

GTU

currents

NEWS OF THE GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION

Where religion meets the world

FALL 2007

3 Alumna Alexis Latner

4 Newhall Awards

8 Fall Calendar

9 Faculty Profile:
Mia Mochizuki

10 Point of View:
Questioning the Past,
Creating the Future

12 New Student
Scholarship Fund



“

My belief is that each of us is endowed with the capability of imagination. How do we encourage it? Kierkegaard would answer — through a passion for life.

”

Jenny Veninga,
Newhall Scholar

Imaginative Theology

Studying Kierkegaard Spurs Imagination

“I believe imagination is the central part of our identity as humans, our belief system, and how we conceive of God.”

So says Graduate Theological Union 2007-2008 Newhall Scholar Jennifer (Jenny) Veninga, who will teach a course next spring under the supervision of Dr. George Greiner, on the relevancy of 19th century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard’s existentialist thought in the 21st century. “Theology,” Veninga says, “can emerge in the imagination. Kierkegaard wrote extensively about imagination, the media, and religious thought, but this work is seldom discussed among scholars.”



Jenny Veninga

Veninga discovered Kierkegaard in his own country when she spent an undergraduate semester studying in Copenhagen. The Dane’s influence has held sway for a decade, leading her last summer to St. Olaf College in Minnesota, where she did research at the world’s top Kierkegaard collection and studied Danish.

“I fell in love with Kierkegaard’s passion,” says Veninga, “and his relentless questions about what it means to exist and be in relationship with God.”

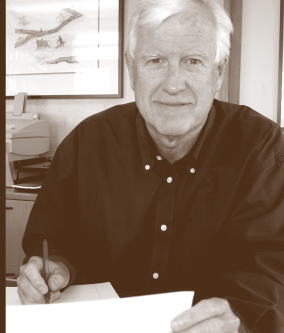
Veninga just completed her comprehensive exams at the GTU, exploring the intersection of media — especially the Internet — with public imagination. “Is there such a thing as a cultural imagination?” she said. “How is it informed by culture, politics, and religion?”

Another question for Veninga is — how does one group imagine the identity of the other, such as Palestinians and Israelis, who seem unable to reach across the divide. How do they learn to practice “responsible imagination” concerning their own identity and that of others?

“Kierkegaard,” she said, “saw imagination as so powerful it could be used for good or evil. Martin Luther King, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Kierkegaard were certainly visionaries. But so was Hitler. My belief is that each of us is endowed with the capability of imagination. How do we encourage it? Kierkegaard would answer — through a passion for life. Being who we’re called to be. I want to help awaken denied, dormant, or unrecognized imagination.”

In the course she will teach this year as a Newhall Scholar, “Rediscovering Kierkegaard in the Present Age,” Veninga will aim for elements of the philosopher’s legacy she says have been overlooked or narrowly interpreted.

continued on page 6



Dear GTU Community,

I am more convinced than ever, as I enter my eighth year as Graduate Theological Union president, that our mission to educate leaders for a future of diverse religions and cultures is one of our greatest assets. It captures the commitment of the creative leaders who founded the GTU as a center for ecumenical, interdisciplinary, and interreligious graduate study. And it positions us at this time for leadership in a way unparalleled in our own history, and in the history of theological education.

As religion plays a more prominent role in public affairs and culture, and as religious conflicts abound, our world cries out for understanding and collaboration. The GTU has a distinctive niche — training students for leadership in teaching, research, ministry, and service in this world of theological and religious difference.

We are fulfilling our mission well, and I am proud of our accomplishments this past year. Specifically, our accreditors commended the GTU for the focus of our work, quality of our programs, fulfillment of our mission, and our ongoing strategic planning. I am also delighted that we have made two new exciting academic appointments. Munir Jiwa is executive director and assistant professor of Islamic Studies at the Center for Islamic Studies, a significant addition to the life and work of the GTU. Holger Zellentin, assistant professor of rabbinics and late antique Judaism, brings to full complement the faculty of the Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies.

This issue of *Currents* focuses on the use of imagination in theology. I think the GTU's institutional planning also involves creative imagination. The best planning combines rationality and focus with an openness to imaginative possibilities. This is why our mission serves us well: we bring our commitments, faculty, staff, insights, and experience to train leaders able to address the world's diverse needs.

Our planning involves finding creative intersections between our denominational interests as we pursue ecumenical understanding and unity, and among Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, and Asian theologies and religions. The ecumenical and interreligious conversations that result are critical for creating justice and peace in a pluralistic and often polarized world. This is our opportunity — and our promise.

I am honored to be an alumnus and president of the GTU. Our mission, ethos, history, and the way in which we plan for the future are at the heart of what matters for the future of religion in the world.

James A. Donahue

GTU alumni speak about how their GTU experience has influenced their life's work.

Alexis Glynn Latner discusses how the GTU stirred her imagination to new ways of seeing and doing.

