

Creating Beauty in Exile

Mako Fujimura: My name is Mako Fujimura, I am the director of the Brehm Center here at Fuller Seminary—and to be able to say that [laughs], it took, I think, an extraordinary courage of one person who saw this vision of the possibility of not just a seminary, but an educational institution in 21st century—new wine skin.

And that takes a great deal of thinking and praying, because it does not come to us easy, as you know. There's many things about our lives that when we transition into another phase, it's a difficult journey to say that in order for us to be not only an effective institution, but a movement into a world that is so fragmented and so broken—a world that needs healing, and yet our institutions in some ways, in many ways, have not met the challenge of our time.

Churches, Sunday morning, is still the most segregated hour that we don't have a voice to speak into culture as words of encouragement, exhortation, as ways to feel the broken fissures, to bring people together, to even lose our selves so that others may find hope. In order to do that, it took I think an extraordinary courage of one person, to tell an artist to be part of this journey. How radical is that?

I'm not quite sure if he's had this moment of clarity or moment of craziness or whatever it was, but I know being here for a year and a half as an artist, not really as a professor or executive director or any of that, but as an artist. To be given a place to work, to be hosted by this great institution, renowned institution, to be an artist in the midst, at the very heart of the vision, and mission, and all that happens here in this wonderful institution.

I hope if you're here visiting that you are not only welcome, but you feel recruited, that you are not only our guests, but you are potential students. Wherever you are, we have resources for your journey, and your journey is a difficult journey. It will take courage and our faith will sometimes fail. But you have people here, extraordinary professors and faculty and staff, events people, FULLER Studio, an extraordinary group of filmmakers who are dedicating themselves to the task of documenting this journey.

You will see here today music perhaps like you never heard before, because these are not just extraordinary musicians. They are

sojourners, they are people who are willing to cast their egos aside to serve a greater purpose. And that music you will not hear, unfortunately, in many places in the world. I'm just so honored, about a year and a half ago, Mark Labberton the President of Fuller Seminary called me and asked me if I would be willing to consider being on this journey.

I thought it was an impossible journey. I didn't think at the time when I listened to his request that it would be possible at all. And today I stand before you and I want to tell you that Mark Labberton, his vision for the future of Fuller Seminary and beyond, for me, it brings hope to not only my journey as an artist, but my journey as a person struggling, living and trying to do what I can to bring reconciliation, the reconciled tongue of this new century. Would you please welcome President Mark Labberton.

Mark Labberton:

Well, it is Mako's version of the story; my version of the story is that it was quite an easy thing. It was easy because what this vision is, is so essential to the enterprise of God's purposes in the world, that it seems to me that the idea of bringing together an artist with a theological institution like this seems to me to be one that belongs so deeply together that the church can't do its mission in the world unless it's an embodied mission in every dimension and in every possible language. So the thought that we would not have it include the work of Mako and the work of other artists in all of their various expressions, seemed to me to be unimaginable. And it's like oxygen to the whole reality of what we're experiencing.

And many of you, I think, are on that journey often feeling very isolated. Part of why the Brehm Center has mattered over all these years has been because at the core, it's been an invitation to a different way of conceiving and a different way of experiencing the meaning of the gospel in relationship to culture and the world as a whole. So, I'm just so thrilled that Mako is here. I'm so grateful for the work of the Brehm Center. And in many ways, this theme of this conference, "Culture Care" could as easily be the tag of the whole mission of Fuller Seminary.

What does Fuller Seminary exist to do? It exists to form people who will be culture carers in every manifestation of that in the world that may be called upon by any given individual or community of people to invest. And likewise, we could say it could be a tag for one way of expressing the mission of the church in the world, that the people of God are simply meant to be culture carers. I think this is the outgrowth of what Jesus means when he says that we are light and salt, that we bring both

light and salt to contexts which are in decay or in need of light in the midst of darkness. And those are culture caring demonstrations, enactments, embodiments of what it is that we're really about. So, to me this is just a source of enormous joy and gratitude and hope. It's oxygen to me. I've said privately to Mako. I think he's been brought here for many reasons, but I actually also think he's been brought here just because I need him to be here. So, I feel very grateful on a personal level that Mako is here as well.

