

currents **Spring 2016**

The news, people, & progress of the Graduate Theological Union

# Sacred Visions

The GTU's New Collection  
of Religious Art

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# currents

Spring 2016

The news, people, & progress of the Graduate Theological Union

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**On the cover:** Chenrezig (or Avalokitesvara), Bodhisattva of Compassion, Tibet. From the GTU's Lanier Graham Collection. See more on pages 12 and 13. Photo by Edward Klyce.

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**IN THIS AND OTHER RECENT ISSUES**

of *Currents*, we have celebrated the strengthening embrace of interreligious education at the Graduate Theological Union, as well as our ongoing addition of new religious partners here in Berkeley. You can see this emphasis in the GTU's redesigned doctoral curriculum, which features more than thirty different concentrations, including many designed to enhance interreligious and interdisciplinary work. You can see it in the establishment of our new Center for Dharma Studies, which brings the study of Hinduism, Jainism, and Indian Buddhism to the GTU. (See pages 14-15.) The GTU has recognized that in today's increasingly pluralistic world, more and more students are pursuing scholarship that explores the connections between two or more religious traditions, or seeking to ground their in-depth study of a particular tradition in a multi-religious environment.

The GTU's increasing focus on interreligious scholarship reflects a national educational movement that is surfacing at the undergraduate level as well. There are at least 130 colleges and universities that address interfaith or interreligious education through the creation of minors, certificates, and other innovative programs that engage students and faculty in the broad range of issues emerging from today's complex societal context.

I recently learned of a new undergraduate course at Dominican University in Illinois that is focused on interfaith education. The goals of this course, designed in cooperation with the Interfaith Youth Core and its director, Eboo Patel, speak to the challenges and importance of interreligious work. These goals include gaining religious literacy and appreciative knowledge of other religions; clarifying the difference between diversity and pluralism; learning how relationships and

networks can be leveraged to work toward the common good; and exploring and understanding models of interfaith leadership and interfaith cooperation that have achieved significant strides in bridge-building. Increasingly, colleges and universities are offering classes that include enactment and discussion of contemporary situations that require the ability to navigate interreligious and cultural complexities and accommodate differences. For example, a class might consider the case of a group of Somali and Sudanese Muslim women who have asked their employer for time off for prayer during the work day.

As students move through these interfaith programs and through undergraduate programs that offer introduction to non-Christian religions, some will choose to pursue graduate study, and the GTU is increasingly well positioned to provide that next stage of education. In fact, many GTU graduates are the creative instigators and leaders of these undergraduate programs—affirming that for decades the GTU has been developing scholars and leaders with the capacity to think religiously, educationally, and culturally about critical issues.

All too often we are seeing in the public domain the damage, fear, and conflict that is being set loose by ignorant and distorted characterizations of religion. The sad truth is that it may take considerable time and effort to extract such dangerous misinformation from the public's consciousness. The GTU is at the forefront of preparing students for academic, religious, and nonprofit vocations in which appreciative and deep knowledge of multiple religions is essential to healthy and effective leadership.

**For decades the GTU has been developing scholars and leaders with the capacity to think religiously, educationally, and culturally about critical issues.**



*Russ Patterson*



by Deena Aranoff

**At the Center of Jewish Studies, the classical and the contemporary come together, producing new articulations of ancient themes.**



# Enlivening Jewish Tradition

**T**he GTU's Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies is an academic hub devoted to the critical examination of Jewish history, literature, and culture. For some, talk of such work conjures up images of scholars wading through the dustbins of history, making small and mostly irrelevant observations regarding minutia of the past. But the work that happens at CJS is anything but irrelevant—and that's one reason I am excited to be the Center's new director.

CJS degree programs provide students with an understanding of Jewish civilization that empowers them in their professional and personal lives, inside and outside the academy. CJS offers a PhD, an MA, and a certificate in Jewish Studies, and also provides faculty and resources for GTU students pursuing doctoral work in Rabbinic Literature, Hebrew Bible, and numerous interreligious concentrations. Our graduates often take up leadership roles in local Jewish communities; some continue on to rabbinical school or further graduate work. CJS public programs host hundreds of people each year and contribute to the advancement of popular understandings of Jewish phenomena throughout the Bay Area. Something magical happens at CJS—a kind of intellectual alchemy in which classical Jewish sources meet contemporary perspectives, producing new articulations of ancient themes. I am honored to be a part of this enterprise.

The scholarly work we do at CJS is a form of transformative inquiry. I often tell students that academic research has three phases. The first phase begins in the student's mind and springs from his or her passion for a particular subject. This first phase—humble, understated, and prolonged—is the most subjective phase of the academic process, a function of the curiosity of the inquirer.

