“We see the same Bible differently, depending on where we’re standing. As Justo González states, none of us sees the whole landscape, nor do any of us see the landscape ‘as it really is.’ Taken together, though—by the church across time and around the globe—we are drawn closer to hearing and understanding the big picture of what God is saying and doing through his Word.”

—Joel B. Green, Provost and Dean, on Reading Scripture in Global Contexts, p. 4 (pictured: Jer Swigart of Global Immersion Project, p. 20)
Scene from the Sidewalk:
Randall Cole is a much-loved community member who oversaw publication design for Fuller for almost 17 years. Throughout his career he has enjoyed looking at and often photographing art, but never with any clear intention. In late 2015 he was inspired to take a closer look at public art, as he says, “focusing on the incredible details that, much like the building blocks of all matter, lay the foundation for each work and demonstrate the creative differences of each artist.” He has fascinated us with his travels and the now well over 500 pieces documented on his Tumblr and Instagram sites, and we are pleased to continue working with him in his new role as a design and production consultant for Fuller. See pp. 74–75 and 94–95 for more.

Venezuelan-born Mata Ruda uses iconography from both sides of the border to address environmental and spiritual issues as well as social concerns about overlooked communities and cultures. This work, the title of which translates as “Endless Struggle,” was painted in Coachella, California, in 2016 with the help of Lucinda Yrene, whom Ruda credits with providing him the spiritual and emotional insight to see the capacity of his art to cure and empower. In a poor community once known primarily for its grapefruit, this piece aimed to open the eyes of the hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Coachella Music Festival to the plight of the area’s year-round residents.

Follow the artists @mataruda and @lucinda_yrene
I like the image Justo González introduces in his book Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes. Writing about “perspectives” in reading the Bible, he asks us to imagine that “we’re all looking at a landscape: “The landscape is the same for all of us. Yet each one sees it from a different perspective, and will thus describe it differently.”

It’s not that we have different Bibles, he goes on to say, but that we see the same Bible differently, depending on where we’re standing. To push the metaphor a bit further, what we see depends on lots of things, like how tall we are, the quality of our eyeglasses, and what we’re looking for. Sometimes we’re drawn to different parts of Scripture—one person to Jesus’ parables, another to stories of Sarah and Abraham, and yet another to the Psalms. Different parts of the landscape catch our attention. Sometimes we read the same texts, say, the Minor Prophets, with different interests—one congregation for their message about economic faithfulness, another for their message about the hope of God’s people for restoration, and still another for their critique of false worship. Standing in different places, we perceive the landscape differently. As González recognizes, none of us sees the whole landscape, nor do any of us see the landscape “as it really is.” Taken together, though—it the church across time and around the globe—we are drawn closer to hearing what God is saying and doing through the Bible, through Hispanic Eyes.

In this way, we’re reminded that, even when we join our voices with the Reformers in their declarations of sola scriptura, “Scripture alone,” Scripture isn’t actually alone. We’re the ones doing the reading, after all, and we bring ourselves, with all of the textures and hues and flourishes of our humanity, to the Bible. We inhabit Scripture in different ways. Scripture challenges us and encourages us in different ways.

A lot of this difference has to do with the lens through which we read Scripture. Like eyeglasses, often unseen but nonetheless fixed atop our noses, these culturally shaped lenses filter how we read the Bible. Gathering with people not like us to read the Bible can surprise us, then, as we hear what others encounter in our beloved texts. Recalling his encounter with Scripture’s Lord, St. Augustine wrote that he heard these words: “Take and read; take and read.” As we “take and read,” let’s do so in concert with readers from the north and south, east and west, readers contemporary and readers past.
JUST LIKE FAMILY
Anna Merritt’s personal touch transforms Fuller’s Guest Center into a home away from home for a unique community of guests.

LORD, I WISH DUWAYNE COULD SLEEP
Dannielle Carr uses creative writing to wrestle with God over her husband’s cancer.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS
S故乡king experiences in the Holy Land lead Jon Huckins and Jer Swigart to rethink Jesus’ ethical teachings on peace.

CULTIVATING CULTURAL HUMILITY
Storytelling deconstructs Jessica Chee-Fung’s Taiwanese American experience and gives her a tool to help others navigate diversity.

JUST DATA
Brooke Istook’s winding path between technology and justice leads to a job she never anticipated—and a new perspective on vocation.
From Mark Labberton, President


My life has been changed by “reading the Bible with the dead,” most notably through historical theology professor John Thompson’s book by that title. My life has also been profoundly shaped by reading the Bible with living brothers and sisters from widely varied global contexts.

“Reading Scripture in global contexts”—the theme of this issue’s section on magnificently varied perspectives in profound ways. When we allow ourselves to view and hear the Bible as seen and read in other parts of the world, we not only benefit from those diverse readings, but our own reading of the Scriptures is transformed. A “neutral” reading is exposed as highly shaped by context, experience, and assumptions about almost everything.

Except for this neighbors, cars, and trees are never just ordinary—they can tell stories of place, climate, values, and more. We are never simply objective viewers of a world simple. Do we, very rarely, view the world as something much more than what we see?

― magnificently varied in the history, context, and people, so it is all the more vividly true of how we read—especially text as deeply layered and weighted as the Bible. Reading conveys an endless and inexhaustible fecundity of interpretation. Those interpretations are built from our personal experiences and are, therefore, shaped by them. As this is true of contemporary texts about current events and people, so it is all the more vividly true as we interpret the ancient texts that deliver the Word of God.

Opinions vary widely about the meaning and application of Scripture to our lives and to our world. Since the 66 books of the Bible are resoundingly varied in the history, context, events, people, and needs out of which they are written, the canon of Scripture itself involves us into multiple views. This informs

" especialmente text with both past and present social and economic realities; they can be expressions of our "tribe" or people group; they can tell stories of place, climate, values, and more. We are never simply objective viewers of a world simple. Do we, very rarely, view the world as something much more than what we see?

"Lo vi con mis propios ojos," insistimos como prueba definitiva de la veracidad de algo. Prójimo, carro, arbusto, lector, medio de estacionamiento, capullo de diente, peluca son cosas sencillas y ordinarias, nada más de lo que parecen.

Excepto por estos prójimos, carritos, árboles y edificios nunca son solo ordinarios — nos pueden ubicar social y económicamente; pueden ser expresiones de nuestra "tribu" o grupo; pueden contar historias de lugar, clima, valores y mucho más. Nunca somos solo observadores de objetivos de un mundo simple. De hecho, muy poco es más subjetivo que nuestro punto de vista, aún más nos indican cómo interpretar las cosas.

Entonces, aunque más se está claramente de cómo leo—especialmente un texto con tantas capas profundas y pesadas como la Biblia. El leer evoca un fecundidad inagotable e inahorada de interpretación. Estas interpretaciones nos incluyen en nuestras experiencias y son, entonces, formadas por ellas. A medida que esto es cierto de los textos contemporáneos sobre eventos y personas actuales, así también le es esencialmente cierto y simultáneamente interpretamos los textos antiguos que llevan la palabra de Dios.

The opinions vary widely about the meaning and application of Scripture to our lives and to our world. Since the 66 books of the Bible are resoundingly varied in the history, context, events, people, and needs out of which they are written, the canon of Scripture itself involves us into multiple views. This informs the reading of contemporary texts about current events and people, so it is all the more vividly true that we interpret and understand the ancient texts that deliver the Word of God.

Opinions vary widely about the meaning and application of Scripture to our lives and to our world. Since the 66 books of the Bible are resoundingly varied in the history, context, events, people, and needs out of which they are written, the canon of Scripture itself involves us into multiple views. This informs...
myriad interpretations of God, of being human, of living as physical-spiritual beings in a material world, of being (or not being) part of the people of God, and of dreaming about and believing in God’s purposes and ways.

The sheer possibilities can be disorienting—

as though all acts of reading and perception are equal and random. This is not true, but it does ground us in the need for reading with humility, for reading in diverse community that will enhance our ability to grasp the text more fully, for realizing that our most natural readings may be the most biased, and for being drawn toward the living Word, Jesus Christ.

Amidst the multiplicity of views the Bible offers, I see and read the Bible chronologically while standing inside my own historical, social, racial, and political context. I also stand amidst the Christian community that sees Jesus Christ as the center from which I apprehend the whole biblical narrative. Tools of history, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, or religion can add welcome insights to my reading of the Bible. I also choose to read through the lens of my confession that the living Word of God made flesh in Jesus will enable the clearest reading of the biblical text.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. I know that more truly by seeing the Bible through the witnesses of God’s diverse global family. Other members of the body of Christ—whether in centuries past or in yesterday’s blog post—help me identify the restrictions of my own perception and allow me to see how I see. Our collective perception promises a more fully orb and unpredictable view of the One who alone is Lord.

de las Escrituras en no invita a múltiples visiones. Esto informa las muy numerosas interpretaciones de Dios, del ser humano, de vivir como seres físico-espirituales en un mundo material, de ser (o no ser) parte del pueblo de Dios y de soñar sobre y creer en las propuestas y caminos de Dios.

Las menores posibilidades pueden ser desorientadoras—como también todos los actos de lectura y percepción son iguales y al azar. Eso no es cierto, pero nos fundamenta en la necesidad de leer con humildad, para leer en una comunidad diversa que mejora nuestra habilidad de comprender el texto más completamente, para darnos cuenta que nuestras lecturas más naturales pueden ser las más parciales y para acercarnos hacia la palabra viva, Jesucristo.

En medio de una multiplicidad de visiones que la Biblia nos ofrece, voy y leo la Biblia cristológicamente mientras me ubico dentro de mi propio contexto histórico, social, racial y político. También estoy en medio de una comunidad cristiana que ve a Jesucristo como el centro desde donde percibo toda la narrativa bíblica. Las herramientas de la historia, la lingüística, la antropología, la sociología o la religión pueden añadir ideas benévolas a mi lectura de la Biblia. También escogí leer por medio del lente de mi confesión que la palabra viva de Dios hecha carne en Jesús permitirá la lectura más clara del texto bíblico.

Jesucristo es el mismo ayer, hoy y mañana, si esto con más certeza al ver la Biblia a través del testimonio de la diversa familia global de Dios. Cada persona integrante del cuerpo de Cristo—ya sea en los siglos pasados o con la publicación del blog de ayer—me ayudan a identificar las restricciones del propio espacio y me permiten “ver como yo veo”. Nuestra percepción colectiva nos promete una visión más esférica e imprescindible de Aquel que únicamente es Señor.
Anna Merritt grew up in a large, tight-knit Italian family—and if that brings certain images to mind, they’re likely right. Sundays always meant a gathering of the clan at the grandparents’ house: along with Anna’s parents and five siblings were aunts and uncles and close to two dozen cousins. “All of us girls would be together in the kitchen with Grandma building cannoli or learning to make a good red sauce while the boys were outside swimming. It wasn’t entirely fair,” Anna remembers with a laugh. “But I did love the cooking.” When that food was served, there was always room at the table for anyone else who might stop by. Says Anna, “‘The more the merrier’ was our family motto.”

Today Anna brings that spirit of familial hospitality to her role as director of Fuller Seminary’s Guest and Conference Center in Pasadena, known by most as simply the Guest Center. Located a few blocks from campus on a quiet street lined with camphor trees, the complex—which includes 70 guest units of varying size—was originally intended to primarily serve members of the extended Fuller community and their family members. Over time that mission expanded to include guests connected with local nonprofits as well: the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), Huntington Library, Caltech, and others.

“We’re the first face of Fuller to many of our guests,” Anna says. “So our role is to be welcoming! That’s something we take very seriously.” Referring much more often to “we” than “I,” she expresses effusive gratitude for a group of staff members who are just as devoted to the guests as she is: “We have a collaborative team of people here who really care.”

Most guests stay for just two or three nights; others—students coming from out of town for a series of intensive courses, faculty in the midst of relocation—stay at the Guest Center for weeks or even months. Either way, what they observe is an attention to detail that makes the difference between an impersonal way station and a home away from home. Everyone finds a welcome basket of chocolates, biscotti, water bottle, and other goodies in their room when they check in; return guests often find a hand-penned welcome note from Anna. During the Christmas season there will be an ornament tied with ribbon to every door; on St. Patrick’s Day it’ll be a clover-shaped cookie; on December 31, a cowbell to ring in the New Year. Anna and her team are lavish with such offerings but not with their spending: Treats are home-baked, welcome baskets are assembled on site, and Anna always keeps her eyes out for good deals, snatching up next year’s Christmas ornaments at this year’s after-Christmas sales.

“Anna always has the special touches,” says Kaye Schneider, an MAFS and MATM alum who stayed at the Guest Center frequently over the years, coming up to Pasadena weekly from the San Diego area when she had classes. “She makes sure the rooms are stocked with everything you’d need to make a meal and that the study lounge has water and coffee. She takes care to have plants around to bring life and color to the entire community area.”

It’s especially the personal touches that make a difference, says Kaye: things like remembering Kaye’s birthday, helping her cater and decorate for a graduation party, or just keeping an eye out for small needs. “After she found out I was bringing an extension cord with me to access an extra outlet, I arrived in my room to find a power strip she’d left me! That’s Anna.”

ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW

What energizes Anna about her work at the Guest Center is that “there’s always something new.” She says, “and always such interesting people coming through.” Like the Special

It’s the personal touches that make a difference.
Olympics athletes and coaches last summer. Or John Nash, the late mathematician who inspired the film A Beautiful Mind. Or the JPL scientists who were working on the Mars Rover mission and had a correspondingly topsy-turvy schedule. “We had to clean their rooms on Mars time!” says Anna, with the housekeepers following a schedule that matched up with that of the scientists—sailing from day to day—over the three months they stayed at the Guest Center. But Anna especially loves getting to know members of the Fuller community who stay for an extended time: students like Kaye, or faculty or staff members who commute from out of town or are in transition, looking for a permanent place to live.

The “something new” that’s always happening in the life of the Guest Center often comes in the form of the day-to-day challenges of property management that need to be creatively addressed. But every once in a while it’s something much bigger. “We had a baby born at the Guest Center,” Anna shares. “Our guest went to the hospital but they sent her back here saying it wasn’t time yet. Well, the baby thought it was time!” The mom’s husband dashed out to get a staff member to come help, but by the time they got back to the room, the baby had arrived.

Then there was the time a guest cut herself severely on a hand blender she’d brought with her. “It was a pretty serious wound, she was fainting, and her husband was out of town—she was all alone with her baby,” Anna recalls. Without a moment’s hesitation, Anna drove her to the emergency room while Katie, who works at the front desk, stayed with her baby.

Anna describes a tradition she had with her son, Nick, during his growing-up years. “He and I would go out of town just for fun, for a couple of days, just the two of us—I called them ‘adventures with Nick.’ One year we decided to go to Palm Springs but hadn’t booked a place to stay ahead of time, and we ended up at a motel that was kind of run-down and shabby around the edges. It looked like it was from the ’60s! “But the owner was so friendly to us that we ended up loving it,” she says, “and we decided to go back every year. That owner always remembered our names, and he always made us feel at home.” Anna carries that spirit to the Guest Center. “Even if there are areas where our facility is a little bit dated, our customer service always needs to be in top shape.”

What that might look like, for Anna or any member of her staff, is taking time to find out how a guest is doing or just engaging them in conversation. “When I walk by and see one of our staff members taking a moment to sit down with a guest out on the patio and have some coffee together, it makes me super happy,” she says. “It’s lovely.”

Ultimately, it’s about creating a place that feels like a home away from home.

TREATED LIKE FAMILY

Every June on the morning of Commencement, they offer a complimentary breakfast on the patio for all their guests, most of whom are family members and friends of the new graduates. They don’t cater; Guest Center staff all contribute the food. “It’s always so much fun,” Anna says, but the best part comes once all the guests have rushed off to Commencement. “When the staff are the only ones left, we pull a couple of the tables together,” she shares, “and we sit down and eat together as a family. I cherish those moments.”

2017 | ISSUE #8 READING SCRIPTURE GLOBALLY
I wake up and he's not beside me. I look in the living room, but the sofa is empty except for the blanket. Maybe he’s outside or gone somewhere, but I didn’t hear him leave. I check the recliner in Eva’s room. I check his office and he’s sitting up in the chair by the window. Awake.

I can offer him nothing. I ask, but there is nothing I can do to help. It’s been a while since he hasn’t slept, so I wonder if something’s wrong. Did he want to talk to me and I wasn’t available to listen?

Please, Lord. I can’t give him anything that will take this away.