Let me offer a prayer as we get started. Oh God, who is the great center of all care. May we as your people today, open our ears to give attention to all the things that you would want to say and show, nudge, encourage, challenge, exhort, remind. You, oh God, are the hope of the world. And it is to you whose care is in the process of remaking all things in and through Jesus Christ. It's your imagination, it's your hope, it's your love, it's your astounding grace and kindness. It's your perseverance, it's your faithfulness. Oh God, how grateful we are for these gifts. May we be awakened to them today again and live into them even in the midst of exile. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

I want to reflect for a few minutes about the theme of exile because it's been so important to me, but I think much more than just a personal story, it's really an expression of the enterprise that sets the context for why culture care, why this theme of creating beauty in exile, matters. It's been illustrated so beautifully in so many different ways, but let me give you at least my way of understanding the biblical frame for the enterprise that we're engaging in.

In the Old Testament, there are really two great paradigms. The first paradigm is really the paradigm of Exodus. It's the paradigm of God finding his people, hearing their cries in their weakness, their vulnerability, their oppression, their injustice in Egypt, and redeeming them, calling them out of Egypt and calling them on to life in the promised land. This paradigm, of course, is paradigmatic for everything that defines Israel's identity. It's the core of what establishes Israel as a nation.

It's the cornerstone of the moment in which God's revelation to Moses and that extended revelation, not just to Moses but to the people of Israel through ultimately the giving of the law, provides the cornerstone for everything that Israel would understand to be its national identity. And therefore, the Exodus is the paradigm that establishes the course of to this day who Israel is, how they understand themselves and how they understand themselves in relationship to God. How they understand

themselves in relationship to the world that's around them, how they understand themselves in relationship to the stranger, the alien, the foreigner. All of that is the location that's created by this great paradigm of Exodus.

Now, in many ways, the nation that we're in right now, the United States, is a nation that for many, not by any means for all, not for those who are Native Americans, not for those who were brought to our shores because of slavery, but for many other people, they came to the shores of the United States with a kind of exodus vision. It was really a sense of leaving someplace and coming to this place. In some sense of, in the great sense of, the image of a promised land hope.

And so, everything from the Statue of Liberty to yesterday's court findings are all roiling ongoing debates about how it is that our nation is a place which understands itself in relationship to this Exodus paradigm, from some place to some new place. Now, some arrived early on the shores of New Jersey and thought this must be the promised land, and others thought, Oh, I do hope not. And they kept pressing westward. Some decided it was Chicago, others, it was Milwaukee or Indianapolis or it was Dallas or it was other places, and some eventually got to California, and then some went South and then decided that it was really specifically Southern California, until finally jumped off the coast and went to Hawaii. And then everyone realized that actually that was the promised land. It was just too small for all of us. That paradigm interplays with the religious, spiritual life of America in a very profound way. In many ways, some of those who came to our shores came because of religious motivations, and a quest for religious freedom. They came seeking to establish, and discover, and lay hold of their experience of the promised land.

This eventually emerges around both self-interest, which de Tocqueville makes a great deal of in his early, early observations of the character of American culture that is deeply individualized, that's deeply shaped by an experience of personal quest of an identity and life that's primarily about what I or my small family or tribe are actually really about.

That paradigm gradually becomes increasingly secularized over the course of all of the time that passes, and in that paradigm, there is then a move from seeking a promised land, which is actually God's promised land defined by God's character, God's purposes, God's values for the people of Israel to be a people who reflected the nature of the God of Israel.

That was the vision of the promised land, not a personal destination of happiness, contentment, desire, possession, control, power, influence. It was actually God's promised land, which was meant to be a community of people who in a given context reflect the reality of the goodness, the glory, the justice and mercy of God. That portrait is one that fades, and increasingly it becomes really a privatized, personalized, individualized, internalized vision of God giving to us—now in the name of Jesus—the promised land that we want for entirely un-kingdom-related reasons.

