

# The bible on postmodern surfaces

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## Postmodernity, eScapeCoated

Postmodernity is slowly becoming the new beast at whose feet people lay the blame for whatever ideas and behaviors make them

nervous. It has been shoved into places usually reserved for the mischievous (woman) temptress that must be domesticated, the wild and flippant (queer) orientations that must be set straight, and the reckless (satanic) tendencies to confuse values and boundaries that must be tamed. People defy postmodernity because they feel that it does not exhibit and sustain *faith* or have respect for *order*. They resist postmodernity as if it's *Enemy #1* to the principles of faith and order, which presuppose certainty, harmony and fixity.

Postmodernity, the specter behind 'postmodernism' (see distinction made below), is the new scapegoat for whatever exposes and agitates people's insecurities. Some of my colleagues and friends in Australia accuse me as being too postmodern whenever, for instance, I challenge Christian or cultural traditions. Previously, in their eyes, I was just silly! But now I am postmodern (for the same reasons). They, however, do not realize that being different and critical do not necessarily make one postmodern. I might still be silly, but that does not mean that I am therefore postmodern. I think on the other hand that the onslaughts of the Enlightenment era (or modernity) and its scientific modes of thinking are more controversial against cultures and traditions, and matters of faith and order, which do not always stand on the kind of evidences and reasoning that modern minds prefer, than postmodernity.

This is *not* an attempt to present an authoritative version of, as if it is 'a bible' on, what postmodernity is, may be, should have been, and/or is becoming. **Stop reading if that is your desire.**

Faith and order in a post-modern world  
On being Christian together  
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This paper does not address the [dis]connections between modernity and post-modernity, which theorists that are more capable have done (see e.g. Docherty, Hassan, Jameson, Norris, and Waugh). Rather, this paper aims to demystify postmodernity and to ponder how we may still appreciate the bible (differently) in our postmodern world (see also Adam 2006). The paper circles around the bible primarily because it has much to do with what it means to be Christian. The bible is one of the points of intersection for many Christians, a site of contact which signifies Christian unity. I circle around the bible also because it contains multiple voices and it is open to a diversity of responses, so it is a lighthouse that points to the harbor of diversity in unity and unity in diversity.

This paper attempts to show and tell, in form and content, that postmodernity is not as scary or as spooky as (pious) people fear it to be. I hope that this paper may help relax the dis-ease toward the place of other teachings and doctrines in the work of faith and of order at various spheres of the Christian life.

Seeking to unspook is not the same as trying to tame (I do not think postmodernity can be tamed). The **spooks that haunt** are the ones that concern me here, rather than the spooks that enable postmodernity to roll.

## **Postmodernity, Unspooked**

Postmodernity is like a rip current that pulls swimmers away from shallow shores. A rip current is formed when waves break unevenly, usually with the ends breaking first then the waves fold inward then gush back out to sea at the middle creating a ripping pull that is much stronger than the power of the waves that came from the deep. The rip current is scary for swimmers who try to swim against it, for it is like swimming upstream against the strong whitewaters of a narrow but deep river, and it can be deadly (those swimmers can drown). But it can also be “deadly” in the sense Indigenous Australians use it (i.e., fun, cool, awesome, etc.). The best way to enjoy the rip current is to ride it out to sea, feel

for a place where one can swim away from the pull of the current (by swimming outward to the left or to the right of the rip), then circle around the current and back to shore. As the sea gets deeper, the rip current weakens and one can easily swim away and around it.

Comparing postmodernity to a rip current allows me, at the risk of oversimplification, to imagine two currents (or pulls) in postmodernity, one scary and the other can be fun. There are more than two currents, of course, but these two suffice for this paper. I am referring to, first, the destabilizing effect of postmodernity, the current that rips and pulls one into the deep, away from the safety of the shallow shore, and second, the playful aspect of postmodernity, the current that one can ride into the deep where it sinks thus releasing one to swim away. The rip of postmodernity whirls one into, at once, pain and pleasure, danger and enjoyment, fear and tranquility, disempowerment and freedom, and so forth, the kind of experience that Julia Kristeva calls *jouissance* (cf. *Monro*: 15, 109ff.). Together, they are “deadly.” Allow me to address the two currents in turn.

