

# GTU currents

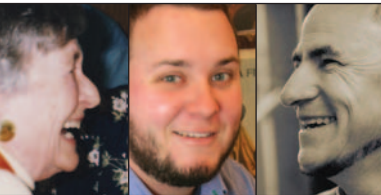
*Where religion meets the world*

NEWS OF THE GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION

**SPRING 2008**

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“

*I won't force  
my students to change  
what they believe,  
but I'll challenge them  
to critically interrogate  
why they believe.*

”

**Danté Quick,  
Teagle-Wabash Scholar**

## Students' Stories: In the Classroom

### Learning to Teach to the “Big Ideas”

**D**anté Quick, Teagle-Wabash scholar, strides across the classroom, his voice arresting, his manner assured. He's dressed impeccably in a gray suit, crisp white shirt, and colorful bowtie. A dozen students, nearly all African American, regard a familiar image of a fair-haired, blue-eyed Jesus that Quick has projected onto a large screen. “Race,” he says, “is at the bottom of religion in America.”

Quick is one of 12 Graduate Theological Union doctoral students participating in the GTU's Preparing Future Faculty Project, a year-long training funded by the Teagle Foundation and Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Religion and Theology. Besides developing students' practical teaching skills, the project aims to learn how faculty can best mentor future teachers to develop their sense of vocation and help them bring meaning and value into liberal arts classrooms. The program has provided students with two intensive seminars, a dozen faculty mentors, and the opportunity to teach courses at UC Berkeley and GTU-member schools.

This spring, with mentoring from San Francisco Theological Seminary and GTU history professor Christopher Ocker, Quick is teaching his course, “Theology and Ethics in Black and White: Aesthetics and the Political,” at American Baptist Seminary of the West (ABSW), where he's also the current Howard Washington Thurman Teaching Fellow. This is his third semester in the GTU's Philosophical and Systematic Theology doctoral program. An ordained minister, he wants to become an educator.

Quick grew up in Washington, D.C., and overcame dyslexia to graduate from Morehouse College and Princeton Theological Seminary. He has served a Baptist church in Atlanta, founded a faith-based consulting firm, and worked for the mayor of Washington, D.C., a congressman, and the governor of Georgia. His political background also includes roles as policy analyst, special programs administrator, and legislative representative.

For the past two years, he has led the New Liberation Presbyterian Church in San Francisco.



**Danté Quick**

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## currents

GTU

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

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

## Alumni Then and Now

**Dr. Bernard Adeney-Risakotta (Ph.D. 1982) is Director of the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS), the first cooperative interreligious Ph.D. program in Indonesia. He received the GTU 2007 Alum of the Year award for his outstanding work in the field of religion. Here he talks about his interfaith journey.**



**Dr. Bernard Adeney-Risakotta**

*"I love to break down stereotypes and prejudices and help people talk to each other across seemingly irreconcilable assumptions."*

### Early Years

I grew up in China, Chicago, Hong Kong, Indianapolis, and Taiwan in a family of devout Christian evangelical missionaries. My English father was a historian from Cambridge and something of a genuine saint. My mother, who came from a Baptist farming family in Minnesota, did her best to mold me into a properly pious evangelical. After many failed attempts to live up to my own idealized understanding of what it means to follow Jesus, I finally gave it up and became a rebellious, mystical, agnostic existentialist while attending a missionary boarding school in Taiwan. Shortly before graduating from high school, I had a profound spiritual experience that led to a new commitment to learn to live like a follower of Jesus.