So, we pray that Jesus will be the one who will give us our desires, not give us *desires* that are actually God's desire. It's, "God will give us what my heart desires," unmitigated by any call or command or vision of who it is that God is or what it is that God is really about. It's now just, "God meet my desires and give me what I see." This happens of course, in a very pervasive way, and consumer Christianity, which now pervades and defines so much of America, is precisely about that. Andy Stanley, the well-known preacher, has said on several occasions that the one assumption that he makes of everyone who ever comes into the door of a church that he's preaching in, is that they are first and foremost consumers.

That consumer reality is by definition a kind of personal promised land quest. And Jesus comes along and says, there is a promised land, it is a new life. It is a movement that's so dramatic that it's nothing less than the difference between death and life itself, but it's now meant to be lived out in a way that is a reflection of the purposes for which you were made, the identity that you've been given as a creature made in the image of God, that's purposefully expressed in how you love one another—those that are like you, those that like you, and those that *don't* like you, and includes even those who are your enemies.

This is the promised land vision, the deep promised land vision. But in a secularized version, stripped of the awkwardness of Jesus' call to be genuine disciples, comes instead the stamina, the vision, the demand that God really just simply satisfy what I or we or my tribe desire. This is incredibly self-serving and problematic, and it is no wonder that so many secular people today now look at the church and say, "So, what's different?" And study after study that suggests that the evangelical church looks very much like the culture that's around it, is only palpably present in so many different forms, in so many different contexts, that in fact it reveals how far we've gone from anything like the peculiar people that Israel was really meant to be in the promised land.

This is the crisis that leads to the second paradigm in the Old Testament. This is why God sends prophet after prophet after prophet to say to the people of Israel, “No, stop, stop, stop. I hate your worship. I hate your festivals. I hate your way of expressing your life because it is so much not the manifestation of the heart and purpose for which you’ve been called. It’s not a manifestation of me. It’s not an expression of my desire for justice. It’s not an expression of my understanding of what it means to live artfully and creatively in the world. It’s not what it means to embody the character of the kingdom of God.” And as prophet after prophet after prophet comes and these harsh and demanding and grueling judgments are declared in relationship to Israel, Israel just continues to rebuff prophet, after prophet, after prophet. Eventually, it becomes clear that this strategy is not going to achieve its purposes, and God then initiates and begins to declare in anticipation that you will be a people sent into exile, and it’s that that is the second paradigm. The first paradigm is pretty clear. The good guys are Israel, the bad guys are Egypt. You just get Israel, the good guys, out of the clutches of the bad guys and into the promised land. And it’s a fairly straight forward kind of paradigm. You just need to then live it out.

There’s that major problem, but the paradigm is fairly clear. The thing that makes the exile so fascinating is that the exile is an implicated act on our part. We are the bad guys, and sent into exile because of faithlessness, because of an inability to see, and hear, and bow the knee before God and God alone. We tend only to our own ends, our own people’s ends, our own preoccupations, our own idols. And those are the things that actually end up defining who we are. And therefore, we are sent into exile. Israel is sent into exile as a way of it saying now what will happen when the temple is desecrated, when the architecture is damaged, when the vessels have been used for unholy purposes, when false gods are set up in the temple, when you are removed, in many cases, from Jerusalem, when you’re under the authority and control of Babylon now, who will you be? When the circumstances have devastated your identity, now who do you understand yourself to be?

And in that context, God is setting Israel into a context of exile in order to call them to live as strangers in a strange land. And to ask them, now that all of the surrounding circumstances have been redefined, where will you find your identity? Who will you actually be? How will you show that you belong to me? Not just for the goods that I provide, but actually because of who I am and who you are called to be.