I turn first to the scary current. Postmodernity haunts people who imagine that it shakes the foundations of order and disturbs structures of meaning and faith (cf. *Downing* 2006: 16-18). This perception often dismays the unsteady and misguides the skeptic. I hold on the other hand that postmodernity does not smash belief systems or raze structures and havens of meaning. It does not, to use an island image, pull the mats from under us. Rather, postmodernity shows that the mats on which we sit were woven with



many strands and they are already frayed. The strands are supposed to hold each other into place but every time that the mats are moved, rolled out or put away, and every time that people walk or sit on them, the furry surfaces of the strands are

flattened and smoothened out, so that the strands can easily slip out of place and thus the mats continually unravel. Along this line, postmodernity calls attention to the fraying



composition of our mats but it does not pull the strands apart or push people away from those mats. Postmodernity exposes the flux as well as the woven- and constructed-ness of our mats (our ‘security blankets’), the places where we sit and stand, and

challenges us to come to terms with the wavering stability of our placements. Put simply, postmodernity reminds us that we occupy both real and ideological spaces that continually unravel (crumple and disintegrate) and thus, so to speak, we need to find meanings in the fray.

The first framed image I ever owned was a cheap postcard that shows a globe which was open at the bottom, with all sorts of things falling out at the bottom to form a trash heap below. The image is Michel Granger’s *la grande décharge* (the great dump, 1977).



A friend once said that the frame was worth more than the postcard, and in response I explained that the frame was very cheap! For me, that cheap postcard deserved to be framed because it matched how I (a struggling Third World student at that time) saw the world: the world was unraveling, falling apart, in pieces. I arrived at that opinion even before I heard of

postmodernity and it might be one of the reasons why postmodernity appealed to me, namely, because it also saw how “the world” was unraveling, falling apart.

In *Shrek 3*, Shrek tries to discourage Fiona from having a baby because ... *babies do nothing but poo!* Had Shrek seen *la grande décharge*, he might have related babies to the world.

Postmodernity is not preaching something new. In the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition, for instance, realizing that the world is falling apart goes back to the two creation stories. In the first story, after each day's creative activities, God sees and the narrator announces that the things called into existence that day were "good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Then on day six, God judged that everything called into existence were "very good" (Gen 1:31) before resting up on day seven. The world was intact and in a "good" state. Everything was according to plan, and the creating God was satisfied.

The second (garden) story, on the other hand, starts with God noticing two lacks in the creation: God had not sent rain and there was no man to till the soil (Gen 2:5). The world was not as good as God saw it in the first story (so Fewell). And in trying to make up for these lacks, especially the second one (God saw that the man created to till the soil needed a helper, suggesting that the man was not properly endowed for the task for which he was created), that the world began to unravel. In trying to plug up what were missing, more lacks were exposed and it feels as if, as in the postcard, the world was open at the bottom and its contents are falling off. In this regard, the garden story was not about the lost of paradise or the fall of humanity but how the creative acts of God also unraveled the creation. In other words, the world was falling apart even before the talking serpent revealed the truth about the forbidden fruits, that they will enable one to know "good and bad" (which is a divine characteristic; cf. Gen 2:15-17, 3:1-5).

The world falls apart in a different sense at the beginning of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. This Hindu text contains a conversation just before the battle at Krukshetra between Prince Arjuna and his charioteer and guide Krishna, who in the course of the story turns out to be a divine being (*Bhagavan*). The battle lines have been drawn, the conchshells of war

blown, vibrating in the sky and on the earth, and the parties are ready to fight. At that moment, Arjuna asked Krishna to draw his chariot between the armies so that he can see who is fighting whom. What he saw melted his courage: “There Arjuna could see, within the midst of the armies of both parties, his fathers, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, friends, and also his fathers-in-law and well-wishers” (1:26). He can not gather the spirit needed to fight his friends, relatives and teachers: “I do not see how any good can come from killing my own kinsmen in this battle, nor can I, my dear Krishna, desire any subsequent victory, kingdom, or happiness” (1:31). At that very moment, on the spot, Arjuna’s world[view] falls apart. He became confused about his duty (2:7), and the rest of the conversation contains Krishna’s instructions about *dharma* (duty and harmony).