The Graduate Theological Union is a place where theology has imagination, and the imagination has theology. Witness my M.A. thesis: I started with revelation as described by Paul Tillich — conventional and comfortable reality falling apart, creating human anguish, and painful existential questions, after which the holy reveals itself as a surprising and salvific answer. And I compared it to classics of science fiction literature, like *Star Maker* by Olaf Stapledon, *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. LeGuin, and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter Miller. Where else but at the GTU, with the critical but enthusiastic support of advisors, could I have done a thesis like this? My primary advisor was Robert J. Russell, Director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences. Ted Peters of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and Durwood Foster of San Francisco Theological Seminary also advised.

My thesis was a springboard to a vocation in creative writing. I've edited creative and technical books, taught creative writing, and written magazine articles. My stories have appeared in science fiction magazines and horror anthologies, and my novel, *Hurricane Moon*, was published in July 2007.

The intersection of science and religion plays a large part in *Hurricane Moon*. A starship sets out to find a



**Alexis Latner, M.A. 1985,
science fiction writer**

unknown. For space mission planners, that phrase means the things you can't plan for because you can't anticipate them. In a theological context, "the unknown unknown" evokes God. In *Hurricane Moon*, people experience the *unknown unknown* in both ways.

There are as many reasons to write science fiction as there are writers, but as a GTU alumna, a substantial part of my motivation is service to the world. Science fiction readers tend to have lively but tired minds — they are readers who need mental recreation. When someone needs a good book to help get through a bad night, I want mine to be a book they reach for. Additionally, we live in a world where science and technology continually unravel our certainties, change our social structures, and even threaten to end the world, as we know it. Parables of faith in a scientific, technological universe help both writer and reader in their journeys of faith.

The GTU helped shape my theological imagination and my writing. Studying theology and faith in an ecumenical, interfaith, multicultural setting was memorable, and those experiences led me to create new worlds in which to explore questions of spirituality and science.

"Studying theology and faith in an ecumenical, interfaith, multicultural setting was memorable, and those experiences led me to create new worlds in which to explore questions of spirituality and science."

new world and establish a new civilization, without the mistakes made on Earth. The new world must have a large moon to stabilize the planet's axis, bring life-giving tides, and assure the ecological future. Astronauts and colonists of the starship *Aeon* discover a green, oceanic planet covered with hurricanes. It has a huge blue moon. But then their season of crisis begins. The starfarers are variously humanist, atheist, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Pagan, and other — and all of them must refine their faith in the crucible of the *unknown*

Newhall Awards

Each year the Graduate Theological Union recognizes a group of doctoral students as Newhall Scholars, providing the opportunity to work collaboratively with core faculty to develop and teach new courses, lead research, and expand the boundaries of innovative scholarship. This year 23 scholars will present a broad spectrum of topics, including religious conversion theories, Asian American congregational identities, new media in worship, and the moral status of animals. These fellowships were made possible through the generosity of Jane Newhall, a Trustee Emerita and longtime friend of the GTU.

“Asian Hermeneutics and Postcolonial Reading of Biblical Wisdom Literature”

SUNGAE HA (GTU)

A study of biblical wisdom texts in the context of Daoist texts that emphasize a feminist spirituality focused on nourishing life as well as freedom from conventional thinking and patriarchal social order.

“Biblical Translation: History, Theory, and Ethics”

COURTNEY GULDEN
(GTU)

A focus on major biblical translations within the context of historical periods. Students will translate passages to help them understand how words and ideas evolve from cultural, social, and political influences of the period, as well as how myths regarding “literal” and “original” texts arise.



“Biblical Women in Art and Literature”

BOBBI DYKEMA KATSANIS
(Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley)

An examination of the ways biblical women have been depicted in Western art and literature. Through biblical texts and works of art, students will study the effects of these depictions on theology, biblical studies, and ministry as well as their relationship with goddess figures from European and Near Eastern traditions.

“Christianity and the Ottoman Empire”

JASON VAN BOOM (GTU)

An exploration of the role of the early Ottoman Empire in European history, starting with the battle of Manzikert in 1071 through the

dissolution of the Ottoman sultanate in 1923. The course will also study the influence of this early history on modern relations between Islam and the West, and ask whether religious historians can contribute to a dialogue that would improve possibilities for peace.



“Environmental Ethics”

MARILYN MATEVIA
(GTU)

An exploration of the moral status of animals through scriptural, philosophic, and scientific sources of norms and rationales that shape human relations with animals. Students will also study how these relations are reflected in the world biodiversity crisis.

“Grace and Freedom”

SHEILA TAYLOR (GTU)

An examination of the “problem of grace and freedom” or the relation of divine action to human action in the work of Christian salvation during both historical and contemporary times. Is grace contingent on human choice? Or, is human freedom illusory due to the sovereign power of grace?

“Harmony in Faith: Asian Identities and Worship”

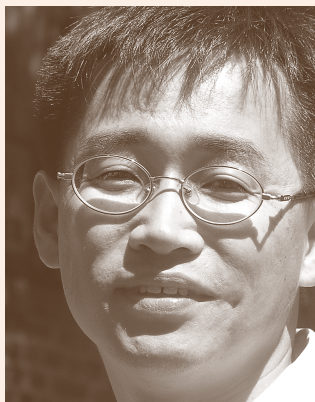
RICKY MANALO (GTU)

A survey of liturgical celebrations and devotional practices from Asian Christian heritages that incorporate Asian cultural symbols, rituals, and stories. The course will present the subject from a Roman Catholic perspective within a larger ecumenical context.