Exile is because Israel is implicated in its judgment. It's not because of the authority of Babylon that exile occurs. It's not because Nebuchadnezzar is an overwhelming power. It's because, as it's represented in the biblical narrative, Babylon is used by God to discipline the people of God into a new kind of calibration of their identity and their life. Exile is also a theme that Jesus picks up on. And in many contexts I would suggest that the best way of reading a text, for example, like a Sermon on the Mount, is that the Sermon on the Mount is instruction for a faithful exilic life.

We read it and it begins with the Beatitudes, which themselves are a kind of short condensation of the expression of this unexpected set of instincts. How do people who are poor calibrate their life? How do they understand what it means to be persecuted? How do they understand what it means to be people who are calling out and seeking a God when the answers for their prayers do not seem to fall in the way that they did perhaps in the promised land, and now in exile demand a new kind of faithfulness, a new set of reservoirs of faith, and character, and purpose that really only God can actually provide.

I want to suggest that we have to ask ourselves these days in North America—and gratefully, not all of us live in North America. But in North America, I think we have to ask ourselves, if part of the dissonance that the church now feels in the culture and the cries that go up that say, I think we want to return to the promised land. If in fact we're caught in a kind of nostalgia that looks back and hopes for some day when in some previous era, some kind of form of Christendom allowed a certain kind of expression of Christianity to be sustained and civically allowed for, even affirmed, but was not really a faithfulness that was grounded in a vision of promised land life, but was really already deeply accommodating to spirits of personal enticement, and desire, and appetite, which really had little or nothing to do with the righteousness and justice of God.

And instead, we are now people who are really living as exiles, people who are not nostalgically called back to some former era, but people called to now discover in the awkward peculiarity of a culture, which is in the middle of tectonic shifts around religion and politics in so many different ways, which exposes us to the challenge of whether or not now, in this peculiar time, we're prepared to live as peculiar people. Or whether we're just going to demand our rights to promised land life.

If you think that you're living in the promised land, then your strategy is to say, "I've got to get my promised land back," but if in fact you're

living in exile, Israel is never called to leave exile. Ultimately, they are invited by God and drawn back and restored in Jerusalem. But they're not called to *fight* Nebuchadnezzar. They're not called to be people who *oppose* and do battle with Nebuchadnezzar. They're called to love Nebuchadnezzar and his house, to seek the shalom of the city, their enemies, for in their shalom Israel will find its shalom.

This is, I think, exactly—and again in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus then picks up these various themes and says, “It’s not a big deal if you love those who love you, even the Gentiles can do that.” I mean, this is not a great achievement, although I have to say on some days that might be a big achievement. “But if we love those who love us, fine,” Jesus says, but the question is whether you can love those who do not love you and even love those who are not your enemies.

This is sort of the gold standard of exilic life: are we called to love beyond our capacity when our personal promised land is threatened if not completely gone, when in fact we now have to ask an entirely different set of questions about how it is that we see our neighbor, the stranger, the foreigner, the alien, and the enemy. Those are gospel questions that demand of the Christian church, especially I would say in these days in North America, a really deeply different calibration than the calibration of just thinking, we need to get our promised land back.

First of all, we have to remember that for many, it was never a promised land to begin with. It was their home. For Native Americans, this was simply their context. In fact, many others who came to our shores because of slavery, they came here with no sense that this was their promised land, it was precisely the inverse of that. It was the tragic inverse of that. It was really already a statement of privilege, if you could call it your promised land, and in the context of that comes a Christian narrative, which then gets reinforced in a certain way that I want to suggest we need to re-evaluate and seriously reconsider.

And in this period where I think the church would be more faithful, more distinctly Christ’s people, if we could understand that we actually don’t live in the promised land, we live in exile. And in exile, we now have to ask, what does it mean to find the capacity to love in an unexpected way? To see the enemy, the foreigner, the stranger, the alien, and to go toward them and not away from them.

The Old Testament literature is replete with examples of this. Daniel is one of the great examples of a text that is meant to nourish a vision of

faithful exilic life, of being peculiar people. But the New Testament is replete with examples of Jesus' own ministry, of this instinct that somehow moves toward the crisis, toward the dislocation, toward the other, toward the stranger, toward the place of alienation, toward the place of fear.