What does he do all night? He’s up and alone in the stillness, darkness without anyone to talk to, or anyone to help.

LORD, I WILL NOT LOOK FOR THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD.

We’re at the hospital to remove the chemo pump from his chest port. He can’t make it to the infusion center on foot. So I park in the valet section at the front, but there’s no valet service on a Saturday. The curb is always empty and no one has told us not to park there. I leave wilted Duwayne and sleeping Eva in the car to get a wheelchair.

Duwayne eases himself into the wheelchair. Then I ease Eva into Duwayne’s lap. I push myself and our family to the waiting area.

When I awake, I am still with You. When I awake, Duwayne still has cancer.

Lord, You are full of compassion. Hear our prayers. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

This text is excerpted, with permission, from a continuation of Danielle’s master’s thesis project: Where Were You? An Exploration of the Presence of God. The work in its entirety can be found online at FULLERstudio along with a video reflection of her experience.
LORD, LORD, LORD, HAVE MERCY. HAVE MERCY. HAVE MERCY. CHRIST
Before their first child was born—as a kind of final hurrah Jon and Jan Huckins signed up for a trip that would change their lives forever. It was 2010, and the couple had just made a courageous decision: that Jon, after ten years in pastoral ministry, should attend seminary. Feeling the need for more training and a stronger intellectual foundation, he had enrolled in Fuller’s MA in Theology program. Now with a baby on the way, they decided to take a trip to Israel through Jerusalem University College before being homebound by school and parenthood.

Their time in the Holy Land became much more than a “final hurrah” for Jon and Jan when they befriended their hotel server. Milad and his wife were expecting their first baby at the same time the Huckins expected theirs. Jon and Milad ended up hanging out on the hotel rooftop one night, talking World Cup soccer and impending parenthood while overlooking Herod’s Palace in the Old City of Jerusalem. In the middle of their joking and conversing, Milad grew somber. He looked at Jon and asked, “Why do your people think I am a terrorist?”

Jon, stunned, had no response.

“How can you thank God for your breakfast every morning and hop on a tour bus to holy sites while, five minutes away, your brothers and sisters in Christ are experiencing daily occupation and oppression?”

Milad was an Arab Palestinian Christian, his family displaced by Israeli military advances in 1948 when thousands of Palestinians fled in terror. He now lived in Bethany—the place of Lazarus’s resurrection in John 11—in the West Bank, where tensions between Israelis and Palestinians often erupted with thrown rocks and flying bullets. At Milad’s invitation, Jon and Jan began visiting Milad and his community. After their Holy Land tour came to a close each day, the two Americans would get on a public bus and pass through military checkpoints into the West Bank. What they saw shattered their perceptions about Israel and Palestine, politics and theology, theology and ethics. Jon realized that he had always understood Israel-Palestine relations through the lens of a subtle yet embedded Christian Zionism—and now, everything was turned upside down. His mind started spinning with new questions about God and discipleship: “Does peace fit into theology? How has my inherited theology been an obstacle to peace rather than a mandate to pursue it? What does a theology of peace look like? How is that practically lived out such that both Milad in the West Bank and my neighbors in San Diego flourish?”

Milad and his community bustled open a door in Jon’s mind, and he stepped through to find out what it means to follow Jesus in the midst of very real and physical conflict.

In 2005, when a 7.6-magnitude earthquake shattered the region of Azad Kashmir at the base of the Himalayas, the damage in that rural area of northern Pakistan was catastrophic. Emergency response teams were disabled. Almost 90,000 people died and nearly 4 million were displaced. Much of the farming region’s livestock were killed. In the aftermath of that disaster Jer Swigart, a young man who had come to take part in the relief effort, was struck by a realization. Working alongside others to clear rubble, distribute aid, and assist with communications between the villages and United Nations representatives, he discovered a God whose presence preceded him everywhere he went—even into areas he had previously considered “enemy territory.” For him it was an epiphany: God and God’s kingdom were much bigger than he had ever thought or imagined. Rather than bringing God to others in any way, it became clear to him that he was joining a very present, compassionate God in merciful action among those in need. While the infrastructure of Pakistani villages was being rebuilt, Jer found himself—and his perceptions of God—being undone and reshaped by a simultaneously global and personal deity.

His convictions about God’s power and presence only deepened as Jer, serving as a communications liaison for the UN, became involved in the negotiations of a peace treaty between two Pakistani villages that had waged war against each other for decades. When he watched men who had once sought each other’s annihilation shake hands in peace, the gospel went into “high definition” for Jer. He realized that in Christ, God waged a decisive peace; as a result, people who previously were subject to destruction were given new life. When Jer returned from Pakistan to his home and pastoral work in California’s Bay Area, his expanded understanding of God, enemy-love, and mission convicted him of his deep need for further theological training and leadership formation. At the same time, his boss approached him: “With your skill set and what God is up to in you,” he said, “I want to encourage you to consider seminary and an MDiv as...
“[I] realized that in Christ, God waged a decisive peace; as a result, people who previously were subject to destruction were given new life.”

–Jer Swigart

“Does peace fit into theology? How has my inherited theology been an obstacle to peace rather than a mandate to pursue it? What does a theology of peace look like?”

–Jon Huckins
your next step.” As Jer discerned, prayed, and researched, he realized that every major mentor in his pastoral career had been a graduate of Fuller Seminary. He enrolled at the Fuller Northern California regional campus. During one online class, Jer found himself consistently pushed, encouraged, and challenged by a classmate in San Diego. When the quarter finished, Jer sent an email of gratitude to the student, saying he hoped they would get to meet in person one day. When, later, Jer arrived at his hotel in Jerusalem for a Fuller immersion course, he found—much to his surprise—Jon Huckins from his online course sitting in the lobby. Jon was back in Israel, this time with Fuller. Famed ethicist and then-Fuller professor Glen Stassen, known for his “Just Peacemaking” philosophy, was leading the trip, focusing on what it means to live as an agent of reconciliation in the name of Christ.

Jon and Jer spent the next two weeks as travel companions and brainstorming partners. Pakistan and the West Bank collided as the two learned together in East Jerusalem, wondering how to incorporate what they learned—rebuilding from earthquakes, forging peace, sharing meals with the displaced, listening to intellectual giants—for lives of peacemaking. Dr. Stassen’s class took on flesh and bones. Finally, Jer and Jon committed to a plan—its end goal being a lived theology for themselves, their people, and their communities.

FORMING EVERYDAY PEACEMAKERS

As an initial experiment, the two tried out their plan with their congregations. Ten individuals from Jer’s church in the Bay Area and ten from Jon’s in San Diego engaged in several weeks of preparatory study and discussion, and then flew to Israel and the West Bank. This was not a mission trip, but a formation trip. The end result was not to convert others to Christianity, but to meet and learn from Christians, Jews, and Muslims on the front lines of building peace in hostile environments. Jon and Jer hoped their congregants would experience the same sort of internal transformation they had undergone. Much to their surprise, it worked. More than that, it was bigger than expected.

Others from their congregations, from neighboring congregations, and from churches across the nation heard about the trip. Before Jon and Jer had even debriefed, the wait list for the second trip was long and growing. They realized this was more than a program; they had started an organization. The Global Immersion Project was born. Jer and Jon continued their peacemaking training and formation trips—now called Learning Labs—to East Jerusalem, and added Tijuana, Mexico, as another with a focus on the immigrant experience. Over time they developed workshops, webinars, and e-courses as further platforms for meeting their mission of “cultivating everyday peacemakers.”

Both Jon and Jer came to Fuller with their own dramatic experiences, but their time in seminary helped them process and grow out of those experiences as leaders committed to peace. “Fuller created the space for questions I couldn’t ask elsewhere,” Jon says. “The professors there taught me how to think, not what to think. At the same time, they showed me how much bigger God’s kingdom was. I realized that the world and God’s activity stretched far beyond the American-centric Christianity I had been steeped in. I was formed to think bigger and see more.”

Jer also credits Fuller with encouraging him to step out and experiment with those bigger ideas. The biggest experiment, of course, became the Global Immersion Project, but that was only one outgrowth of the commitment to applied theology Jer drew from Fuller. Another was Jer’s own dedication to “become a student of both the Word and the world,” a commitment drilled into him by Fuller President Mark Labberton. Jer built a diverse library of Christian voices from around the globe, helping him to remember the God who precedes him everywhere.

The Global Immersion Project is just a half-decade old, but it is continuing to expand beyond Jon and Jer’s predictions. They see their work as an equipping of the American church to “embrace its identity as the reconciled beloved and vocation as beloved reconciler.” They desire the church’s transformation and activation as an instrument of peace in the world, a testament to a core tenet of the Christian faith. As they witness the growth of this movement through Global Immersion, they pray it continues to grow. “When Christians in the United States follow the Jesus we talk about—the one who commanded us to love our enemies, to pray for peace, to be peacemakers—the world will be a different place.”

MARK LABBERTON, co-founder of Fuller’s Faith and Science student group.

NATE HARRISON, photographer, at Fuller magazine’s senior photographer and video storyteller. Find his work at NateHarrison.com.
When Jessica ChenFeng (MFT ’07) arrived at Fuller as one of only a handful of Asian Americans in her Marriage and Family Therapy cohort, she noticed that she never felt at ease in spaces where she was the only Asian person. “I was my fullest self with people I was comfortable with culturally, and I didn’t like that,” she recalls. She grew up in a Taiwanese American family and a mostly Asian community, and didn’t realize how embedded she was in her own culture and context until she was diving into marriage and family therapy, a primarily white-dominated field.

She noticed that her Asian identity was rarely addressed, and she didn’t learn how to practice therapy out of her own cultural identity. “A lot of the theories are written by white men, and the way marriage and family therapy is practiced is also from a Eurocentric ideology,” she explains, and then jokes, “I was a really good pretend white therapist, and I didn’t know it.”

Before coming to Fuller, Jessica says she had never been exposed to Christianity outside of a Taiwanese context. “I didn’t have a conscious awareness of how culture and faith come together, but I remember experiencing a lot of grace at Fuller,” she says. She also experienced professors modeling humility and curiosity. Jessica recalls Old Testament professor John Goldingay, while answering a student’s question in a Bible course, saying, “The more and more I study it, the less I understand it.” That was revolutionary for Jessica. “It was so refreshing to me,” she says, “because it connected to this thing in me that knew there must be a humility or not-knowing about God—how can we presume that what we know is always right?”

Jessica’s willingness to be humble led her to want to learn about others’ worldviews and how they came to construct them. But first, she needed to learn about her own. While working on her PhD at Loma Linda University, Jessica came across literature on the “intersectionality of social identity,” and she says, “it clicked immediately. It gave words and language to my life experience.” She focused her doctoral work on social location—how one’s gender, culture, race,
and class, among other factors, all play a part in one’s understanding of self and relation with the world. Jessica began to develop a “critical consciousness,” which helped her when she encountered discrimination in her own life or misinterpreted the intentions of others. “When things like that happen to me now, I have a different lens,” she says. “It doesn’t disempower me. I’m conscious of why that happens, and I have places where I can process that, so I don’t have to react. It doesn’t take away from me anymore.”

One arena Jessica mentions that highlighted the effects of social location, both for herself and others, was last year’s US presidential race. She observed that, whatever candidate they supported, there were times the family were interacting online in social media echo chambers, attending churches that reinforced their opinions, and socializing with friends whose beliefs matched their own. “What hurt the most and felt personally threatening,” says Jessica, “were the people we assumed were ‘like us’—family members, people who share similar social identities to ours—who we began to perceive as ‘the other.’” Yet understanding the perspectives of those “others,” she insists, must start with understanding our own critically examining ourselves and the influences that have built our own identity and belief systems. Jessica tells of one family member—another Taiwanese American woman—whose experience and political response illustrate both the complexities and constraints of cultural embeddedness. “She has many identities,” Jessica describes, “one being marginalized as an Asian woman who had to immigrate to the United States and learn English, and at the same time feeling that she and her family worked hard to get an education and citizenship in legal ways.” The news articles this family member reads and socializing with friends who share the same beliefs can be interacting online in social media echo chambers, attending churches that reinforced their opinions, and socializing with friends whose beliefs matched their own. “What hurt the most and felt personally threatening,” says Jessica, “were the people we assumed were ‘like us’—family members, people who share similar social identities to ours—who we began to perceive as ‘the other.’” Yet understanding the perspectives of those “others,” she insists, must start with understanding our own critically examining ourselves and the influences that have built our own identity and belief systems. Jessica tells of one family member—another Taiwanese American woman—whose experience and political response illustrate both the complexities and constraints of cultural embeddedness. “She has many identities,” Jessica describes, “one being marginalized as an Asian woman who had to immigrate to the United States and learn English, and at the same time feeling that she and her family worked hard to get an education and citizenship in legal ways.” The news articles this family member reads and the people who inform her thinking, Jessica perceives, all reinforce her particular beliefs. “She is genuinely living out her strongest convictions, but has no access to those with other worldviews that might in some way challenge her. Such trust and closeness came ‘after years of dying deep into our relationship—why and how the social hierarchies in America came to be. ‘Why was ‘the other’ so bad? Every immigrant group, all of our xenophobia, all of our history—that’s the same story.’” Jessica says. By embedding privilege and oppression in historical context, she helps her students to stop personalizing it, going from “I’m bad” to “No, our history makes it so that we had no other way to live in this societal structure.”

Teaching the diversity class over the years, Jessica has noticed that as she walks alongside her students through their shared “consciousness-raising,” she watches them first emerge out of an “ignorance is bliss” state. As they start to understand other people’s behaviors and their own, sometimes it feels more frustrating. “A lot of people, for a season, become angry; they’re discouraged, they feel hopeless about their experience,” explains Jessica. “But if you persist in it, I believe that you do connect more with yourself, you understand the world better, you build coping mechanisms, you learn how to be empowered.”

Today, in a climate that too often feels divided, Jessica believes the challenge we are faced with is answering the question, “What does it mean to be in community and to be in unity as the body of Christ?”

“We have to advocate for processes that allow for everyone to be heard and to emphasize that trying to make people arrive at a conclusion of ‘X’ or ‘Y’ is not necessarily the primary agenda,” says Jessica. “I think for a lot of people, this is scary and risky because it’s so personal.”

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When Brooke Istook (MACS ’10) completed college with a degree in information technology, she had a growing sense she had prepared for a field she didn’t want to enter. With equal parts anxiety and resignation, she walked across the graduation stage and began wandering toward a vocation she couldn’t yet name—a ten-year process that would be much messier than the spreadsheets and systems she had studied.

That process began when she found work as a technology consultant—a job that gave Brooke the flexibility and free time to volunteer in areas that felt more enlivening to her. “By volunteering I could figure out the landscape,” she remembers. “I knew I wanted to have a career transition, but I didn’t know what it was.” Whether it was Bible studies with the homeless in Los Angeles or development work in Ethiopia, when Brooke wasn’t in front of a computer screen she was helping others. “There was always this piece of me that wanted to do meaningful work and not just affect profit and the bottom line,” she says.

Brooke decided to bring this desire and her vocational uncertainty to Fuller’s School of Intercultural Studies, a place where she could take steps toward a vocation she couldn’t yet envision. One class in particular, David Scott’s Children at Risk course, put her passions into sharp relief. “We had a project in the class where we surveyed specific risks children around the world face,” she remembers. “I was going through material about different categories of risk for children globally, and the sexual abuse and trafficking section really broke my heart.” She was haunted by the data, especially the low rates for rehabilitation, and began to use assignments in other classes to research the subject. “I centered all of my work around women’s and children’s issues from that day forward,” she says. “My time at Fuller really helped me clarify and focus on this issue I was passionate about.”

With that newfound clarity, Brooke graduated a second time and began looking for work—just as positions in the nonprofit sector were at a historic low. “We had a project in the class where we surveyed specific risks children around the world face,” she remembers. “I was going through material about different categories of risk for children globally, and the sexual abuse and trafficking section really broke my heart.” She was haunted by the data, especially the low rates for rehabilitation, and began to use assignments in other classes to research the subject. “I centered all of my work around women’s and children’s issues from that day forward,” she says. “My time at Fuller really helped me clarify and focus on this issue I was passionate about.”

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With that newfound clarity, Brooke graduated a second time and began looking for work—just as positions in the nonprofit sector were at a historic low. “I was searching, searching, searching, and nothing was working,” she remembers. “I was getting nowhere fast despite my best efforts.” Confused and disheartened, she found work again in the technology sector she had tried to leave, and it felt like one more step away from the career path she thought she was preparing for. It wasn’t the only surprise: Brooke and her husband discovered they were going to have a baby.