“History of Christianity in China”

HYUNG SHIN PARK (GTU)

A study of Chinese Christianity from the Tang dynasty on, including its origins, cultural expressions, and theological developments that include the early diversion from a European style of Christianity, Roman Catholicism, evangelism, missionary work, and Christianity in the new China.



“Minimalism and Spirit: Body/Land”

LARRY TAYLOR (GTU)

A study of the spiritual dimensions minimalist art presents and the religious experience such works can engender. Students will investigate Judeo-Christian traditions, Buddhism, phenomenology, ecology, and more to help understand the implications of minimalist art and the relationship between religious and aesthetic experience.

“Music as Art and Theology”

WALTER KNOWLES (GTU)

An ecumenical study of music used in Christian worship communities from an historical, theological, and theological aesthetics perspective. Students will examine ritual and social context for music from the New Testament through the 19th century.



“New Media in Worship/Preaching”

MICAH JACKSON (GTU)

An exploration of the role of media, including film and static images, as an aid to public worship and preaching. Students will create media-enhanced “worship offerings.”

“New Religious Movements in the USA”

EMILY WU (GTU), **NATALIE FISK** (GTU),
OFELIA VILLERO (GTU)

Once known as cults, new religious movements are well established in the U.S. This course is an examination of what historical and social conditions cause such groups to form and whether they present a danger or are examples of broad theological diversity outside white Judeo-Christian traditions.

“Rediscovering Kierkegaard in the Present Age”

JENNIFER VENINGA (GTU)

An opportunity for students to investigate larger themes in the writings of noted 19th century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, including how to live a meaningful life and make sense of one’s existence, the importance of decision-making, and the role of the individual in church and society. (Read a profile of Jennifer Veninga on page 1 of this issue.)

“Rethinking Women in Paul”

LAURA ANDERSON (GTU)

An introduction to the women portrayed in the Apostle Paul’s New Testament letters, with an examination of the impact of subsequent interpretation, considering gender, textual voice and presence, power, work and economics, family life, and religious practice.



Richetta Amen

“Slavery and Scripture”

KATY VALENTINE (GTU),
RICHETTA AMEN (GTU)

An historical survey of Greek and Roman slavery and its relationship to New Testament literature that both supports and condemns the practice. Students will interpret these passages with other readings, including author Toni Morrison’s novel “Beloved.”

Newhall Awards *continued*

“Success and Failure in Religious Nonviolence”

JOHN ROEDEL (GTU)

An introduction to principled, unconditional nonviolence based on strong religious commitment in contrast to “strategic” nonviolence used as a tactic. Students will explore both successes and failures of nonviolence to evaluate its effectiveness.

“The American Jewish Experience: History and Culture”

RACHEL MILLER (GTU)

An overview of American Jewish history and culture from the arrival of the first Portuguese Jews in New Amsterdam to the present day. In addition, the course will cover internal tensions within the Jewish community and the interaction of Jews with the larger American culture.

“The Spirituality of Henri Nouwen”

KANGHACK LEE (GTU)

An introduction to the theology and spirituality of Henri Nouwen, a

late-20th century Catholic priest and spiritual writer who focused on such topics as art, community with the disabled, and compassion and social justice.

“Theories of Conversion:

Models and Methods of Religious Change”

STEVE BAUMAN (GTU)

A multidisciplinary study of the phenomenon of conversion, with attention to modern conversion theory and experiences across a broad spectrum of spiritual traditions and marginalized groups.

“Wisdom Literature and Spirituality”

ELIZABETH FORD (GTU)

A focus on Wisdom and Deuterocanonical texts as well as contemporary wisdom figures in students’ lives to determine the process by which text and life form and inform wisdom spirituality.

Imaginative Theology *continued from page 1*

Through films such as “Babette’s Feast,” novels by Walker Percy and Flannery O’Connor, and music by Mozart, one of Kierkegaard’s favorite composers, Veninga will lead students to his main themes, among them paradox, anxiety, despair, redemption, and the relation between self and society.

“I want to find fresh ways of looking at Kierkegaard,” Veninga says, “including his critique of the newspapers of his day and his preference for indirect communication as a way of conveying theological ideas. Kierkegaard said Jesus himself used storytelling.”

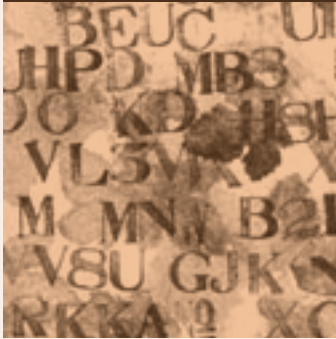
Veninga’s interest in imagination may have started with Walt Whitman. As a Southern Methodist University (SMU) undergraduate majoring in religious studies, she wrote a paper about the noted American poet, finding him a “mystic of the ordinary,” a man of great vision who was able to imagine and understand how human beings live in this world.