I'm writing a book right now on fear, and among the many themes that are emerging in this book and the interviews that I've been doing with people, it's just been this fundamental sense of how immediately people live in a context of fear, how readily people talk about fear when given the right opportunity. How palpable, and visceral, and personal these experiences of fear are. And the question is, in the context of a world of fear, what does a life of faithfulness actually mean? Right now, I would say what seems to define a great deal of the American church is fear and violence. Fear and violence that are used to, again, recover a promised land vision.

But what if instead of recovering a promised land vision, we were to instead have an appetite for becoming a peculiar people. What if the crisis of this moment is actually a deep invitation to a new way of understanding our location, our identity, our living, breathing experiences of what this can mean? I want to just share with you some illustrations of people that have been some of my teachers in reflecting on this. Some are in the United States, but I have to say most of them are outside the bounds of the United States, where living as a peculiar people as people in exile is normative in many, many contexts, where the Christian church is thriving in the majority world.

Take this trip with me in your mind to Rwanda. It's not long after the genocide, about two years at this stage. I was there for a time to visit people who had been victimized by the genocide in various ways and their families, somehow, had survived. Just to listen to their stories, just to try to understand who they were and what they had been through.

I met a woman who was relatively young. She was probably in her early 30s. As the story gradually unfolded and she told me about her own family's experience, it ultimately became clear that she had lost 41 relatives in the genocide. Many of them had been killed in the village that she herself lived in. She fled, she described vividly what it was like to hide and how slowly she gradually re-emerged once it became clear that the genocide, it seemed, was over. She was not eager or ready to go back to her village, because many of the people who had committed these atrocities were people that were still living in her village. There was a sense that she couldn't dare go back. She didn't know what would

happen, and in any case, the horror was so great that the thought of returning seemed impossible. Except that over time she did gradually come to feel that she needed to go back to her own village. Along the way, as was true for that period of time and had such significance in Rwanda, she was meeting, of course, children who had become orphaned through this horror. And one of them was a little boy who was about nine, who had no parents. She could tell his family had all been killed, and so she began to take care of him and invited him to come with her as she continued in this journey.

She and he on the way met another little boy, this one about five, and she took them to the doctor, discovered that the younger little boy was HIV positive. The older boy was not positive, but was vulnerable, as both of them were. They become her new family. And in this way that's just part of tentative, refugee-like, raw, exposed life, she huddles with them. And they eventually make their way back to her village and to their home. She hides, she said, really for the first several months, they just decided to stay mostly inside, again, trying to just deal with the trauma, the overwhelming violence and the fear of what neighbors nearby might actually do. She would appear, she said through the windows of the house and see the faces of people that she knew who had been part of the killing party that had destroyed her family. They needed food, of course, there was no way to survive otherwise. They would dart out to various markets with what little money they could somehow find. They gradually developed a little garden. The little garden began to grow, the garden produced more fruits and vegetables than they could actually eat.

So, they decided as this new little family that what they were going to do was that they were going to start giving their vegetables to the neighbors that they also knew didn't have enough food. And she describes quite vividly this one particular neighbor whose face was vividly in her nightmares as a memory of the tyranny, and the brutality, and the violence that had been perpetrated. And that neighbor moved even closer to her house, and she became aware of the fact that he had no food. They had more than enough, and she and her now sons had to go through a conversation about what they would do with the food for this man. And they decided that they would take him food. They couldn't, she said, at first take it to him personally. So they just began to leave it on the doorstep of his house. But one day they were caught putting food on the doorstep of his house. And instead of it being the drama, and tyranny, and trauma that she had feared, instead, he just burst into tears and said, "So you're the ones that have been bringing this." What grew up through this woman's life was an experience, in my

view, of a person who was living now as a faithful exile. She was home. She was in her own house, but she saw and understood, of course, the world in tragically different terms. And she said, “I couldn’t decide not to do this. How could I decide that I’m going to raise these boys, now my responsibility, in a context where the toxicity of bitterness, and resentment, and hatred, were going to define our family’s life. It has to be that we somehow learn to love beyond those categories.”