During pregnancy, Brooke was finally forced to slow down the volunteering and work ethic she had grown accustomed to. “In nonprofit work, the currency isn’t money—it can quickly become who’s doing the most,” she says, “and that can get complicated.” The life she was trying to build from her own ambition seemed small compared to the new life in her arms, and she could feel her momentum begin to shift. “I wasn’t focused on my work anymore,” she says. “I began to realize that I was trying to fill a hole, and I had to let go.” Just when Brooke finally let go, the phone rang.

A friend and former coworker in tech consulting was on the other line with details about a nonprofit looking for staff, and she wanted to connect Brooke with the CEO. A few conversations later, Brooke was hired as the director of strategy and operations for Thorn, a nonprofit organization that uses the latest technology to fight child pornography and child sex trafficking on the Internet. Rather than leaving one career for another, Brooke discovered work that needed both her passion and the work experience she had tried to leave behind. “For so long I regretted going down the technical career path, and I couldn’t make sense of it,” she says. “I had given up, but every piece of it has come back around at Thorn.”

“In the past, these crimes against children weren’t so easy to access—they required driving to dangerous areas of town or sending illicit mail, but now the anonymity of the Internet creates new digital space where predators can find victims and other abusers with the click of a button. It’s this dangerous blend of technology and predatory behavior that Brooke now works to address. “If we can find victims faster, deter potential

“There was a piece of me that wanted to do something more meaningful and not just affect profit and the bottom line.”
offenders, and make platforms as safe as possible," she says, "we’re squeezing the access points and hopefully making a difference."

Still, the reality of Thorn’s work can take its toll, and one glimpse of a chat room transcript can remind staff members of the disturbing darkness beyond the screen. It’s what psychologists call “vicarious trauma,” and the emotional impact can easily tempt them to stop their work. “If you haven’t been taking care of yourself, you hit a rough patch,” Brooke says. “You don’t know what will trigger employees, and I’ve definitely cried on some days.” To keep their work sustainable, Brooke helped Thorn develop a group counseling program and therapy for the employees, a solution that came from her own years of navigating burnout.

With the right emotional support in place, the team can focus on collaborating with others to develop new tools. “Predators are always going to be using the latest technologies to their advantage, so we need to be just as nimble,” she says. Partnering with law enforcement and information technology experts, Brooke helped develop “Spotlight,” a high-powered search engine that identifies potential victims more quickly in order to get them the support they need. Her team has worked with national technology companies to circulate policies and safety standards for digital platforms to incorporate into their code. They recently hosted a hack-a-thon with engineers from Silicon Valley to explore new inventions to protect children. “Some of what we’re doing is asking questions: What would really change things? Can we do that technically and legally? Who should get on board?” she says. “We have a great ecosystem of support and partnerships to make it happen.”

This work is a natural fit, and as she looks back, Brooke says that working at Thorn is something her own strategizing could not have anticipated. Every day, she brings her passions to analyzing spreadsheets and organizing project plans, systems she has now learned to hold with open hands. “We can strategize, we can try to make plans, but at the end of the day, real change is through relationships, through consistency, through those everyday moments.” It’s a hard-won conviction she carries with her into a rapidly shifting digital landscape, grateful for wherever each step leads.
사실로, 성경을 읽는 것은 이론보다 실천에 더 중요하다고 주장했습니다. 마틴 루터는 1534년에 완성된 손수 번역한 독일어 성경은 기독교 교리 발전에 유례없는 영향을 끼친 것입니다.

성경을 읽는 것이 어떤 문맥에서나, 특히 다른 문맥 속에서, 교적 해석학이 가능할 뿐 아니라 필수적인 것으로 보인다. 성경을 읽는 것은, 반성적이고, 변혁적인, 그리고 복음중심적 성경 읽기 실천을 보여주고 있습니다.

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THE CONTEXTUAL NATURE OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: AN ETHIOPIAN CASE

Keun-Sang An

From 1999 to 2009 I taught theology and missiology in the Horn of Africa, first in Asmara, Eritrea, and then in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. As a teacher in these contexts, I regularly observed students struggling with Western modes of biblical interpretation. They were often unfamiliar with and disinterested in abstract and rationalistic hermeneutical concepts and methodologies. Western hermeneutics did offer helpful interpretive practices for these students, especially for the local churches they served. Furthermore, such sophisticated hermeneutical approaches did not always encourage students to ignore their own ways of reading the texts, neglecting practices that had been passed on in their historical and cultural contexts.

With this recognition, I began to encourage my students to understand the importance of constructing their own theologies in and for their historical and cultural contexts, rather than simply and passively accepting perspectives developed in different contexts. In particular, I worked diligently with my students in Addis Ababa to discover culturally relevant ways of reading the Bible in the Ethiopian context. Fortunately, there was a time-honored church tradition in Ethiopia—the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC). It has developed and maintained its own ecclesiastical tradition in the Ethiopian context for almost as long as the history of the Christian church. Significantly, the EOTC has its own distinctivistic way of reading the Bible, which has been shaped and developed in the context of Ethiopia's long history.

At that time, I had opportunities for fellow- ship with the teachers of the Theological College of the Holy Trinity, an Orthodox seminary in Addis Ababa. I visited the school and spoke with theology teachers there. They were happy about my interest in the EOTC and the theology of the church, and they graciously helped me in my research on the history and practices of interpretation in the EOTC. This interaction enriched and transformed my own theological perspective, especially in the area of biblical interpretation. I came to affirm the contextual nature of biblical interpretation and the significance of tradition and context.

The contextual nature of biblical interpretation

Biblical interpretation is inherently contextual. People in a particular context have a specific way of reading, hearing, and understanding biblical texts. In what follows, I will summarize several factors involved in the contextual nature of biblical interpretation.

Social Location

Fornah and Segovia have noted two important and closely related developments in biblical criticism at the end of the 20th century. The first is the emergence of critical reflection on the critical role of standpoint or perspective in biblical interpretation. The second is the increasing diversity of biblical interpretation that has derived from new perspectives and standpoints around the globe. I would argue that these interpretive developments are primarily concerned with the contextual nature of biblical interpretation.

Segovia also emphasizes the role of flesh-and-blood readers and their social location in the reading and interpretation of the Bible. He argues, “All such readers are themselves regarded as variously positioned and engaged in their own respective social locations. Thus, different real readers use different strategies and models in different ways, at different times, and with different results (different readings and interpretation) in the light of their different and highly complex social locations.” In actuality, there is a multitude of voices reading and interpreting the Bible from different parts of the world.

In this discussion, I am referring to social location inclusively, incorporating both the location of a society and an individual’s position in the society. Corporately, social location includes the overall sociocultural and historical context of a society. Individually, social location may include “personal history, gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, place of residence, education, occupation, political perspective, economic status, religious views or commitments, and so forth.” All of these factors shape communal and individual human identities and influence our interpretive practices.

This perspective on social location is important because it recognizes communal and individual dimensions as significant factors. As Michael Barram asserts, “Every interpretation comes from a ‘place’ to the extent that someone is a reader of the Bible.” As we read the biblical text, therefore, we see, hear, and value is inevitably colored by our own situations, experiences, characteristics, and presuppositions.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the social location of the reader and its impact on the reading of texts. Consequently, social location has been privileged as a primary factor that determines how we are as individuals but also by various social forces, patterns and ideals of our particular culture and our particular historical situation.” People’s social location provides the perspective from and in which they see and understand the biblical texts.

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Church as the Interpretive Community

Hearing and reading the Bible is an inherently communal event. As Justin S. Ukpong states, “The readings are mediated through a particular conceptual frame of reference derived from the worldview and the sociocultural context of a particular cultural community. This differs from community to community. It informs and shapes the exegetical methodology and the reading practice and acts as a grid for making meaning of the text.” Each and every culture has its own way of hearing or reading and understanding a text. Practically, in many cultures, reading or hearing the biblical texts is primarily performed in the context of community instead of by an isolated individual reader.

The faith community, in particular, fulfills the role of the hermeneutical community in the process of interpreting biblical texts. As Mark Driscoll notes, “Reading is a communal enterprise for the same reasons that Christianity is a communal enterprise.”

God has charged the church to “obediently guard, discern, proclaim and interpret the word of God.” As God’s people, the church is the intended addressee of the Bible. First, the biblical texts were written and read in the context of the community of God’s people. Second, the biblical authors themselves regard the biblical materials as having their genesis and formation within the context of God’s people. They speak people’s language and offer themselves from within and to communities of believers.”

In addition, the Bible addresses the contemporary church. God speaks to the church through the biblical texts: the immediacy of the Bible is experienced by the community

“For many years, I have made listening to Scripture one of my spiritual and academic disciplines. I find that when I listen to Scripture being read, I hear things I have missed through ordinary reading. During the last five years I worked on a commentary on Ephesians (now published in Zondervan’s Story of God series). In addition to spending countless hours reading the text of Ephesians with my eyes, I also listened to a recording of this letter at least one hundred times. As I did this, the language of Ephesians became alive in new ways. I heard words differently and discovered connections to my own life that I had missed. Now, with my commentary finished, I still devote time each week to listening to the reading of Scripture. This is a central practice in my devotional life.”

Mark D. Roberts is executive director of the Max De Pree Center for Leadership at Fuller Seminary. Subscribe to his e-devotional for leaders at ipros.org.
Thus, the church is the primary context for biblical interpretation. Importantly, local churches all over the globe are the hermeneutical community, as these reflect ethnic and long-term theological traditions. They are located in particular historical and cultural contexts. Each faith community reads or hears and understands the biblical texts according to its own place in the story of Scripture. As William A. Dyrness notes, “Just as history has been replaced by history’s theology, day by day, by theologies. Each group, from its own perspective, is reading the biblical text and finding its own place in the story of Scripture.” Thus, the task of contextual biblical interpretation involves exploring and describing different ways people read biblical texts in their particular historical and cultural contexts.

It is important to recognize that the contextual nature of biblical interpretation is not an obstacle. Rather, it is a valuable asset for the biblical interpretation of the Christian church. As Ukpong rightly points out, any given reading appropriates only “a certain aspect or certain aspects of a text.” No one way of reading the Bible can claim to appropriate the totality of understanding the biblical texts. A text has multiple aspects, dimensions, and perspectives, which no single reading can totally grasp. Therefore, “the more perspectival readings of a text we are aware of, the more dimensions of the text are disclosed to us, and the better we can appreciate it.”

In this respect, each local interpretation of the Bible in its historical and cultural context can make a unique contribution to a more holistic understanding of the Bible for the church of God. Christians can learn from each other’s interpretation of God’s Word. We are being transformed by the Word of God, and we proclaim the Word of God to the world. In this way, we build up the body of Christ for the glory of God. I would argue that this is the way that the church hears or reads, understands, and practices the Bible. As Green asserts, if “the church is one, holy, apostolic, and catholic,” as in the traditional confession of the church, “there is only one church, global and historical.”

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THE EOTC’S READING OF ISAIAH 53:8

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) provides a compelling historical example of contextual reading of the Bible, which has been shaped and developed under the substantial influence of the EOTC’s tradition in the historical and cultural context of Ethiopia. The contextual interpretation of the EOTC is most practically revealed in the preaching of the EOTC. As an example, I will analyze a sermon on Isaiah 53:8 given by a priest of the EOTC in a local church. The sermon centered on Isaiah 53:8 but referred to other biblical passages, which is frequent among other biblical passages, which is frequent in sermons of the EOTC. I will give an abstract of the sermon—which was titled “Who can speak of his descendants?”—followed by a discussion of the major interpretive characteristics the sermon reveals.

Abstract

“I who can speak of his descendants?” [Isa 53:8] is a word of proclamation regarding Jesus Christ. In Isaiah 53, the prophet Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah, including his nature, emptiness, suffering, and death. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul writes that Jesus’ sacrifice is all for our sake. After his resurrection, Jesus returned to his glory. Now he reigns in all his power and authority. Jesus Christ is not a man, nor a prophet, nor a mediator. John 1:1–3 declares that he was the Word, who was with God and was God. He was with God. He created the world. He was God. This Word dramatically became flesh. He became man through the Virgin Mary. The prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled in Matthew 1:21.

Isaiah 53 is also significant in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–39). He was the financial minister of Queen Candace of Ethiopia, who went to Jerusalem to worship God. On the way back to Ethiopia, he was reading Isaiah 53. Philip explained to him the meaning of the passage and he received Jesus Christ. He was then baptized. He was the very next person to be baptized after the baptism of Jesus’ disciples. Thus, Ethiopia was the first country to receive baptism and to read the Bible. Ethiopia took the first initiative to seek God. Later, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church became the Tewahido church and, thereafter, the true church. In this way, Ethiopia laid the foundation for Christianity.

Major Characteristics

The preacher interprets the biblical passage as having two historical references: the first is Jesus Christ and the second is the event regarding the Ethiopian eunuch. The preacher and fulfillment schema is employed as the key interpretive approach. In this way, the preacher highlights both the salvation of Jesus Christ and the historical significance of the EOTC.
This sermon reveals four major character-istics of biblical interpretation in the EOTC. First, it is Christ-centered. Second, it employs a prophecy and fulfillment schema. Third, it seeks to connect the biblical text with the Ethiopian context. Fourth, it places an emphasis on the practice of faith.

Christ-Centered Interpretation

Christ is the center in the preacher’s sermon, and the text is christologically interpreted. He states, “Who can speak of his descen-dants?” This verse is the word which ex-claims on Jesus Christ.” He continues, “This was delivered by the prophet Isaiah. He lived in 700 BC. However, he spoke about Jesus, who has very nature, suffering, death, emptiness, and so on, in Isaiah 53.” Then the preacher seeks the specific implications of the text in the New Testament. He states, “Who can speak of his descendants?” The story is about Jesus Christ. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 8:9, tells us that Jesus’ submissions are all for our sake. The rich Christ became poor for us. Then he returned to his glory. Now he is in all his power and authority.”

This preaching demonstrates the traditional view of the EOTC on Christ. For example, the preacher states, “He is not the one who many people assume him to be. He is not man. He is not prophet. He is not mediator. Then who is Jesus? In order to know him we need to listen to John’s teaching. According to John 1:23, he was the Word. He was in the beginning. He was God. He created the world. He was God. This Word dramatically became flesh. He became man. So who is Jesus? Jesus was the Word. What happened to him? He became man. How did he become man? Through the Virgin Mary. This was prophesied by the prophet Isaiah. Glory be to his mighty name!” This demonstrates that the EOTC reflects the traditional teachings on Christ of the early church.

Prophecy and Fulfillment in Christ Schema

The preacher’s interpretation of the biblical text follows the traditional prophecy and fulfillment schema between the Old and New Testaments, wherein Old Testament prophe-sies are accomplished in the New Testament. He states, “Isaiah 7:14 says, ‘Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel.’ Matthew 1:21 says, ‘Who will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’” Isaiah said that “She will be with child and will give birth to a son.” And the gospel writer said that she gave birth to a son, and named him Jesus. The prophecy was fulfilled.

Seeking the Ethiopian Connection

In this sermon, the text is interpreted in light of a special Ethiopian connection. For the preacher, the verse refers to the circumstances of the Ethiopian eunuch. He asserts, “Especially, the verse ‘Who can speak of his descendants?’ talks about an Ethiopian person.” He continues to advocate for the traditional interpretation of the EOTC re-grounded in 2 Chronicles 10:38, “Then the Ethiopian eunuch was the very next one who was baptized after that . . . The Ethiopian Orthodox Church shared his baptism early before . . . Therefore, Ethiopia was the first country to receive the baptism. Ethiopia laid the foun-dation of Christianity . . . This country still lives by faith and will stay forever and ever.”

The preacher continues, “He accepted Jesus before the Apostle Paul came to Christ. He knew Jesus before the Roman Empire and Greece. Praise be to his holy name!” Through this man Christianity came to Ethiopia. Then the later the Ethiopian Or-thodox Church became the true church and Towahado Church. Thus, this is the way our faith came. This is our religion . . . I am telling you that Ethiopia became the first Bible-reading country. I am telling you that Ethiopia took the first initiative to seek God.”

Emphasis on the Practice of Faith

Throughout this sermon, the preacher is con-cerned with the faith and life of contempo-rary believers. He consistently repeats the phrase, “Who can speak of his descendants?” and applies it to contemporary Christians. “This verse is the Word, which exclaims on Jesus Christ. Among the generations, God saved those who spoke of him. However, those who did not speak of him perished. Everyone who speaks of the speaker will be saved, but those of us who do not speak of him will perish.” Nevertheless, the will of God is to save all. May God help us to speak of him and be saved!”

