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*24<sup>th</sup> Surjit Singh Lecture in Comparative Religious Thought, Graduate Theological Union*

**Toward A More Perfect Union: The Contribution of Judith Berling to Religious Pluralism in Theological Education**

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## **Toward a More Perfect Union:**

### *The Contribution of Judith Berling to Religious Pluralism in Theological Education*

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#### **The 24<sup>th</sup> Surjit Singh Lecture, 2016 Graduate Theological Union**

The GTU has been a leading center for ecumenical and interreligious studies, and the Singh Lecture reflects this spirit. It is named after Surjit Singh, who was professor emeritus of Christian philosophy at the San Francisco Theological Seminary (SFTS) and GTU core faculty. The 2016 lecture was delivered by the Rev. Dr. Philip L. Wickeri as part of a symposium celebrating the work of Dr. Judith Berling. Dr. Wickeri is well known for his work on Chinese Christianity, having received the Luce Fellowship in Theology in 2005 to study the work of K. H. Ting. Formerly Hewlett Professor of Evangelism at SFTS, Professor Wickeri now serves as advisor to the Anglican Archbishop of Hong Kong, Professor of Church History at Ming Hua Theological College, and Visiting Professor at Shanghai University.

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The annual Surjit Singh Lecture on Comparative Religious Thought and Culture was designed to foster interreligious and cross-cultural communication, learning and understanding. It is appropriate that the lecture be at the GTU, because this is part of our own ecumenical and interreligious tradition. And it is especially appropriate that the lecture this year is part of this conference on “Learning as Collaborative

Conversation” to celebrate the scholarship and teaching of Professor Judith Berling.

It is an honor for me to present the annual lecture in this distinguished series initiated by my friend and colleague from San Francisco Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union, Professor Surjit Singh. Surjit gave the inaugural lecture in 1991, and Professor Judith Berling delivered the Singh Lecture in 1996. Over the course of twenty-five years, many distinguished scholars have given this lecture, and I am humbled to be in their presence.

My title is borrowed from the then Senator Barack Obama’s famous speech of 2008, which was in turn borrowed from the Constitution of the United States. Our constitution looked for a more perfect union of justice, peace and liberty, and Senator Obama drew on this to address issues of race, poverty, health care and education in a new millennium. To be sure, no union can ever be perfect, and this is as true for the world of theology and religious studies as much as it is for the social and political life of the United States.

In this lecture, I want to draw on Judith Berling’s intellectual journey to speak on the subject of religious pluralism in theological education. The Graduate Theological Union was formed at the height of the movement of ecumenism in Christian theological education, but little thought was given at that time to the importance of pluralism, interreligious understanding and other religious traditions for theological education and preparation for ministry. It is in this area that Judith has made a particular contribution, and in so doing, she was and still is far ahead of her time.

### **The Scholarship of Judith Berling and Her Contribution**

...over the course of her life, she increasingly identified herself with the other side of the sagely ideal, the teacher of women and men. Her early role emulated the style of Confucius, and she expressed in her professional vows her serious commitment to her role as teacher. However, she was not just a teacher of the classics, one who prepared students for examinations; she was also a religious teacher, a convertor and savior of women and men [in the educational system]. She believed that she was called

to revive the true transmission of the Way...To her students she was the sage who forms one body with heaven and earth and all things through her mind of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

I am of course referring to Lin Chao-en, the 16<sup>th</sup> century Chinese thinker who became the subject of Judith Berling's doctoral dissertation (1976). I have changed the pronouns and made slight changes in the text just quoted, but it is from the concluding pages of Prof. Judith Berling's first book, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*, published in 1980. Scholars are sometimes drawn to study historical figures whose ideas they themselves embrace, at least in part. In the case of her study of Lin Chao-en, we see the early budding of ideas Judith would continue to pursue throughout her career.

Over the past months, I have been immersed in the writings of Judith Berling. She wrote in 2006 that it took her twenty years to find her scholarly voice. If that is so, to read her work chronologically helps us to understand the emergence of her voice. She would not want me to summarize her intellectual history – and I would be unable to do so in a short lecture. Instead I pick up three overlapping areas of her work that especially interest me, and which will illuminate her contribution to religious pluralism in theological education. I hope this will facilitate our collaborative conversation and further exploration.