The second phase of research usually involves an extended encounter with primary materials: literary, archival, published, or in manuscript. This is per-

haps the most important phase of academic research; it is both demanding and fragile. It is demanding because access to a source requires familiarity with its language, genre, and context. It is fragile because the specificity of the source material can easily be lost, swallowed up by researcher's assumptions. If handled well, however, this encounter is transformative. The researcher's questions change as a result of the scholarly attunement to the material itself.

In my view, the metric of good scholarship is not only whether it is engaging or interesting, but also the degree to which it emerges from this authentic encounter between the researcher and the material. How this encounter unfolds is different for each scholar. Some scholars present work that is a thinly veiled unfolding of a scholar's own interiority. Others present scholarship that privileges the primary sources at the expense of an authorial voice. I believe the best work strikes a balance between these two extremes.

Like many of the students at CJS today, I have sought to navigate these tensions in my own scholarship. My Jewish learning began in the traditional Jewish environments of my childhood. Those environments cultivated a devotional posture toward classical Jewish sources; the goal in studying biblical and rabbinic materials was simply to understand them. Toward this end, one relied upon the guidance of the authoritative readers of prior generations. The reader was encouraged to relinquish the value of his or her



perspective in order to access the text without contemporary distortions.

This type of devotional study was a tremendous source of delight for me and drew me closer to the tradition. The call to relinquish my own personal perspective and voice, however, was complicated by my status as a woman. I came to realize that male readers, especially those granted a measure of authority as teacher or rabbi, often came to confuse (or were invited to confuse) their own perspectives with that of the sources. Mastery of the sources allowed one to speak for the sources. Such teachers wove their own readings into the texts; their readings became the authoritative meaning of the text itself. As a woman, I did not undergo this process. Instead I remained in the early phase, locked in a posture of devotion and subordination. The invitation to the next phase, issued wordlessly and unconsciously to my male peers, never came.

I share this personal history because, in many ways, I transferred this traditional posture to my academic life. My decision to pursue a PhD in Jewish history was an extension of my earlier passion for Jewish learning. My teacher, Yosef Yershalmi, embodied the ways in which the study of Jewish history can help one forge and clarify a relationship to the tradition. But as I took my first, tentative steps towards becoming a scholar, I found it very difficult to move into the final phase of research—that stage in which the scholar puts forth an argument, summoning the materials toward a particular perspective. I could only make my way through the texts in devotional style.

Luckily, there were a few people who enabled me to find my voice. First, the series of scholars who helped me in the final stages of my dissertation: J.W. Smit, Jennifer Greenfield, and Benjamin Gampel. Second, I credit the support of my friend and colleague, former CJS director and current professor Dr. Naomi Seidman, who throughout my ten years at the GTU, has truly invited me to speak. Thank you, Naomi.

I offer these reflections about my own scholarly path as a way of illuminating the profound transformations that we hope are part of the academic process for all who study at CJS. Studies at CJS constitute nothing short of a transformation of the student. To be sure, our program includes “devotional” aspects, by which I mean the dutiful acquisition of the languages and major trends of Jewish history. At the same time, however, students cultivate their own perspectives and arguments. They acquire the theoretical tools that enable them to make their contributions to the world of Jewish Studies.

The academic study of Judaism that takes place at CJS has the capacity to enliven contemporary Jewish life. This might sound strange, since it has long been assumed that the critical study of the Jewish past, certainly of biblical and rabbinic materials, puts

*“Looking back on my past two years at the CJS, I imagine myself as a cartographer, and my two main professors, Naomi Seidman and Deena Aranoff, as experienced explorers in the world of Judaism. I now have the tools to map my own Jewish experience, and to continue to travel in the Jewish world, deepening into my own unique identity.” —GENEVIEVE GREINETZ (MA, '16)*



one at a distance from the heart and meaning of the tradition. I believe, however, that the conflict between historical study and the pursuit of religious meaning has begun to fade.

The great clash between history and religion has given way to a worldview in which a historical understanding of religion and its ruptures and changes over time can be readily assimilated by individuals seeking to strengthen their religious commitments. The contemporary *Zeitgeist* favors the notion that people and cultures can best be understood through their temporality, kind, and condition, through an inquiry into the past and its role in shaping the ever-shifting present. Indeed, historical inquiry has become a constructive mode of religious inquiry, a means by which an increasing number of individuals find meaning in Jewish practice, literature, and ideas.

This shift in sensibilities is everywhere apparent at CJS. Though the study of history may have signaled alienation from Judaism a mere generation ago, it has become a rich and viable point of entry for some who seek to deepen their relationship with it. We have arrived at a cultural moment in which postmodern perspectives have become a fertile means by which an increasing number of individuals make meaning out of both their own experience and the contingent, historical development of their religious tradition.

As director of CJS I am honored to be the custodian of this process—enabling CJS students and the broader Bay Area community to cultivate critical, analytical perspectives, facilitating a true encounter with classical and contemporary Jewish formations and the articulation of new perspectives. Far from foreclosing an enduring connection to Jewish life, the scholarly work happening at the GTU and its Center for Jewish Studies is a powerful and productive force shaping Jewish culture today.

