or unexpected voices."

Over her career as a scholar, Dr. Burrus has pursued this approach through a range of concerns. "Initially, my work was focused on women's histories. Then I became interested in gender more generally, particularly in the novel ways masculinity was being reconceived in ancient Christian sources. How did we come to think of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and what's going on in that distinctively masculine kind of theological formulation?"

Issues of sexuality and eroticism are primary in several of her books, including *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (2008), as well as *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (2004). In her upcoming book, *Ancient Eco-poetics*, Burrus has shifted her attention to ecological thinking. She describes the book as an "attempt to discover in early Christian texts and artifacts resources for thinking better ecologically."

The move to Syracuse has given Burrus the opportunity to teach undergraduates for the first time. "It's a big switch after two decades at Drew teaching either theological school students or PhD students," she notes. "So many of my undergraduate students are struggling with messages they've gotten from the church that they find troubling in a wide range of ways." The importance of this work has been highlighted in the current political context. "I was teaching a course on Christianity and Sexuality to undergraduates in the midst of the Trump election. With

so much at stake for gender and sexual minorities, it's not difficult to persuade them of the relevance of the material."

Syracuse has also offered Burrus opportunities to move beyond her primary expertise in Christianity. She's now teaching courses in Greek and Roman religions, material she studied as an undergrad.

Reflecting on her GTU experiences, Burrus recalls the GTU's Center for Women and Religion as being critical. "CWR held meetings where graduate students would listen to one another's work and encourage each other. It was the early days for feminist scholarship in religion, so having that center to highlight and support the significance of that work was crucial for me."

During her doctoral work, Virginia had opportunity to be mentored by women scholars across the consortium, including her doctoral advisor Rebecca Lyman (CDSP), as well as Anne Wire (SFTS), Marty Storz (PLTS), and Mary Ann Donovan (JST). "A big part of my sense of the GTU involves being educated by a wonderful group of women scholars," she recalls. "So moving into the world as an academic, it has always seemed perfectly natural to be in places where women are playing strong roles."

Burrus celebrates the scholarly freedom she and other students were offered: "The GTU really empowered us to do the work each of us wanted to do. I'm quite sure I would be a very different teacher and thinker had I not had the particular graduate education I had. The GTU not only allowed me, or even just encouraged me, but *forced* me to find my own path and to discover my own vision and voice. That's something I have never stopped doing, and I'm so grateful."

Doug Davidson is director of communications at the GTU.