### **1. Chinese Thought and Chinese Religion**

Judith's study of Chinese thought and China's religious diversity has shaped her approach to learning and teaching. She began her work at Carleton College, and went to Columbia University for graduate study in Chinese culture, history and religion. At Columbia, she did the requisite course and language work, continuing her studies in Japan and Taiwan. This should not be glossed over, for language study and cultural immersion takes time and hard work. It should also be enjoyable, and in Judith's case it was. This was at the height of the "area studies" interest in

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Judith Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 237-38. Hereafter abbreviated as *Lin Chao-en*.

American higher education. Among other things (that we need not go into here) area studies was of necessity multi-disciplinary, for all aspects of a nation or a society needed to be taken into account to develop a better understanding of a people, a culture or a religion.

Judith began her studies by focusing on China *on its own terms*, by trying to understand China in its own context, concentrating on the people, the thinkers, the religious believers in the ways they were trying to understand themselves. She did not try to instrumentalize China as some of the area studies people did, especially those with political or strategic interests. Nor did she impose a theoretical construct on her subject, as many graduate students, then and now, are sometimes tempted to do. She was drawn into her study of China by an interest in ecumenism and religion, and was originally intending to go to Union Theological Seminary in New York for further theological studies and ordination to the ministry. But for reasons you can read about elsewhere, Judith's interests shifted to Chinese studies, but theology and religious studies were always on her mind.

Her engagement with Chinese culture began, she writes, in a university course she took that changed her life.<sup>2</sup> Judith, who has been mentor to many of us, faculty as well as students, had two mentors of her own: Bardwell Smith at Carleton and William Theodore de Bary in graduate School at Columbia. They introduced her to China and Japan, and, like all good mentors, they inspired her, encouraged and supported her in ways far beyond the mere academic. We all know that mentors often believe in us more than we do in ourselves. Judith's own involvement with China (I cannot comment on Japan) goes far beyond the academic. I know from personal experience of her interest in Chinese art and literature and archaeology and travel, and of course food.

Judith was never an "Orientalist" in Edward Said's redefinition of the term. I recently read the unfinished memoir of one of my own teachers, Frederick W. Mote, who was trained in traditional Chinese historical

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 9.

methods, and later taught at Princeton. He wrote that there is little evidence that Said's thesis applies to the East Asian experience with the West, despite the ruthless activities of the imperialist powers.<sup>3</sup> I tend to agree with this as far as North American and European Sinologists have been concerned, from the early Jesuits on forward. In the case of Judith Berling, she has always been both sensitive and appreciative in her approach to Chinese culture. And she has always been involved with people as subjects of their own history. Religious ideas and cultural concepts matter to her because they related to people and communities. Relationships have been important for her more than any form of study, and she has had no interest in changing China.

Her first and in some ways most academic book is on Sung (960-1279) and post-Sung religion in China, centered on syncretism and Lin Chao-en (林兆恩, 1517-1598). But even here, she had a broader and more general interest in mind, and when her dissertation became a book, she was writing for non-specialists. The idea of syncretism in China has never had the problematic connotations as it has had among then exclusive Abrahamic traditions of the West. In China, it is more common to speak of religious traditions in relationship to one another, and to see this as promoting tolerance. Syncretism for Berling is a "borrowing, affirmation or integration of concepts, symbols or practices of one religious tradition into another by a process of selection and reconciliation."<sup>4</sup> Somewhat like Judith herself, Lin Chao-en did not aspire to advance a new system of religious thought or a creative new approach to Confucianism. Rather, he sought to be a teacher, deeply committed to religion and spirituality, for himself and for his students.

In *A Pilgrim in Chinese Culture*, written almost two decades later, Judith describes herself as a pilgrim.<sup>5</sup> In this book, she writes about what

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<sup>3</sup> Frederick W. Mote, *China and the Vocation of History in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 159.

