

**Fall Harvest:
 Imagining a New Economy**

Come be a part of the Gathering's Fall Harvest of ideas, conversation, fellowship and fun. Come because our faith and economics have a lot to say to one another. Because we live on this planet. Because we like food.

Friday, 23 October 7:00 pm-10:00 pm Saturday 24 October 9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Registration:

\$35 (\$25 members) includes Saturday lunch. To facilitate meal and room planning, please register before 16 October by contacting: bob paterson-watt Tel: 416-467-1462 registergb@gatheringbaptists.ca

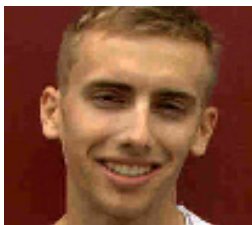
Marnie Saskin

Marnie is interested in urban sustainable living and in particular food security. She co-ordinates the Woodbine Heights hub of Not Far From The Tree through Shoelace Collective. She is trying to resolve her love of chocolate with its carbon footprint.



Benjamin Watts

Benjamin is a Commerce graduate of Ryerson University, responsible for research and planning at SIRIUS Satellite Radio Canada. He is a Tri-athlete and a volunteer with Canadian Diabetes Association, Karma Food Co-op and St. Michael's Hospital.



Angela Elzinga Cheng

Angela lives in Junia House, an intentional Christian community house based on new monastic values, in a Toronto neighbourhood with her husband, two children, and other community members. She works at FoodShare Toronto which supports food projects and food policy change city wide.



Patricia Dutcher-Walls

Associate Dean and Professor of Hebrew Bible at the Vancouver School of Theology, Pat is a Presbyterian minister active in the church through positions in campus chaplaincy, part-time congregational leadership, preaching, and social ministries.



**A World of Difference
 How To Read The Holy Bible
 by Patricia Dutcher-Walls
 from The Presbyterian Record, June, 2009**

How shall we read the Bible? How do we interact - ancient writers and contemporary readers - so that we might interpret responsibly in the midst of a multitude of voice? It seems there are as many interpretations as there are interpreters. Christians all over the world read the Bible in different ways. My hope is to consider the different contexts and different readings that have shaped how the Bible has been interpreted in recent years. The variety is indeed part of my point—variety makes a world of difference!

I will explore the biblical text from several angles—what lies 'behind' the text - its ancient social location; what lies 'in' the text - with a focus on the 'family' of books Deuteronomy to 2 Kings; and what lies 'in front of' the text - us, we who read these ancient texts today.

Behind The Text

So what lies 'behind' a text? What is the ancient social context that will help us understand how the theology and literature of the authors fit into that context? Like other agrarian states, Judah was a highly stratified society in which a few elite groups dominated the mass of farmers and peasants. Judah's upper classes were organised into factions, forming coalitions so necessary for power in the politics of monarchic states. In the seventh century, the Deuteronomy faction of religious leaders (associated with King Josiah's religious renewal programme, 2 Kings 22-23) understood and wrote about God in terms of loyalty with God, faithful

worship of God alone, the centrality of the temple in Jerusalem, and the keeping of the law (Deut. 11).

It's also important to look at how Judah's external relations influenced its literature. Throughout the seventh century BCE, Judah was a vassal of the Assyrian empire which controlled its provinces and vassals through warfare, conquest, deportation, and administrative and economic structures. Throughout history, peoples that have been conquered react to empire through both assimilation and resistance. For the history writers, it is not surprising to find that various accommodations to or resistance against the empire were written into what it meant to be faithful to their God.

For example, Deuteronomy's insistence in some texts that foreigners who threatened the land and who worshipped other gods were to be annihilated may reflect resistance against the Assyrians. In contrast, assimilation is seen in the writers' direct borrowing of Assyrian forms in covenant literature. Both Deut. 13 and 28 borrow language directly from curses in the treaties that Assyria forced on its vassals. Apparently, Deuteronomy's writers used Assyrian curse forms to express the consequences that would follow if someone broke the covenant with God.