*Deena Aranoff is the director of the Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies*



# My CJS Journey

By Tania Lowenthal

*“My time at the Center for Jewish Studies set the foundation for a lifelong commitment to creating, fostering, and nourishing Jewish communal life.”*

—Tania Lowenthal



**T**wenty years ago, with the muddy clarity of a twenty-something in search of a meaningful direction, I enrolled at the GTU’s Center for Jewish Studies. I did not know that Professor Naomi Seidman would become an esteemed Director of the Center, charting its academic and spiritual direction. I did not know that Professor Daniel Matt, would go on to become a world-renown Zohar scholar. I did not know what path would emerge for me. But I knew—rightly—that the journey would inform my life’s direction.

Here’s why the CJS, for me, is *besheret*:

At CJS, I had the opportunity to learn from remarkable, visionary scholars in Jewish history, thought, and mysticism. But the generosity of their spirits and their view of themselves as lifelong learners allowed us to truly learn together. I was stretched intellectually and spiritually, and I was able to bring my wisdom and life experience to the learning of others around me. We were truly a learning community.

The CJS faculty encouraged me to write my thesis—a curriculum on Jewish Spirituality for Young Adults—because it was what I wanted to do (and *they*, at least, seemed undaunted by the fact that I had no idea how to do it). Since I’d grown up in Cali, Colombia, some assumed I would explore the history of Sephardic Jews in Colombia—and indeed, they have a fascinating story that has shaped contemporary Jewish life around the world. But it didn’t call me. I had questions

about Jewish mysticism—specifically, how young people could access its deep learning and traditions. Professor Matt understood what inspired me and guided me throughout my scholarship, offering feedback that was always insightful, humble, and extremely helpful. Although he is one of the world’s great scholars in Jewish mysticism, he was, to me, a very personal, wise, and accessible advisor. Quintessential CJS.

I’d grown up firm in my Jewish identity, but at CJS I discovered there were boundless ways that identity could be expressed in my life. I also learned to have faith in myself. Professor Naomi Seidman offered me the delicious opportunity to do an independent study with her to enhance my Hebrew. The work was remarkably challenging. But those meetings were precious, protected time. Furthermore, in typical CJS fashion, I was encouraged to find a creative way to use my skills as a native Spanish speaker to fund the crucial Aramaic lessons needed to unpack the

heavy texts I was devouring. I was encouraged, supported, and challenged to expand my boundaries in ways I could never have imagined.

Diversity of thought and experience is a starting point at CJS—and throughout the GTU. From the moment I stepped onto campus, my presence was received as an opportunity for deeper learning and understanding; I was Jewish, Colombian, gay, and left-handed—all welcome characteristics in our learning community.

More than anything, being a student at the CJS and years later serving on the advisory board has helped align me, professionally and personally. It set the foundation for a lifelong commitment to creating, fostering, and nurturing Jewish communal life on my own terms, and in ways that cultivate independent, thriving Jewish life where I live.

*Tania Lowenthal (MA, '98) is Director of Admissions and Marketing at The Brandeis School of San Francisco.*





# Bridging the Divides

## A profile of Dr. Michelle Gonzalez Maldonado, the GTU's Alumna of the Year

By Suzanne E. Miller

**T**he Graduate Theological Union's Alumna of the Year, Michelle Gonzalez Maldonado, has embodied the GTU's values of interdisciplinary study and interfaith engagement throughout her academic career. Since graduating from the GTU with her PhD in Systematic and Philosophical Theology in 2001, Dr. Gonzalez has engaged in work that straddles the oft-divided disciplines of theology and religious studies. Currently Professor of Religious Studies and Assistant Provost of Undergraduate Education at the University of Miami, Dr. Gonzalez's academic specializations include Latino/a, Latin American, and Cultural Theologies as well as Afro-Caribbean and Latino/a Studies.

An exemplary scholar and prolific author, Gonzalez is the author of numerous books, including *Caribbean Religious History* (co-authored with Ennis Edmunds, NYU Press, 2010); *Shopping: Christian Explorations of Daily Living* (Fortress, 2010); *Embracing Latina Spirituality: A Woman's Perspective* (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2009); *Created in God's Image: An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology* (Orbis, 2007); and *Sor Juana: Beauty and Justice in the Americas* (Orbis, 2003).

Dr. Gonzalez believes her experiences at the GTU prepared her not only for her work as a scholar but also for her role as Assistant Provost. "I very clearly came to the GTU in a huge part to work with Alex Garcia Rivera, who, as you know, has passed away, but he continues to shape how I think intellectually. But the sense of community, not only among my fellow students, but also the community that the administra-

tion and the faculty created, was very special. As Assistant Provost, I think back to my Academic Dean at the GTU, Margaret Miles. She was a great role model by being a gracious and powerful committed leader of the institution. At times I think we don't realize people are role models for us until much later in life. Since I've gone into administration, I've thought a lot about her, and am inspired by her impact upon the GTU."