### GTU Years

After completing a degree in Asian studies and English literature at the University of Wisconsin, I spent some years traveling and studying in Europe and Asia, and eventually earned a second degree in theology, ethics, and Asian religions at the University of London. Then I came to Berkeley to work with the Christian World Liberation Front, a kind of wild Jesus movement group. Along the way I took a GTU course taught by Jurgen Moltmann, and Charles McCoy convinced me to apply to the GTU Ph.D. program. My passion was to learn to understand violence and conflict as they related to religion and nuclear technology. Many scholars at the GTU inspired me. Tom Schubeck introduced me to liberation theology. Bill Spohn, John C. Bennet, and Robert McAfee Brown challenged me to think critically about Christianity

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## GTU In the Community

# Torah Lishma: *Study for its Own Sake*

**T**orah lishma. This Jewish idiom, which means study for its own sake, bespeaks Jhos Singer's passion. A San Francisco Bay Area Jewish educator, Singer is one of six 2006-2007 recipients of the Koret Jewish Educators Fellowship, administered by the Graduate Theological Union Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies (CJS). The program offers courses to Jewish educators for professional development and as an introduction to the CJS certificate program. The fellowships cover tuition for one class offered by CJS.

The Koret Jewish Educator Fellowships are a part of a project called "Jewish Perspectives: Bridging the Gap Between the Academy and the Public," a CJS initiative to bring Jewish studies and celebrations to the community. Additional Koret Foundation funding for the Jewish Perspectives project supports visiting scholars and special lecturers. In spring 2007, Singer took the course "Gender, Law, and Talmud," with visiting scholar Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert.

"As an educator, you give so much of yourself. It's nice to receive the chance to do some learning myself," says Singer, who teaches 5th-8th graders introductory methods

*"The goal of my learning is to become a better teacher, and the result of being a better teacher is that I have a deep thirst to learn."*

for reading and understanding scripture, in addition to traditional Jewish celebration, prayer, and practice at Half Moon Bay's Coastside Jewish Community Religious School. He says his GTU studies, made possible through the Koret Jewish Educators Fellowship, have rejuvenated his love of learning.

"The goal of my learning is to become a better teacher" he says, "and the result of being a better teacher is that I have a deep thirst to learn."

So far, Singer has taken two courses for credit toward a Certificate in Jewish Studies. In addition to "Gender, Law, and Talmud," he took "Hebrew: Post-Biblical Readings II," taught in spring 2006 by Newhall Scholar Saul Friedman. Singer found the classes at CJS "engaging and encouraging," citing the professors' openness to dialogue while offering perspectives different than his own.

Singer says his rekindled delight in learning flows to his students at Coastside as he shares his new insights. In addition to his role as teacher, Singer is a maggid or spiritual leader, also offering the Coastside community his talents as a service leader, sermonizer, and musician.

While Torah lishma — study for its own sake — is enough for now, Singer hopes that with help from the Koret Fellowship, he can complete the CJS certificate program, which he calls a "solid beginning" toward completing a graduate degree and the legal training to become a rabbi. "My continuing education wouldn't be possible without the Koret scholarship," he says. "Jewish educators typically don't have formal training, so this program provides higher education and helps us become more competent teachers and leaders."

Naomi Seidman, CJS Director and the mother of a child in a Jewish school, describes Jewish educators as the "saints and heroes of our lives." "The more we can do for them," she says, "the better it is for all of us."

**For more information about the Graduate Theological Union Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies, visit [www.gtu.edu](http://www.gtu.edu).**

## Student Learns the Power of Activist Filmmaking



Ryan Parker

“Film can engage people at a deeper level than an ordinary sermon,” says Ryan Parker, a doctoral student in the Graduate Theological Union Religion and Arts area who’s focusing on film.

One of the most powerful ways to educate, he says, is through documentaries. Parker, who plans to teach at the college level, decided to take what he learned at the GTU and direct it toward “something practical” with people who want to make a difference. Last October he started volunteering for Active Voice ([www.activevoice.net](http://www.activevoice.net)) in San Francisco, an organization that connects social justice documentary filmmakers with audiences in churches, mosques, and schools as well as civic and political organizations. At Active Voice, filmmakers get help creating a community — through websites and local viewings — that will hopefully lead to sustained involvement in the issues the films present, such as race on Death Row, relationships between immigrant and native-born American Muslims, and industrialized agriculture.

Now working as a project coordinator for a 90-minute film called “Renewal,” Parker is organizing the “Renewal Circle,” a web-based community support network, and setting up pre-screenings for small feedback groups. This documentary, by Marty Ostrow and Terry Kay Rockefeller, presents portraits of environmental activists of multiple

faiths. The filmmakers want to know if “Renewal” inspires audiences enough to get involved in stewarding the planet. The GTU has already hosted one screening and another larger viewing is planned for this spring, where Parker hopes to include a panel discussion.