<sup>4</sup> *Lin Chao-en*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> See Judith Berling, *A Pilgrim in Chinese Culture: Negotiating Religious Diversity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2005).

she has learned from a Chinese understanding of the religious journey to expand her own religious (and theological) pilgrimage. She was an outsider and “other” in Chinese culture, and because of this, she learned humility about her own religious understanding. This in turn broadened her horizon through her learning from (and not just about) China. She repeatedly writes that this pilgrimage was a journey to deeper spirituality in her own context. In addition, it helped her to facilitate inter-religious communication and negotiate religious diversity. But, I would argue, this could never have happened had she not begun an understanding of Chinese religious life on its own terms.

Judith’s use of concrete stories more than abstract concepts helps us to journey with her. (This past weekend, I listened to M. Scott Momaday in Santa Fe, the native American “national treasure” tell some of his stories, and I learned again how stories can continue to move us.) She also introduces new ideas. I especially like her use of the Chinese character *jing* as a heuristic device to conceptualize Chinese religious interactions:

井

The pictograph may also describe the well-field system for rice-growing in China. Judith uses the character heuristically to describe religious borrowing around a common core. She then develops her own model of Chinese religious life and religious diversity, going beyond what she did with Lin Chao-en. She emphasizes the cultural embedded-ness of all religion, and writes about inter-religious negotiating, assimilating, appropriating, and resisting that there in Chinese religious encounters and in our own. This book is a good introduction to Chinese religious life for a non-specialized audience, recognizing the different local, regional and national variations, as well as the ways in which religions mediate political power, provide access to the transcendent and develop multi-layered embodiment of the Way (道). More than simply a book about Chinese

religions, *A Pilgrim in Chinese Culture* is a study of what Chinese religious understanding can contribute to a revised Christian perspective on our religious neighbors in North America. But it begins with developing an understanding of other religions that we encounter.

### **Excursus: On Pilgrimage with Judith in Fujian**

I thought of Judith last month, when I was rereading *A Pilgrim in Chinese Culture*, and visiting Fuzhou to delve into various archives in search of materials on the Anglican Christian tradition in Fujian. (I always like to be reading a related but different book when I am doing my research.)

Judith, did you know we were going to Fujian together?

Fujian is the most interesting province in China for the study of religions of all kinds: folk religion, Buddhism, Daoism, as well as Roman Catholicism and Protestant Christianity. Islam is also represented here, but not as significantly as it is in other parts of China. Fujian is the most “religious” province of China, whether judged in terms of the number of adherents or public visibility.

I visited Mawei, the coastal port of Fuzhou, which has historically been an important center for trade and shipbuilding. (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5) Fuzhou was one of the treaty ports opened to foreign commerce after the first Opium War (1842), and along with the traders came missionaries. In the process, the small town of Mawei became a bustling entrepot of Chinese shipping magnates, sailors, traders, naval officers, foreign missionaries and military men, alongside the local population. Mawei is not very far from Putian, the birthplace of Lin Chao-en, and later a center of Anglicanism.

In Mawei, I was taken to the Mazu Temple. (Fig. 1) Mazu (媽祖, also known as the Heavenly Empress 天后) is the Chinese who protects sailors and seafarers. She is widely worshipped in the coastal regions of China, especially in Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Tianjin, Taiwan and Hainan, as well as in Southeast Asia. She was born as Lin Moniang (林莫娘 “the silent lady”) in the year 960 (Song Dynasty), and died in 987. Six hundred years later, Lin Chao-En would have been familiar with the worship of Mazu, including the temple for her in his own hometown.

According to legend, Lin Moniang who lived on Meizhou Island off the Fujian coast, wore red garments while standing on the

shore to guide fishing boats home, even in the most dangerous and harsh weather. Her life was shortened in the service of others. Her father and brothers were fisherman.