There was a woman in the church that I served in Berkeley, a wonderful woman, a creative woman. She and the guild of other quilters that she was a part of were part of that glory guild of people who would never think of using a machine on any quilt. Who would consider that a violation of “quiltiness.” And so, she and her guild made these exquisitely beautiful, all handmade, quilts. She was a person who lived, I think she would say, in a quilted world. It was really in a way, the way that she saw herself and her life, very controlled, very clean, very orderly, very lovely. Very small.

And she began to hear through our church in Berkeley about the horrors that were happening in Eastern Congo, especially outside Goma, with all the violence, and again, the great challenges that are there. We became connected to a wonderful hospital there that was doing a terrific job of responding to women who were victims of fistula, that had been caused largely by the violence, and rape, and other things of all the marauding troops in that section of Eastern Congo.

This woman would not exactly have been a likely candidate to go on a mission trip to Goma. You don’t worry about using machines on cloth in Eastern Congo. But she had a deep heart, and a very compassionate heart, and she began to wonder whether or not these quilts—treasured, prized, awarded quilts—could somehow be of use in Goma, especially to women who only had one piece of clothing, which was what they were wearing and really nothing else. Who had been rejected from their families, from their villages, from other settings, didn’t have bedding, needed surgery, were in recovery, and had nothing beautiful around them.

So, she put out a call to her guild: I want the very best of your quilts. And I want you to send them to me, and we’re going to send them to this hospital in Eastern Congo. And we will give them as gifts to these women who are facing this unbelievable trauma. This happened and within just a couple of weeks, I think, we had something like three or four hundred of these amazingly beautiful quilts that had been sent.

The Sunday before they were sent off—for free by British airways—we draped these quilts all over the pews of the church. Goma is a long, long ways from Berkeley. Berkeley might be strange and weird, but it's not Goma. It's not Eastern Congo. It's nothing like that. But we had a heart for what it was that was going on there. And this woman gave this amazing gift along with her friends, and we invited her and her friends and these quilts in the sanctuary, and draped over all of these pews with these magnificent quilts. And at a certain stage in that service we liturgically had people stand and wrap themselves in these quilts. We just sat for a long time in silence.

These women whose lives were completely different than our own, whose location was completely different than our own, whose sense of violation was unlike that of probably anyone else in the room. And yet there was a place for beauty in the context of utter dislocation and violence. And in that context, we then prayed for them. We tried to imagine ourselves as the recipients of each of these quilts. We prayed for God, whose surrounding love held us, to be the surrounding love that would hold them. That this material substance, this beautifully created draping would cover them, and love them, and hold them, in their vulnerability. And then we commissioned them, and through the amazing gift of British Airways and through the technology of the internet, it was possible for us to see a video the next Sunday of many of these women who had now received these quilts, who were now themselves standing with these quilts wrapped around them. Now, see, this quilting woman, this gilded, beautiful, “no machine will touch my quilt” person, could actually also become a person who would show up in a place of exile with beauty, that could give love, and compassion, and mercy to women who deeply, deeply needed it.

I think of a church in a suburb of the Bay area. It was a church that is a vibrant congregation. Through various things that were going on at the time, this church became aware of the AIDS Garden in Golden Gate Park, and they began to just volunteer for the monthly cleanup of the garden.

It was a church that holds really, I would say, a traditional classic Christian teaching about issues of sexuality. It would not be a community that my instinct would be an obvious community that one might think would show up in an AIDS Garden ready to clean out the underbrush, and get things in appropriate shape for the next month. But they did this, and they did this in significant numbers as it went on, and they began to become great friends with the people who were in the garden care as well. Many of whom were also HIV positive, some of

whom had full-blown AIDS, people who had come to that circumstance through all sorts of choices on their part, practices of behavior and dilemmas of personal life and circumstances that were really daunting.