“For me,” he says, “Active Voice is a much more effective way of contributing to a social justice effort than working on my own. I see how ministers can augment pastoral care with documentaries that can be educational and even therapeutic. A lot of filmmakers we work with at Active Voice are making a difference in people’s lives. They’re just using a different language than what you would find in religion. There’s something about documentaries that allows filmmakers to really get into people’s lives. By simply watching, we open ourselves up to their experience. We can encounter the other and hear their story in a powerful way.”

Parker says his work at Active Voice has inspired him to move from watching and commenting on films to attempting one of his own. This summer, with the help of friends back home in Mississippi, he’s going to launch his own documentary project. But first, this semester he’s writing a syllabus called “Documenting Change,” about ways to use documentaries to teach.

*“There’s something about documentaries that allows filmmakers to really get into people’s lives.”*

“What average family has time to take a class in biblical exegesis (a critical analysis of text)?” he asks. “But film is a great, real, storied way to learn about issues such as homosexuality in the Christian church from respected scholars and ministers, as you see in the recent documentary, ‘The Bible Tells Me So.’ With this film, a minister can start a conversation in a congregation and go from there. There are a lot of stories not in our sacred texts that still need to be heard and seen.”



## GTU Alum Shares \$100k Grant to Research Nature and Meaning of Ultimate Reality

### Readers Speak

## We Heard You!

We've made some changes to *Currents* based on what you, our readers, told us in a November 2007 survey.

Our new format will feature a more colorful 8-12 pages, printed in mid-April and mid-October. Because of technological improvements, the cost to print full color is now about the same as it was for our previous two-color *Currents*. You asked for and we're going to give you stories — about alumni, current students, faculty, cutting-edge scholarship, research, and new books written by GTU faculty and alumni. Along with these offerings, we'll share news of the GTU, and feature a Q&A column with President James A. Donahue. We'll be sending an e-mail version of *Currents* to you as well as a mail version. The mail and email versions will point you to even more information, accessible at [www.gtu.edu](http://www.gtu.edu)

Graduate Theological Union alum Kirk Wegter-McNelly (Ph.D. 2003) and colleague Dr. Ray Chiao are one of five interdisciplinary teams to be awarded \$100,000 through the Center for Theology and the Natural Science's (CTNS) Program, STARS (Science and Transcendence Advanced Research Series), funded by the John Templeton Foundation.

Co-principal investigators Dr. Wegter-McNelly, Assistant Professor of Theology, Boston University School of Theology, and Dr. Raymond Chiao, Professor of Natural Sciences and Engineering, UC Merced, will construct a small-scale detector of "gravitational waves" to investigate different scientific models of the universe and shed new light on the universe's origin and contingency — whether or not the universe depends on something beyond itself for its own existence and order. Their work will take our scientific understanding of the universe to a new level and is likely to reshape age-old philosophical and theological debates about its origin. Stay tuned!

**Established in 1982, CTNS is an affiliate of the Graduate Theological Union. For more information, visit [www.ctnsstars.org](http://www.ctnsstars.org).**

### Learning to Teach...

*continued from page 1*

His experience in the pulpit clearly energizes his presentation in the classroom as he engages his students with a confident delivery that includes humor and storytelling.

Quick regards his teaching vocation as a "revolutionary activity," an opportunity to help students expand beyond pre-set categories, such as race, gender, class, and politics. Freedom and self-fulfillment, he says, come from the teacher's ability to "incite a revolt against ideas and dispositions that hinder intellectual growth and innovation." For Quick, this is the essence of "teaching to the big ideas," the purpose of the Teagle-Wabash program.

Adding to an already solid teaching background, Quick says he learned important practical skills in the August and January training seminars presented by seasoned educators — how to construct a syllabus,

classroom management techniques, and effective technology use.

