



GTU

Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology

The Journal of the Graduate Theological Union

Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology

Volume 2, Issue 2

ISSN 2380-7458

Afterword

Becoming More of the Same, For Which We Cheer

Author(s): Riess W. Potterveld

Source: *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology* 2, no. 2 (2016): 131-134.

Published By: Graduate Theological Union © 2016

Online article published on: February 28, 2018

Copyright Notice:

This file and its contents is copyright of the Graduate Theological Union © 2015. All rights reserved. Your use of the Archives of the Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology (BJRT) indicates your acceptance of the BJRT's policy regarding use of its resources, as discussed below.

Any redistribution or reproduction of part or all of the contents in any form is prohibited with the following exceptions:

- You may download and print to a local hard disk this entire article for your personal and non-commercial use only.
- You may quote short sections of this article in other publications with the proper citations and attributions.
- Permission has been obtained from the Journal's management for exceptions to redistribution or reproduction. A written and signed letter from the Journal must be secured expressing this permission.

To obtain permissions for exceptions, or to contact the Journal regarding any questions regarding further use of this article, please e-mail the managing editor at bjrt@ses.gtu.edu

The Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology aims to offer its scholarly contributions free to the community in furtherance of the Graduate Theological Union's scholarly mission.

Becoming More of the Same, For Which We Cheer

Riess W. Potterveld

*Graduate Theological Union
Berkeley, California, U.S.A.*

Published in: BJRT, vol. 2, no. 2 © Graduate Theological Union, 2016

I am grateful to the students, faculty, and graduates of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) for their effort to launch this Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology as an online resource and opportunity to share seminal ideas and theological and ethical reflections with wider constituencies. This volume is dedicated to Judith Berling and Arthur Holder both of whom served the Graduate Theological Union as Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs for extended periods of time and both of whom were extraordinarily successful in guiding the educational development of the GTU.

Judith brought courses in the religious traditions of China (Confucianism and Daoism) to the GTU and introduced courses in comparative religion, as well as offering special courses on course development and pedagogy to better prepare students for their vocation in teaching. She has mentored numerous PhD students through their labyrinth of academic obligations, examinations, research and writing and may easily hold the Guinness Book of World Records for mentoring others. There will be a special conference at the GTU on May 25-26

focusing on her pedagogy and approach to interreligious education and largely supported by papers and presentations offered by her former students and colleagues who have been shaped by her teaching and scholarship.

Dean Holder will serve as Professor of Christian Spirituality on a half-time basis after retiring from position of Dean. Arthur's imprint is all over the GTU, particularly in the development of the Center for Islamic Studies, Center for Dharma Studies, the new Ph.D. curriculum, and the newly aligned Common MA program. He has managed a very complex set of educational institutions within the GTU and developed academic infrastructure that supports assessment and contributes to the constant quest for improvement and innovation. Arthur will continue during the next year as the Accreditation Liaison Officer.

In the coming months, we at the GTU will be welcoming a new Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs to the GTU. Dr. Uriah Y. Kim, currently Academic Dean at Hartford Seminary, will arrive in January 2017 to serve as the new Dean and will also carry the title, John Dillenberger Professor of Biblical Studies. Dr. Kim received his Ph.D. from GTU in 2004 and was named Distinguished Alumnus in 2013. He also earned a M.A. from New York University, M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Th.M. from Candler School of Theology. Since the GTU is expanding its interreligious representation, it is fortuitous that Uriah has been engaged with others at Hartford in the creation of a new Ph.D. program in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations as well as other degree and certificate programs that are interreligious in nature. We look forward to his arrival and leadership in guiding the GTU in its next chapter.

The GTU has always and will continue to emphasize interreligious and interdisciplinary graduate education but we are increasingly paying attention to the engagement of theology (ethics, history, culture, sacred texts, and art) with persistent, perplexing social

problems. One of the writers in the regular issue of this volume (Vol. 2, No. 1), William O’Neill, SJ – who was awarded the Sarlo Excellence in Teaching Award two years ago – offers a deep assessment of issues of genocide and the function of personal loss, suffering, and testimony in reconciliation. He was an advisor to Rwanda as that country dealt with these harsh realities. We speak often these days about public theologians and activist scholars because more scholars are addressing public issues in blogs and other social media. I have heard this described as the movement from the cloister to the hub – or the idea that research and scholarship may have practical or transformative impact on society beyond the enhancement of knowledge in a particular discipline.

Many GTU programs that offer Bay Area community public education focus on issues that are capable of generating disagreement or conflict. The GTU offers a safe space for engagement with issues about which a variety of viewpoints are held. Several schools that I have served instituted training sessions so that faculty members could learn to better handle the questions of representatives of the media who are looking for incendiary commentary on complex and nuanced problems delivered in a couple of sound-bytes. All of these developments force the academic scholar to adjust to a role or expectation that is clearly changing as academic institutions attempt to prove or demonstrate their relevance and value to the larger society.

Among the countless dissertations, theses, and articles I have perused in the last three years, a remarkable number integrated rich, substantive historical, textual, and theological research projects with consideration of contemporary problems that rivet public attention and demand solution. This is not to say that all or even most graduate level research and writing is focused on social problems or the issues that rile the public sphere. It is to say that having one foot in the academy and

one foot in one's societal context is a pattern that is increasingly visible in the academic world.

We have said for decades that online resources advance education by creating a platform for instant ubiquitous sharing. This journal is one additional opportunity to share significant research and writing produced in our community and to create a forum for the exchange of provocative and challenging ideas. Students are already busy with classes, comprehensives, dissertation research and writing, part-time jobs, partners and families but it is their devotion and aspiration that has brought this Journal into being. We thank you.

Riess W. Potterveld is the 7th and current President of the Graduate Theological Union. Before his tenure at the GTU, he has served as president of the Pacific School of Religion and Lancaster Theological Seminary. Under his leadership, the GTU has expanded to include new initiatives and centers, most notably the inclusion of the Center for Arts, Religion, and Education, the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, the Center for Theology and Natural Sciences, and the establishment of the Mira and Ajay Shingal Center for Dharma Studies.