He continues to advocate for the traditional Christology of the EOTC, while bringing this Christology into the contemporary context of Ethiopia. “Today many people believe that Jesus is prophet, man, and mediator as the Pharisees say. We know Jesus by his teaching, not by the teaching of Pharri-ses. He is God the Creator. We do not doubt him as Philip did. We believe in Jesus as written in the Bible, not by assumption . . . As the disciples were with Jesus, they did not know him. It obviously happens today in our generation. May God give a chance of repentance for those who went away from his presence!”

The central message of this sermon is the person and salvific work of Jesus Christ. The preacher employs a christological in-terpretation of the Old Testament text in Isaiah. The preacher also interprets the text as having another historical reference: the event regarding the Ethiopian eunuch. The preacher in this sermon seeks to highlight the salvation of Jesus Christ as well as the historical significance of the EOTC.

CONCLUSION

This particular sermon demonstrates the sig-nificant influence of tradition and context in biblical interpretation. The EOTC provides a compelling historical example of biblical understanding that has been shaped under the substantial influence of the EOTC’s tra-tion in the historical and cultural context of Ethiopia. Just as significantly, it helps to enrich our own understanding of God’s truth in the Bible.
from 2008 to 2015, our family lived six months out of each year in Mwanza, Tanzania, the second largest city in the country, nestled on the southern shores of Lake Victoria. We began spending half the year in Mwanza because my wife, Jen, is an infectious diseases physician-scientist who does clinical medical research on the intersection of a freshwater parasitic infection called schistosomiasis and the HIV virus. Jen holds dual appointments at Well Cornell Medical College in the United States and its partner institution, Bugando Medical Centre, in Tanzania. Although now with school-aged children we are no longer able to split our time between Pasadena and Mwanza, our family still spends the summer months in northwest Tanzania.

As a New Testament scholar my initial experience in cross-cultural hermeneutics, therefore, came not because of an intentional pursuit on my part, but because I happened to marry someone committed to the field of global health, someone who has lovingly dragged me halfway across the world during sabbaticals and paternity leaves and summer breaks. Yet the experience of reading, teaching, and preaching the Bible in Tanzania has been immensely formational for my own vocation as a seminary professor. In attempting to connect with the local context in Mwanza, I have regularly volunteered as a teacher at St. Paul College, a Pentecostal Bible college in Mwanza, Tanzania.

In the fall of 2009, while we were living in Mwanza, Jen returned from an international conference that focused on emerging strategies for HIV prevention. She mentioned something completely novel to me at the time, namely, that the practice of male circumcision has the potential to save millions of lives by preventing new HIV infections. In the early-to-mid-2000s, several large randomized, controlled trials of male circumcision (MC) conducted in South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda had shown an approximately 60 percent reduction in HIV incidence among circumcised heterosexual men.1 The protective effect of MC is thought to occur because of high concentrations of cells that are susceptible to HIV infection in the foreskin. As a result of these studies, in 2007 the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended that MC “should be considered an efficacious intervention for HIV prevention in countries and regions with a high burden of HIV and low MC prevalence.”

I vividly remember wondering the next morning, as I was out for a morning run on a dirt trail above our apartment on Bugando Hill, “What does it mean to read Paul’s letter to the Galatians in a context in which male circumcision might actually save lives?” As a New Testament scholar, I reflected on the apostle’s passionate and uncompromising opposition to the adoption of male circumcision among non-Jews in Galatia who had come to believe in the gospel of God’s grace through Jesus the Messiah. Paul penned the letter in response to the arrival in Galatia of certain Jewish-Christian teachers—called schismatists—and the HIV crisis. Paul started in the fall of 2009. While we were living in Mwanza, Jen returned from an international conference that focused on emerging strategies for HIV prevention. She mentioned something completely novel to me at the time, namely, that the practice of male circumcision has the potential to save millions of lives by preventing new HIV infections. In the early-to-mid-2000s, several large randomized, controlled trials of male circumcision (MC) conducted in South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda had shown an approximately 60 percent reduction in HIV incidence among circumcised heterosexual men.1 The protective effect of MC is thought to occur because of high concentrations of cells that are susceptible to HIV infection in the foreskin. As a result of these studies, in 2007 the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended that MC “should be considered an efficacious intervention for HIV prevention in countries and regions with a high burden of HIV and low MC prevalence.”2

But on the morning of my run in 2009 I had absolutely no idea what a faithful interpretation of Galatians might look like in the Mwanza region of northwest Tanzania, a region that fits the WHO’s recommendation for MC to prevent HIV infections. I had read enough in the fields of missiology and cultural hermeneutics to know that the answer to my question surely could not come from me, a cultural outsider. So I sat down with several of our Tanzanian friends, Jen and I applied for and received a collaborative research grant from the Association of Theological Schools for a project entitled: “New Creation Is Everything: Christian Identity, Male Circumcision, and HIV/AIDS in Northwest Tanzania.” We gathered a team of leaders from the churches in Mwanza region—Lucas Funnay, Mary Funnay, Mary Mbugo, and Agrey Mwakikao—and the six of us worked together every step of the way to design and implement the project.

Our goal for this collaborative research project—located at the intersection of the fields of biblical hermeneutics, theological education, qualitative medical research, and public health—was to develop resources that might equip pastors and church leaders in Mwanza to address the public health benefits of MC from a theologically and medica-
ly informed perspective. Influenced by the writings of South African biblical scholar Gerald West, we were committed to de- veloping a dialogical hermeneutic that fostered a mutually informative exchange between ordinary, untrained readers and the trained members of our study team. We also believed it was important to map local perceptions of MC among Christians before working to develop any resources for these communities. In order to assess these perceptions, we gathered ten single-gender focus groups at local Protestant churches for discussions that lasted between one and two hours. The groups were divided evenly between men and women, as well as urban and rural settings. Focus group questions centered on perceptions of MC, the role of religion, tribal identity, and gender in making decisions about MC, and the nature of the Bible’s teaching about MC. Sessions concluded with a contextual Bible study of Galatians 5, based in part on a method of study pioneered by Gerald West and others at the Ujamaa Center in South Africa.

Our focus group study was instructive in many ways. It verified that tribal identity and religious identity were the primary de- terminants of MC. Specifically, Christians in the Mwanza region frequently reported perceiving MC as a public health issue that should therefore be avoided by followers of Jesus. As one urban female participant succinctly framed the issue, “Even if we say many ethnic groups . . . don’t circum- cise, you will find . . . the Muslims in those ethnic groups have been circumcised but the Christians have not been circumcised.” The distinction between Christians and Muslims via the practice of MC was occasionally framed in theological terms, as was seen in the comments of two participants:

“In the Christian churches we teach people mainly about the spiritual life alone, but the body we leave behind” [semi-urban female].

“The Christian” is concerned with spiritual matters rather than with physical matters. That does not apply to the Muslim. ‘The Muslim is very much concerned with physi- cal matters and he talks more about issues of cleanliness rather than stressing moral issues . . . when his body is clean then that is when he is noticed by God. It is not like that for a Christian, he says God deals with the heart” [semi-urban male].

Moreover, participants in the focus groups frequently indicated that MC was perceived as a practice for the sexually promiscuous, or as unnecessary since they were taught in their churches to focus on “circumcision of the heart.” One semi-urban male reflected this view clearly: “Our goal is not to enhance promiscuity; our goal is to build our youth in good Christian faith and to live in it and to be patient to get your partner. For us it is meaningless that [MC] reduces [HIV trans- mission] because we do not teach our chil- dren to be promiscuous.” Only one out of 167 participants had ever heard MC discussed at church, but nearly all Christian parishioners seemed to us, encourage the very practice that Paul disapproves, while also standing with Paul in his apocalyptic view of the world. Apocalyptic eschatology has funda- mentally to do with the conviction that in the present time God has inaugurated a liberating war against the powers that have enslaved humanity and set the world in op- position to God—powers that Paul elsewhere identifies as sin and death (see e.g., Rom 7:7). In the context of the Galatian controversy, Paul presents circumcision as problematic in part because the law that prescribed the practice was itself involved in the enslav- ing of humanity (3:23–25; 4:5–21; 5:18). Since “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision” is anything, an insistence that un- circumcision is mandated for Christians as an authentic interpretation of Paul falls victim to the same cosmological binary that Paul works so hard to challenge in Galatians.

Thus, we suggested that, from a theological perspective informed by Paul, circumcision as an identity marker for God’s people or a means of defining the world is not a viable option for those who read Galatians as Chris- tian Scripture. Yet that conclusion poses the way for a consideration of the role that advocacy of the practice of MC might play in a robust theology of embodied existence. Elsewhere in the curriculum we suggested that God’s care for the health and wholeness of the physical body is an integral part of the New Testament’s witness (see, e.g., Jesus’ ministry in the Gospels of healing the sick, lame, blind, etc.; John 7:2; 1 Cor 5:13–14, 15–20; 7:34; 15:19–26; 2 Cor 7:1; Eph 5:29–30; 1 Thess 5:23). Therefore, to the extent that male circumcision offers numerous health benefits to Tanzanian Christians (not limited to HIV prevention, but also including the prevention of infant urinary tract infec- tions and some types of cancer; as well as the reduction of other sexually transmitted in- fection), the practice can be supported not as a means of male inclusion in the local church, but as a public health inter- vention that has the potential significantly to diminish the loss of life, dignity, and power associated with the HIV epidemic.

**PHASE TWO: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

In July of 2014, we held an all-day educa- tional seminar for over 200 male and female church leaders in the Mwanza region. So enthu- siastic was the response to the teaching that, toward the end of the session, the group erupted in laughter and applause when one pastor stood up and loudly proclaimed, “We are ready! Let us line up to be circumcised today!”

Unfortunately, at the time of the seminar we did not have the funding or the approval to do anything more than encourage these pastors and church leaders to bring the information back to their congregations. But just a few months later, two significant developments allowed us to take an encouraging next step in the work we had started. First, Jen Agrey Mwakisole (one of the initial study team leaders and later a DMin student in Full- er Seminary’s School of Intercultural Studies), Samuel Kalluvya, and I were awarded a Grand Chal- lenges Grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for a project entitled “From Ob- stacles to Opportunities for Male Circumci- sion in sub-Saharan Africa.” The goal of this project was to assess whether harnessing the influence of churches, including making use of the curriculum our team had devel- oped, would increase uptake of MC in the Mwanza region. Given recent estimates that every 5–15 male circumcisions prevent one HIV infection, increasing male circumcision rates nationwide in Tanzania from about 30 percent to 50 percent could prevent approxi- mately 200,000 HIV infections in Tanzania alone. Second, it happened that just as we were awarded the Gates grant, the Tanzani- an Ministry of Health announced a plan to

“Reading Scripture is one of the primary ways we confess our faith in this world and instead are transformed by the renewal of our minds (Romans 12:2). Scripture reshapes and reorients our perspectives, attitudes, and values in light of who God is and what God has done for us so that we ‘may live our trust toward God.’”

-Ahmi Lee is assistant professor of preaching at Fuller Seminary. She brings a rich multicultural background to her research and teaching.
The campaign provided male circumcision with overseeing this government-backed
villages, 32.4 percent of men indicated that
Ministry of Health outreach, 29.5 percent
villages were randomly assigned to receive
Our project aimed to assess the
religious leaders’ perspectives on circumcision.
\*decreased. Our project
conducted a large, cluster randomized trial
to between 100 and 200 men per day, and
 misdemeanor justice, and exposing the perpetrators and
the plight of the oppressed.\*[11,16,10]

**CONCLUSION**

By the end of our project—or at least the most
recent iteration of it, if we are continuing to
explore ways to build on our previous work—we had come a long way from the question.
What does it mean to read Paul’s letter to the Galatians in a context in which male circumcision might actually save life? Or perhaps we realized that what
seemed like a reasonably simple statement is not
adequately be answered without careful attention
to a cluster of related issues such as questions of religious legacies, ecclesiastical
Christian identity in a pluralistic setting, strategies for the promotion of public health
measures, qualitative research methods, and
effect and the relationship between theology and medicine. I have certainly come to see that
reading Scripture in a cross-cultural setting can
be an immensely challenging yet deeply rewarding experience.

And biblical interpretation can be an
extremely important aspect of public health policy in sub-Saharan Africa. Without
specific appeal to Paul’s theology, Musa
Dube, one of the leading prophetic voices
working to encourage the church in Africa
and worldwide to confront the reality of the
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**ENDNOTES**

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and leadership and were able to work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (1Sa 16:10).

**HERMENEUTICS FOR THE AFRICAN CENTURY**

Stephanie L. Black

L et me say first that I write this as an ob-
server and a guest, who has taught biblical studies in sub-Saharan Africa for a
long time, and who has interacted with well-informed and wise biblical scholars from
many different traditions. I am deeply indebted to the abilities, passions, and commit-ments of my African colleagues. They have helped me see how we work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (1Sa 16:10).

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book speaking in his own time to his original audience, the text is the Bible as we have it in written form, and the reader is us, the contemporary audience. (God, the divine author of Scripture, is understood to be active by means of the Holy Spirit in all three components of this model.) Through the centuries Christians have placed differing emphases on the relative roles of authors, texts, and readers as they have read the Bible and sought to hear God’s authoritative revelation.

Through most of the late-19th and 20th centuries, biblical scholars in Western universities found their academic discipline dominated by an approach to the Bible that focused on the author-text end of this model. The goal of peering behind biblical texts to explore the historical world of the author and the author’s community tended to supersede interest in the text itself as the Word of God, and often this approach even precluded such an interest. Confronted with the skepticism about God’s role in producing biblical texts that accompanied this “historical criticism,” more theologically conservative scholars began to use the “grammatical-historical method” in interpreting the Bible. This is a more text-centered subset of historical criticism that focuses on the text as a product of the author and his historical age, while leaving room for belief that the human authors who wrote biblical texts were divinely inspired. Such an author-text approach allowed evangelical scholars to engage in academic study of the Bible. But it also kept their attention on the author-text side of the hermeneutical equation, rather than the text-reader side. Even today, or at least until very recently with the renewed interest in theological hermeneutics, evangelical hermeneutics textbooks tend to say more about how to recover historical author meaning in a biblical text than about how to make living connections between the text and contemporary readers.

In addition, African biblical scholars trained in Western theological institutions have often been influenced, even unconsciously by the historical approaches they learned there. As David Adamo puts it, “Although one appreciates the opportunity to study in many of these great Western universities and seminaries, one thing is certain, the overseas training in biblical studies and theology is one of the ways by which African biblical scholars have been colonized.” As a result, mission-related Bible colleges and seminaries may continue to reflect primarily Western approaches to, and assumptions about, interpreting the Bible, even when the teaching faculty and institutional leadership have been nationalized.

Am I advocating a rejection of historical and grammatical study of the Bible? By no means. But a more comprehensive approach to biblical interpretation that takes into account the author, the text, and the reader in God’s choice to communicate with his human creatures through written revelation, nurtures a more profound and honest look at how reading takes place and who the Bible’s readers are. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart remind us that “whether one likes it or not, every reader is at the same time an interpreter.” Or, as W. Randolph Tate says, “Readers always wear tinted glasses and make sense of a text according to the particular shade of the lenses.” The point is that readers have always been involved in making sense of the Bible, even when they mistakenly believed their understanding of biblical texts to be objective or absolute. Through much of the history of evangelical missions in sub-Saharan Africa, it was interpreters interpreting the Bible for their African converts. My point is that African readers—and especially today’s African biblical scholars—have an important contribution to make to our understanding of biblical revelation by offering a different set of lenses through which to encounter God’s truth in Scripture.

As it happens, Western evangelical biblical scholarship has in recent years moved beyond its focus on author-text approaches and begun to explore more reader-centered ways of approaching the Bible. In light of increasing global and cultural awareness and a growing voice placed on the contributions of diverse viewpoints, Western scholars are eager to hear the insights that biblical interpreters in Africa and elsewhere in the Majority World bring to our understanding of God’s revelation. The door is wide open to the voices of African readers of the Bible. But ironically, little has been produced thus far by evangelical African biblical scholars about ways to engage the reader’s viewpoint in biblical interpretation. What has appeared comes largely from university circles in South Africa and beyond, interpreters who may express suspicion of the Bible itself as an inherent source or tool of imperialism, patriarchy, and oppression. This suspicion runs counter to evangelical convictions about divine revelation and the Bible’s unique authority. In fact, the association of reader-centered, contextual interpretations of the Bible with these more eccumenical practitioners may have tainted such hermeneutical approaches with a “liberal” label that inhibits their use by more conservative biblical scholars in Africa.