The idea of loyalty to God also seems to have been influenced by the imperial context: through a process of resistance to the empire, the loyalty the Assyrian king demanded was subverted to become an ideal of loyalty to God, reinforcing that theological commitment.

In The Text

When we go on to ask about what lies in the text of this part of the Bible, a close reading shows that these authors were also willing to include a variety of views and voices from their blending of ancient tradition and current insight. Biblical scholar Robert Polzin shows how the history writers include multiple interpretations as a way to understand God's interventions with humanity.

For example, what at first appears in Deuteronomy as the voice of God speaking through Moses with an authority that is final becomes, in the artistry of the writers, an exploration of continual and open-ended interpretation and application of divine commands. In spite of the warning from Moses in Deut.12:32 not to add to or take anything from everything that he commands, all the characters, Moses, Joshua, the narrator, even God, are shown to engage in interpretation, application, and extension of the commands.

Another key example occurs where Deuteronomy claims there is only one way into the promised land, that of annihilation of the Canaanites. In contrast, however, the stories in Joshua and Judges report a myriad of other ways that Israel emerged on the land. Many of these alternate texts show that the early Israelites found ways to live beside the inhabitants of

the land and include those inhabitants in Israel's social and religious community.

The history writers collected the covenant law contained in Deuteronomy and wrote the theological history contained in Joshua through 2 Kings. They blended foundation stories and ancient traditions with more recent theological insights. As sages expressing the religious ideas of their time, they expressed their understanding of God in the language and concepts of their context. Context made a difference.

Further, rather than writing and preserving a text that speaks with a single perspective, these writers created a complexly voiced text. A dominant perspective is consistently placed against alternate perspectives that transform its dominance. Primary paradigms that create frameworks for collections of stories are then modified by the stories themselves. This means that within the Bible itself, there is justification for appreciating diversity, for seeing that variety makes a world of difference. *(cont'd on page 7)*



KNOWN UNKNOWN AND UNKNOWN UNKNOWN

*...Because if I know
then, knowing,
I can no longer unknow
What I know
and I know
that the consequences of knowing
will change me.
I can no longer
continue to act
as if
I do not know
because I know.
And.
I know that I know.
And I know
that it is possible that the known
knows
that I know.*

Slavald Rumzek

Losing my religion for equality

by Jimmy Carter The Observer, 15 July 2009



As a life-long practising Christian and a deacon and Bible teacher for many years, my faith is a source of strength and comfort to me, as religious beliefs are to hundreds of millions of people around the world. So my decision

to sever my ties with the Southern Baptist Convention, after six decades, was painful and difficult. It was, however, an unavoidable decision when the convention's leaders, quoting a few carefully-selected Bible verses and claiming that Eve was created second to Adam and was responsible for original sin, ordained that women must be 'subservient' to their husbands and prohibited from serving as deacons, pastors or chaplains in the military service.

This view that women are somehow inferior to men is not restricted to one religion or belief. Women are prevented from playing a full and equal role in many faiths. Nor, tragically, does its influence stop at the walls of the church, mosque, synagogue or temple. This discrimination, unjustifiably attributed to a Higher Authority, has provided a reason or excuse for the deprivation of women's equal rights across the world for centuries.

At its most repugnant, the belief that women must be subjugated to the wishes of men excuses slavery, violence, forced prostitution, genital mutilation and national laws that omit rape as a crime. But it also costs many millions of girls and women control over their own bodies and lives, and continues to deny them fair access to education, health, employment and influence within their own communities.

The impact of these religious beliefs touches every aspect of our lives. They help explain why in many countries boys are educated before girls; why girls are told when and whom they must marry; and why many face enormous and unacceptable risks in pregnancy and childbirth because their basic health needs are not met.

In some Islamic nations, women are restricted in their movements, punished for permitting the exposure of an arm or ankle, deprived of education, prohibited from driving a car or competing with men for a job. If a woman is raped, she is often more severely punished as the guilty party in the crime.