"I also learned the importance of a well-constructed pedagogical philosophy," he says. "The workshops forced me to identify my own biases that I bring into the classroom. Unless we clearly lay out our biases to students, we lay landmines for them. Now they know up front that I'm interested in liberation and exploring concepts that may be oppressive — around gender, ethnicity, sexuality. I won't force my students to change what they believe, but I'll challenge them to critically interrogate why they believe, to see beyond realities, and to question them. For me, those questions and the 'big ideas' are couched within a radically communal ethos so that the 'I' cannot exist without the 'we.'"

**For more information on the Preparing Future Faculty Project at the GTU, visit [www.gtu.edu](http://www.gtu.edu).**

### Planning a Legacy is a Statement of Gratitude for GTU Retiree

**F**rom 1967 to 1983, while working for the Graduate Theological Union Bibliographic Center and later the GTU library, Winifred Barber witnessed the development of a new kind of theological education.

"We were all searching for a new way of being on the planet," she says. "There was no other school like the GTU, no existing structure to refer to for guidance. It was challenging and wonderful all at the same time."



Forty years after she started working in the acquisitions department, Barber is thrilled to see the outstanding inter-religious work of GTU graduates and new developments like the Center for Islamic Studies.

Like many women of the 1950s and 1960s, Barber left school when she married. She had never held a job before she began purchasing the GTU library's books, and she credits the GTU community with inspiring her to return to UC Berkeley for her bachelor's degree. "I never would have gone back to school without the support of those at the GTU," she says.

She remembers with fondness Dr. Stillson Judah, the librarian at the GTU Bibliographic Center when she applied for a job there in 1968; Oscar Burdick, collection development librarian during her tenure; and Dr. Norman

Mealy, professor of church music at the GTU and Church Divinity School of the Pacific.

Today Barber is a member of the GTU Legacy Circle, a society that honors generous friends who've made provisions for the Graduate Theological Union in their estate plans. She calls her bequest, made in memory of Dr. Judah and Dr. Mealy, a "statement of gratitude" for what the GTU gave her, and her way of supporting the GTU's work beyond her lifetime.

A gift of life insurance, bequest, or trust can help secure the GTU's future. Such planned gifts have supported students through scholarships, brought outstanding scholars to "Holy Hill," and improved the GTU's facilities for work and study.

**For more information about including the GTU in your estate plan, go to [www.gtu.edu](http://www.gtu.edu), click "Make A Gift" at the top of the home page, or call Linda Frank, Vice President for Advancement, 510/649-2425 for a confidential conversation.**

### GTU Legacy Circle

ANONYMOUS (4)  
WINIFRED E. BARBER  
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SANDRA & THOMAS E. BERTELSEN '93  
JOAN WITHERS DINNER  
MARGARET & JAMES G. EMERSON, JR.  
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RITA R. SEMEL  
CLAUDE WELCH

\*Deceased

*"We were all searching for a new way  
of being on the planet,"  
she says. "There was no other  
school like the GTU."*



## New Books 2007/2008

### Bernard Osher Foundation gives \$1 million to GTU Scholarship Endowment

"Words cannot express the gratitude we feel toward the Bernard Osher Foundation for their support of the Graduate Theological Union in this scholarship grant," says GTU President James A. Donahue of the recent \$1 million gift from the Bernard Osher Foundation to the GTU Scholarship Endowment. "These funds make it possible for students to continue their educational endeavors in this unique interreligious environment." The gift will bring financial assistance to many talented students. Recipients of the scholarship funded by the Bernard Osher Foundation will be named "Osher Scholars."

**The Bernard Osher Foundation seeks to improve life by providing support to higher education and the arts.**

#### ... by GTU Alumnus Kirk Bingaman '00

*Treating the New Anxiety:  
A Cognitive-Theological Approach*

Jason Aronson Publishers

Bingaman demonstrates it is possible and necessary to help those in our care to live meaningfully, even in a time of great change and uncertainty.

#### ... by GTU Faculty Lewis Mudge (SFTS)

*Gift of Responsibility: The Promise of Dialogue Among  
Christian, Jews, and Muslims*

Continuum Press (June 2008)

Mudge argues that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, locked as they have been over the centuries in many kinds of mutual enmity and violence, need to join resources to resist the destructive economic and political forces now on the loose across the globe.