All of that became real stories, real people, real places that people showing up in a context that defines, in a certain way, a lot of San Francisco's life. And the AIDS Garden is like an embodied location that says, here is a place of trauma. Here's an experience of untold pain and sorrow. Here's a place where lives were fractured and families were torn apart, and human suffering occurred, and we can at least show up and care for the garden. These relationships grew with other caretakers who were there. Real understanding began to emerge and in the context of that, there were surprises, of course, expressed by some of those who were caring for the garden that a Christian church living far away from San Francisco would actually come to the AIDS Garden and show up every month in humility, and love, and graciousness, and compassion, and kindness toward all of those who were being honored by the AIDS Garden, as well as the people that were also there to take care of it.

And it was in the context of that that conversations grew up and trust gradually began to build. And this church that really would have had an understanding of itself as a "we are not them" kind of people are now in that community, as peculiar people loving in unexpected places and ways. And it was a remarkable thing when the keepers of the AIDS Garden asked this Christian church—with all of its positions regarding human sexuality—to become the caretakers of the annual gathering of people on International AIDS Day, in the context of the AIDS Garden. To care for themselves, and the garden, and the guests that would come into this AIDS Garden.

That was done by a Christian church that would argue for a classic and traditional understanding of human sexuality, but shows up with compassion, and love, and great creativity to love a community of people that would understand themselves to be strangers, foreigners in need of being loved.

I think of a student here at Fuller. His name is Andre Henry. He's African American. He comes from the South. He has been a part of Fuller for a number of years. He's a very, very thoughtful, extremely creative and gifted musician, and a person who's been a worship leader in New York and in many other places and has been a very significant part of our community here at in Pasadena.

Over the last couple of years, especially with so many shootings of African American men, he, and certainly a lot of other African American students at Fuller, have great concern for how it is that they make sense of their faith, and make sense of their faith in the context of a culture of violence, which seems at times and in ways to be so vividly focused on them.

Andre, in an idiosyncratic and wonderfully moving way, decided that he wanted to just somehow externalize the experience of race, that is hard to figure out. How do you embody this in a way that isn't just literally his own body? How can it be seen by people who don't share his own racial background? He decided what he was going to do is to take a large rock that was approximately this big. He would paint it and then he would write words on it that conveyed the burden that he feels every day by being an African American in this setting.

And then, far too heavy to carry, he put it in a wagon and began to just walk through his life, whatever, and wherever he went with this rock in this wagon. Walking along just trying to bear witness to a reality which may not be being adequately seen, it may not be adequately felt. It's just, as it were, "This is just my life. This is just the burden that it is for me every day, to be an African American young man in this culture. And every day, though you cannot necessarily see it and you're inured to it, if you don't live inside my body, you might not actually get that this is the burden that I'm actually carrying every day.

So, now let's let it be visible. Let's let it be external. Let's let it be named and now let's just walk through life into the bank, standing at Railey's, walking down the street, taking it to class. He went to a number of churches with this, and no one ever commented. As in, not even like, "What is that?" No capacity to engage in the reality of living in exile. It should be our instincts, our capacity, our reservoirs, our desire, our vision, our hope to lean toward that, to engage that, understand that, to share in that. To understand what it would mean to walk through life with that sort of burden every day. Not a burden that I carry, but a burden that my brother carries, and carries in a context in which I also live, but I walk, and live, and move with freedom in a way that he doesn't. What does it mean to be people who can do that? About two years ago, there was that horror of the ISIS killing of the Egyptians who were workers in Libya. There are Egyptians on our campus, and we naturally, as we often do in such tragedies, seek to gather people together and have moments of witness, and worship, and memory, and reflection about what this event was about. And we were planning what I guess I would just call a memorial service. And one of our students and