How might we envision an evangelical African biblical interpretation that takes seriously the divinely inspired authority of authors and texts, while acknowledging the role of readers in completing the process of God speaking? In bringing their insights
to global biblical interpretation. African evangelicals offer significant contributions as readers in at least two ways. First, because of cultural affinities with pre-institutional, agrarian, and/or communalistic societies like those within which the Bible was written, African biblical interpreters can sometimes clarify practices and values that Western readers misunderstand or ignore. I personally have gained from the expertise of research students at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, who have explored the resonance between biblical text and their own social and cultural contexts in practices as general as community worship, sacrifice, and polygamy, or as specific as familial curses (Nash in Gen 30:20–27) and respect for the tombs of ancestors (Nehemiah in Neh 2:1–5).

Secondly, because of their own experiences, African biblical interpreters often challenge other readers in terms of what they notice and prioritize in biblical texts. Conceptual frameworks such as honor and shame, poverty and power, and extended family relationships may be central to the interests and concerns of the biblical authors themselves but overlooked by Western readers for whom these are not daily categories of concern. That Nehemiah was motivated by a sense of shame and his desire to maintain his homeland, as mentioned above, is one such example.1 In terms of leadership and power, my students in Nairobi were intrigued by the framing of the relationship between Paul and Apollos in 1 Corinthians 16:12: “And Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians, and by Apollos in choosing not to get involved at that point. What Paul briefly noticed, or took as a simple statement of fact, my students recognized as a model of generous relational détente between two church leaders. Similarly, in Paul’s letter to Philoena, they recognized that Paul’s seeming humility is actually the rhetorical cloak of an established leader gracefully and perhaps humorously telling subordinates what to do: “I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prince of Christ Jesus... So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me... I say nothing about your own things, but I have your own self” (v. 17, 10).

I have also observed that at times Western interpretive traditions block my African students from identifying similarities between the biblical text and their own contexts. Sometimes these readings need to be unlearned—or “decolonized,” as Ngigi wa Thiong’o and others have so famously said. For example, Luke’s focus on the poor in his Gospel is well known, but while middle-class Westeners, to select just one set of readers, may too readily assume this refers simply to material poverty, that is, the situation of not having enough money. Christian students in Nairobi were intrigued by the passage in Isaiah from which he draws] highlights Jesus’ attention to social and economic injustices that create mate-

rial poverty while benefiting an elite few, as well as his concern for the social and religious marginalization—that is, relational poverty—that the poor experience. This reading of Jesus’ attention to poverty and poor people in Luke’s Gospel is not only true to the historical author’s intent, but also offers a much richer resonance for African readers who have their own experiences of social and economic injustice on a national or global scale, and for whom cohesive relationships with family and local community are an essential element of their existence. When we read these passages in a New Testament class in Kenya, in an attempt to filter out Western assumptions absorbed through previous Bible studies and textbooks, students felt challenged to reimagine their own roles as Christ-followers in addressing poverty in their local settings.

It is that alignment between God the Holy Spirit speaking into the situation of the biblical author and his community, as it is then recorded in the biblical text, and God the Holy Spirit speaking similarly into readers’ own parallel situations that completes the process of divine communication through written revelation. Tate suggests, “The words on the page never change, and in one sense neither do the worlds of texts. But readers must always approach the textual world and make sense of it in relation to their own world, a world constantly in flux.”2 While at the same time the text provides a limited playing field of possible meaning.

A brief walk through 1 Corinthians 8:8–10 illustrates what this might look like in terms of African evangelical hermeneutics. I’ve noticed that many Western Christians fragment Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 8–10, not recognizing the topological continuity that flows through these three chapters. More concerning, they tend to miss the unfamiliar (to them) concrete historical issue of sharing food in the context of pagan worship. Not so my African stu-
dents. Christians who regularly encounter marriage ceremonies, infant naming ceremonies, burials, and the like, where social and family celebrations are interwoven with traditional animistic or syncretistic rituals, are very familiar with the sorts of questions Paul and his audience raise about participating in temple feasts in Corinth. That, African readers tend to understand the author’s world in this situation and therefore may be more likely to notice how Paul responds in this text. I’ve listened to many lively discussions among my African students about the tensions faced by young Christian couples who resist participating in such practices, yet who want to be part of celebrations that knit together their families and communities while at the same time being fully convinced of Jesus Christ’s superiority over the spirit world. (Not to mention that that roasted goat slaughtered by an uncle murmuring incantations to the spirits tastes pretty good. Otherwise, when do we get to eat meat?)

In addition, living in a multireligious context like Kenya means being invited to share food with neighbors and colleagues when the food offered may have been part of Muslim or Hindu worship. One student told me “I have been asked to the home of a Hindu woman with whom one of them had shared a hospital room the week before. A follow-up visit to check on her health and pray for her was an open door to a relationship in which they might share the gospel with her. But when they arrived, they saw the family’s Hindu shrine. And when they were served tea, they knew the milk in the tea had previously been poured over the idol as an offering. Should they drink the tea, or not? It’s at this point that God’s message through Paul into the Corinthians’ situation, as we find it in the text of 1 Corinthians 8–10, aligns with God’s message to these Kenyan readers in their own multireligious context, and the Holy Spirit brings written revelation to life as divine communication.

But there’s more: With such understanding, African readers have the power to remind readers elsewhere that these chapters in 1 Corinthians are not merely about the possibility of offending the sensibilities of other Christians (“should Christians drink alcohol?”). They also address more troubling issues of syncretism and potential demonic activity for believers to consider when we participate in social practices with religious or quasi-religious overtones—whether it’s Halloween in Europe and North America, the Day of the Dead in Latin America, the Hungry Ghost Festival in China, Asian practices directed toward ancestors and deities that surround them, or any of us receiving thoughtful gifts of holiday food from Muslim friends and neighbors on Maulid (Mohammed’s birthday) or Eid (the end of Ramadan). My goal here is not to attempt to resolve some of these difficult issues in an all-encompassing manner but to point out the opportunity for a confluence of author, text, and reader in African evangelical hermeneutics that can offer important insights from the Bible not just to African readers, but to all of us in the global church.

In Africa, where people long for the Bible to address daily needs for identity, security, health, prosperity, and defense against dark spiritual forces, an evangelical African bib-

lical hermeneutics that weaves together the divinely inspired authority of authors and texts with the role of the readers to whom God is speaking today opens new possi-
bilities for the Holy Spirit to bring written revelation to life as divine communication. And as the numerical center of Christi-

anity moves to the Global South, especially to Africa, the understanding they draw from God’s inspired Word will flow north and west, enriching us all.

ENDNOTES

6. Tate, Biblical Interpretation, 193.
“I find it helpful to think of reading the Bible like eating food. We eat food regularly with our friends, family, and coworkers. Instead of communally reading meaningful amounts of the Bible, most Christians read small pieces alone, if at all. Even at church services, we generally read the Bible for about one minute. It is my belief that communal reading of Scripture helps the church relearn how to feast on the Word together, to be fed and nourished by the God who speaks to his children through the Word. It is very encouraging to see that the vast majority of Christians want to read more of the Bible. But when they are instructed to do so and left to read the Bible individually, most are not able to read much. It is therefore not an issue of desire but a problem of strategy. By gathering together as a community and reading Scripture together, people can read the whole Bible in well under two years. (Reading all 66 books of the Bible takes about 80 hours at a normal speed.)”

Fuller Trustee Bill Hwang is currently partnering with Vice President of Vocation and Formation Tod Bolsinger to build resources on FULLERstudio that will facilitate the practice of reading the Scriptures communally.
F

er over six years, my wife and I read the Gospel of Mark with every Peruvian who was willing, one to one, in small groups, and in the sum of our mission team’s work in Arequipa, Peru, but it was our primary approach to evangelism. I hesitate to frame our practice of Bible reading with reference to the word evangelism, because the practice of evangelism needs badly to be freed from the verbal, informational, and cognitive biases that have dominated its use in Christian mission. Proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God is a word-and-deed endeavor, and that is what I mean by evangelism. For our team, the “word” dimension of evangelism focused on reading the Gospel of Mark as gospel, and the deed dimension focused on reading with Peruvians seeking God’s kingdom and justice. These two dimensions, summarized as reading with, constitute a practice I would identify as “incarnational evangelism.”

Reading with kingdom seekers is a deeply formative experience, not least hennetically. The formative effects of “reading with” have already been highlighted by some of the forces and factors that have constituted them and enables us to be partially constituted by them. This sort of reading with as reading in solidarity resonates deeply with my experience of incarnational evangelism.

Yet West’s work has a couple of important limitations. First, West consistently speaks of the other as a believer. This is natural because he assumes that the church should be interested in reading the Bible. But shouldn’t the practice of evangelism shape the imagination and the hermeneutical strategies of the church? If so, there is obviously a space in which to imagine the reading of Scriptures with the other who is not a believer. The author who comes nearest to extending the insights of liberal Hermeneutics in this direction is Bob Ekblad, who writes about reading with the “not-yet-believing” other, primarily in a prison context.3 Ekblad’s concern, however, is the liberation of the other, not the hermeneutical formation of the Christian who reads with the other. This brings us to West’s second limitation: he discusses the formative effects of reading with only in relation to the transformation experienced by the scholar. The “ordinary readers” with whom West impels scholars to read are members of the church (i.e., believers). The hermeneutical practice of reading with is a scholarly concern, not a practice of the church. The hermeneutical formation of the church as readers, therefore, is not in view.

In light of my experience in Peru, however, West’s liberating missional hermeneutics. To this end, I put the question this broadly—rather than asking only about the “missionary” practice of evangelism—because I work at the intersection of missional theology and theological interpretation of Scripture, an interdisciplinary space where we make lifestyle choices in order to “place ourselves” in a different relation to the poor—even if we go so far as to “assume the condition of the poor”—this does not make us poor in the full sense of the experience. There is no total “cessation” possible for human beings.4 The same is true of culture.5 The admission of such limitations is not, however, a denial of the possibility of any Christlike self-emptying or self-denial. We still have choices to make. Will we place ourselves, insofar as we are able, into the particularity of the other? Will we live in solidarity with the other?

For our team, the evangelical practice of reading Scripture with kingdom seekers, then, the question is whether reading with means merely reading together or, in the humility, service, and solidarity by which one comes into the particularity and experience of the other.

**Reading a Gospel as Evangelism**

Now I come to the dynamics of taking a Gospel as gospel. On the face of it, Mark is “the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”6 Mark 1:1. In this sense, to take the story of Jesus as the message of evangelism is quite natural, though admitted unusually.7 Moreover, I have found that reading a Gospel is the best means of making disciples rather than converts. The experience of walking through Jesus’ story gives the reader a chance to decide who Jesus is and whether to follow him. For example, half the way through Mark’s narrative (8:29), the reader who recognizes that Jesus is the Crucified one necessarily confesses that Jesus is the crucified and resurrected one. In this case, a you to Jesus is a yes to his call to be followers of him. These are, by themselves, good reasons to practice reading the Gospels evangelistically.

In my experience, though, reading a Gospel as gospel is especially fitting for incarnational evangelism because of the correla...
Generally, the experience of participating in incarnational evangelism is an embodied participation in the gospel narrative. One might suspect that this is a complicated way of saying that, through having new experiences, a reader will see the text anew through particular eyes. What follows is one example of how the church learns to read Scripture through the other’s perspective. That the patient hope of a people who are used to starting ye (already) but going slowly, little by little, stalling for reasons out of one’s control, postponing, expending (which is the word for both “waiving” and “hoping”) I dare say this is the structure of a great deal of Peruvians’ life. I wish I could count the number of times that friends and neighbors, vendors and laborers—and eventually, brothers and sisters in Christ—calmly said to this exasperated gringo, “poco a poco.” Like every dimension of culture, this patient hope has a potential dark side. The experience that shapes it, I believe, is one of centuries-long economic and political corruption, and a persistent lack of options. These may give rise to the virtue of longsuffering hope, but they may also produce resignation and distrust. Nonetheless, I was impressed more often than not by the expectation that change will come, poco a poco.

More importantly, I was shaped by it. After a few years of reading Mark with Peruvians, I began to hear the book’s prologue (1:1–5) differently. Before, I would read the fulfillment of the promise that God would come to lead his people out of exile (1:9–20) and Jesus’s startling claim that “the time is fulfilled” (1:15) and ask my reading companions whether “we” could imagine waiting on a promise for hundreds of years. What would it be like to wait so long and then, finally, hear that the time is now? None of my kind reading companions ever pointed out the irony of my posing that question to them. There is a problem, after all, when readers hearing “poco a poco” over and over, sometimes day after day—after settling into a Peruvian way of life and walking a while with my patient, hopeful friends—that the question was really only whether I could imagine Israel’s long wait and, so, hear the goodness of the news that the time has come. By entering incarnationally into the stories of my Peruvian companions, I was in turn able to enter into Israel’s story differently. I believe cognitively that Mark’s opening announcement of “good news” was supposed to provide the kind of heart-wrenching relief and joy that accompanies the fulfillment of a hope inherited for generations. I was able to think such thoughts, and even to be moved by such rhetoric, but reading with Peruvians allowed me to experience the gospel in a new way, as one “partially constituted” (West) by the longsuffering hope of the Peruvian people. Perhaps the only way we have, as those who are allowed to hear God’s word to a Peruvian, of reading with the hopeful is one example among many. I might also write about reading with the poor, the thankful, the weak, the,women, the ecclesial, and so on. All of these and more were aspects of reading Mark with Peruvians that shaped me in ways that defy general description. I am grateful for the difficulty of putting these experiences into writing is very much the point: the practice of incarnational evangelism is hermeneutically formative in ways that merely reading the perspectives of others is not. If we could gain the perspective of the other just by reading about it, we wouldn’t need to read with the other. This fact is, reading with, in the fullest sense of the phrase, is uniquely transformative.

INCARNATIONAL EVANGELISM AS THEOLOGICAL FORMATION

The church has various theological formative practices. Worship, for example, is a set of practices that shapes the church in numerous intangible ways that, in turn, affect how we interpret Scripture. This is not the primary aim of worship, but it is, undoubtedly, one of its effects. Similarly, incarnational evangelism includes a variety of practices, one of which is reading Scripture with kingdom seekers. I consider these fully theological practices—forms of life that cohere with the missional theology of God’s sent people. As such, they shape the church theologically.

In particular, incarnational evangelism puts the church in solidarity with the other, which has its own formative effects. Reading Scripture with the other uniquely places the church in a position to hear God’s word from new perspectives. Reading Scripture with the other uniquely shapes the church in a position to hear God’s word from new perspectives. Reading Scripture with the other uniquely places the church in a position to hear God’s word from new perspectives. Reading Scripture with the other uniquely shapes the church in a position to hear God’s word from new perspectives.
While teaching at a conference some years ago, I was startled when a participant announced that he could not imagine how any Republican could claim to take the Bible seriously. Not long afterward, I witnessed a repeat performance in another setting, except in this case we were told that Republicans alone read Scripture correctly. This reminds me of what I imagine to be a first-century “battle for the Bible”: Pharisees, Christ-followers, and Sadducees, all reading the same Scriptures but reading them quite differently, and reaching diverse conclusions about the nature of faithfulness to God. How can this be?

Clearly, a lot has to do with our formation as readers of Scripture and not only with the words written on the page. This underscores the importance of reading Scripture as a “practice,” since the idea of “practice” assumes circularity: Formed by our reading of Scripture, we become better readers of Scripture. 

CULTIVATING THE PRACTICE OF READING SCRIPTURE
When Jesus criticized two disciples on the Emmaus Road for their failure to believe what the prophets had spoken, the problem was not their inability to hear the prophets or take them seriously. Jesus asked, “Wasn’t it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:27 CEB). “Of course it was necessary!” we might say, but the question remains, which prophets actually document this necessity? “Isaiah 53,” we might respond, but we would then need to acknowledge that we can say this only because we have learned to read in just this way. After all, Isaiah 53 never mentions the Messiah, and Jesus’ contemporaries were unaccustomed to thinking himself in all the scriptures.” (Luke 24:27 CEB).