Whitman, a writer who found beauty in the commonplace, seems a fitting start for a young woman from a two-stoplight Texas town, who still misses her cowgirl boots. After SMU, Veninga went to Harvard Divinity School, where she earned a master’s degree in theological studies, then returned to SMU for a yearlong fellowship in the chaplain’s office. She chose the GTU, which she describes as “one of the best decisions of my life,” for her doctoral program in the area of Systematic and Philosophical Theology.

Veninga’s passion calls her to two roles—teacher and minister. She expects to finish her doctorate in the next two years as she also completes the ordination process for the United Church of Christ.

“If I can create my dream job,” she says, “I will serve as a university or college chaplain and also teach in a religious studies department or affiliated theology school.”

Students Speak



Two doctoral students reflect on how the GTU has spurred their creative thinking, expanding their view of theology in the world.

SARA LEMME, INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

The diversity of students, faculty, and course offerings at the GTU has opened my eyes to the many differences among theologies — sometimes held even by those belonging to the same religious community. This has helped me think creatively about various avenues for communicating about religion to a theologically diverse community. For example, I am exploring the question — What could the Hebrew Scriptures *sound* like? — by looking deeply at the musical elements of the text, such as meter, repetition, and accents. Music has the potential to transcend that place where minds can crash into each other, allowing truth to be expressed in a more conceivable manner to a wider audience.



RYAN PARKER, ART AND RELIGION

My introduction to Korean cinema through the Korean Student Association's film festival and my advisor's suggestions to examine religious uses of contemporary cinema in America have expanded my creative thinking in unimaginable ways. But perhaps the greatest challenge has come to my theological worldview. In the American South, where I've spent most of my life, the familiar question, "Where do you go to church?" implicitly links an individual to the collective identity of a particular congregation. The GTU has encouraged me to forego denominational concerns and seek out places where my faith and theology resonate with the wider world.



Meet us in San Diego for the Annual GTU Alumni/ae Luncheon at AAR/SBL

11 a.m. reception, 11:30 a.m. lunch
Saturday November 17, 2007
San Diego Marriott Hotel and Marina
Marriott Hall Salon 6
333 West Harbor Dr.
San Diego, CA 92101

Join us at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting as we honor our 2007 Alum of the Year, Bernard Adeney-Risakotta (Ph.D. '82), Director, Indonesian Consortium of Religious Studies, a doctoral program sponsored by Yogyakarta Gadjah Mada University, State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga, and Duta Wacana Christian University.

Open to all alumni/ae. Advance reservations required.

RSVP no later than November 5 to Kris Jachens -- 510/649-2424 / kjachens@gtu.edu or visit www.gtualumni.net/alumlunch to register online.

Visit www.gtu.edu for more information on these and other Graduate Theological Union readings, art exhibits, lectures, conferences, and more.

GTU Library Workshops

September 7 – November 8, 2007

Graduate-level Library Skills; Craft of Research; Presentation and Communication Skills; and "Make it Snappy: Give Us Thirty Minutes and Walk Out With a New Skill." All workshops meet in the GTU library Teaching Lab. Sign up at the Flora Lamson Hewlett Library, 2400 Ridge Road, Berkeley, at the reference desk or at http://library.gtu.edu/forms/workshop_signup.html.

James Rosen: Homage

Thursday, October 25, 2007

5:30 p.m., Opening Reception followed by 6 p.m. Lecture. Graduate Theological Union Flora Lamson Hewlett Library, 2400 Ridge Road, Berkeley. Exhibition runs to January 30, 2008. James Rosen's work has been exhibited at galleries and museums

throughout America and abroad. His homage to Grunewald's 1515 "Crucifixion" graces a wall of the Flora Lamson Hewlett Library. This exhibition celebrates Rosen as artist, teacher, and friend of the GTU and will feature a selection of paintings inspired by past Great Masters, as well as his recent works. The exhibition coincides with his show at Gallery Paule Anglim in San Francisco. For information: 510/649-2541 or cwoulfe@gtu.edu.

Distinguished Faculty Lecture 2007

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

7 p.m., Chapel of The Great Commission, Pacific School of Religion, 1798 Scenic Ave. (at Le Conte), Berkeley.

"Who Do You Say That I Am? The Fundamental Question for the Moral Life." Lecture by Richard Gula, S.S., Professor of Moral Theology, Franciscan School of Theology. Response by Martha Ellen Stortz, Professor of Historical Theology and Ethics, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. Reception and refreshments to follow in the GTU Flora Lamson Hewlett Library, Richard S. Dinner Boardroom. All are invited.

For information: 510/649-2440 or gtudean@gtu.edu.

Andalucía: Crossroads of Europe • May 2008

Immerse yourself in the diverse traditions and fascinating history of Spain's Andalucía region with the Graduate Theological Union Travel Program. Explore this crossroads of Europe, where Christian, Jewish, and Muslim cultures once intersected and

thrived. Dr. James Conway (Th.D. '72) will lead a 9-day visit for 20 guests, including private tours of historical sites, meetings with local community leaders, and free time for your own discoveries.

Dr. Conway, who is fluent in Spanish, holds a doctorate in sociology and religion from the GTU, a master's degree in development economics, and a bachelor's degree in philosophy and religion. He currently serves as a regional officer for USAID in central Africa.