The same discriminatory thinking lies behind the continuing gender gap in pay and why there are still so few women in office in the West. The root of this prejudice lies deep in our histories, but its impact is felt every day. It is not women and girls alone who suffer. It damages all of us. The evidence shows that investing in women and girls delivers major benefits for society. An educated woman has healthier children. She is more likely to send them to school. She earns more and invests what she earns in her family.

It is simply self-defeating for any community to discriminate against half its population. We need to challenge these self-serving and outdated attitudes and practices - as we are seeing in Iran where women are at the forefront of the battle for democracy and freedom.

I understand, however, why many political leaders can be reluctant about stepping into this minefield. Religion and tradition are powerful and sensitive areas to challenge. But my fellow Elders¹ and I, who come from many faiths and backgrounds, no longer need to worry about winning votes or avoiding controversy - and we are deeply committed to challenging injustice wherever we see it. We have decided to

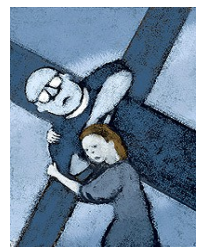


draw particular attention to the responsibility of religious and traditional leaders in ensuring equality and human rights and have recently published a statement that declares: 'The justification of discrimination against women and girls on grounds of religion or tradition, as if it were prescribed by a Higher Authority, is unacceptable.'

We are calling on all leaders to challenge and change the harmful teachings and practices, no matter how ingrained, which justify discrimination against women. We ask, in particular, that leaders of all religions have the courage to acknowledge and emphasise the positive messages of dignity and equality that all of the world's major faiths share. The carefully selected verses found in the Holy Scriptures to justify the superiority of men owe more to time and place - and the determination of male leaders to hold onto their influence - than eternal truths. Similar biblical excerpts could be found to support the approval of slavery and the timid acquiescence to oppressive rulers.

I am also familiar with vivid descriptions in the same Scriptures in which women are revered as pre-eminent leaders. During the years of the early Christian church women served as deacons, priests, bishops, apostles, teachers and prophets. It wasn't until the fourth century that dominant Christian leaders, all men, twisted and distorted Holy Scriptures to perpetuate their ascendant positions within the religious hierarchy.

The truth is that male religious leaders have had—and still have—an option to interpret holy teachings either to exalt or subjugate women and have, for their own selfish ends, overwhelmingly chosen the latter. Their continuing choice provides the justification for much of the pervasive persecution and abuse of women throughout the world. This is in clear violation not just of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but also the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul, Moses and the prophets, Muhammad, and founders of other great religions - all of whom have called for proper and equitable treatment of all the children of God. It is time we had the courage to challenge these views.



¹ The Elders are an independent group of eminent global leaders, brought together by former South African president Nelson Mandela, who offer their influence and experience to support peace building, help address major causes of human suffering and promote the shared interests of humanity.

The Commencement Address by Paul Hawken to the Class of 2009, University of Portland, 3 May 09

When I was invited to give this speech, I was asked if I could give a simple short talk that was 'direct, naked, taut, honest, passionate, lean, shivering, startling, and graceful.' No pressure there. Let's begin with the startling part. Class of 2009: you are going to have to figure out what it means to be a human being on earth at a time when every living system is declining, and the rate of decline is accelerating. Kind of a mind-boggling situation... but not one peer-reviewed paper published in the last thirty years can refute that statement. Basically, civilization needs a new operating system, you are the programmers, and we need it within a few decades.

This planet came with a set of instructions, but we seem to have misplaced them. Important rules like don't poison the water, soil, or air, don't let the earth get overcrowded, and don't touch the thermostat have been broken. Buckminster Fuller said that spaceship earth was so ingeniously designed that no one has a clue that we are on one, flying through the universe at a million miles per hour, with no need for seatbelts, lots of room in coach, and really good food—but all that is changing.