This example speaks to the integrated nature of Christian practices, and especially to the ways those practices shape us as readers of Scripture. Christian formation helps us to read the Scriptures Christianly. So it is worth reflecting on the difference it makes to our reading of Scripture that we regularly recite the Apostles’ Creed. What difference does it make to our reading of Scripture that we meet each other repeatedly at the Lord’s Table, that we speak often with people who do not share our faith, that we who share a common faith in Christ eat together regularly, and that we pray to Jesus as though he were God? (And what difference does it make when we do not engage in such practices as these?)

Of course, reading Scripture is itself a central Christian practice, so we may ask how we cultivate this practice among the others—a question I take up more fully in Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture (Ashdown, 2007). Here let me make six suggestions.

(1) Reading Scripture is not enough. Theological and ecclesial formation inform and are informed by reading Scripture. Communities that put Scripture into practice through seeking the Holy Spirit, confessing sins and forgiving each other, praying for the sick, and offering good news to others find themselves being prepared to read Scripture.

(2) Read and read again. It is easy to turn time with Scripture into a game of “Twenty Questions”: how to apply this? (or that?) to my life or vocation? But the value of Scripture lies in the way it affects our patterns of thinking and feeling, in the process of listening to the words of God’s people and hearing the voice of God. We do not present us with texts to be mastered, then, but transformation of our lives through Scripture. The Bible does not address by this text?

(3) Read slowly. Those of us who find ourselves moving back and forth between blogs, email, texts, news outlets, and social networks on our smartphones and tablets need different rules of engagement for reading Scripture. This practice concerns not how fast I can get through today’s reading, but how slowly, combining prayer, reading, and contemplation. To crib Jesus’ words, “Let these words sink into your ears” (Luke 9:44 NRSV).

(4) Involve yourself. If the last century or more has imagined education as the process of stepping back to observe, assess, and attain knowledge, then this practice calls for different habits. This learning is self-involving, a means by which we hear God’s address. Why do we resist this text but embrace that one? What does it mean that we are included in the community of God’s people addressed by this text?

(5) Read together. Inasmuch as scriptural texts have their origins and purpose deeply rooted in the community of God’s people, we ought to find ways to read in community. By this I refer to the importance of study groups where our assumptions and views are tested, but even more I mean to counter the temptation to imagine that Scripture is simply for me and about me, or that I am tasked with determining its significance apart from the larger church, historically and globally.

(6) Refuse to distinguish between reading the Bible for a class or sermon and reading the Bible for Christian formation. We come to Scripture for different reasons at different times, but it would be a mistake to imagine that preparing an exegesis paper or sermon required qualitatively different protocols. Should we leave our theological and ecclesial locations behind when doing exegesis? Should work with Scripture in sermon preparation bypass the reservoir of my regular reading practices? Should the crises that arise as I encounter God’s voice in Scripture not shape my reading of these texts with and for others?

As with Christian practices in general, so with developing scriptural patterns of faith and life: the destination is the journey itself. This is a journey in which we discover that the work of scriptural reading is not about transforming an ancient message into a modern application but about the transformation of our lives through Scripture. The Bible does not present us with texts to be mastered, then, but with a Word intent on shaping our lives, on mastering us.
BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN THE GLOBAL-INDIAN CONTEXT

Johnson Thomaskutty

In the globalized context of the early 21st century, with a world characterized by integration and convergence, new modes of biblical interpretation are needed. Interpreting Christian Scripture in the Indian and South Asian contexts is a very different task when compared with Euro-American ways of interpretation. In a context such as India, in which various linguistic, religious, cultural, ideological, and symbolical diversities exist, a locally oriented interpretation that is attuned to global perspectives has the potential to strengthen the narrative voice of the text. This essay attempts to highlight ways in which biblical worldviews can be integrated and pluralistic Indian worldviews interact in the process of interpretation. Yet this interaction raises a number of challenging questions. Are there existing interpretive methodologies sufficient to address global readers? How would a “local” to “global” development help interpreters draw the attention of a global audience? And how might a “gnomic” interpretative process (in relation to descriptive processes) help an interpreter achieve his/her goal?

In the following sections, I discuss an interpretative framework suited to globalized India. A model of interpretation that takes into account people of other faith traditions, religious practices, and socio-cultural identities. Part of a text will also be considered in the process. With that in mind, I discuss the necessity of crossing traditional boundaries, the importance of creating ideological constellations, the value of building dialogical relationships, and the goal of leading the reader toward a “third space.” The story of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–22 will be considered as a paradigm for developing such an interpretative framework.

CROSSING TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES

In the contemporary global context of India, crossing traditional boundaries is one of the foremost necessities in biblical interpretation. The interpretive tasks need to begin with an attempt to understand differences based on prevalent casteistic, religious, linguistic, and ethnic identities. Part of attending to contextual realities in India involves understanding the “otherness” of different readers and their interpretive sensibilities. If an interpreter attends exclusively to his or her own contextual realities, a wider impact is impossible in today’s global Indian context.

The biblical text is discussed in a threefold fashion: the metaphor of water develops, first, with the help of a universal metaphor that is water, and, second, with a spiritual connotation attributed to that universal metaphor for gnomic significance. Jesus thus uses a strategy of dynamic localization rather than pure localization. This can be seen as a rhetorical strategy directing readers from particulars to universals.

In today’s global-Indian context, an interpretive strategy of dynamic localization, wherein both the centrifugal and centripetal aspects of a text are brought to the foreground, is to be preferred over a purely local approach. That is, Christian Scripture should be interpreted as a source that develops from local to universal realities, and vice versa. In this way, the text can find its meaning in a wider global context. In the contextually advanced and postmodern context of India, an interpreter can adopt innovative methodologies to advance the scope of her or his initiative, aiming at a global audience. A majority of the hermeneutical questions raised in India today are inadequate to catch the attention of a wider, non-Indian audience. Pure localization methods and exclusively contextual hermeneutical strategies may not make adequate sense for a wider audience. Those who interpret the text from Dalit, Tribal, and Adivasi perspectives mostly adopt pure localization methods and thus limit the scope of their hermeneutical engagement. As interpreters consider other contexts, they mostly serve the interests of a limited group of people.

It is the biblical text—not the reader or the reader’s context—that is a universal reality. An interpreter who advances from univer- sals to contexts can persuade the reader for wider efficacy. Similarly, an interpreter who brings out contextual aspects in closer relationship with the textual horizons can develop situational aspects through the framework of the text. Thus, both centrifugal and centripetal movements can facilitate a dynamic localization rather than a pure localization. Contextual methodologies, with their parachorial perspectives, can help us understand the global contexts of the text. In the process of contextualization, it would be more appropriate to begin with the universal metaphors of the text and connect them with the local aspects. Just as the Johannine Jesus and the narrator adopt this methodology in narrating the story of the Samaritan woman, an Indian interpreter can facilitate an inclusive and universal strategy where the universals are emphasized in relation to the particularities, and vice versa. In that sense, contextual interpretation in India should take a different stance by emphasizing methodologies of pure localization.

CREATING CONTEXTUAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CON Constellations:

Creating contextual and ideological constellations between biblical worldviews and contexts to the Indian worldviews should play an important role in the process of interpreting the Bible. In John 4, Jesus engages with a woman in a local context where she comes to carry water from Jacob’s well, the dialogue as a whole develops, first, with the help of a universal metaphor (that is, water), and, second, with the help of a universal metaphor for gnomic significance. Jesus thus uses a strategy of dynamic localization rather than pure localization. This can be seen as a rhetorical strategy directing readers from particulars to universals.

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There is no sweeter taste than a read of the Psalms in the morning, no more gentle guide than Old Testament stories, and no greater grace and mercy than the gospel of Jesus. I am so thankful that my life is bathed every day in this sweetness, guidance, and mercy.

Scott W. Sunquist is dean of the School of Intercultural Studies and professor of world Christianity at Fuller Seminary.
Indian interpreters must strive to create an adequate study of the Bible, as Paul Ricoeur has argued, must be thoroughly contextualized within a new level of understanding. This approach can be quite significant in the multireligious and pluralistic context of India.

In that process, some of the challenging contextual realities of the country, such as caste-consciousness, multilingual identities, and multicultural dimensions, require careful attention. Every interpretive task should be actualized through connecting the universals with the contextuals, and vice versa.

In the process of interpretation, the text should be linked to Indian realities, but at the same time, Indian realities should be connected to a universal worldview. Hindu names and concepts such as Brahman, Akasa, Mahatman, and others can find meaning in the interpretive task and their implications explored in relation to universal readers. Similarly, the experiences of the Dalits, Tribals, Adivasis, and other marginalized groups should be dynamically placed and interpreted with a gnomic intent. Jesus' employment of a constellation of words and ideas from the Samaritan context to lead his interlocutor toward a new perspective on eternal life can serve as a model for Christian interpreters of the Bible in India.

BUILDING DIALOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS

In the process of interpreting Scripture in a pluralistic context, an interpreter should consider building dialogical relationships with people of other religious and cultural backgrounds. The dialogue of Jesus with the Samaritan woman reveals a universalistic, interreligious, and cross-cultural mission initiative as he breaks down gender, ethnic, and religious boundaries to be engaged in the mission Dei. The interreligious nature of the dialogue sharpens the woman's existential views and directs her to the Savior of the world. John's narrative technique develops an unusual method of interpretation in order to accommodate the feelings and aspirations of the woman. Jesus, as the protagonist, communicates the message of eternal life in relation to the existential realities of his interlocutor.

The message of the Bible should be communicated to people of other faith traditions. The Johannine narrator uses his literary skill at its best in the story of the Samaritan woman. When an ancient text is introduced to the global-Indian reader, it has to be interpreted with the help of a narrator and a modern reader who interact with one another. While the dialogue within the text (between Jesus and the Samaritan woman) functions at the micro-level, the dialogue between the reader and the modern reader functions at the macro-level. When the text is introduced to the reader through the perspective of an ever-continuing narrator, the text can accommodate existential realities and the reader can gain a new identity in relation to the textual horizon. In this way, the text can deal with existential realities such as gender discrimination, economic problems, caste hierarchy, and others. A dialogue of the narrator with the global-Indian reader through the mediation of the Samaritan woman and her experiences would facilitate a dialogue that leads to liberation and transformation.

LEADING THE DISCOURSE TOWARD A “THIRD SPACE”

An interpreter is expected to lead readers toward the global-Indian context. Neither an interpreter who simply engages in a descriptive analysis of the text nor one who emphasizes only the pure localized aspects of the Indian context can direct the attention of the reader toward a gnostic “third space.” In John’s discourse, the personal and moral implications concerning the Samaritan woman are sandwiched between divine realities as follows: first, the dialogue begins with a discussion about the difference between “the gift of Jacob” and “the gift of God” (that is, between the “water of this world” and the “living water”) in relation to eternal life (vv. 7–13); second, the woman’s moral and personal situation is subsequently discussed (vv. 16–18); and third, there is an emphasis on the need to adhere to the existent Jerusalem-centric spirituality in order to continue with the “already . . . but . . . not yet” worship in spirit and truth (vv. 19–20). The dialogue reveals a central truth toward the end of the conversation, that is, the revelation of the identity of Jesus as the Messiah. This development of the dialogue rhetorically persuades the reader to aspire to an eternal life experience. Ultimately, Jesus leads the woman toward “eternal life” perspectives. Thus, a “third space” (eternal life experience) emerges in relation to but distinct from the first and second spaces the Jerusalem-centric spirituality and the Samaritan-centric spirituality.

A distinguishing mark of Indian ethos is its profound spiritual outlook. But at the same time there exist polarities of religious
The Bible has such a rich store of images in it that prevailing biblical interpreters should employ dynamic localization strategies in order to make scriptural texts relevant in both local and global contexts. A gnomic interpretative strategy in relation to descriptive aspects should be adopted in the global-Indian context for wider efficacy. In that process, the text should be considered as a paradigm to include the feelings and aspirations of diverse people, irrespective of their racial and national identities. In order to achieve this goal, an interpreter, first of all, should cross traditional hermeneutical boundaries, moving from pure localization to dynamic localization. Creating constellations of ideas between the biblical worldview and the Indian worldview might help interpretation in particular contexts, but such a strategy should not ignore a global audience. In a pluralistic context like India, building dialogical engagements with other religious and cultural forces both is necessary and has the potential to enhance the scope of the interpretative task. Furthermore, by crossing traditional boundaries, creating ideological constellations, and building dialogical relationships, the interpreter should aim to direct global-Indians toward a “third space.” Through these means an interpreter can lead an interpretative discourse in contexts both “here and now” and “everywhere and ever.”

ENDNOTES
1. My attempt here is not to deal with aspects of globalization that indicate growing interdependence of countries and provinces through communication, finance, and governance. Rather, I intend to explore the possibilities of a renewed framework for New Testament interpretation. For more details, see Johnson Thomaskutty, “A Dialogue between ‘the Eastern’ and the ‘Western’ in New Testament Scholarships: A Proposal,” in Bible Darshan: Post-Western Interpretation of the Bible (Delhi: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017), 2. In the English language, “gnome” often refers to a general maxim or a proverbial saying. With reference to a grammatical category in his analysis of Koinoios Greek, Daniel B. Wallace states that “this gnome present refers to a general, timeless truth.” Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 523. In speaking of a “gnomic present” in New Testament Greek, I am referring to the timeless dimensions of Scripture. But such gnomic interpretation must lead to new ways of working within and expanding the limits of the text.
2. In pure localization/dynamic contextualization, the interpreter attempts to employ the local/contexual aspects over against the global-Indian. But in dynamic localization/ contextualization, the interpreter emphasizes the local in relation to the universal.
5. Craig Blomberg comments, “The Samaritans actually looked for a ‘hater’ or in Hebrew and Conform Figure called the Taheb, but John has provided the dynamic equivalent for the Taheb, and the new dialogue that follows accentuates the new setting.” Blomberg, The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 11.
6. Other major themes in the story are eternal life, hour, salvation, spirit and truth, belief, worship, spiritual food, and “God is Spirit.”
8. See Thomaskutty, Dialogue in the Book of Signs, 64.

As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to Lord our God, until he has mercy upon us. Psalm 123:2

The explosion of Protestant evangelicalism in Latin America is a phenomenon largely accomplished by worshippers with neither theological church training as adults. A report by the Pew Research Center in 2014 notes, “Just one-in-ten Latin Americans (9 percent) were raised in Protestant churches, but nearly one-in-five (18 percent) now describe themselves as Protestants.” Many of these people were not raised in church, nor taught the Bible as children. Like the many indigenous women in the Andes region who read the Bible frequently, often carrying it as the only book in their humble adobe/hovel (wool/cotton/ woolen carrying cloth), they are grassroots readers.

There is not much information on how these women read the Bible or how it impacts their daily life, but close observers of Christianity in the Andes region can note profound trans- formational effects on how these majorities and their local faith cultures navigate the daily challenges of life, especially the oppressions of gender, race, and class. This essay seeks to understand and intend to fill a scholarly lacuna, but it seeks to provide examples of real, practical applications of hermeneutics on the ground of the lives of local believ- ers in the Andes region.

Having spent my formative years in a mission- ary household in La Paz, Bolivia, here I share the story of two missionaries in La Paz. The great majority of Hispanic “hombres y mujeres” (brothers and sisters, a common designation of congregants in Protestant churches) who read the Bible in the Latin American context view the Bible as a defini- tive source of inspiration and authorization for the typically quotidiano actions of daily life. Much like their fellow Christians in the United States, Latin American believers— and especially those among the rural and working class segments of society—relate to stories of human toil, struggle, and emotion, often personalizing sections of a biblical nar- rative that ache for theological study might paint differently. Those who cannot count on the government or other institutions to resolve grievances and disputes, provide basic care for children, or alleviate fierce competition for limited resources tend to feel that they must desperately cling to God. Es- pecially in these respects, the Old Testament speaks and validates real life experiences. Biblical stories of hardship also speak to these believers in unique ways based on their different experiences of human nature and society. These readers take notice when the biblical narrative depicts natural catastrophes, unpaid wages, or discrimina- tion—experiences that more commonly and disproportionately affect minorities and the poor. Accordingly, reader responses to such narratives play a greater role in shaping faith culture where most believers are poor and underprivileged than in communities that enjoy a more material prosperity, and political self-determina- tion. For believers in my parents’ community in La Paz, the Bible provides a basis for social face these familiar issues takes them beyond the place of the reader, making them partic- ipate through the vital ethical and affective responses it stimulates.

I am wary of the temptation to essentialize the Bible reading of mis-hispanos, but my formative years spent in La Paz suggest to me that narrative elements that are inert in
Isa 5:23) becomes personal and close instead of abstract or far off. Identifying with a character in the story makes it easier for a reader to believe that the creating and redeeming God of the Bible knows her.