One day, when they were drowning in a typhoon, Lin Moniang went into a trance to save her father and brothers. She succumbed to an early death after this heroic act. Her spirit continues to protect seafarers and attracts a popular cult, which has now spread far beyond the fishing villages on Taiwan and China's southeastern coastal region and includes Vietnam and overseas Chinese in California. Her birthday festival during the third month of the Chinese lunar calendar attracts tens of thousands of pilgrims across Taiwan in a ninety-mile procession, which has become an annual multimillion-dollar extravaganza, as well as a much contested political arena on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.<sup>6</sup>

As Judith notes in her book, Chinese religions are naturally syncretistic, and so Mazu has been appropriated by Buddhists and Daoists in attempts to attract devotees. Some Buddhists believe that Mazu is an incarnation of the goddess of mercy Guanyin (觀音). In Fujian, there is today a Mazu Association that emphasizes the humanistic and self-sacrificial aspects of Mazu, especially her work in helping others. In Taiwan, Mazu temples are everywhere. In Macau, Mazu is considered the founding patron of the city. Mazu pilgrimages are important not only in Taiwan, but also on the mainland and in Southeast China, and even in California, I am told.

Fujian was always the center of Chinese Anglicans, and by 1938, almost half of all Anglicans were from this province. More Chinese Anglican bishops came from Fujian than from any other place. Although Western denominations no longer exist in mainland China, the various traditions are still evident, and they are being studied by scholars working on Christianity in China, including myself. I went to the Mazu temple escorted by a young man who is very attracted to Anglican traditions of worship and theology. He attends the former Christ Cathedral in Fuzhou, but

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<sup>6</sup> As quoted in C. Julia Huang Elena Valussi and David A. Palmer, "Gender and Sexuality," in David A. Palmer, Glenn Shive and Philip L. Wickeri, *Chinese Religious Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 110-121.

he lives in Mawei, about a half hour drive away, where his family has been prominent for five generations.

The young man who was my guide is very fond of the Mazu temple, which is a center of cultural and religious life in the city. It looks out over the port, although the view of the sea is being obscured by the many new buildings. The Mazu temple (天后宮) dates from 1868, and it has been restored several times over the last 50 years. (Fig. 2) The interesting thing about the temple is that it not only features Mazu, but two other local female deities that I had never heard of before. All the imagery in the temple is female, and we may say this is a “women’s temple.” My guide explained that it was primarily the wives and daughters of the seafarers who used to go to the temple to pray for their husbands and sons who were at sea. (Fig. 3) As usual, it is the women who were helping the men, and the men didn’t even realize. The temple increasingly assumed a feminine character, which is unusual in Mazu devotions.

I asked my friend how he related Mazu to his own Christian beliefs. “This temple,” he said, “is part of our culture and tradition, and I embrace it as such.” A good enough answer, I think. He had said earlier that Anglican theology helped him accept and not negate Chinese culture, and this was different than the perspective of the dominant forms of Chinese evangelicalism. I spoke to him about T. C. Chao (趙紫宸, 1888-1979), the outstanding Chinese theologian of the twentieth century who himself became an Anglican and embraced Chinese religion and culture in his theological work. We were too rushed to go very deeply into the theological discussion, but I was reminded about Judith’s work on pilgrimage. My guide, just as T. C. Chao before him, was himself on a pilgrimage. And so am I.

Mazu is worth further study. Her relationship to sailors and to the sea, and to state power and patronage; her appropriation by other Chinese religions; the uniqueness of the “women’s” temple in Mawei; similarities and differences Mazu devotional practices in different places are all projects worth pursuing. (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5) Mazu could also be studied through an interreligious approach involving Christianity. How should Christians understand and learn from Mazu devotion? Devotion to Mazu, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Guanyin, Our Lady of Guadalupe, the importance of the representation of various religious women. Judith’s commitment to

Chinese studies, feminist studies, and theology helps us make the connection, and suggests possible approaches. At least this is what I thought on pilgrimage with Judith in Fujian.

Judith encourages us all to be pilgrims in other religious cultures as well as our own, and to recognize what we see and hear and feel about our journey. It is the journey itself, and not the destination that is important.