There is invisible writing on the back of the diploma you will receive, and in case you didn't bring lemon juice to decode it, I can tell you what it says: You are Brilliant, and the Earth is Hiring. The earth couldn't afford to send recruiters or limos to your school. It sent you rain, sunsets, ripe cherries, night blooming jasmine, and that unbelievably cute person you are dating. Take the hint. And here's the deal: Forget that this task of planet-saving is not possible in the time required. Don't be put off by people who know what is not possible. Do what needs to be done, and check to see if it was impossible only after you are done.

When asked if I am pessimistic or optimistic about the future, my answer is always the same: If you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren't pessimistic, you don't understand the data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren't optimistic, you haven't got a pulse.

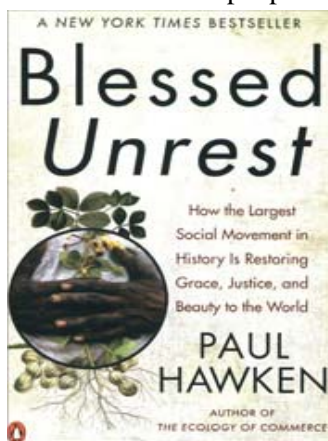
What I see everywhere in the world are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world. The poet Adrienne Rich wrote, 'So much has been destroyed I have cast my lot with those who, age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.' There could be no better description. Humanity is coalescing. It is reconstituting the world, and the action is taking place in schoolrooms, farms, jungles, villages, campuses, companies, refugee camps, deserts, fisheries, and slums. It is made up of teachers, children, peasants, business people, rapper, organic farmers, nuns, artists, government workers, fisherfolk, engineers, students, incorrigible writers, weeping Muslims, concerned mothers, poets, doctors without

borders, grieving Christians, street musicians, the President of the United States of America and, as the writer David James Duncan would say, the Creator, the One who loves us all in such a huge way. And they are working on the most salient issues of our day: climate change, poverty, deforestation, peace, water, hunger, conservation, human rights, and more. This, the largest movement the world has ever seen seeks connection, rather than control, the dispersal of power rather than dominance. There is a rabbinical teaching that says if the world is ending and the Messiah arrives, first plant a tree, and then see if the story is true. Inspiration is not garnered from the litanies of what may befall us; it resides in humanity's willingness to restore, redress, reform, rebuild, recover, re-imagine, and reconsider. 'One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began, though the voices around you kept shouting their bad advice,' is Mary Oliver's description of moving away from the profane toward a deep sense of connectedness to the living world.

Millions of people are working on behalf of strangers, even if the evening news is usually about the death of strangers. This kindness of strangers has religious, even mythic origins, and very specific eighteenth-century roots. Abolitionists were the first people to create a national and global movement to defend the rights of those they did not know. Until that time, no group had filed a grievance except on behalf of itself. The grounders of this movement were largely unknown and their goal was ridiculous on the face of it: at that time three out of four people in the world were enslaved. Enslaving each other was what human beings had done for ages. The abolitionist movement was greeted with incredulity.

Conservative spokesmen ridiculed the abolitionists as liberals, progressives, dogooders, meddlers, and activists. They were told they would ruin the economy and drive England into poverty. But for the first time in history a group of people organised themselves to help people they would never know, from whom they would never receive direct or indirect benefit. And today tens of millions of people do this every day. It is called the world of non-profits, civil society, schools, social entrepreneurship, non-governmental organisations, and companies who place social and environmental justice at the top of their list of goals. The scope and scale of this effort is unparalleled in history.

The living world is not 'out there' somewhere, but in your heart. What do we know about life? Life itself creates the conditions that are conducive to life. I can think of no better motto for a future economy. We have tens of thousands of



abandoned homes without people and tens of thousands of abandoned people without homes. We have failed bankers advising failed regulators on how to save failed assets. We are the only species on the planet without full employment. Brilliant. We have an economy that tells us that it is cheaper to destroy earth in real time rather than renew, restore, and sustain it. You can print money to bail out a bank but you can't print life to bail out a planet.