For more information about this and other GTU Travel Program opportunities, contact 510/649-2420 or travel@gtu.edu.

God's Action In Nature's World:

Assessing Publications By Robert John Russell

Saturday, December 8, 2007

1-5 p.m., Richard S. Dinner Board Room, Flora Lamson Hewlett Library, 2400 Ridge Road, Berkeley.

A conference sponsored by the GTU and The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences featuring Dr. Robert John Russell, Professor of Theology and Science in Residence at the GTU and Founder and Director of The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS), a GTU affiliate. This conference will critically assess Dr. Russell's new book, *Cosmology—from Alpha to Omega: the Creative Mutual Interaction of Theology and Science: Selected Essays 1982-2007* (Fortress Press, forthcoming) and the *festschrift*, *God's Action in Nature's World: Essays in Honour of Robert John Russell*, edited by Ted Peters and Nathan Hallanger. Scholars will comment on the nearly three decades of scholarship produced by CTNS at the GTU. All are invited. For information, visit www.ctns.org or call 510/848-8152.

Revealing Faith in Art

Ask Dr. Mia Mochizuki, Thomas E. Bertelsen, Jr. Chair of Art History and Religion at the Graduate Theological Union, about the relationship between art and theology, and she'll tell you it boils down to one thing — imagination.

“What all religious art — whether cathedral, crucifix, or painted tin saint — has in common is the drive to understand the divine,” says Mochizuki. “We see the push and pull of the imagination as it struggles to give form to the incomprehensible.”

She views the study of art history as critical to the work of the GTU and a life of faith. In her classes at the GTU and the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, Mochizuki shows how objects and architecture have a central role to play in the study and practice of religion.

“Art history gives students access to the missing half of theological sources,” she says. “Objects are artifacts of belief and have as much to tell us about faith and practice as texts.”

“Studying art history also allows students to think outside the box about how they can creatively minister to the churches of tomorrow. Increasingly, we live in a visual society, and visual literacy is a critical component in ministering to a range of communities.”

“What all religious art — whether cathedral, crucifix, or painted tin saint — has in common is the drive to understand the divine.”

— Mia Mochizuki, Ph.D.

In Houston, a Quaker meetinghouse includes a 12-by-12 foot square retractable roof. At sunset rays pour through and, Mochizuki says, “look like a flash on the human eyeball, like a revelation.” In Oakland, the Cathedral of Christ the Light is rising on a busy urban corner with soaring walls of glass, transcendence crystallized.

“How does the structure of a building shape participation in the liturgy?” Mochizuki asks her students. “How can a painting of a Madonna and Child serve as a focus for retreat or the basis of an intercultural dialogue?”

The GTU, Mochizuki says, “is on the cutting edge of finding ways to imaginatively enrich the practice of religion.” Its Art and Religion area is the oldest program of its kind in the nation and was an integral part of the GTU's founding.

Art making also plays a part in theological education at the GTU, with courses through the Center for Arts, Religion, and Education (CARE) that explore the intersection of art, spirituality, and imagination. Students can learn new media techniques, such as digital filmmaking, or revered traditions like manuscript illumination or icon painting.

Mochizuki says she expresses her own imagination through research. She earned her doctorate in art history at Yale University, where she focused her studies on early Netherlandish, reformation, and 17th-century Dutch and Flemish art. Her forthcoming book, *The Netherlandish Image after Iconoclasm, 1566-1672*, addresses the challenges for church decoration in the first century after iconoclasm.

In her book Mochizuki asks, how can we understand the power of devotional art through its destruction? Citing Stephen De Staebler's “Winged Figure” in the GTU library as an example, she asks, “Should we understand the sculpture through the half of the body present or the half that's absent? Absence can underscore the generative aspect of iconoclasm and, in a sense, lay the foundation of what is to come.”

Grappling with these and other questions of the visualization of belief, she says, is what trains students to discern, construct, and innovate new forms of communication in their ministries.

“What I find so inspiring,” she says, “is the diversity of religious art — everything from the Amiens Cathedral to Andy Warhol — that never fails to remind me of the power and range of human creativity in the service of faith. After nearly five centuries, we still feel that electric jolt when we see Michelangelo's God giving the spark of life to Adam on the Sistine Chapel ceiling.”



Mia Mochizuki



Questioning the Past, Creating the Future

Two member school presidents discuss how the Graduate Theological Union's unique academic environment prepares students to use creative thinking in theology.



**Rebecca Parker
and
William McKinney**

REBECCA PARKER

President, Starr King School for the Ministry

"In the experience of our faculty, women cannot think theologically." This is what my advisor told me when I began graduate studies in religion three decades ago. Women's theological work was transforming the questions and methods employed in theological analysis — but this rising wave of energetic, critical, and creative work hadn't yet influenced the curriculum in theological education. I changed advisors.

Theological education's curriculum has advanced since the 1970's. The work of Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Asian women; feminist and Womanist theologians; and *mujerista* and Native American scholars has introduced new questions and imagined new approaches. This is critical because the standards of excellence for theological schools cannot be met today without the leadership of scholars who bring multiple worlds and realities into their work.