## **2. *Inter-religious learning and Christianity***

The GTU has been primarily, a consortium of Christian theological seminaries and divinity schools. That may now be changing, but Judith – herself a committed Episcopalian – has taken the Christian context as her starting point, but has been involved in interreligious learning as her medium, both personal and professional. We have now centers for the study of Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and South Asian religious traditions at the GTU, and this makes interreligious conversations not only possible but also necessary and inevitable.

Judith's interest in interreligious dialogue follows directly from her work in Chinese religious studies. But unlike many other scholars, her emphasis is not on dialogue *per se*, or on the dialogue of ideas, but on learning from and with other religions. This approach is expressed in her book *Understanding Other Religious Worlds: A Guide to Interreligious Learning* (2004).<sup>7</sup> This book is something of a manual for learning religions, for theological and classroom learning, and learning beyond the classroom. One can see in this book, Judith's own involvement and experience with theological education and religious studies in the North American context and beyond. She develops a learning process that seems, at least to me, easy to understand, but difficult to put into practice.

She speaks of 6 stages of interreligious learning<sup>8</sup>:

1. Building on the diversity of learners' experiences while respecting the internal diversity and multiple perspectives of religions studied;

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<sup>7</sup> See Judith Berling, *Understanding Other Religious Worlds: A Guide for Interreligious Education* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

2. Empowering learners by developing voice and agency while also teaching them to respect the voices and agencies of those who they engage in study;
3. Entering other worlds through art, text, or narrative, so that learners engage difference and particularity while acknowledging their own and others' social locations;
4. Engaging understanding and interpretation of the distinctive ways in which religions represent themselves, and not merely the mastery of ungrounded information;
5. Developing linguistic flexibility through a mutually critical conversation that engages the languages of all participants, including those of the religions studied;
6. Establish mutually respectful relationships, learning to stand with others.

Her focus throughout this book is on the learners and their experiences, but not at the expense of the beliefs and experiences of other religious worlds. She has a deep and nuanced approach to the important of religious and cultural difference in the study of religion. We can see how in this book Judith's interests have been shaped by her own teaching at the GTU. This is not a book of advocacy, but rather a guide to doing what we are trying to do inter-religiously at the GTU. You can see how her vocabulary in the above six points has become part of our vocabulary, or perhaps it is the other way around. Judith takes very seriously the task of inter-religious learning and understanding, in light of the serious challenges we face. So much of politics and international relations are today bound up with religion, and so it is the responsibility of GTU and other religious institutions to take up the task. Judith has helped the GTU lead the way.

In a more recent essay, she emphasizes the need for "multi-faith and multicultural group collaborations in engaging and presenting primary writers" as an approach to teaching and learning. She sees this as both a

pedagogical and practical necessity, a process in which she expects a great deal of the students (2013 essay) In other words, she wants us to mix with one another to seriously engage different religious texts and inter-religious problems. Judith's emphasis has always been on religious communities of interpretation, not on religious traditions or religious ideas. Hers is an approach much more oriented toward living dialogue and critical engagement among people, rather than a dialogue of ungrounded or philosophical ideas.

That said, this presents us with at least two difficulties, neither one of which can easily be resolved. The first is that it will require a very high level of commitment and expertise among those who become involved in inter-religious learning, especially the teachers. It will take, I believe, a continuing commitment on the part of the educators and their institutions to develop opportunities for their own inter-religious learning. For younger scholars, this will involve the learning of Western as well as non-Western languages; sabbatical time (pilgrimages) in other religious worlds; and serious study of religious texts, traditions and communities other than one's own. Can our GTU seminaries commit to this? Specifically, in a world of declining resources and funding for theological education, how can this be possible? This is a real question for me, not a rhetorical one.

A second difficulty involves the type of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism or Islam that we are talking about. Speaking only of Christians, inter-religious learning requires a disposition to dialogue and engagement with the "other" that is lacking in many Christian communities. For those who regard themselves as liberal, progressive, or "catholic" there is an openness to this kind of engagement. But Christians from conservative and evangelical traditions may not generally welcome an approach to theological education that includes interreligious learning. I assume there will be a similar reluctance on the part of conservatives from many other religious communities to engage in interreligious learning. It is not enough to say that we do not have many conservatives at the GTU, for we are open to all. Berkeley is not the world! In my own context, one that is much

more inter-religious than the United States, we have very little commitment to interreligious learning, especially in the churches and the seminaries. I mention this here as a difficulty, but it is also a challenge for all of us. I will return to this subject below.