What is more, this depth of identification is often accompanied by a correspondingly higher degree of expectation placed upon God—or at least one that comes less self-consciously. The theologian Karl Barth, in a series of lectures delivered in 1949, reminded us that in prayer we are obliged to “meet God with a certain audacity: ‘Thou hast commanded me to say, ‘Help me in the urgency, and they have fewer qualms than those who deny justice to the innocent (e.g., 2 Kings 4), and vanquishes the substratum of abstract or far-off thinking. To the indebted, ill, or down on their luck, the local church often becomes the most profound and immediate institution of social justice in the community.

Many of the tales the congregation members told us about were stories of how the church had intervened in personal situations beyond immediate or long-range relief. In one of the most remarkable stories, a married couple was struggling to make ends meet to the point of not being able to afford food for their children. They turned to the church for assistance, and the congregation not only provided food but also helped them find housing and employment. This story is an example of how the church can become a bridge between the individual and the community, offering practical support and interventions in times of need.

With this perspective, we gain a deeper understanding of the characters in the Bible. Their choices, like some made by the biblical characters, did not necessarily square with the dogmatic framework. God’s ways could be scandalized than their American counterparts by the questionable choices and actions. The biblical characters, including God. Their choices, like some made by the biblical characters, did not necessarily square with a dogmatic framework. God’s ways could be scandalized than their American counterparts by the questionable choices and actions of the biblical characters, including God. Their choices, like some made by the biblical characters, did not necessarily square with a dogmatic framework. God’s ways could be scandalized than their American counterparts by the questionable choices and actions. The biblical characters, including God. Their choices, like some made by the biblical characters, did not necessarily square with a dogmatic framework. 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female leaders or instigators of social change who could serve as role models to empower and inspire indigenous women. They rarely had the opportunity to speak up and could not always muster the courage to act in opposition to injustice. Our hermanas, however, captivated as they were by the biblical narratives they read, assumed that the stories were theirs to emulate and embody, whether the characters were male or female.

One way in which Bible reading served to confer voice and autonomy on these women was through testimonies. In Bolivian evangelical churches, testimonies delivered publicly by new believers drew from Scripture in giving their testimony. The storyteller and the collective group. The testimony-giver took ownership of the biblical story in reflecting on her life before Christ, her present condition, and her future aspirations and dreams. I saw many indigenous women give powerful testimonies through gatherings that provided a rare opportunity for them to speak in public. In these settings, their identity was not only that of a wife, mother, or daughter. These women spoke about how they saw themselves as individuals in the eyes of God. As they grew in the knowledge of God who dwells in the midst of ambiguity, and to act with audacity in the face of difficulties. These are the real, practical applications of hermeneutics on the ground, reading the Bible in Bolivia.

I met Hermena Juana during Bethesda School’s first year, when her oldest son, Josué, enrolled. She was a single mom of two young boys working a couple of days each week as a house cleaner. She herself had little formal education, having been taken out of school during the fourth grade and brought to the city by her older sister to work as a maid. Hermena Juana had struggled, grieved with depression after being abandoned by her husband. When she became a Christian, her love for the Scripture was insatiable. Over the two decades I knew her, I saw her transformed into a confident reader and eloquent preacher who was often invited to speak at various churches throughout the city and its campus. In Bolivia until recently it was not very common that someone like Hermena Juana would be seen speaking in public or in a position of leadership, but many evangelical churches now embrace female preachers from backgrounds like hers. Hermena Juana and others like her, having gained literary confidence, a sense of self-possession, and a boldness for action by reading her Bible, went on to inspire other women who followed suit.

Scholars note that today in North America many Christians can be seen dwelling in “the divided consciousness of simultaneously believing and not believing,” on the “cusp” between belief and disbelief. In this respect, for the hermanas Bolivianas, being “on the cusp” is not an option. Poor indigenous women rarely receive encouragement or have the social proof to rise above their natural conditions. So they read the Bible with extra care, diligence, and interest as they discover its offer of not just salvation, but also of personal agency, of dignity, and of a role to play in the divine story. Like Hermena Juana, they take full ownership over the biblical narratives—improving themselves, speaking out, and serving the broader community beyond their own challenges and difficulties—because they intimately relate to the struggles of poverty, injustice, and discrimination that they encounter in the Bible. Scripture serves as a catalyst of growth and a source of encouragement to respond with bold compassion to those in society who have even less. It is a reminder to find God who dwells in the midst of ambiguity, and to act with audacity in the face of difficulties. These are the real, practical applications of hermeneutics on the ground, reading the Bible in Bolivia.
Both active in the Los Angeles Chicano Mural Movement of the ‘60s and ‘70s, David Rivas Botello and Wayne Alaniz Healy joined forces in 1975 to form East Los Streetscapers. In 1996 they were awarded the commission to depict the diverse Pico neighborhood of Santa Monica. As Healy describes it, this project “required an immense amount of patience.” In addition to site changes, the approval committee could not agree on the concept: “What one group approved, the next group rejected.” Eventually the city provided photographs of members of the community and the project was completed nine years later (at left in detail, above in situ). More at eastlosstreetscapers.org.
This content is curated from ongoing conversations taking place throughout the Fuller community. Visit this Voice section on Fuller.edu/Studio for links to full videos, articles, and more.

**Prayer is not a matter of waking up God or making God pay attention to us. God is always with us, in us, around us, under us, over us. God’s presence pervades the universe, and that presence is personal. God loves each of us all the time. The problem has to do with us and our ability to quell the noise that goes on constantly in our minds. . . . So we need to learn to focus on God, to rest in God, to listen to God. Prayer is all about getting through the barriers that keep us from God. . . . In the end, it is God who does the focusing through prayer practices we can use to dialogue with the Presence that “pervades the universe.”**

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**THE JESUS PRAYER**

“We live in a time when prayer is trapped by the distractions of the world. We are 24/7 in our society we are always on, always connected, always trying to multitask to do more than one thing, and that makes it very difficult for us to just focus on God, to focus our minds and our hearts on God. We have to look at the wisdom of our own Christian tradition, the wisdom that enables us to develop practices that cause us to be a still point in the frantically turning world we experience.”

Charles Sczyna, professor of church history, in a discussion about distraction and the Jesus Prayer, an ancient Orthodox form of prayer based on repeating the phrase, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Learn more online.

**BERANKAH**

“Berakah prayer begins objectively with what God has done in history. We know who God is because of what he’s done . . . Christian prayer and worship began with these objective statements, thanking God, and then asking God to intercede on our behalf in the world today.”

Todd Johnson, William K. and Delores S. Brehm Associate Professor of Worship, Theology, and the Arts, describing a popular Korean prayer tradition in which many individuals pray aloud at the same time.

**THE LORD’S PRAYER**

“The Lord’s Prayer is not really a how-to manual or an instructional manual. It’s really a kind of relationship manual and a loyalty manual. It has to do with developing certain patterns of thinking, feeling, and believing that are constituted in certain practices. . . . Those kind of patterns give rise to prayer, but prayer also gives rise to certain renewed and transformed behaviors and thoughts and feelings.”

Joel B. Green, provost and dean of the School of Theology, reflecting on the relationships between the Lord’s Prayer and Christian formation. Watch more online.

**TONGSUNG KIDO**

“Tongjung kids is an opportunity for the worshipping community to offer up to God one prayer that is at once unified and variegated. Coming from cultures that emphasize community more than individuality, this form of prayer stresses the importance of individual prayers participating in the larger picture of God’s work in the community as a whole.”

Debi Yu, admissions and student affairs advisor for the Doctor of Ministry program, describing a popular Korean prayer tradition in which many individuals pray aloud at the same time.

**THE EXAMEN**

“The examen is a wonderful tool to use as we’re seeking God’s will and discerning our own vocation, because the parts of my life when I feel alive, present in love, and energized are most likely those places where God has put a gift inside of me or given me a passion or a purpose. When I’m in line with the purposes of God, I am fully alive. The times that I’m detached or removed, I’m somewhere farther away from God and God’s plans and purposes for me. As I’ve practiced with the examen on a daily basis, looking for God’s presence in those times of joy and understanding more about God’s movements in places of detachment and pain, it helps me prepare spiritually for those times when I’m really in a difficult place.”

Laura Harbert, affiliate professor of clinical psychology, reflecting on the psychological effects of the prayer of examen, an Ignatian practice of prayerfully reviewing our daily lives. Learn more online.

**LEARNING TO PRAY**

Prayer can be paradoxical (evoked here by a unique voice, pictured above, of Fuller’s prayer garden), and it involves patience, practice, and connecting to a tradition that is older and deeper than the present moment. This voices gathered here introduce only a few of the many prayer practices we can use to dialogue with the Presence that “pervades the universe.”

- “Prayer is not a matter of waking up God or making God pay attention to us. God is always with us, in us, around us, under us, over us. God’s presence pervades the universe, and that presence is personal. God loves each of us all the time. The problem has to do with us and our ability to quell the noise that goes on constantly in our minds. . . . So we need to learn to focus on God, to rest in God, to listen to God. Prayer is all about getting through the barriers that keep us from God. . . . In the end, it is God who does the focusing through prayer practices we can use to dialogue with the Presence that “pervades the universe.”

Voices feature images of faculty and students engaged in prayer and reflection, including a group gathered in a prayer garden, a faculty member leading prayer in the Fuller Chapel, and individual students praying in a quiet space. The voices also include quotes from Fuller faculty and staff on the importance of prayer in their personal and professional lives, such as the quote from Professor Todd Johnson, who describes prayer as a way to connect with God objectively and subjectively, thanking God for what he has done and asking God to intercede on our behalf. The voices conclude with a reflection on the examen, a prayer practice that helps individuals connect with God in their daily lives and discern their purpose and vocation. The voices encourage listeners to explore different prayer practices and connect with the Presence that pervades the universe.
"Prayer for much of the Christian tradition has caught up between two folded hands the ache of human life, our longing for purpose, the growing fears of everyday life, the inexpressible and cruel, the loss that stands in the midst of all things mortal, the hope that there is one who delivers, one who remains when all else goes down to the dust. How could anyone teach such things? Prayer seems to awaken every longing that goes unquenched in human life, and to lift those desires to the dark luminosity who is God."

-Kate Sonderegger (pictured right), professor of systematic theology at Virginia Theological Seminary

"Communicative prayer seems to be the species of prayer that is in play during liturgies when utterances seem to be addressing God. If God is not the target of an utterance in the liturgy, can these utterances also be seen as addressing God or not?"

-James Arcadi (pictured right), a fellow of the Analytic Theology project

"What does it mean to say that God has answered a petitionary prayer? Can we be clear about what that specifically involves? What’s needed when we say “this is an answer to prayer”?"

-Scott Davison, professor of philosophy at Morehead University

"Theology is the highest form of prayer or pure prayer. This is the experiential knowledge of God, not speculative knowledge of God’s essence. Evagrius is famous for saying that if you are a theologian, you truly pray, if you truly pray, you are a theologian."

-Dennis Ockholm, professor of theology at Azusa Pacific University

"Prayer is inherently relational. Prayer petitions and praises a personal being in the context of an intimate relationship. Thus, prayer is not magic. Magic doesn’t work because it doesn’t connect to the natures of the things involved. It remains unrelated. Since reality is personal, only personal relationship will be effective. We are conscious of desires to the dark luminosity who is God."

-Jason McMartin, associate professor of psychology and theology at Biola University

"Prayer can lay the foundation for a theological aesthetic since it transforms not only one’s heart but, in so doing, it transforms one’s way of perceiving the world."

-Kevin Hector (pictured left), associate professor of theology and philosophy of religion at the University of Chicago

"The key benefit presupposed by many Christians is that God sometimes does things in response to prayer that (1) God wants to do and can do but (2) would not have done had the prayer not been offered. This isn’t a genie in the sky, but it is the case that whether something happens depends in part on making the request to God. That’s why prayer matters."

-David Bainger, professor of philosophy at Roberts Wesleyan College

"Analytic theology will not help one pray better if one simply wants to know how to philosophically describe a Christian phenomenon. Indeed, insofar as such desire bends toward curiosity, it works against the ends of prayer. . . . Analytic theology will be spiritually fruitful to the extent that it opens itself up to an end beyond analytic theology."

-Natalie Cames (pictured left), assistant professor of theology at Baylor University

"Prayer is joining in the activities of God, and to do that we must know what the activity is, we must join ourselves to it in intention . . . and we have to be responsive to God’s intentions in ways that music players are responsive to the conductor."

-Jonathan Jacobs, a professional philosopher and Eastern Orthodox Christian

"Prayer is a person-forming exercise that integrates one’s sensible self-consciousness into the God-consciousness."

-James Gordon, assistant professor of philosophy at Wheaton College

"The act of petitionary prayer involves placing our desired outcomes before our minds and maintaining an active desire that God will help bring it about. Further, if we really want God to help bring about a desired state of affairs, we must assume that it is in accordance with God’s will so that the act of prayer will include actively surrendering our desires to God so that they might be in alignment with his desires."

-Robin Collins, professor of philosophy at Messiah College
For centuries, Christians have cried out to God with this simple prayer, words prayed in a single voice no matter the language or culture or time: Lord, have mercy! Many of the languages spoken at Fuller are represented on this page, and you can hear them set to music on REVERE | RESTORE, an album created by members of the Fuller community. Says Director of Chapel Julia Tai: “In these times, the only words I can pray are, ‘Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Grant us forgiveness and peace.’” Recently the Prayer Garden (pictured) was transformed into a contemplative and creative space for people to pray for the world.

Resources

- The Vital Connection: A Fresh Approach to Christian Spirituality and an Opportunity to Move on with God
  Richard Goldingay (St. John’s Extension Studies, 1998)

- The Spiritual Formation Series

- Meditative Prayer: Entering God’s Presence
  Richard Peace (Wipf & Stock, 2015)

Available Classes

- The Practice of Worship and Prayer with Catherine Burzatti (and other faculty)

- Meditation and Spiritual Formation: Integrating Research and Practice with Sarah Schneider

- Spiritual Traditions and Practices with Richard Peace (and other faculty)

- The Spiritual Disciplines with Richard Peace

- Integration of Spirituality and Urban Ministry with Joseph R. Coletti

- Healing Prayer in Intercultural Ministry with J.J. Travis

- Spiritual Formation and Integrative Practice Group with Alexis Abernethy

- Arts, Spirituality, and Transformation with Alexis Abernethy

"LORD, MOVE YOUR CHURCH INTO ACTION. Use us to bring hope to a suffering world. Amen."

The notecards hanging in the Prayer Garden expressed prayers written in multiple languages. One of the cards offered the words above.
“While winning and competition are not inherently theologically empty, Christians must look beyond ‘winning’ and seek to infuse the contemporary sports culture with beauty and creativity. In order to do that, Christians must acknowledge the beauty and creativity that often are found outside of winning.”

Adam Metz, DMin student, from an essay on sports and popular culture. Adam was one of the many Fuller representatives at the Global Congress on Sports and Christianity.

“Rigorous physical activity, like sports, that emphasizes striving, growing, becoming ever better and more capable, is a spiritual activity. The maintenance and honing of the body in order to meet all of its potential is to … strengthen the sole means we have for knowing God—we strengthen our physical and created selves, our whole person. Sport serves as a systematic vehicle for this spiritual pursuit, the improvement of the body, the whole person, and the spiritual self.”

Erik W. Dailey, PhD student and adjunct professor, from his essay “Sport and Transcendence through the Body” in the International Journal of Public Theology. Erik was one of many speakers at the inaugural Global Congress on Sport and Christianity held at the Yorkminster Cathedral in York, England. Other Fuller representatives included Adam Metz (DMin student), Ben Proudberg, associate professor of human development; Rubén Fernández Morales (MAT student), and Robert Johnston, professor of theology and culture, who are quoted in these pages. Dean of Students Steve Yamaguchi (pictured above) enjoys the rigorous activity of riding to work every day, and recently took a group of students on his route from Pasadena to Long Beach, California.

“Reading St. Paul from a disability perspective urges reconsideration of how to understand the metaphors of winning and achievement of the imperishable prize. Within this Pauline framework, winning does not come at the expense of losers. On the contrary, those who are most successful are shaped by norms of competition that foster the well-being of others, that honors and respects those who are otherwise deemed weak and inferior, and that seek to edify the whole rather than the individual self. Is it possible for us to develop a Pauline theology of sport from this platform?”

Amos Yong, professor of theology and mission, analyzes Paul’s use of athletic metaphors for the Journal of Disability and Religion. Read the whole article as well as other voices on able theology online.