As faculty, many of us expect ourselves and our students to think theologically at the intersections of diverse cultures, religions, and life experiences. We still have work to do. I look forward to the day when the GTU has a critical mass of women of color scholars on the core doctoral faculty and when the Council of Presidents is racially and cultural diverse.

When I began my graduate education, the theological faculty addressed significant topics — nuclear proliferation, ecological crisis, the gulf between religion and science, and world hunger — but they were largely ignorant of the worlds I knew as a woman. My degree program required me to become knowledgeable of the world *as the faculty knew it*, but left the world *as I knew it* un-named and un-examined. It turned my attention away from realities such as violence against women and children, gender inequality, homophobia, and racism — issues that moved to the center of my theological thinking only after I graduated.

continued on page 15

WILLIAM MCKINNEY

President, Pacific School of Religion

When PSR's faculty revised our Master of Divinity curriculum a few years ago, one of our trustees — Sara Polster of Jossey Bass publishers —pressed us to articulate the educational values that inform the curriculum. We took a long time — almost a year — to respond to our trustee's challenge.

The new curriculum is built on four core principles, two of which seem to me to be broadly affirmed across the GTU.

One core value is an emphasis on the critical appropriation of the texts and practices of the Christian life in an interfaith perspective. For me the phrase critical appropriation implies a certain posture or way of being that demands both an appreciation of what has been thought or done in the past, along with a radical willingness to question the relevance of past practice for God's emerging future.

A second core value we affirmed is contextuality. Religious texts and practices are born in and lived out in particular social and cultural contexts. An important goal for theological education is helping students understand various contexts, including, but not limited to, their own. Theological education serves multiple publics and exists in a peculiar space between the academy and various faith communities. In some places creative thinking in theology is seen just as part of a seminary's accountability to the academy, but that's not true here at GTU. I think we've helped our sponsoring religious communities understand that creative thinking is critical for their futures as well.

As a Christian I am more and more convinced that our best theological work is happening in places that engage both the full range of Christian faith expressions and lively interaction with other living faith traditions. This is possible at GTU in ways it is not possible for most theological schools. Do we do it as well as I would like? We're on our way but we're not there yet. Even with the diversity of backgrounds and interests represented on Holy Hill, we always have more opportunity to foster the sort of dialogue that could happen here.

GTU: Then, Now, Future

Twenty years ago, Judith Berling arrived at the Graduate Theological Union as dean. Today and throughout this year, in addition to her role as Professor of Chinese and Comparative Religions, she is serving as the Acting Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs. It is a kind of *déjà vu*, she says, or coming home.

“I’m coming into the role now with much more knowledge of the GTU,” she says. “The good news is that the GTU is much sounder and healthier today than it was in 1987. Still, as always, we’re evolving, and there is much work to be done.”

In addition to her work as dean, Berling will co-teach one interdisciplinary seminar this fall with Dr. Philip Wickeri. Her style in both teaching and organizational leadership is, not surprisingly, imaginative and collaborative. In the classroom, she says, “I like to challenge students to find their own voice, acting like a coach or a midwife.” And as dean — “I like to set things up by listening and then helping find common ground and building consensus. It’s the only way to work at a place like the GTU. It’s a slow process, but it works.”



“I like to set things up by listening and then helping find common ground and building

consensus. It’s the only way to work at a place like the GTU.”

— Judith Berling

Here are some of Berling’s reflections on the GTU then, now, and looking to the future.

THEN In 1987 the GTU was tiny and there were many who had been here since its founding. Consequently, there were many memories about what the GTU was intended to be, and often they were competing memories. There were no written policies when I came! There was only oral tradition and, in many cases, contended oral tradition. I could listen to all the stories and see how they somehow knit together.

NOW Now the GTU is much clearer about our identity, both as a common enterprise and as a consortium. We’re clearer on our mission, and on our strengths and weaknesses. And we have better-articulated processes for how we do everything, without being too bureaucratic. Our Ph.D. program has more content and coherence, and we have more services for students — including better financial aid. On the other hand, we’ve lost some of the oral memory, and it will be important to capture that if we can.

FUTURE The GTU has always been, and always will be, in a process of becoming. This is partly because within the context of the ecumenical idealism of the 1960’s, we were striving toward something better than what existed at the time. Idealistic vision is central to our vision now, too. We have to set realistic benchmarks, and then we can reach beyond them. The other reason we are in a process of becoming is because the world keeps changing, and we change with it.

We are excited both about opening our *Center for Islamic Studies* this year and continuing to develop *GTU Partnerships in Transforming Theological Education in Asia, Oceania, and North America*.

But often change is hard. The *Alternative Futures Task Force* is in the process of engaging with the Common Enterprise and the GTU member schools to explore and plan for a more robust financial future. These are important if difficult issues. We need to think about how we do everything in a different way. The opening here is that where we haven’t taken full advantage of collaboration, now we have the opportunity.

Supporting The GTU



Trustee Establishes Scholarship Fund

Gifts Fund Scholarships, Library, and Future

This past summer generous donors stepped forward to give the GTU a total of \$350,000 to support talented students, boost the endowment fund, and help pay for renovations of the Flora Lamson Hewlett Library.