Both of these religious texts predated postmodernism and my cheap postcard. But they coincide in the awareness that “the world” is not as constant, secure and meaningful as we often assume (hope) it to be. The *Bible* and the *Gītā* say more about the world and other things, but this awareness is one of their points of intersection with postmodernism. Such awareness echoes the elusive concept of *Shunyata* (emptiness or zero-ness) in Mahayana Buddhism, which suggests that everything is in flux, constantly becoming and collapsing, and void of essential substance or self, because everything is interdependent. This Buddhist perspective also predated postmodernism!

I draw a distinction between postmodernity and postmodernism. I stated above that the *Bible* and the *Gītā* predated postmodernism, but I imagine also that the kind of energy characteristic of postmodernity, which pulls postmodernism, ticked in the pulse of ancient societies also. Postmodernism is the *ism* that lays claim to the spirit of

postmodernity, an *ism* that can be located in time as the culture that superseded modernism (around the 1960s according to Fredric Jameson and the mid-1970s according to Steven Connor; cf. Connor 1997: 5-6). The spirit of postmodernity here echoes what Lyotard refers to as the ‘postmodern condition,’ which he characterizes as incredulity toward totalizing metanarratives or grand narratives, which assume some form of transcendent and universal truth (cf.

**I must confess:** I see postmodernity in the pulse of ancient texts and religious cultures because I resist the divide between pre-modern, modern and post-modern, which implies that the pre-modern (including natives of the South Seas) were simple and unsophisticated.

Lyotard 1997: xxiv-xxv). Postmodernism gives expression to postmodernity, but postmodernity is not limited to postmodernism. Can postmodernity be limited to a place and time, or to anything at all? This seems impossible given that the pull of postmodernity, evident in postmodern theories, has “the desire to project and to produce that which cannot be pinned down or mastered by representation or conceptual thought, the desire which has been identified by Jean-François Lyotard as the pull towards the sublime” (Connor 1997:17).

Since, as I imagine, the pull of postmodernity was present in ancient texts and in religious cultures, so it is not totally new or irreligious, then there is no reason to fear it. Postmodernity is present almost everywhere. Lift a text or a tradition, whether ancient or recent, and turn over a story or a memory, and one finds the pull of postmodernity in play. To fight the pull of postmodernity might pull one under. One would be better off by riding it out before circling around and relocating oneself, possibly at another place. This is the other current of postmodernity that I wish to briefly address, the opportunity to be playful that postmodernity creates.

By reiterating the volatility of “the world,” postmodernity raises the anchors of the powers-that-be, setting those adrift and opening up a space for the rafts of marginalized, exploited and displaced subjects. The decentering arm of postmodernity also raises a flag for the politics of difference and otherness. This current of postmodernity is liberating, and I will briefly turn to three of its codependent ripples -- story, identity and diaspora -- and how they may impact the way we read the bible.

<b>Story</b>	<b>Identity</b>	<b>Diaspora</b>
<p>In kindling incredulity toward metanarratives, acknowledging that no narrative controls over all other narratives, Lyotard opens a window for people to hear local narratives. Incredulity to grand narratives is invitation for (other and) multiple stories, including stories that come from <i>la grande décharge</i>.</p> <p>Unfortunately, we in the (Western?) churches dread this postmodern challenge as if it is seeking after the rejection of Christian narratives and so, in response, we give up, withdraw from, our storytelling functions.</p> <p>When did Christian narratives become metanarratives (cf. Adam 2006: 9, 62)? and for whom? Are we exaggerating the place of Christian narratives in a world where Christianity is not the dominant religion? Though governments with military power and rigorous warfare tactics come</p>	<p>In promoting heterogeneity, which seeks to embrace subjects who have traditionally been marginalized, especially with respect to race, gender and class (so hooks, Levinas, Eagleton), the postmodern critique of identity is liberating. This <i>turn to the Other</i> has taken root, and bore many fruits, in many lands and circles.</p> <p>The decentering of dominant mastering subjects needs to go together with the sensitizing and empowering of displaced and outcast subjects (so Kristeva, Freire, Gutierrez). But things do not always happen this way.</p> <p>Sometimes the decentering process takes place in order to install another master from inside the same circles of sovereignty, who ends up extending the empire of his predecessors. The boundaries of control are not broken, and the cultures of domination grow.</p>	<p>Awareness of limits, margins and acts of marginalization draws attention to space and placement. Where one is, ones context, plays a part in conditioning who one is, and how one thinks and operates (cf. Adamo, Patte). Things are interesting for the postmodern subject because s/he spreads over several places (a hybrid) at once. Recently, many governments legalize dual citizenship, as if one can occupy and have ‘home’ in two countries at the same time.</p> <p>We need to reconsider what ‘home’ (and citizenship) means in our postmodern age. Home is no longer just about land and space.</p> <p>As people spread throughout the world, away from their homelands, and as technology brings people from distant lands closer together, home is no longer the place where one lives. A Fijian might have grown up in Seattle and now lives at Rhode</p>