### ***3. Interdisciplinary studies in theology and religious studies***

The third area of Judith's contribution has already been suggested: an interdisciplinary approach to the study of theology and religious studies. In this area as well, Judith has led the way, especially through her work in the IDS seminar for GTU doctoral students. Many of you here have taken that seminar which Judith has co-taught with colleagues, including me. Speaking as one of those co-teachers, I learned from this experience as much as I taught, but I also spent significant hours with advisees, something that is not the general experience of doctoral programs elsewhere. A personal approach to learning has been distinctive for the GTU, and this should not ever become negotiable. Judith has not yet written a book on interdisciplinarity, but I think I speak for all when I say that I hope it is in her future. In the meantime, we all have our PDF files from the course which distill much of the work she has put into this.

The whole concept of an academic discipline is based upon a European approach to study and learning. The disciplines were recast during the Enlightenment, and they became the foundation of Western learning. Whether we recognize it or not, we are all children of the Enlightenment in some sense, and this is not a bad thing. I may be among a very few in this room who find value in the "Enlightenment Project," but that is a subject for another time. Our world situation has now changed. A disciplinarily-confined approach to scholarship becomes increasingly problematic in a globalized world of many cultures and religions. Most universities and institutions of religious studies continue to be organized disciplinarily. But there are increasing conversations and collaborations

among the various scholarly disciplines and this makes for an interesting time to be involved in teaching and learning.

As I have tried to show, Judith's learning and teaching have been interdisciplinary from the beginning. This has also been the approach of many of us in our own areas of scholarship, so much so that it now seems to be the most natural way of engaging in academic work in the humanities, the social sciences and other disciplines. Judith's work on Lin Chao-en, and her advocacy of interreligious learning were interdisciplinary in themselves. As she once wrote, her fields are Chinese studies; feminist studies; religious studies; interreligious learning. The latter especially has given her an appreciation of difference. Sensitivity to, and appreciation of difference in terms of culture, religion, gender, class, race and sexual orientation is characteristic of Judith's thought. And, I would say, this is also an area in which the GTU has excelled. This is the GTU difference!

You have to take her seminar, which will still be offered at the GTU, to fully understand Judith's approach to interdisciplinarity and difference. But I cannot resist a very brief discussion of the structural models of interdisciplinarity that have become famous among her students and colleagues. I set them down here directly from her teaching notes:

**1) Discipline of Orientation/Home Discipline**

Description: two or more disciplines are used, with one of them being the discipline of reference. Technically speaking, this model is not genuinely interdisciplinary.

**2) Balanced Model**

Description: Two or more disciplines/fields are employed with each one weighted relatively equally. Scholarship in this model can either be multi- or pluri-disciplinary or interdisciplinary.

**3) Interstitial Model: Working at or between the Boundaries**

Description: Recognizes the boundaries of disciplines but works between them. Scholarship in this arena is marked not by adherence to disciplinary methodologies but exploration of the "negative," "unexplored" space between these methodologies. It recognizes boundaries of disciplines, but does not work within them. It transgresses, synthesizes, etc.

#### **4) Emerging Conversation (Paris Cafe)**

Description: Builds on a conversation/debate among scholars coming from various disciplines and/or approaches.

#### **5) Problem/Issue-based model**

Description: This scholarship is defined around an issue or problem, which is well-delineated. Clusters of disciplines/approaches are marshaled to examine the particular phenomenon.

#### **6) “Frame” Model**

Description: The need for interdisciplinary analysis is discussed at the outset of the work, and interdisciplinary analysis occurs in the conclusion, but in the “body” of the work each section/chapter is written within and from a specific discipline.