At present we are stealing the future, selling it in the present, and calling it gross domestic product. We can just as easily have an economy that is based on healing the future instead of stealing it. We can either create assets for the future or take the assets of the future. One is called restoration and the other exploitation. And whenever we exploit the earth we exploit people and cause untold suffering. Working for the earth is not a way to get rich, it is a way to be rich. The total cellular activity in one human body is staggering: one septillion actions at any one moment, a one with twenty-four zeros after it. In a millisecond, our body has undergone ten times more processes than there are stars in the universe, which is exactly what Charles Darwin foretold when he said science would discover that each living creature was a 'little universe, formed of a host of self-propagating organisms, inconceivably minute and as numerous as the stars of heaven.'

So I have two questions for you all: First, can you feel your body? Stop for a moment. Feel your body. One septillion activities going on simultaneously, and your body does this so well you are free to ignore it, and wonder instead when this speech will end. You can feel it. It is called life. This is who you are. Second question: who is in charge of your body? Who is managing those molecules? Life is creating the conditions that are conducive to life inside you, just as in all of nature. Our innate nature is to create the conditions that are conducive to life. What I want you to imagine is that collectively humanity is evincing a deep innate wisdom in coming together to heal the wounds and insults of the past.

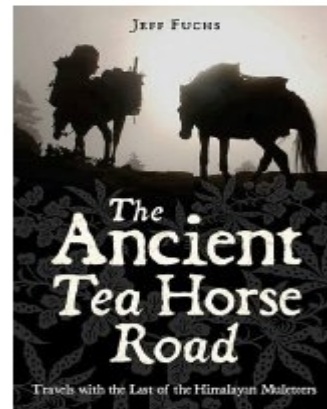
Ralph Waldo Emerson once asked what we would do if the stars only came out once every thousand years. No one would sleep that night, of course. The world would create new religions overnight. We would be ecstatic, delirious, made rapturous by the glory of God. Instead, the stars come out every night and we watch television. This extraordinary time when we are globally aware of each other and the multiple dangers that threaten civilization has never happened, not in a thousand years, not in ten thousand years. Each of us is as complex and beautiful as all the stars in the universe. We have done great things and we have gone way off course in terms of honouring creation. You are graduating to the most amazing, stupefying challenge ever bequeathed to any generation. The generations before you failed. They didn't stay up all night. They got distracted and lost sight of the fact that life is a miracle every moment of your existence. Nature beckons you to be on her side. You couldn't ask for a better boss. The most unrealistic person in the world is the cynic, not the dreamer. Hope only makes sense when it doesn't make sense to be hopeful. This is your century. Take it and run as if your life

depends on it.

Paul Hawken, entrepreneur, environmental activist, is the author of many books, most recently Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming.

So what are you reading, eh?

Having just returned from a journey through some rugged terrain on Canadian soil, the western and northern coasts of Newfoundland, I have a deep appreciation for those who live and work in such places. Our family met some local folks who are third and fourth generations Newfoundlanders, with experiences of their own



and stories from their forebears, those who eked out a living in the face of some great challenges and harsh conditions. This journey east in Canada leaves me yearning to go further east to another place of unparalleled beauty and danger. In his book, *The Ancient Tea Horse Road*, Jeff Fuchs tells of his time in the countries connected to the Himalayas. In previous visits to the region, he heard tales of 'lados,' those men of the mountains who both led and bore the burdens of caravans making the hazardous trek across more than 2000 miles of the most beautiful and terrifying terrain on the planet. He walked that road, met some of the surviving lados, and tells their tale. So vivid is the picture he paints, I found myself desperate both for a glimpse into the rugged beauty of the place and a cup of hot Puer tea. I will read this book again. I heartily recommend it to you

-bob paterson-watt



**Baptist Peace Fellowship
of North America**

The Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America gathers, equips, and mobilizes Baptists to build a culture of peace rooted in justice. We labour with a wonderful array of peacemakers to change the world.