Besides Dr. Raquel Newman's \$100,000 scholarship fund, the school received another \$100,000 gift from anonymous donors for the GTU's unrestricted endowment. Its investments help support programs and operations that sustain the GTU's mission.

A third gift came from The Flora Family Foundation, which contributed \$100,000 for renovations of the library named in honor of Flora Lamson Hewlett.

With a \$50,000 contribution, the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation also has pledged to help preserve the Flora Lamson Hewlett Library — one of the country's largest theological libraries, with more than 754,000 books, microforms, audiotapes, and videocassettes in its collection.

For information about how you can help protect this vital resource for theological training and scholarship, contact advancement@gtu.edu or 510/649-2436.

For the past decade Dr. Raquel Newman, a retired board development and marketing consultant, has supported Graduate Theological Union students through generous donations to the school. This spring she expanded her support with a \$100,000 endowment to establish the Raquel H. Newman Scholarship Fund, a gift that recognizes what she calls the "remarkable work" GTU graduates accomplish in the world.

"Every year I'm so proud of our graduates," Newman says. "From a caring and tolerant atmosphere at the GTU, they go on to positions that are making a critical difference in our society."

Newman, a longtime non-profit volunteer, has served on the GTU board of trustees for five years, where she has learned firsthand the institution's strengths and needs.

"This is a one-of-a-kind school with an excellent reputation," she says. "I'd like the GTU to be strong financially always, and also better known. We've accomplished a lot with an excellent staff and more exposure through (President) Jim Donahue's public speaking on ethical issues. With more fellowship support we will continue to attract the best and the brightest students. I consider it a privilege to help out."

To make a donation to the GTU and help support the outstanding students who study here, contact advancement@gtu.edu or 510/649-2436.



Raquel Newman

*"I consider it a
privilege to help out."*

Preaching in Pictures

What do role-playing games have in common with preaching? Plenty, according to Micah Jackson, a Graduate Theological Union 2007-2008 Presidential Scholar and doctoral student in homiletics, the art of writing and preaching sermons.

"The task of preaching and theology is to get a picture of the world beyond our own and help people see that picture," says this former gaming industry writer and designer. "Gaming and theology — two seemingly divergent realms — are now borrowing from the same technology,

continued on page 14

"The Presidential Scholarship is what made doctoral education possible for me. Without it, I would have had to delay entering the program, maybe forever."

— Micah Jackson

A Creative, Collaborative Path

Joan McGrath, new chair of the Graduate Theological Union board of trustees, is fascinated by the power of groups to survive and thrive — the first Christians whose tiny movement grew to today's two billion; her own successful company, built on teamwork and caring ethics; and the GTU, founded by people of distinct faiths committed to learning about one another and bringing a healing message to a world in need.

McGrath, who started her two-year term this October and has served as a GTU trustee for 10 years, says she has always been interested in religion. She earned a master's degree in theology at the University of San Francisco and then taught English literature, theology, and philosophy in high school, where she also worked as a principal. Later she entered Fordham University for doctoral studies in systematic theology.

"Questions about church origins and evolving doctrines fascinate me," says McGrath. "My key interest is to ask how Christianity grew from this small group of people around Jesus to Christianity today, with its various denominations and movements. Why is Christianity still a living religion through all the ups and downs? And what can we learn from the history of Christian origins that can help us understand the development of other religious traditions?"

McGrath says her knowledge of how people interact to accomplish surprising results comes from her experience teaching and McGrath RentCorp, the company she and her husband launched in 1979. Named one of Forbes magazine's 2006 "Best Small Companies," the corporation, which rents modular buildings and electronic testing equipment, enjoys success thanks to a group culture the McGraths consciously built.



Joan McGrath

"I truly believe that ordinary people can join together to do extraordinary things."

"We started with a focus on supporting one another to counter setbacks and developing highly motivated teams whose hallmark was, and still is, integrity," says McGrath, who served as executive vice president for 15 years. "We also have fun and laugh a lot, and all of this leads to a long employee retention rate."

From this basis she calls the "greatest factor in my leadership formation," McGrath has set goals for the GTU. "I want to develop the board," she says, "into an active, enthusiastic, and committed group of people who support GTU projects because the school's contribution to the world is so acutely needed. We have an outstanding group, and the GTU executive team is stronger than ever."

McGrath says the board will concentrate on preserving the uniqueness of faith traditions within the GTU while engaging members in conversation and collaboration to operate with more financial efficiency.

"There's no doubt in my mind," McGrath says, "that imagination and creativity are needed to design the GTU's future direction. We usually take the old, trodden path. I daresay there are new, creative paths to explore. The goal is for the conversation and collaboration to filter into churches, mosques, and synagogues, so 'the other' is neither enemy nor stranger. I truly believe that ordinary people can join together to do extraordinary things."

Teacher, Mentor, Therapist, and Grad Contributes Annual Support

"I had no idea what I was doing," says Graduate Theological Union alumna Felicidad Oberholzer (Ph.D. '84) of her first conversation with then-GTU registrar Betty Over. "I went to see her to find out how to get into the program in religion and psychology. I didn't know I needed a Master of Divinity, or even what that was."