<p>from predominantly Christian countries, Christianity is not (was never?) the ‘grand’ religion. And why do we imagine that Christian narratives are the (only) metanarratives that postmodernity challenges?</p> <p>Given that we are Christians, we see our narratives as grand. They are for us, and we are many; but they are not for everyone, and they are many more.</p> <p>Postmodernity creates a space where Christian narratives can be in conversation with narratives that are grand for other people, both people from other faiths and people from outside the dominant Christian cultures. Postmodernity does not problematize engaging in such conversations. In a way, my musings above illustrate how this is one way to take on the storytelling function.</p> <p>Once we calm down from stressing over the postmodern incredulity to metanarratives, and face the illusion that Christian narratives are metanarratives, we should consider reclaiming the storytelling function. If we don’t, we leave storytelling in the hands of the media and the gazes of the moviemakers.</p> <p>Reclaiming storytelling is one way of refusing to let go of our narratives. They may not be <i>the</i></p>	<p>Sometimes decentered subjects can’t shed the scales of the master cultures, both the language and the models of domination, thus they become shadows and puppets of their masters. With respect to race, for instance, those subjects are “whiter than white people” and, with respect to gender, they are “manlier than man,” and so forth.</p> <p>The postmodern critique of identity is not just about paying lip service to our heterogeneous makeup, but it calls for resistance against homogenizing tendencies (e.g., essentialism) and for the reconstruction of identities (of both the Other and the decentered master-subjects). It affirms the agency of the Other and embraces our fraying mass consciousness and woven mass cultures.</p> <p>The postmodern reconstructed identity has a crosscultural face, a face that belongs across ethnic and cultural (e.g., gender, age, sexual orientation and so forth) divides. The reconstructed postmodern identity is multiple and varied (see also Fowl); e.g., there are multiple Pacific Island identities, and there are variations within each island group.</p> <p>The postmodern reconstruction of identity can help us see, e.g., how the ‘people of the land’ is</p>	<p>Island, partner to an Italian from across the border with Canada, but ‘home’ for her is somewhere on the shores of Fiji. Home is not where she is, but where she draws her identity. Home is more than space; it is also about the harbors of ones security and identity.</p> <p>I make a simple point here but others might misunderstand, so I reiterate -- a Fijian living in the US is not in diaspora (to say that she <i>lives in diaspora</i> is to keep her in perpetual displacement), rather, her <i>home is in diaspora</i>. Likewise, a European in India, or an African-American returning to Ghana, will long for home, which will not be at where they are. The location of identity, their home, is not at where they are; they are strangers where they live.</p> <p>What is (or makes something) home for a postmodern subject? What in a place, idea, event, and so forth, make those homely for a postmodern subject? In light of the foregoing, whatever it is must be elusive. <i>Home is elusive</i>. At the same time, <i>home is illusive</i> (in the Freudian sense), that which is not present but for which one longs and thirsts.</p> <p>Context conditions identity, and so does home (in the form of family, food, customs, clothes, tradition and so on). Context is</p>
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<p>metanarratives, but they are chief strands of our mats. To continue to tell them is to not let them slide out of sight. They will now and then slip out of place, but we should not let them fall off our mats.</p> <p>The bible contains many strands that await retelling, and weaving with other narratives.</p> <p>...</p>	<p>varied and multiple. From Genesis on, 'people of the land' refers to groups of non-Israelites (Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, and so forth). But when we get to Ezra, it also refers to Jews left at home, not taken in the exile.</p> <p>The critique and reconstruction of identity open up our narratives for (mass) varied conscious retelling and crosscultural interweaving.</p> <p>...</p>	<p>present; home is transcendent, across "the river," yonder. One of the ways of making this elusive home present is through recalling memories and stories.</p> <p>Alas, I am back to the task of storytelling and "the bible on postmodern surfaces." The bible is a home for Christians, but it is a home that is also in diaspora. (Those who imagine that they can master the bible bear the cuts and scars of essentialism.)</p> <p>...</p>
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The foregoing imagines postmodernity to be bestowing opportunities upon us to reclaim our storytelling roles, to affirm differences and variations when we reconstruct identities, and to account for the ways in which context and home (which is in diaspora) condition who we are. Postmodernity oozes with liberating and reconstructive energies, more so than threatening waves of destruction.

