

Donald H. Gard  
1923-1995  
PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, EMERITUS

B.A., University of California, Berkeley; M.Div, Princeton Theological Seminary; M.A.,  
Ph.D., Ancient Near East Languages and Literatures,  
Princeton University, July 13, 1950  
California State University, Fullerton From July 17, 1967 To June 2, 1988  
Birth: May 20, 1923; Death: July 25, 1995

He was called "Dr. God" by some of his students, and it wasn't just a play on words. Don was a tall, imposing man with a resonant – even godlike – voice. But it was his qualities of soul that really inspired the nickname and the immense respect that students and faculty alike had for him. He was a person of great compassion and kindness with a wondrous empathy for students and the ability to believe in them without reservation. Faculty felt the same way: Don was someone you could talk to.

Don Gard was born in Fresno in 1923. As a youngster, he accompanied his mother on the piano while she did singing engagements to help keep food on the table during the Great Depression. He was valedictorian of his high school graduating class and received a Scaife scholarship to study science and math at Berkeley. However, his interests in the ministry led him to switch majors and graduate with a degree in philosophy and membership in Phi Beta Kappa.

He did his ministerial studies at Princeton Theological Seminary and spent a year (1946-1947) at the University of Basel, Switzerland studying with one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, Karl Barth.

After earning his Ph.D. with a dissertation on the Book of Job, he accepted an offer to teach Old Testament studies at Princeton Seminary and lectured there from 1949 to 1956. He then answered a call to become minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Trenton, New Jersey where he remained from 1955 to 1959. Next came an offer to become minister at the First Presbyterian Church of Anaheim which he accepted and where he worked from 1959 to 1966.

While there, Don was criticized by some members of his own church and others in the community for his opposition to the Vietnam War. His vindication came in the form of the Distinguished Service Award in 1965 from the National Conference of Christians and Jews (now known simply as the National Conference).

What Don's wife Ruth called the happiest period of his life began in 1967 when he was hired by CSUF president Bill Langsdorf as his administrative assistant. But Don was preeminently a teacher and longed to return to the classroom. His wish granted in 1969 when he and Morton Fierman of the Department of Secondary Education co-founded the Department of Religious Studies. In the first three years of the department's existence, Don taught six courses per semester to keep the program afloat. He then was able to begin hiring other faculty and to expand the religious studies program. Though small, the department has graduated some 225 students who have gone on to successful careers in such fields as law, counseling, teaching and the religious ministry, and has provided an opportunity for thousands of students over the years to explore the religions of humankind.

For many years, Don taught "Anxiety, Guilt and Freedom," an extremely popular course taken by many students in both the Religious Studies and Counseling Departments. When he retired, his colleagues produced a *festschrift* in his honor with the same title; *Anxiety, Guilt and Freedom – Religious Studies Perspectives (Essays in Honor of Donald Gard)*.

Don was chair of the Religious Studies for 12 of his 16 years in the department, served on numerous university committees, and was president of the Phi Kappa Phi Chapter. Always involved in the work of the Presbyterian Church, Don was no the board of the San Francisco Theological Seminary and a member of his denomination's National Missions Board.

In summary of his teaching career, perhaps Don's close friend and department co-founder Morton Fierman, in his eulogy at Don's funeral, put it best: "He was able to make a complicated concept simple, a nuance of thought meaningful, a profound idea discernible. He was a stretcher of minds, a challenger of the mediocre, a spiritual vitamin of the parochial."

Don Gard is survived by his wife, Ruth, four children, seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Submitted by  
Benjamin J. Hubbard  
Professor of Religious Studies  
November 15, 1996