Dr. Gonzalez carries this same grace and commitment to community into her work as a professor. In the classroom, she cherishes "sitting with a group of young people, reading a bunch of great and challenging books and talking about ideas, because having a space in which to cultivate critical thinking is a gift that is becoming increasingly scarce in our sound bite culture."

Emphasizing the importance of community beyond the walls of higher education, Gonzalez believes intellectuals need to break down the barriers between



*"We're living in a world where it's clear that religion matters in very dramatic ways. Scholars of religion need to be able to speak to and educate the broader public about the meaning and role of religion in the world."*

*— Dr. Michelle Gonzalez Maldonado*

the academy and the world: "I think our work needs to be more public. Today, we're living in a world where it's clear that religion matters in very dramatic ways. Scholars of religion need to be able to speak to and educate the broader public about the meaning and role of religion in the world." This is equally emphasized within her publications and classroom instruction.

In her most recent book, *A Critical Introduction to Religion in the Americas: Bridging the Liberation Theology and Religious Studies Divide* (New York University, 2014), Dr. Gonzalez considers the divide between liberation theology and the lived experiences of the marginalized. She challenges theo-

logians to listen anew to the communities about which they write: "If liberation theologians are going to claim to represent and advocate for the voices of the marginalized, they have to be authentic to that." She explains that her project was inspired in part by her grandmother's lived experiences as a devout Catholic and spiritual medium: "I want to explore the tensions of her religious reality. I also want to study faith, justice, and social transformation. Unfortunately, the current division between religion and theology do not allow for both."

Dr. Gonzalez emphasizes, "We're at a point right now, I hope, in the academy that we really need to stop having these quibbles about

religious studies versus theology. While religious studies claims a certain objectivity, I think it is just as open to the critique of subjectivity as theology. I see theology as one expression of the study of religion. Although I want theology to be theology, I also worry sometimes that theology is too self-referential as a field. We're constantly talking about the same people, talking to the same people, and it is a very circular and closed discussion. So, my hope in the book is to open up the discussion."

Dr. Gonzalez attributes her strong professional formation to the Graduate Theological Union: "When I think about how my experiences at the GTU shaped who I am today, two things stand out to me. The first is the interdisciplinarity of the program. I think that ability to bridge fields of study, and be able to work with scholars and faculty in other disciplines really set the groundwork for how I understand myself as a scholar. Second, it's the sense—and this is embedded in both the actual structure of the GTU as well as its intellectual life—that you can be unapologetically grounded in your tradition, but open to dialogue with other traditions. That concept really shaped me. I can have my convictions—whether they be faith, intellectual, professional—but those convictions aren't better than anyone else's, and they exist in the GTU in a context where there are multiple faith convictions at play. And this is the world we live in, the world we teach in, and the world we write in."

*Suzanne E. Miller is a doctoral student in Biblical Studies and Communications Assistant at the GTU.*

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# A Steady Hand

Throughout 14 years as GTU dean, Arthur Holder has led with wisdom and grace

*This summer, Dr. Arthur G. Holder will be retiring as the GTU's Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs after 14 years of distinguished service. On the next three pages, you'll find excerpts from reflections written by members of the GTU community in celebration of Arthur's work. Visit [www.gtu.edu/honoringArthur](http://www.gtu.edu/honoringArthur) to see more—and to share your own words of appreciation.*

**A**bout fifteen years ago, I sat down to lunch with Arthur Holder, then Dean of Academic Affairs and Professor of Christian Spirituality at Church Divinity School of the Pacific. Over the course of our conversation, I realized Arthur might be open to being recruited for the position of GTU Dean, and encouraged the President to approach him immediately. I take pride in having helped recruit Arthur Holder to serve as Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs at the GTU, as he has been exactly the Dean the GTU needed during these challenging times.