### Postmodernity reFramed, bible rePositioned

Turn Michel Granger's *la grande décharge* over and we have a world that is not falling apart but rather, a world that is filling up. Postmodernity may turn the world as we know



it upside down, but that is an opportunity to reconstruct the world.

My software allows me to rotate the image over, in order to illustrate what I have in mind, and in so doing I see that the world is filling up with rejected junk. That is an appropriate image for this paper, for it embodies and gives expression to the hope for the return of the repressed (Freud, Lacan),



abject (Kristeva) and the sublime (Lyotard). We may end up

reconstructing the world with rejected materials, and with repressed subjects, but this does not mean that we will end up with the same world. Since we will reorganize (differently) the previously “dumped” materials, we will therefore end up with a different world. A reordered world is a different world.

I unpacked my understanding of postmodernity around the bible and the task of reading the bible (see also Adam 2000), which are, figuratively speaking, strands woven into the Christian mat. Though I limit myself to the bible and the task of reading, others may extend the opportunities that postmodernity bestows to other strands, such as the various understandings of (Trinitarian) God and humanity, of tradition and order, of rituals and sacraments, or of how those may intersect, and so forth.

I focus on the bible also because it appears to have weathered the rip currents of postmodernity. The bible contains multiple stories, none of which we should read as a grand narrative. We should on the other hand read the stories in creative tension, like the way the persons of the trinity relate to one another. This is a healthy challenge against the tendency on the one hand to see the bible as a metanarrative, and on the other hand to use one biblical narrative (e.g., John’s understanding of Jesus) to control the meanings of all other [biblical] narratives. There can’t be a biblical center, or a canon within the canon. As the three persons of the trinity are diverse yet united, different but the same, so are the biblical narratives. All of the biblical narratives should therefore get an opportunity (under the direction and leniency of readers) to talk with and listen to each other, as well as to interact with narratives from beyond the covers of the bible, in written and oral forms, ancient and more recent. At the urgings of postmodernism, we can no longer keep the bible separate from the sea of stories that flow through public channels. And we in churches should not sit back and leave the task of telling [our] stories to Pixar, Disney, Paramount, and others.

The task of storytelling is subjective, and it forms subjects. Storytelling is opportunity for many to become subjects, both the ones who tell and the ones who listen, for they in time would hopefully tell more people, so storytelling constructs identity (of both the tellers and the listeners) and empowers the rippling of the circles of storytelling. Among the indigenous people of Australia, for instance, to participate in storytelling is a chance to share the traditions that form their identities (who they are, from where they come, and

to where they are heading) and to swim in their sea of stories. The challenge for indigenous Australians is not about finding a story to tell, but about feeling that one has received permission to tell a story. Permission here is not about sanction, as if some people are prohibited from participating in storytelling events. Rather, this permission has to do with feeling that the story one wants to tell belongs in the circle of stories in the place where one is (esp. when one is away from home). The currents of postmodernity can be formative in this aspect. For in resisting metanarratives and homogeneity, the storytelling circle should be permissive for many, including Aborigines.