#### **7) Weaving model**

Description: This model weaves together various threads or strands of interdisciplinarity to create a pattern or a rich cloth or tapestry (or carpet). It conceptualizes the strands as intricately connected in an orderly and pleasing way. In some cases, there is a dominant thread that is enhanced by lesser decorative threads, and in other cases the threads are relatively more equal.

#### **8) Thematic Overlapping Model**

Description: Perhaps a variant of the interstitial model, this model occurs when a topic is addressed within more than one discipline, or should be addressed within an additional discipline. Each of the disciplines is likely to define the topic differently, and to bring to bear different assumptions, methods, and agendas when addressing it. Many scholars addressing such a topic would take a multidisciplinary approach, simply putting the various understandings of and explorations of the topic alongside one another, but an interdisciplinary scholar would put the multiple perspectives in dialogue or seek to reconcile them in some way.

Of course there are not just eight models, and perhaps in updated class notes there are more. But the models give an idea of how work in theology and religious studies can be structured in interdisciplinary ways. The M.Div. degree is among the last of the generalist degrees. We used to speak of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s four areas of theological studies: the Bible, history, theology and practical theology. Most theological seminaries have moved beyond these rigid classifications, but even if they have not, we can see that theological studies itself will involve

conversations among the disciplines and a certain degree of interdisciplinarity. The same can be said of religious studies (e.g. Judith's work in Chinese religions), which makes use of textual work, religious thought, history, anthropology, psychology and other disciplines.

Most of us begin with some kind of home discipline, but we quickly move on to the second model. The interstitial model is favored among the post-moderns, and those who are uncomfortable with the very idea of discipline. We all like the Paris Café model, as much for the lifestyle it suggests as for its very serious approach to conversations among the disciplines. The problem-based model is well-suited to seeking practical, real-life solutions in ministry and church work. The frame and thematic models help to approach their subjects from different perspectives. My personal favorite is the weaving model, not only because it relates to my interest in Turkmen carpets – their color, their texture, their irregularity, their depth – but because I believe that it most fully integrates the scholarly disciplines one has chosen.

Judith wants students to find their own scholarly voices, and to engage in collaborative conversations with one another. This makes for a dynamic way of organizing seminars and classes, and it highlights the importance of speech in academic exchanges. With Judith, students and colleagues carry on an extended collaborative conversation, even over many years, and in my own case, many thousand miles.

When I was in graduate school, I became interested in the work of Eugen Rosenstock-huessy (1888-1973), a German polymath who was also involved in many disciplines. He too emphasized speech (not language) in his work. He chose as his motto *respondeo etsi mutabor*, "I respond though I will be changed." This could be our motto as well. In the last paragraph of his great book *Out of Revolution: The Autobiography of Western Man* (1993), he wrote the following. Note that this was before the age of inclusive language, and I leave his text untouched.

My generation has survived social death in all its variations,  
and I have survived decades of study and teaching in n

scholastic and academic sciences. Every one of their venerable scholars mistook me for the intellectual type which he most despised. The atheist wanted me to disappear into Divinity, the theologians into sociology, the sociologists into history, the historians into journalism, the journalists into metaphysics, the philosophers into law, and – need I say it? – the lawyers into hell, which as a member of our present world I had never left. For nobody leaves hell all by himself without going mad. Society is a hell as long as a man or woman is alone. And the human soul dies from consumption in the hell of social catastrophe, unless it makes common cause with others. In the community that common sense rebuilds, after the earthquake, upon the ashes on the slope of Vesuvius, the red wine of life tastes better than anywhere else. And a man (or a woman) writes a book, even as he stretches out his hand, so that he may find that he is not alone in the survival of humankind.<sup>9</sup>

Rather heavy, as only a German of a certain age, and with a certain disposition can be. But the quote is at the same time moving, and even humorous. It shows how interdisciplinarity was treated in the academy (in Rosenstock's case, Harvard and Dartmouth) before the 1970s. We have moved a long way since then, at least I think we have. And Judith Berling has pointed the way forward.