July 20-25, 2009

Weber State University, Ogden, Utah, USA
When There Is Justice, Then Peace Will Come

Peace Camp Report Card

The twenty-fourth annual gathering and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the organisation was held in July. Here's my report card on Peace Camp.

Location: Grade C- This year's summer conference was held in Ogden, Utah about 45 minutes outside of Sault Lake City. Not only is



Ogden a fair drive from Sault Lake, it is also a fair airplane ride from London, Ontario. And despite the fact that Londoners who didn't have much of a summer to speak of should welcome a bit of heat, well, it was hot...stinking hot. Heat, when combined with high altitude does not make for an easy walk in the park... or from the dorms. It also leads to head colds which a few of us easterners found out. But, Ogden is much closer for our western sisters and brothers, who often have to travel east far more than I have to travel west. And the scenery is 'breathtakingly' beautiful, regardless of altitude. And, the Weber State campus where we met (while itself quite arid) was air-conditioned and a great place to hold a conference.



Worship Grade: A+

Speakers were top grade, but you can't go wrong with the likes of Ken & Nancy Sehested, Daniel & Estela Schweissing, April Baker, Paul Dekar and Rita Nakashima

Brock. If you don't know any of these names, you need to do an internet search on them. They

are learned, wonderful communicators of the Word. To be in their presence and hear their wisdom cannot be described in a few words. Look them up.

Workshops/Education Grade: B+ Workshops were very good. They would have been great (in my humble opinion) if they'd been a little less US-centric. There was a great workshop where Canada's perspective (along with others) was highlighted on being multilateral. Afternoons included various options such as Non-violence Training with Janet Chisholm and Kat Malinsky, short films, sacred dance with Angela Yarber, and recreation options for all ages.

Music Grade: A+ Greg Ledbetter coordinated evening worship with Kate Campbell and Darrell Adams leading music. For those of you who know Kate and Darrell, it was a blessing to have them back. Angela Yarber's artistic talents of painting and dance added creative expression to the speakers' words.

Fellowship: Grade: B As usual, the gathering of the blessed community—those times of friendship, conversation, and fun—were wonderful. The grade is not A+ only because so

many of you were missing. If you go almost every year or if you've never been before... I missed you... we missed you. There is always room at the table. Regardless of how full, we always notice those who are gone.



CanCon: Grade:

C- Canadian Content was not overwhelming to say the least. With less than 10 Canadians in attendance it is pretty difficult to get too much attention in this regard. Ken Sehested began his sermon (first night) with CanCon. Paul

Dekar inserted CanCon into almost everything he did. Overall, we can do better.

Final Comments: Was this year's summer conference the best ever? I hesitate to say yes; there have been a lot of great ones. It WAS one of the best. Next Year is the 25th Anniversary and it's promising to be super. It's also closer: July

12-17 in Keuka Park, New York. Tony and Peggy Campolo, Maung Maung Yin, Kim and Reggie Harris and Canada's own Pat Dutcher-Walls are already in the line-up. Who cares how hot it will be?

**A place at the table:
Reflections of a free lunch gadabout**

By Daphne L. Hunt

The fragrance of fried onions, barbequed ribs and apple pie wafts its way out a window and onto the street.

On the door of the church a small sign says 'free community lunch', but there is not much else around except a trickle of people going into the building to indicate that a robust meal is being prepared and people are gathering to dine together. Inside, large pots of soup, bowls of salad, trays of dinner rolls and small dishes of fruit are brought out and placed on the long table at the end of the room. Those who have arrived have their favourite tables. Several folk at the far end wave enthusiastically to me to come where they have saved me a seat.

'They're giving out yoghurt and cereal today after lunch,' says one of my companions. 'And bread, too,' says another.

While waiting for a couple of others in our small group to arrive, we exchange greetings and catch up on who has had work and news of the day. The others arrive and conversation is filled with talk of the food to come, some teasing about my vegetarian preferences, politics, economics and silly stories that send the group into gales of laughter.