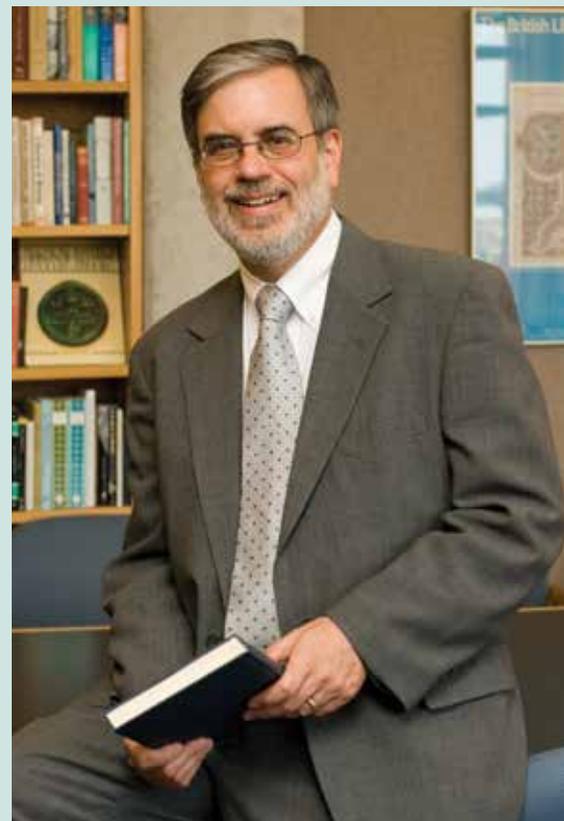
The GTU Deanship is a fascinating but challenging position, with a great deal of responsibility to facilitate consortial academic collaboration and to run a world-class doctoral program, while drawing almost entirely on faculty whose employment and primary teaching responsibilities are in one of the member schools. The responsibilities are great, but the actual structural authority of the Dean is “soft,” based on the power of persuasion to establish and sustain collaborative relationships. It takes a special set of virtues to be effective in this position, and Arthur Holder has been richly endowed with those virtues.

Arthur has led the Core Doctoral Faculty with steady wisdom, gentle humor, and a profound gift for seeing reasonable pathways through complex issues. He listens well, and has a knack for cutting through Gordian knots of miscommunication. His clear thinking and

lucid communication engender trust and confidence. When those around him are digging in and exaggerating their different points of view, Arthur calmly leads the discussion back to the key underlying issues on which there is often substantial agreement. He is articulate, thorough, insightful—and always fair.

Arthur is patient and resilient, taking the long view. Years before the GTU adopted its new doctoral curriculum, Arthur established a task force of young faculty who then presented the bones of the structure now in place. At that time the Core Doctoral Faculty was intrigued, but not ready to make a change. But those seeds, planted well in advance, made the eventual acceptance of the new structure easier, for the ideas had been in the air for some time.

Like many other faculty, I have come to trust Arthur's even-handed judgment on policy and student issues. As a former Dean, I have a



good understanding of GTU policies and procedures, but I have learned again and again that it is wise to consult Arthur to see if I am missing an important perspective or possible implications of an issue. He has more than once clarified my thinking so that I am more even-handed in applying policy and procedures to complex student situations.

I am in awe of Arthur's ability to respond quickly, clearly, and crisply to inquiries. He once emailed me a response to a query while he was standing in line at the hardware store! His efficient responses to faculty and staff keep the institution running smoothly and efficiently,



and help us feel we have access to our Dean.

As a member of the GTU's Rostered Faculty, I have reported to him annually and sought his counsel about professional decisions, sabbaticals, and priorities. He is astonishingly supportive, both personally and professionally, yet he asks discerning and insightful questions that have caused me to think deeply about my work and my life. His generous spirit, his ability to set expectations that help me thrive, and his

astonishing capacity to appreciate the work and gifts of others have modeled for me what leadership—and friendship—are all about.

Arthur Holder has made a deep and lasting mark on this institution. We are all better for his service, his presence, his steady hand on the rudder of the institution as it has navigated rough seas.

*Judith Berling is Professor of Chinese and Comparative Religions, and former Dean of the GTU.*

*By Elizabeth Drescher*

## Celebrating the Venerable Arthur Holder

As Arthur Holder prepares to retire as GTU Dean, I imagine many of his former students and advisees are struggling, as I have been, to find the right words to express the scope and meaning of Arthur's contributions to our academic and personal lives. This has been frustrating, but the truth is that it's not really my fault. So many of the gifts Arthur shared with me came with few words themselves—rescuing me from an ill-fitting advising situation; standing up for my work behind the scenes with faculty who didn't quite get it or didn't think I could do it; steering me toward research, speaking, publishing, and teaching opportunities; opening the path toward my first academic position and listening patiently when it seemed necessary to leave; and supporting me directly and indirectly as I crafted a new way to do the work I felt called to do. All these things came about with the same calm, kind, pastoral demeanor that attended to my own developing understanding of myself as a scholar, educator, and writer. Sure, there were lots of words in the margins of my papers and the dissertation itself, but these were always framed by the sustained experience of Arthur as a generous and caring educator, a thoughtful mentor, and an accomplished, humble, and profoundly moral academic exemplar.

This last bit—Arthur Holder as an academic exemplar—has been no small thing for me even as I've followed a somewhat less conventional vocational path. As a graduate student, I often referred to Arthur, especially with regard to his steady and substantive work on the spirituality of the early Middle Ages and particularly the writings of the Venerable Bede, as “a meat and potatoes historian.” Arthur's sustained attention to this body of work offered a depth and richness to the developing discipline of Christian spirituality, and to religious studies in general. Arthur's scholarship also showed me that a solid, substantive,

historical grounding in traditional spiritualities earned one a right to venture further afield, to experiment, to play, even, with the dusty tomes, methods, and, importantly, culture of a discipline.