Since that conversation in the 1970's, Oberholzer became the first lay woman to earn her M.Div. from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, as well as the first woman hired in the Theology Department at St. Mary's College in Moraga, California. She also completed her doctoral work at the GTU, finished her internship hours for degrees in clinical psychology and marriage and family counseling, and raised five children. "I had a lot of financial help," she remembers. "I couldn't have done it otherwise."

Oberholzer was attracted to the GTU for its unique program in religion and psychology. She explored other graduate programs in psychology but felt they were missing the spiritual component. The GTU had the only program that combined both, and that creative combination has been an asset to her as a teacher, mentor, and therapist. She has taught more than 35 different classes at St. Mary's, but one of her regular offerings is a course on sexuality, marriage, and family. Her GTU training helps her bring insights to the class that she feels benefit her students. She also is able to talk with her clinical clients about spirituality, offering them a holistic approach to therapy.

In 1994, when Betty Over died, a scholarship fund was established in her memory. Oberholzer has contributed to the fund every year since.

"My professors and advisors were instrumental to my success at the GTU," she says. "But Betty was the one who inspired me to become a donor. She was a person who got things done — someone who made theological education accessible. I couldn't have done it without her."



Felicidad Oberholzer

Preaching in Pictures *continued from page 12*

with ministry relying more on imagery through photos and video than it did years ago.

"Churches," he says, "have ignored visual language — what people see and understand, usually through TV and movies. But they're wisely recovering that language."

Jackson came to the GTU to work with Dr. Linda Clader, Professor of Homiletics and author of the book, *Voicing the Vision: Imagination and Prophetic Preaching*. He has found the school's environment especially creative and collaborative. "You encounter people here who hold different beliefs," he says, "and that encourages and even requires creativity to communicate. There really is no theological shorthand."

After he graduates, Jackson hopes to teach in a seminary or theological school. In the meantime, as a Newhall Scholar, he'll lead a spring course exploring the role of media as a preaching and worship aid (see pages 4, 5, and 6 for all Newhall Scholars and courses).

"The task of preaching and theology is to get a picture of the world beyond our own and help people see that picture."

Presidential Scholarships are merit based and offer two years of full tuition and a stipend.

Center for Islamic Studies Opens



The Center for Islamic Studies opens its doors this fall at the Graduate Theological Union, building an academic platform to help scholars and students of many faiths understand Islam as a living world religion.

The center will work in cooperation with several GTU member schools, offering introductory and advanced courses in Islamic history, theology, philosophy, culture, arts, and religious practice, while placing particular emphasis on the interaction among contemporary Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. It also will work to strengthen GTU ties with various departments at the University of California, Berkeley (Near Eastern Studies, Ethnic Studies, African Diaspora Studies, Anthropology, etc.) that intersect with the study of Islam in multiple ways. Future plans include the development of certificate and M.A. programs in Islamic Studies.

Additionally, the center will sponsor conferences, symposia, workshops, and research projects that foster interfaith dialogue, and it will serve as a liaison with local Muslim communities and study centers, sharing resources in homiletics, interfaith scholarship and dialogue, pastoral psychology, and counseling.

Munir Jiwa, Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies, directs the center. Jiwa was previously a Mellon postdoctoral fellow in the Department and Center for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. He holds a master's degree in religion from Harvard and a doctorate in anthropology from Columbia University. His research has focused on mass media portrayals of Islam and Muslims. Associated Faculty include Ibrahim Abdurrahman Farajajé, Ph.D., Starr King School for the Ministry, and Marianne Farina, C.S.C., Ph.D., Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology.

For more information, call 510/649-2562 or Islam@gtu.edu.

Questioning the Past, Creating the Future *continued from page 10*

Theological faculties need to attend to what educator Maria Harris calls the "null curriculum" — what we leave out of the curriculum or ignore. Ignored worlds often come to theological education through the urgency of the questions our students ask and the life experiences they bring to their study. Many worlds intersect at the GTU. Engaging the questions that arise when worlds meet is holy work. As Rilke said, "inside human beings is where God learns."

GTU currents

Currents presents the news, people, and progress of the Graduate Theological Union. Published three times a year, Currents is distributed to alumni, faculty, students, staff, and friends of the GTU.

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Women's Studies in Religion at the GTU

The Graduate Theological Union Women's Studies in Religion program (WSR) offers a Certificate in Women's Studies in Religion. The program's purpose is to sustain, promote, and advance the study of women in theology and religion, recognizing diversity in race, sexual and gender orientation, ethnicity, class, culture, and nationality.

"The emergence of women's issues in society has transformed us all, and there is still much work ahead," says Marion Grau, Associate Professor of Theology at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. "The WSR program will introduce students to this work and support those who feel called to pursue it."

The program affirms the GTU's long-standing commitment to women's studies in theology and religion; builds upon an established network of academic and community resources; and draws upon the innovative work of women faculty and students at both the GTU and University of California, Berkeley.

In addition to serving students at the GTU who wish to concentrate on women's studies, WSR also offers a colloquium series open to students at the GTU and UC Berkeley, and to the public.



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