Though the Hebrew Bible~Old Testament, for instance, privileges the Judean story and the Israelite identity, those of us from outside those cultures do not necessarily need to adopt those. We may choose to do so, and that is our choice. But we need to remember that we are adopting a story that our ancestors did not construct. We are making the home (story) of another as our home (story). We must therefore be responsible for the story (home) of another people, and for our foreignness to their story, their home. Some of us, on the other hand, may privilege stories from outside of the bible, and we should bear the postmodern incredulity toward metanarratives in mind. Privileging non-biblical stories is not sacrilegious, for in doing so we participate in a biblical (read: canonical) process, insofar as the stories in the bible were not biblical from their beginning. Moreover, the Judean story incorporates elements from outside the experiences and cultures of their ancestors (cf. Cross), so the privileging of stories and ideas from outside the covers of the bible is something done in the bible itself. These are further evidences of the spirit of postmodernity operating in the bible.

In repositioning the bible on the currents of postmodernity, we encourage the bible to cross its literary and cultural boundaries, and to engage other narratives. Postmodernity gifts readers and storytellers with the opportunity to weave biblical narratives with other narratives. In other words, in repositioning the bible on the currents of postmodernity we return it to its 'home' and we remind ourselves that the bible is not a (or, our) mat, but a strand in our mat (woven with multiple stories).

## Bible reSurfaced, at home

I suggested above that the bible is home for many Christians; Christians however do not share the same understanding of what transforms something into a ‘home’ or appreciate their homes in the same way. The home to which I am referring here is the one I imagine to be in diaspora (see above). This home is whatever anchors ones sense of security and identity. This home might be a place, which has become home because of a custom and/or a memory, and/or a story, and/or a song, and/or a teaching, and so forth. Without the latter, that place is just a space, a site, rather than a home. A space is home because it is loaded.

**I must confess**, one other thing: As a migrant worker, it might appear paradoxical that I imagine that I am not in diaspora, but rather, for me, my home is in diaspora. I am not in diaspora because I am in a place of comfort. But my home is in diapura because it is not where I am.

Home is loaded! A space is home also because it is welcoming. It does not imprison, but draws one to its limits, giving one security and the opportunity to feel that one belongs.

Saying that home is in diaspora is a paradox; ‘home’ gives the impression of comfort and security, certainty and availability, but locating it in diaspora suggests that this home is also removed and transcendent. This home is comforting and not present, so one cannot own and control it, as if it is divine!

This is the kind of home to which the Hebrew Bible leads readers, especially those who read it as a story that extends from *Genesis* to *2 Chronicles* (rather than from *Genesis* to *Malachi* as in the Christian Old Testament). The Hebrew Bible presents readers with a story that interweaves many stories, starting with creation events and a garden episode and ending with curses and expulsion, followed with a story of sibling rivalry, murder and the marking of the murderer for endless wandering. The story picks up with the proliferation of human iniquity and the floods of God’s punishment, from which God saves one family with many animals in an ark. The deluge and the constructed ark seems to invite humans to build a high tower (in case God breaks the covenant sealed with a rainbow), and God responds to this construction by coming to confuse languages and to disperse the people further. Expulsion from home and dispersion of humans are two of the strands that hold these stories together. There are other strands, of course, but I privilege these two in this retelling.

Abram and his sons, and their sons and grandsons, servants and daughters, wives and handmaids, with many animals, move back and forth between the land that God promised

them, a land that already belonged to other ‘people of the land’, and other lands (a popular one was Egypt). The land of promise was not always fertile and abundant, and the story of the patriarchs circles around famine and departure from their home (a space that became home because God promised it, but the same space was home for others).

Except for Benjamin, all of Jacob’s children were born outside of the land that God promised to the patriarchs, their places of birth were outside Canaan, thus problematizing claims to belong to the land of the Canaanites.

From Egypt Moses led the populous Israel back to the land of the Canaanites, and the Israelites had to fight, kill (and some of their people were killed) and grab both land and wealth, thereby fulfilling God’s promise. The majority of the people that left Egypt died on the way, in the lands of other peoples (that is to say that Israel did not exodus through an empty wilderness), under the eyes and arms of their God. Descendants of the people that came out of Egypt, upon their arrival, divided the land of the Canaanites among themselves, some choosing to accept their portion across the Jordan but others preferred to stay in Transjordan, and consequently they dispersed throughout the land. Dispersion continues, even in the land that God promised. In this land, Israel falls into and out of favor with their God, who graciously and patiently sent judges to deliver the chosen people.