In his 2010 Presidential Address to the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality (SSCS), Arthur laid out a bold and provocative challenge. Of course, he did it with tremendous grace, with deep respect for the culture of the discipline, and with great enthusiasm for the possibilities that a reconsideration of the sources, methods, and motivations in the discipline might yield in terms of a Christian value he has long championed and modeled: Justice. Thus, he insisted, “Future scholars in a truly pluralistic field of Christian spirituality will learn to ask, ‘How can this text help us serve the cause of justice?’”

I cannot say how much I have answered that question, but I can say that Arthur's influence on me as a scholar, an educator, and a wobbly sort of disciple myself keeps it alive in my work. It is a question that points us toward the benefits pressing beyond the “classic” boundaries of any discipline and of attending to even what appear to be the most marginal of approaches and perspectives so we can open new ways of seeing and understanding a rapidly changing world. It is a question, furthermore, that carries with it a gracious acceptance of both the solidly traditional and the often uncertain frameworks of the new. It is a venerable question from among the most venerable of scholars and educators I have known, Arthur G. Holder. I feel incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to keep trying to put it into practice.

*Elizabeth Drescher (PhD, '08) is Adjunct Associate Professor of Religion and Pastoral Ministry at Santa Clara University and author of Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones (Oxford, 2015).*



# The GTU Honors Arthur Holder

Throughout my six years serving with Arthur Holder on the GTU Council of Deans, I was continually impressed by his competence and graciousness. Arthur was always fully informed of the varied and complex administrative developments at the GTU, and his even-tempered personality was a perfect fit for dealing with its varied constituencies. I always found him to be a strong advocate for faculty and students.

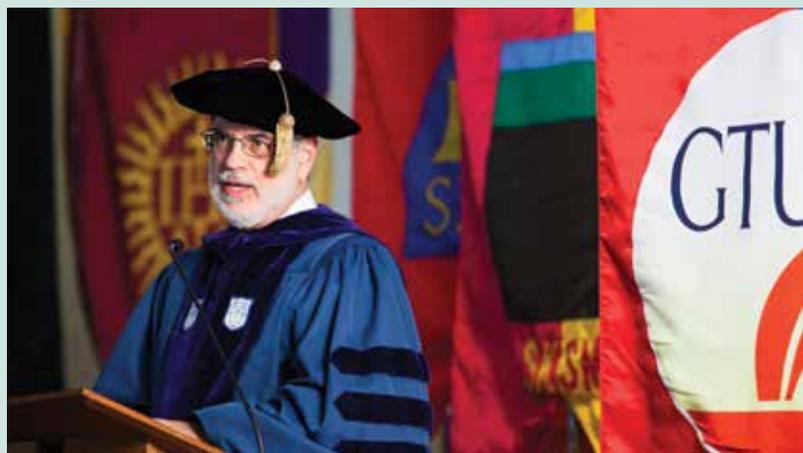
—**Bruce Lescher** (PhD, '91), Senior Lecturer in Christian Spirituality and former Associate Academic Dean, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

Words cannot express how deeply grateful I am for Arthur Holder's extraordinary leadership, mentorship, and friendship. I am thankful for his generosity of spirit, and for the care and kindness he has shown me and the Center for Islamic Studies. Arthur is exemplary in that Christian Spirituality is not just his academic commitment but something he practices in all that he does. I am a better director, scholar, teacher, and Muslim because of his dedication. Alhamdulillah (Praise God) and congratulations to Arthur Holder for his many years of exceptional and selfless service as GTU Dean.

—**Munir Jiwa**, Director, Center for Islamic Studies

Arthur Holder has been an excellent friend to New College Berkeley and me during his years as Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs at the GTU. Although NCB is one of the smaller organizations within the GTU, Arthur has never given me the sense that he regards me or New College Berkeley as inconsequential. My NCB colleagues and I often comment that we don't know when we've met a person who so graciously blends the gifts of scholar, pastor, and leader. Arthur's scholarship is significant, and he is a ready mentor to other scholars. His pastoral care is evident in the way he listens to colleagues, even in the context of agenda-driven meetings. As a leader, he empowers others and helps us grow in the work we do. During Arthur's years as Dean, there have been transitions for the GTU and many of the schools and institutes within it. Education—and theological education in particular—has been weathering storms. I can't think of a better person to have offered navigational guidance to the GTU through all kinds of weather than Dean Arthur Holder.

—**Susan S. Phillips**, Executive Director and Professor of Christianity and Sociology, New College Berkeley



I must have performed many good deeds over the course of several lifetimes, because in this life I've had the blessing of working closely with Arthur G. Holder. From our earliest days of negotiating with faculty over admissions decisions to our recent work together on accreditation and the new doctoral program curriculum, I have had a profound appreciation for Arthur's genuine spirit, intellect, eloquence, deep commitment, faith, good humor, and, especially, his respect and support. He is a steadfast comrade, a respectful associate, a creative thinker, a co-teacher who works in full partnership, a mentor with an elegant diplomacy, an executive administrator who bridges imagination and reality, and a cherished friend.