people who were on our staff said, “No, no, no. This is not a memorial service. Now you don’t understand what this is; this is actually a celebration.” We’re going, “Celebration? What does that mean, celebration?” Because there’s no greater honor than to have been a martyr. This is a time to give thanks to God for the privilege that these people have been martyrs. Absolutely it was unjust, absolutely it was a horror, absolutely it was undeserved. Absolutely it should be opposed. And it is an honor to have suffered, even martyrdom, for the sake of Christ. Not exactly my instincts and a fascinating mirror about the universe of spirituality that I’ve lived in, which is often a promised land spirituality. I demand my promised land back. But if I understand that I live in exile, where in fact there are real opponents, and there are real struggles, and there are real acts of sacrifice, then my discipleship, my instinct for what it means to seek beauty, to offer beauty in the midst of exile, to nurture it in the human heart, mind, imagination, in every artistic form, in every human and compassionate form, in every possible form, we are meant to demonstrate this peculiar life that is the life of God in us.

This is clearly, it seems to me, what we’re called to do, but it’s not the instincts of spirituality that are bred in the way that promised land life has been accommodated to American consumerism, instead of exilic life, which is really meant to be only a reflection of the righteousness and justice of God. I was so encouraged when I heard Rich Mouw, then the president of Fuller, tell the story of the fact that not long after 9/11, there were a number of Muslim scholars who were going to be here on campus for a couple of weeks, studying Protestantism in America.

He told a small group of us that he had actually set aside his outer offices to be used as a place of prayer. I was glad for that. And in a very kind of annoying sort of way, also found it sort of titillatingly interesting to imagine what some donors might think that Rich Mouw, the president of Fuller Theological Seminary, had a certain number of Muslim scholars who were praying in his outer office. And I ran into a friend of mine here on campus later that day, someone who comes from the Muslim world, is from that part of that world, has been brutally at the hand of Islamic terrorists and violence for many, many reasons. He’s been imprisoned and tortured. He is somebody who can talk about what it means to live as in faithful exile. So, in a kind of catty way, I walked up to him and we chatted about various things. I was eager to ask him this question: “So, did you know that there were these scholars, and did you know that actually Rich turned over his outer office to them to be able to pray in five times a day?” He said, “No, I didn’t. I hadn’t heard that.” I said, “So, what do you think about that?” He said, “Well, it’s not a big deal to give them an office. We’re supposed to give them our lives.” “Right,” I said. “That’s exactly what I’m

thinking." [audience laughter] That was my native instinct. It was entirely about giving them our lives. That was precisely, that was where my heart went. Really, it was. Or not, really. Or not really so much. Why was that so native to him? Because he understands what it means to live as a faithful exile. He doesn't have the same terms that I often in my impoverished, privileged life have.

The reason why this enterprise of culture care is so critical, is because it awakens to us, as Mako has often said, no longer talking in terms of culture war, but culture care. Culture care is an expression of faithful exilic life. How do we actually show up building houses, planting gardens, loving and seeking justice, being people who seek the shalom of our enemy fortress, for it's in that shalom that we will find our shalom. Friends, these are calls to a different set of instincts.

And I hope that the enterprise of this conference, and the whole enterprise of Fuller Seminary in this season, is to acknowledge that we are in a period where the tectonic plates are shifting, where the church is in one of its deepest moments of crisis, not because of some election result or not, but because of what has been exposed to be the poverty of the American church in its capacity to be able to see, and love, and serve, and engage in ways in which we simply failed to do. And that vocation is the vocation that must be recovered, and must be made real in tangible action. Oh Lord, may it be so, that we live in the promise of a land that, at one time, eventually, by God's grace, all things will be made right. But today, may we be faithful exiles seeking to love and bring beauty in ordinary kindness, and love, and mercy, in acts of justice and, creativity, and imagination.

For it's that, that will reveal the reality of the love of God who knows and seeks people in exile to restore and remake them to be the light and salt, that can do as exiles what only we can do. Lord, we pray this will be so and we acknowledge and confess and lament our poverty. So may it be that we can be faithful exiles, reflecting your vision, your compassion, your mercy, and kindness to the glory of Jesus Christ, we pray, may we be your peculiar people. In Jesus' name, amen.