This is a fairly genteel crowd at the community lunches hosted by churches and a synagogue in the inner suburban east end of Toronto. Other churches in the inner city, I am told, serve groups of folk who have experienced a much rougher existence and scuffles are not uncommon between diners, many struggling with addictions of one sort or another.

A volunteer at one of the lunches tells me that she has been helping prepare these weekly lunches for 10 years and she is tired. She has seen the number of people who desperately need these free lunches increase and the conditions that create the need for the lunches have not improved.

The intent of the community lunches is to be inclusive and so, some who are financially comfortable find a sense of belonging and enjoy the social time along with those in abject need who partake of the goodness. Sometimes that intent gets clouded in the minds of those who are frustrated by lack of progress on eradicating poverty and a few judgemental looks are cast upon those in the line-up for food who don't appear to need it.

At Woodbine Heights Baptist Church (WHBC) – with funding from KAIROS, a national ecumenical social justice group – Shoelace Collective was formed in 2007. The collective brought together volunteers and clients of the food bank held at the church, people of WHBC and the local neighbourhood. The collective wanted to go beyond food banks and help those struggling with poverty and low incomes. In 2008, Shoelace Collective began PLOT (People Lunching On Tuesday) a weekly free community lunch in partnership with Daily Bread Food Bank.

Venturing out to other community lunches was a result of conversations I had about Shoelace Collective with some folk who joined us at PLOT and who attended the other lunches. Why not explore what the other churches are doing and see if we can get new ideas? Perhaps there is something we can share with them that will be useful. One of my companions said I should publish a Michelin-like guide to all the free lunches in the city.

A half hour's brisk walk north of The Beach, PLOT is a newcomer barely two years old. The Salvation Army has its own sources for food and its lunch began at the same time. The rest rely on Daily Bread Food Bank, local grocery stores and bakeries. Some may come from farmer's markets in the city and sometimes there is sharing between.

It has been nearly three years since I had the 'ideal' job downtown. I felt distant from folk who need some kind of assistance to make ends meet and was only reminded of their existence when I saw people sleeping on subway grates and begging between office towers. When my position in the company was eliminated, I became one of 'them' participating in a precarious existence with no sense of income security. I have yet to become a client of the food bank, though. As others do who help, I get occasional leftovers from the food bank when I volunteer and there is abundance at the

community lunches. This allows me to spend the money I have on other food essentials that I would otherwise forego. My feelings vacillate between the recognition of need for assistance



and the persistent sense of disqualification because I seem to have so much more than others. It is a deeper need for social interaction that keeps me coming back to both sides of the table at these lunches. On Tuesdays, I get my co-operative fix from working with others to prepare and serve a tasty meal for the community. On other days, I join my lunch buddies in sumptuous repasts and we regale one another with our ideas, jokes, stories, news and sometimes share heartfelt pain.

There are times I wonder how I will feel if I get a job that takes me out of this nurturing milieu. I would miss the camaraderie. I would miss 'them' because I am 'them'. If this is Tuesday, it must be PLOT. I know where the dishes and utensils belong in the kitchen. The call of a positive cash flow in the form of full-time or even part-time employment could end it all. For now, we have our favourite tables and I feel welcome at all of them.



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In Front of The Text

By looking at contemporary readers we can think about how we might read and interpret responsibly amidst multiple voices. I have selected three contemporary writers from varied locations so we can listen as different voices interpret Scripture.

Cyris Moon, a Korean scholar, wrote a contextual liberation theology in *A Korean Minjung Theology—An Old Testament Perspective*. Moon interweaves the Old Testament story with the reality of oppressed and alienated people, the 'minjung.' He draws a parallel between the emergence of Israel in Canaan and events in Korea when the country was divided into wealthy, powerful groups struggling against the masses of minjung: widows, labourers and refugees. Moon proposes that the ancient Hebrews and the 20th century minjung are alike in awakening to their collective power and becoming more aware of their rightful place in society.