After the kingship was established, ongoing internal and international tensions and unrest caused further dispersions of the people. The house of David overtakes the throne of Saul, and two generations later the empire divides into northern and southern kingdoms, with centers in Samaria and Jerusalem. Israel (in the north) turns away from the house of David (in Jerusalem), and the unity of the descendants of Abraham falls apart. Foreign nations later arrive to take control over them, Assyria taking over in the north and Babylonia in the south. Dispersion thus continues, with some people running back to Egypt, and neighbors standing aloof while foreign invaders tear down the walls of the capital cities.

My retelling is selective, and it follows a plot that leads into exile, where the people long and lament for ‘home’ with songs, questions and stories. This umbrella story ends in *2 Chronicles* with the people in exile, poised to return home. It is a story of dispersion, of longing for a home that is not at the place where people are. There are places in the story where readers get the impression that the people have returned from exile and started to

rebuild their homes, but the overall flow of the narrative is from creation to exile, with 'home' not fully owned or captured.

The Christian Scriptures in its received form also points toward departure for a home that is beyond reach, as if it is in diaspora. The New Testament starts with four versions of the Jesus event, ending with the resurrected Christ ascending to a home that is yonder, leaving the followers with the expectation of his return. The second coming however does not happen right away, but delays even up to the end of the New Testament in *Revelation*, which looks toward the consummation of time and the ultimate end of suffering. Reading the bible as a whole brings to mind the story of Odysseus who, in Homer's *Odyssey*, arrived back to Ithaca after journeying for ten years since the end of the Trojan War and he had to compete for his wife Penelope. He won his wife back, and found out that she was faithful during the long time he was away, but then he had to face a test Penelope designed to find out if he is really her husband. Odysseus' homecoming was a return to a place that was no longer home to him. The story ends with Odysseus setting off again, as if he is destined not to be at home. For him too, home is not at where he is; home is in diaspora.

How different are the foregoing stories from those of refugees who have come within the borders of your country? They live among you, but 'home' for them is not where they are, and that is no fault of yours. You might be most hospitable, but there is something about belonging that is mysterious.

There are four strands in the foregoing that we should interweave in order that they can hold each other in place. First, is the affirmation that the bible is home for Christians. Second, is the awareness that the bible contains stories about peoples whose homes are in diaspora. Third, is the recognition that we cannot lay claim to, as if we can own and thus control, that which is in diaspora, beyond our reach. And fourth, is the realization that the bible is one strand in the mat of our faith and our perception of order. The bible is loaded and divine, and is open for interweaving with other narratives, other strands, other homes. It is through interweaving (which serves as a metaphor for storytelling here) that we can bring the bible closer to where we are, so that the bible can surface among us, as a home that is at hand.

This paper circles around the bible and the *jouissance* in the task of reading the bible in a postmodern world, waving a flag for storytelling as a way of assuring that our narratives do not slip out of sight. In response to the postmodern celebration of otherness, difference and heterogeneity, storytelling encourages the interweaving of our narratives with those of other peoples. In this regard, storytelling can be a tool for upholding unity in faithful diversity. Moreover, storytelling is a helpful way of making present that which is not within reach, the home that is in diaspora.

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Since storytelling is not free of biases, there is always a threat that a storyteller will harmonize and sanitize the story by removing multiple and alternative meanings. The readings I present above illustrate how storytelling can resuscitate multiple meanings, thus affirming that diversity of meanings can coexist in the same text.

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## **Abstract**

This paper emerges from of my wrestling with a simple question: What is the place of the bible in the postmodern world? I face this question at the confluence of three postmodern currents: skepticism toward metanarratives, call to embrace heterogeneity, and drive to make sense of the displacement of, and our distancing from, sites of meaning and identity. I argue that the bible has a place in the postmodern world (even if critics cannot agree on what it means) and call for storytelling as a way of facing the currents of postmodernity. Storytelling is one way of assuring that our narratives do not slip out of sight, and an effective way to interweave our narratives with those of others. Storytelling can therefore enable us to maintain Christian unity in faithful diversity.