**For a more complete listing of new books by GTU alumni and faculty, visit [www.gtu.edu/news-events/publications](http://www.gtu.edu/news-events/publications).**

### Alumni Then and Now

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and politics. Karen Lebacqz was my mentor. As her teaching assistant, I watched with amazement her brilliance in teasing students into real thought.

#### Bringing GTU lessons to Indonesia

I spent several years as a professor at New College for Advanced Christian Studies at Berkeley (NCB) and the GTU. After a sabbatical year in Asia and England, I left NCB and the GTU to help develop a graduate program in religion and society at a Christian university in Indonesia. I expected to be in Indonesia for three to six years. Seventeen years later I am still teaching and learning here. After helping to develop graduate programs in Christian universities, I spent several years teaching in predominantly Muslim institutions. Now I am coordinating the efforts of leading national, Muslim, and Christian universities to jointly develop an international Ph.D. program in religious studies. Indonesia may be the only place in the world where secular, Muslim

and Christian universities can jointly sponsor a doctoral program in religious studies. During these past years, I witnessed the huge transformations of Indonesian society as a result of the fall of Suharto's authoritarian government.

#### This is what I know now —

I love learning from those of other faiths. I love to see the light in my Muslim neighbors. Our path is not so dark because we walk together. I love to break down stereotypes and prejudices, and help people talk to each other across seemingly irreconcilable assumptions. The GTU taught me that it is much more fun to talk with people who are different than I am than to argue with those who are the same. I want to keep learning and changing as long as I live.

**For more information about Adeney-Risakotta's work: email [alumni@gtu.edu](mailto:alumni@gtu.edu).**

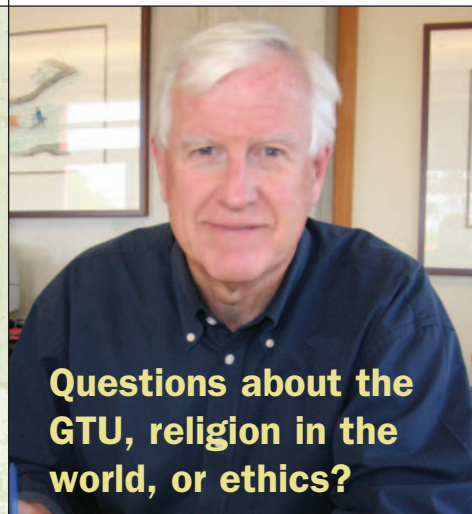
## In Memory, John Dillenberger



**1918-2008**

John Dillenberger, a giant in the life and history of the Graduate Theological Union, peacefully passed away on February 7 at his home in El Cerrito, Calif. In addition to his distinguished career as a scholar of historical theology, Dillenberger was instrumental in founding and leading the GTU, serving as Dean and President from 1967-1971, and later as Acting Library Director, Acting President (1999-2000), and GTU Board member.

Dillenberger also was a past president of the Hartford Seminary, a professor at Princeton, Columbia, Harvard, and Drew universities, and a student of Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, who became his guides and mentors at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He authored 13 books, including "Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings"; "Visual Arts and Christianity in America"; and "From Fallow Fields to Hallowed Halls: A Theologian's Journey," his autobiography published in 2004. "All of us who knew John," GTU President James A. Donahue says, "were inspired by his enthusiasm for and commitment to the life of the GTU. His determined spirit and visionary leadership will be sorely missed."



**Questions about the GTU, religion in the world, or ethics?**

**Pose a question to GTU President and Professor of Ethics James A. Donahue** and we may feature it along with his answer in our fall issue of *Currents*. Send your question to *Currents* Editor and Communications Director Joanne Brown: [jbrown@gtu.edu](mailto:jbrown@gtu.edu) or fax: 510-649-1417 or write: Graduate Theological Union, 2400 Ridge Rd., Berkeley, CA 94709.

## Spring 2008 *Currents* Newsletter

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