### **Religious Pluralism and the Future of Theological Education: By Way of Conclusion**

Judith Berling has been a pioneer in interdisciplinary, inter-cultural and interreligious theological studies. I have tried to indicate some of the areas in her work that we will be able to draw upon for the future. You can I am sure find many more. All students and colleagues who have learned from Judith will help to carry on her work in their own ways. She also continues to carry on our work. This is part of what it means to be in collaborative conversation.

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<sup>9</sup> Eugen Rosenstock-huessy, *Out of Revolution: The Autobiography of Western Man* (Brooklyn: Argo Books, 1993), p. 758. Rosenstock-Huessy's collection of essays *I am an Impure Thinker* summarize themes and major methodological concerns from his work and provide autobiographical material. In the opening chapter, *Farewell to Descartes*, he writes: "I am an impure thinker. I am hurt, swayed, shaken, elated, disillusioned, shocked, comforted, and I have to transmit my mental experiences lest I die. And although I may die, to write a book is no luxury. It is a means of survival."

That said, I am not particularly sanguine about the prospects for theological education in North America or elsewhere, or the possibility of interreligious learning in theological studies, as important as I believe this is. I am unsure as to how religious pluralism will be incorporated into the theological education, or whether interreligious learning will be incorporated at all. I teach in Hong Kong, and I regularly lecture and attend conferences in mainland China. I have found very little interest in interreligious learning in theological seminaries, universities or social science institutes. Of course, following Judith, I try to find ways of changing that, and I think I can record some successes. But there is a divide between religious studies and theological education in Asian institutions, especially in China, and one needs to acknowledge and respect this divide for China is a different context.

Whenever I return to the GTU, I feel that we tend to exaggerate the virtues of “the People’s Republic of Berkeley” on America’s Left coast. We sometimes speak as if our own GTU approach is the wave of the future, which in time will be accepted all over. Those of us who work in other contexts quickly learn that this is not the case. Yes, the GTU is a very special place, but so too are other institutions. Maybe the GTU is missing out on some things. From self-confessed conservative Christian thinkers, we can discuss such subjects as the conserving power of religious traditions; the steady and unwavering commitment to traditional forms of religious practice; the importance of what we might call a “pre-critical” reading of the Bible in devotional life and daily prayer; the continuing adherence to doctrinal orthodoxy. In other contexts, and here I speak not only for myself but for many of my former doctoral students, especially those working in Asia, we learn to adjust and adapt, and begin such conversations. We discover new things. We translate what we have learned here, so that what we offer can be received and appropriated, often in ways that we never would have imagined. The GTU has much to offer, but maybe there should be a bit more learning from other contexts, including the more conservative ones. Because our insights are so very

important, we need to learn to have collaborative conversations with those who are not at the same starting point, and who may never accept our approach.

We seek a more perfect union of graduate theological education, and we recognize the contribution that my devoted friend and colleague, Professor Judith Berling has made to this enterprise. In so many ways, she has helped us all, both here at the GTU and in other places, discover our own voices and embrace religious pluralism in theological education and religious studies. Because of Judith's contribution, we can continue to move forward, even if the task ahead is daunting.

I could not end this lecture without recognizing the importance of Rhoda Bunnell in sustaining Judith on this journey. For those of us who were fortunate enough to know Judith's partner, our lives were enriched in her presence. Rhoda was a wonderful person and we came to love her. She always cut to the heart of things, with her disarming wit and keen insight into the human condition. Judith, you enhanced one another, and Rhoda blessed us all in the time we were given to be with her.

The future beckons. We will need to introduce what we have done in theological education and religious pluralism, to the situations in which we find ourselves. We know that this will not be an easy task. Each new job, each new project, each new book, becomes an act of re-creation, not repetition. The conversations continue, the work goes on and our hopes and dreams will never be extinguished. Judith has helped create a more perfect theological union, but it must be made more perfect still.

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**Figure 1.** Main entrance to 天后宮 in Mawei



**Figure 2.** The courtyard of 天后宮



**Figure 3.** The altar at 天后宮



**Figure 4.** View of Mawei harbor today from 天后宫



**Figure 5.** Postcard showing the view of Mawei harbor from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.