“While winning and competition are not inherently theoretically empty, Christians must look beyond ‘winning’ and seek to infuse the contemporary sports culture with beauty and creativity. In order to do that, Christians must acknowledge the beauty and creativity that often are found outside of winning.”

From What Does It Really Take to Be Great? a collection of theological and scriptural reflections to help athletes understand emotions, character, adversity, and more. The resource was edited by Rubén Fernández Morales (MAT student), the Western Europe coordinator for the international sports ministry Athletes in Action.
“Performance-based identity is an identity where people put their worth and value into how they perform in sport. What I’ve found in my research is that this performance-based identity is also associated with a fear of failure, with perfectionistic concerns, and with fear of disappointing those around you. Psychologically when we put our worth and value into our performance, we can begin to anticipate competition as a threat to our actual selves, which triggers some of the same mechanisms as real fears and stress and puts us from our resources in negative ways.

“It leads to four areas of coping: blame, shame, creating chaos, and control—things that really undermine people’s emotional health. . . . Change starts with understanding that your worth as a human being goes far beyond sports and athletics. It’s something greater than yourself that contributes to your sense of identity and worth.”

Benjamin Houltberg, associate professor of human development, leads research in Fuller’s Thrive Center on a variety of topics related to sports and thriving and encourages elite athletes through Hope Sports, a nonprofit that connects athletes with acts of service. Listen to his whole interview on sports and purpose online.

“Although winning can create a pedestal to preach the gospel, it can also leave Christian athletes feeling that they must attain athletic success to be useful to God’s kingdom. This would be an example of ministering ‘through’ athletes rather than ministering ‘to’ athletes. In contrast, the latter focuses on sport as a context for spiritual transformation as a part of one’s vocation, which includes gifts that (a) remind one of God’s unchanging love, (b) provide a source of joy, and (c) create opportunities to connect and serve others.”

Sarah A. Schnitker, associate professor of psychology, with Benjamin Houltberg, associate professor of human development, in their essay on developing virtues in athletic contexts. Read the whole article online.

“When I started training, I would have said that I run to be as impressive as my brother, to have that medal around my neck instead of simply being the little sister at the finish line. But over these months, my view has changed. Now I would say that I run to connect with the church, to form bonds that will last a lifetime. We have all experienced a lot over the past few months. Moments of joy and moments of sorrow, moments of peace and moments of pain, but what was most important was that we could all share these moments together. A true church family, united by a cause and a God much bigger than any of us could ever imagine.”

Meredith Miller (MDiv ’08) reflects on her experiences running with a World Vision Marathon team. Read her whole article online at the Fuller Center website.

“Want to know the six words (children) most want to hear their parents say? ‘I love to watch you play.’ That’s it. Nothing grandstanding like ‘you’re an all star,’ and nothing discouraging like ‘here are a couple of things I noticed that you can work on.’ Just ‘I love to watch you play.’ As I gear up for T-ball, band concerts, gymnastics practice, and everything else I’ll be watching my three kids do this year, I’m internalizing these six words, I’m sure I’ll say other things, some that are helpful and some that aren’t. But I want my kids to hear that doing what they do, and learning about who God created them to be, is a joy to watch as it unfolds.”

Brad Griffin, the associate director of the Fuller Youth Institute, in an essay considering research on youth athletics and emotional health. Read more online.

“This is not to say that sports are all bad. On the contrary, sports can be a great source of socialization, a way to learn about teamwork, and a vehicle for learning about virtues like integrity and perseverance. But we also need to be aware of the potential negative consequences of a sports-based identity, especially when those identities are rooted in competition and towards purpose. Read her reflections online.

“While some people are naturally driven by purpose, many people base their worth in what they do rather than in who they are. We believe that through experiences like a home build with Hope Sports, identities can begin to shift towards something greater than achievement. This shift occurs through meaningful encounters that are experienced cognitively with the mind and affectively with the heart.”

Christa Faivisow, a student researcher at the Thrive Center, reflecting on redirecting sports away from destructive forms of competition and towards purpose. Read her reflections online.

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I like to commute by bike because it helps me reconnect with our planet and our Creator. Twenty-five miles feels different when pedaling myself over it rather than sitting in a car. I sweat and breathe a lot and feel purged and invigorated when I get home. When I’m on the riverside bike path, for the southern half of the ride I find a contemplative rhythm that is prayerful and quieting. When I’m on the urban northern half of the ride, I pray for all different kinds of people I see on the route through some very diverse urban neighborhoods. Riding my bike helps me pray and see God in ways I wouldn’t see otherwise.

Dean of Students Steve Yamaguchi bikes to Fuller Pasadena from Long Beach—a daily commute that helps him pray with his whole body. He recently took a group of students for a weekend ride down to Long Beach. On the ride, organized by the All Seminary Council, the group biked over 30 miles from Pasadena, through downtown Los Angeles and over the LA River, and ended at the waterfront. ASC Sports Coordinator Chase Weaver said, “Recently, we’ve started emphasizing outdoor-type events and drawing from our very active faculty and staff to accompany and even lead these events. Steve has been riding for years and was the perfect companion for our veteran and rookie riders on a trip through the region we call home.”

“If a person is not able to play, he is easily bewitched or possessed by his own seriousness or the seriousness of another. Inhumanity is the result. Play breaks through such barriers and thus serves as a prologue to and/or a check upon a life of freedom. . . . Play revitalizes our ‘over-seriousness’ toward life, filling us with a spirit of joy and delight that carries over into all aspects of our existence. This attitude is based in and fosters the tacit recognition of a restored humanity that senses its rootedness in life’s fundamental sacredness.”


“In the 2016 national championship, I spun our car in the showcase turn right in front of everyone—it was such an ugly spin! I ended up winning the class that year, but I can’t just focus on the performance. If I only analyze my run, compare my times to my son’s and husband’s times, and focus on my mistakes, I know I’ve lost something. It’s important for me to choose to have fun. If I’m not enjoying the sport, then it’s only another form of work. Racing engages my whole self, and when I’m free to enjoy it, I feel so alive.”

When Mari Clements isn’t leading Fuller’s School of Psychology as dean, she’s racing competitively with her family. They’ve enjoyed the sport for over 20 years—and won numerous national and ProSolo championships along the way. On some days, she’s walking around the Pasadena campus in racing flag heels, a quiet nod to the action-packed sport. Watch a video of her racing online.

“I like to commute by bike because it helps me reconnect with our planet and our Creator. Twenty-five miles feels different when pedaling myself over it rather than sitting in a car. I sweat and breathe a lot and feel purged and invigorated when I get home. When I’m on the riverside bike path, for the southern half of the ride I find a contemplative rhythm that is prayerful and quieting. When I’m on the urban northern half of the ride, I pray for all different kinds of people I see on the route through some very diverse urban neighborhoods. Riding my bike helps me pray and see God in ways I wouldn’t see otherwise.”

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VOICES ON  
Silence

“In solitude and silence people become aware of what is actually occurring in their hearts—without incessant external stimuli, they discover who they are.”

L. Paul Jensen (PhD ’07), an adjunct professor and founding president of The Leadership Institute, in his book Subversive Spirituality: Transforming Mission through the Collapse of Space and Time. Pictured above: Roger Feldman’s Tenacious Convergence, a temporary site-specific sculpture on Fuller’s Pasadena campus that expresses the unstable context of the first-century church. In side, angled walls intentionally disorient the viewer and reveal open spaces just out of reach—evoking a struggle to find prayerful silence in the midst of chaotic times. Watch a video on the installation online.

“As a Christ-follower, I practice meditation on a regular basis. When I meditate, I turn my gaze from my self to Christ who redeemed me. Instead of simply focusing on how I feel or what I think, I look at Christ and what he has done for me on the cross more than two thousand years ago. I am reminded of his goodness in my life and I become more aware of his presence. As I remember how much I am loved by God, it prompts me to think and act more in ways that reflect his love.”

Judy Tiersma Watson, associate professor of psychology, discusses her research on the psychological benefits of mindfulness and meditation. Read more from her research and how she incorporates this practice into her own life of prayer online.

“What does solitude and silence look like in my context? There’s not a lot of silence. I have to think about a spirituality of noise and how I incorporate these noises into my life with God . . . . The example that I think of is the desert and the city. The early church fathers and mothers went to the desert to get away from outside pressure for their encounter with God. I believe we can have that encounter right in the midst of our own context and our own cities. The problem with a lot of us is that we spend so much time learning about all the things that are happening in the world—we spend a lot more time there than in the Bible. So what does it mean to listen to God not just at Saint Andrew’s Monastery, but also in Mackethune Park or walking down Alvarado Street?”

Jude Tiersma Watson, associate professor of urban mission, describing her calling to be an “urban contemplative” cultivating silence in the city of Los Angeles, available online. Pictured, students walk through Austin, Texas, at the Brehm Center’s South by Southwest Festival immersion course; the street mural above them evokes a struggle to navigate a chaotic modern life.

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Berenice Rarig, an international installation and performance artist, was an invited friend of Fuller’s Brehm Center at the 2016 Culture Care conference. Pictured during a performance in Fuller Pasadena’s prayer garden, she uses contemplative approaches to art and materials to explore her conviction that “everything in creation points to the Creator.” Watch her interview online.

“SILENCE PRECEDES SPEECH... only one who has learned to be silent is prepared to speak.”

David Augsburger, senior professor of pastoral care and counseling, from his Baccalaureate address on the pastoral nature of silence, available online.

Berenice Rarig, an installation and performance artist pictured in Fuller’s Prayer Garden, uses simple materials like fabric and paper to guide others to prayerful silence—a silence where we become aware of “the language that is already in the material, pointing to the Creator.” Watch her interview from the Brehm Center’s Culture Care Conference online.
“Where do I go to find the meaning of existence and the meaning of life? For me, it’s Christianity.”

SCREENING SILENCE

Martin Scorsese, Academy Award-winning director, made the statement above at Fuller’s screening of his film Silence, a story of Jesuit missionaries in 17th-century Japan based on the novel by Shusaku Endo. He is pictured with Brehm Center Director Mako Fujimura (left) and Assistant Professor of Theology and Culture Kutter Callaway (right). At this screening sponsored by the Brehm Center’s Reel Spirituality initiative, the film created space to reflect on faith, suffering, and more. Watch the whole conversation online.

“When it comes to chronic pain, the ‘silence’ of God is actually rather deafening. Chronic pain is more like a white-noise drowning out any meaningful signal that might otherwise be heard. When pain becomes the default status rather than the exception, the challenge for the chronic sufferer is not so much God’s silence, but a desperate yearning for God to be truly silent.”

Kutter Callaway, assistant professor of theology and culture, hosted the conversation with Scorsese described above and guided their conversation to thoughts on sustaining faith in traumatic circumstances. Read his reflections on chronic pain online.

“When words like ‘silence’ seem harsh and stark, and they seem to hit home too deeply in an entertainment-filled world, rarely do we encounter art that gives attention to the complexity, paradoxes, and mysteries of life without falling into the abyss of despair. Silence is an antidote to the morphine-like numbness of our culture. It can and should shock us to see the deeper reality beyond the normative reality.”

“I hope Endo found peace, I hope Scorsese finds peace. I hope I find peace, and I hope we all find peace. We cry out for God to reassure us, to quiet our doubts. Perhaps God’s answer is God’s silence, a presence that says stronger than any speech, ‘I’m here. I’ve always been here. I’ll always be here. Rest your head upon my bosom. Be at peace.’”

Elijah Davidson, codirector of the Brehm Center’s Reel Spirituality initiative, in a review of the film Silence online. Read more of his reflections in his book How to Talk to a Movie: Movie-Watching as Spiritual Exercise.

“Everything that had taken place until now had been necessary to bring him to this love. ‘Even now I am the last priest in this land. But Our Lord was not silent. Even if he had been silent, my life until this day would have spoken of him.’”

Toward the end of Endo’s novel, Father Rodrigues offers confession for a Japanese Christian and has an epiphany: faith was still possible in the midst of the suffering he had witnessed. Paradoxically, God’s own silence expanded his heart, making it possible to love in a new way.

Resources

- Rest: Experiencing God’s Peace in a Restless World
- Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering
- Makoto Fujimura (InterVarsity Press, 2016)
- Meditation Prayer: Entering God’s Presence
- Richard Peace (Wipf & Stock, 2013)

Available Classes

- Spiritual Traditions and Practices with Richard Peace (and other faculty)
- The Spiritual Disciplines with Richard Peace
- Theology, Film, and Culture: Engaging Independent Films with Kutter Callaway
- Spirituality and Mission with Jada Terrance Watson
Martin Travers enjoys traveling the world painting and offering workshops to provide at-risk youth and communities with creative alternatives. He has spent extensive time in the Himalayas and in the Mission District of San Francisco. His 2002 work Naya Bihana (A New Dawn)—detail at left, in situ above—portrays three generations of Nepali women struggling to create a better future. Travers was in Nepal in 2015 when the country was rocked by a magnitude 7.8 earthquake, and in the wake of the experience helped found Kala Sikchya, an organization providing art workshops for traumatized Nepali children. Follow him at @martintravers71.
New Fuller Faculty

EUN AN CHOI
Assistant Professor of Intercultural Leadership

Dr. Choi comes to Fuller from a faculty position at the Asian Center for Theological Studies and Mission-Area United Theological Seminary in Hong Kong, China, and Fuller School of Theology in International, Russian, and Korean/Ministry, where she planted a multichurch coalition and trained local leaders, who brings rich theological experience to her role.

KIRSTEN OH
Ecclesiastical Associate Professor of Intermethodist Studies and United Methodist Mission

As ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, Dr. Oh is one of three United Methodist representatives to the Faith and Order Table of the National Council of Churches, and among 600 members of Color Scholars, in addition, she serves as associate professor of practical theology at Paine College, Rainbow University.

MATTHEW W. RUSELL
Assistant Professor and Associate Director of the Fuller Institute for Recovery Ministry

Teaching primarily of Fuller Texas, Dr. Russell previously served as an adjunct at Fuller and taught practical theology and community health at District 121 and internationally. He is a senior counselor at the 51st Pacific United Methodist Church in HVAC and executive director of project1420, an educational and social enterprise incuba.

ENRIQUE TORRES
Ecclesiastical Professor of American Baptist Studies and Executive Director of the American Baptist Theological Center

Joining Fuller’s faculty as ecclesiastical professor, Dr. Torres brings experience as a pastor, educator, author, and executive with particular expertise in missiology. Having taught theology at multiple seminaries and currently serves as pastor of Iglesia Blasina Latina in Los Angeles.
What is Fuller?

Fuller Theological Seminary is one of the world’s most influential evangelical institutions, the largest multidenominational seminary, and a leading voice for faith, civility, and justice in the global church and wider culture. With deep roots, strong orthodoxies, and branches in innovation, we are committed to forming Christian women and men to be faithful, courageous, innovative, collaborative, and fruitful leaders who will make an exponential impact for Jesus in any context.

Fuller offers 18 degree programs at 7 campuses—with Spanish, Korean, and online options—through our Schools of Theology, Psychology, and Intercultural Studies, as well as 20 centers, institutes, and initiatives. Approximately 4,000 students from 50 countries and 110 denominations enroll in our programs annually, and our 43,000 alumni have been called to serve as ministers, counselors, teachers, artists, nonprofit leaders, businesspersons, and in a multitude of other vocations around the world.

¿Qué es Fuller?

El Seminario Teológico Fuller es una de las instituciones evangélicas más influyentes del mundo, un seminario teológico más grande y una voz principal para la fe, la cortesía, la justicia y la justicia en la iglesia global y la cultura en general. Con raíces profundas en la ortodoxia y suscursales en innovación, nos comprometemos a formar mujeres y hombres cristianos con fe, valor, innovación, colaboración y a ser líderes de éxito que tendrán un impacto exponencial para Jesús en cualquier contexto.

Fuller ofrece 18 programas de estudio en 7 localidades—con opciones en Español, Coreano, y clases en línea— a través de nuestras facultades de Teología, Psicología y Estudios Interculturales, juntamente con 20 centros, institutos e iniciativas. Aproximadamente 4,000 estudiantes de 50 países y 110 denominaciones ingresan anualmente a nuestros programas y tenemos 43,000 alumnos y exalumnas que han acudido el llamado a servir en el ministério, la consejería, la educación, las artes, en organizaciones sin fines de lucro, los negocios y una multitud de diferentes vocaciones alrededor del mundo.

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Fuller.edu/MAICS