Cheryl Exum, a North American scholar, in *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* recognizes that the Bible was written in a patriarchal society and inevitably served the interests of the dominant male worldview. She argues that we can re-imagine

women's stories from the submerged strains of their voices in men's stories. Exum demonstrates ways to read texts so that women characters reclaim their own stories through speech and action, bringing women out from the background and diminishing patriarchal control. For contemporary women, she says, this approach will help shape positive gender roles and expectations in society.

In the Global Bible Commentary, Dora Mbuwayesango reads the book of Joshua from her context of Zimbabwe, whose inhabitants experienced brutal dispossession of their land during colonization by white settlers—a disturbing parallel to Israel's conquest of the land in Joshua. She questions whether the church can be a voice for justice today without critiquing the injustice, violence and exclusion depicted in the Joshua, where divine sanction is given to exterminating indigenous people. Mbuwayesango suggests that we should interpret Joshua as a warning against constructing our Christian identity in a similarly violent and exclusivist fashion.

These readings represent only a tiny sample of interpreters from all over the world. No longer is biblical interpretation what it was 50 years ago—a task for European and North American white educated males. Why should we take account of this diversity of reading contexts and biblical interpretations in our own reading of the Bible?

First: Christian regard for our neighbours. We must listen because these global interpreters are, in many instances, our Christian brothers and sisters. In past centuries, our missionary efforts carried the gift of Christianity and wonderful medical and educational resources around the world. However, this too often came wrapped unwittingly in cultural assimilation and served the purposes of economic exploitation. Our global friends have suffered under international economic and political systems that we have benefited from. How can we not listen?

Second: the Bible. Deuteronomy deliberately expands the covenant community beyond land owning adult males, which would have been its culturally prescribed limits. Rather, by consistent appeal to remember that they were once slaves in the Egyptian empire, the Israelite community is extended to include those whom empires treat as expendable. The inclusion of those who once had no place—widows, orphans and resident aliens—fundamentally changed the nature of that community to encompass the perspectives, needs and rights of these 'outsiders'. What happens if we take that radical inclusion as our analogy for our interpretive community today?

Finally: Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God. God is the creator of all that is, including our existence itself, so all reality is firstly and finally defined by God. This makes all human creation limited—all human claims, ideas, knowledge and comprehension are only ever partial understandings of reality. This attitude suggests that everyone lives with a humility that allows us to be open to the other, to other understandings of what our faith means, to dialogue, and to discovery of new insights about

Scripture from those who read in different contexts and thus read differently.

So how shall we read? Here are some principles that help Biblical interpretation today.

1. When reading the Bible, it is important to understand our social location and principles of interpretation. Every reader's own social location, where they stand in social structures, their interests and assumptions, and their reading approaches shape how they read the Bible.
2. When reading the Bible, it is important to recognize the variety of voices within the Bible itself. We read well when we respect complexity and differences which reflect varied faith expressions and theologies that were preserved through the process of writing and re-interpretation that formed the Bible.
3. When reading the Bible, it is important to be aware that its original dominant cultural context submerged the voices of marginalized people. We read well when we use strategies that help us imaginatively reconstruct the world of the Bible and find submerged voices and new perspectives in texts.
4. When reading the Bible, it is important to recognize the variety of voices within biblical interpretation today. We read well when we take seriously the varied contexts and perspectives of interpreters around the world, especially the voices of marginalized interpreters in who might wrongly be submerged below dominant voices.
5. When reading the Bible, it is important to remember that we read in and among communities of interpretation. Among globally diverse communities, we engage in biblical study, ecumenical dialogue, the willingness to re-think ideas, and interaction with those who hold very different interpretations.

Amid distinctive contexts and multiple readings of the Bible, we have a responsibility and opportunity for the practice of passionate and compassionate discussion. As informed and faithful readers of God's living Word, we need to listen well to our global neighbours. In this way, we read to respect dialogue, find richness in texts, and create interdependence with other readers. It makes a world of difference!

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News, Opinion, Book and Movie Reviews, Sermons, Litanies, Prayers; *And more: Contributions of all sorts welcome.*

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