—**Kathleen Kook**, GTU Dean of Students

Arthur has been a trusted friend, a wise Dean, and a committed member of the Board of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences for many years. As my Dean, Arthur has listened to my joys and challenges in teaching MDiv and doctoral courses, and I have grown wonderfully through our annual faculty review. On the CTNS Board, Arthur has represented both the GTU's perspective and CTNS's vision in gentle yet clear ways, and offered sage advice that helped CTNS negotiate the complicated transition from GTU Affiliate to Program Unit. Arthur truly embodies Christian discipleship in the wonderful GTU ethos of ecumenical and inter-religious communities. I am deeply grateful that he has been my academic Dean, my colleague in scholarship, my trusted voice of wisdom and prudence for CTNS, and most of all my dear friend.

—**Robert J. Russell**, Director, Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences

Visit [www.gtu.edu/honoringArthur](http://www.gtu.edu/honoringArthur) to see the full version of these and other essays—and to offer your own words of tribute.



# Sacred Art Collection Comes to the GTU

On these pages, you will see select items from an extensive collection of nearly 300 pieces of sacred art that have been in part gifted and in part loaned to the Graduate Theological Union by the Institute for Aesthetic Development and Lanier Graham and family. This marvelous collection, valued at nearly \$1M, covers most of the world's religious traditions, fitting perfectly with the GTU's expanding interest in the scholarship and practices of religions with origins in the Middle East and Asia. Donor Lanier Graham, the former Chief Curator of the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, chose the GTU for this gift in part because of the GTU's focus on multiple religions and their mutual engagement.

Sacred art often presents symbolic interpretations of that which is deemed holy or transcendent, as artists across centuries and cultures have expressed their reverence and devotion graphically through sculpture, painting, calligraphy, architecture, designs, and other artistic forms. While sacred art is included in the collections of many public and private museums, this new collection at the GTU is unique in that it focuses entirely on sacred art from multiple traditions.

The GTU hopes to take detailed photographs of each work and make images available online to students, faculty, and the public. In addition, funds are being sought to allow portions of the collection to be displayed throughout the school's buildings on a rotating basis and to allow students and scholars to better access the entire collection.



Phoenix Goblet, China, possibly Ming Dynasty (c. 1368-1644 CE)

Garuda, the "vehicle" of the Hindu deity Vishnu. > Garuda represents the ability of divine presence to see everything and be everywhere. Silver, Tibetan.



Seated Guanyin, the Chinese feminine version of the Bodhisatva of Compassion, Blanc de Chine Porcelain, 19th or 20th Century

Photos by Edward Klyce



Indra Seated, Brass, India



Gu Mask, used by women to arbitrate, painted wood, Guro People, Ivory Coast



# Paying It Forward

**Through their gift establishing the GTU's new Center for Dharma Studies, Mira and Ajay Shingal have invested in the future of Hindu scholarship**

**O**n December 5, 2015, the Graduate Theological Union announced the establishment and endowment of the Mira and Ajay Shingal Center for Dharma Studies, a center dedicated to the academic study of Hinduism, Jainism, and Indian Buddhism. The creation of the Center for Dharma Studies was a major step toward the GTU's goal of having all of the world's great religious traditions represented in its academic community.

The new Center for Dharma Studies was made possible by a \$4.4 million gift from a Bay Area couple, Mira and Ajay Shingal, who have been integral to the local Hindu community for twenty-five years. The Shingals chose the GTU for their gift because they believe deeply in the GTU's approach to religious scholarship: "We are so encouraged by the GTU's faith-based approach to education, where students learn from faculty who are practitioners within the traditions they teach," Mira Shingal explains. "The study of many different religions here offers students the opportunity to be in conversation with different ways of thinking, and deepen their knowledge. But Hinduism has been visibly missing at the GTU," she continued. "We feel privileged that we were able to make a gift to help establish this Center. And our hope is that the Center for Dharma Studies will be a very significant help in expanding the understanding of Hinduism for many generations to come."

Ajay Shingal echoed his wife's thoughts about the unique environment the GTU offers: "We need places where religion is respected and taught openly, and for us there is no place that does this better than the GTU. As I hear about the relationships that the Director of the Center for Dharma Studies, Dr. Rita

Sherma, has already built with faculty from the GTU's other Centers such as the Center for Jewish Studies and Center for Islamic Studies, I reflect on the importance of those kinds of relationships that really bind the community together. I think the GTU, through both the member schools that founded it, and the academic centers that have been established over the years, really provides a unique environment, where people from different traditions are able to sit down at the table and talk, with the understanding that we do have differences, but we still respect one another and can seek to work together."

Shingal expressed his appreciation for the ways in which the diverse GTU community and its member schools have shown support for the establishment of the Center for Dharma Studies. "We met one day with the Dean and Director of Intercultural Initiatives at the Jesuit School of Theology, and we spent three hours talking about the commonalities between our two traditions." JST is offering an Interreligious Immersion Course in fall 2016, followed by an immersion trip to India next January in which students will visit both Hindu and Christian sites. The course will be jointly offered by the Center for Dharma Studies and the JST, led by professors Thomas Cattoi and Purushottama



*“We need places where religion is respected and taught openly, and for us there is no place that does this better than the GTU.”*

*–Ajay Shingal*



Bilimoria. “These are the kinds of exciting opportunities that are available at the GTU,” noted Shingal.

While the Shingals celebrate the GTU’s multi-religious environment, their greatest passion is for the expansion of the academic study of their own Hindu tradition. “Hinduism is a very unique, peaceful, and global way of looking at the world,” Mira Shingal explains. “It is a religion of universality that believes we all emanate from the same power, that we are all connected, and that we must take care of this small planet we live on.” Hinduism has “tremendous wisdom” and “a legacy to offer the world” says Mira, but there are few places in the United States where Hinduism is studied with the kind of comprehensive, broad-ranging, academic approach used to study other faiths.

The Shingals believe in-depth scholarship that illuminates the textual, philosophical, and theological ethos of the Hindu world as well as its lived practice can help correct distorted understandings of Hinduism throughout U.S. culture. They have long been involved with an initiative that seeks to address errors in the way Hinduism is depicted in the textbooks in California elementary schools. But this campaign, Ajay says, has been hampered by the lack of Hindu scholars in the United States whose academic credentials are recognized by the state Board of Education. “Back in India, we have institutions where Hinduism is studied, but that same advantage is not available to second or third generations of Hindu American youth growing up here,” offers Mira. “So this is a gift we felt like we could offer to our own Hindu young people, and others in-

terested in Hindu Studies, to help create a space at the GTU where scholars are exposed to the systematic, in-depth study of Hinduism, and also have contact with, and knowledge of other faiths.”

The Shingals hope the Center established in their names will continue to grow and diversify in the years to come. “Hinduism is such a multi-faceted religion, with different teachers and different paths,” says Mira. “I hope the Center will grow so that one day we’ll see a greater range of different Hindu philosophies taught by different professors, and students will be given more than one view of this great philosophy. That’s part of the beauty of Hinduism. It’s not just one simple way of thinking, but it includes many diverse views.” They also look forward to the Center’s expansion of its course offerings in other Dharma traditions like Jainism and Indian Buddhism. The Jain Center of Northern California has recently opened a Jain Studies Initiative at the Center for Dharma Studies, offering graduate courses in Jainism.

“Mira and I feel extremely lucky to have found an institution like the GTU,” says Ajay Shingal. “We know the Center for Dharma Studies will get the best support possible here, so we anticipate many good things in the years to come.” Mira agrees, “I look forward to the day when future generations who grow up here in the United States will be able to learn from scholars who studied at the GTU.”

*Doug Davidson is Director of Communications at the GTU.*





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## **“Learning as Collaborative Conversation” May 25-26, 2016**

For nearly thirty years, Dr. Judith Berling’s effective methods in interdisciplinary, interreligious, and intercultural learning and communication have been instrumental in shaping the GTU’s approach to education. You’re invited to join GTU students, alumni, faculty, and friends from near and far as we gather at the GTU on May 25-26 for a two-day symposium celebrating Dr. Berling’s scholarship and influence.

Visit [www.gtu.edu/celebrating-judith-berling](http://www.gtu.edu/celebrating-judith-berling) to view a full schedule including featured speakers; then follow the links to register your attendance for the free conference and purchase tickets for the celebration dinner on Wednesday evening. Hope we’ll see you there!

## **Upcoming Events**

### **7th Annual Islamophobia Conference**

“Islamophobia: Has a Tipping Point Been Reached?”

Co-Sponsored by the Center for Islamic Studies

**April 22-23**

UC Berkeley School of Law, 215 Boalt Hall, Berkeley

### **Shanti: A Journey of Peace**

A musical celebration integrating western and Indian music, co-sponsored by the Center for Dharma Studies

**April 30, 5:00 pm and 9:00 pm**

Flint Center, 2120 Stevens Creek Blvd, Cupertino

**May 31, 7:00 pm**

Interstake Center Auditorium, Oakland

### **GTU Commencement**

**May 11, 4:00 pm**

PLTS Chapel of the Cross, 2770 Marin Ave, Berkeley

### **Axe for the Frozen Sea Within Us: Law and Violence**

A presentation by Avivah Zornberg, sponsored by the Center for Jewish Studies

**May 13th, 9:00 am**

Pacific School of Religion, Mudd Building 100,  
1798 Scenic Avenue, Berkeley

All events are open to the public, unless noted.  
Visit [www.gtu.edu/events](http://www.gtu.edu/events) for more information.