

# Training In Mission Programme Newsletter

Issue 3

July 15, 2017

## Ubuntu – The “Humanity” In Everyone

TIM Programme 2017

*“We were all humans until  
race disconnected us,  
religion separated us, politics  
divided us, and wealth  
classified us.”*

– Pravinee Hurbungs

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Attending Church on Bau Island in Fiji

### Critiquing Context

There are many topics that we learned in New Zealand but this is one I particularly want to talk about. The reason for this is because this paper talks about New Zealand in both the past and the present and so I will try to compare it with my own country also in the past and the present. During Class I used this book with the title *Vaka'uta, N. "Delusions of Empire." An unpublished paper delivered at the Global Forum on Discernment and Radical Engagements (DARE), Bangkok, Thailand, May 29-June 2, 2017.*

I found this a very interesting article because it gave me some good ideas about my own country. We all know our land and our people freely living in a particular way, but when the colonial powers come too took over everything. They changed the people and created a new sort of life for them. I would like to share what I learned about this topic during the time in New Zealand. While reading the article I tried to look at what has happened to my country and to compare this with the problem New Zealand has experienced in the past and the present. The last point that I learn in during the course Critiquing Context, is about how my people and New Zealand people have become free and independent.

I really appreciate the TIM programme because I am aware that most of the people in the world don't know about my country, and this programme gives my country exposure. This programme has been helpful in allowing me to gain more understanding about the Bible and about God. Most importantly, I have learned to take our problem and to find God within our problems. Our teachers teach us to go deeper to find the presence of God in our situations. That is why God is within us and God is near us through our work and also in our study. God is everything and everywhere, and creation and the world and us as humanity are part of Him, and He is part of us. **Article by Tetoaiti Tapui**

# The Traditional Church – Is it stifling Christianity...

***Being a Christian pluralist means daring to encounter people of very different faiths, traditions, and defining my faith not by its borders but by its roots.***

***– Diana Eck***

## **Theological Reflection**

During our last month in New Zealand, we had a class about Transgressing Church. In the class, we talked about what the church was facing and discussed the issues about Church that concerned us. I remember the video we watched which was a lecture by Marcus Borg about the topic of Religious Pluralism. In the video, the discussion reflected on the wide range of religions and the role that the religion plays in helping us to better understand our own culture. The video also highlights the different ideas of religion such as: religion is the structure of mankind, religion is the structure of human imagination, and religion seen as the sacraments of the sacred. It is shared that modern churches need a pluralistic understanding of religion, not just in their own Christian limits, because many people recognize other religious cultures which allow them to better understand Christianity.

## **Transgressing Church**

In my church, we do not have a good understanding of other religions and faiths. We believe that the Bible is completely authoritative and solemn, and that there are many regulations and norms to be careful of and to observe. However, this makes our vision too narrow, and we will only recognize the surface of the problem rather than in-depth, because for the solemnity of traditional Christianity. The Church limits our ability to see and recognize God's deeper creation, so we are unable to gather the courage to think critically about the Bible and the creation of God in deeper and more meaningful way.

Our church lacks the courage to challenge the traditional views of the Bible as a sacred and holy book as we fail to offer grace to our church members and those of different faiths and religions. I think the majority of Christians still think that their faith or religion is higher or superior to other religions. This is relevant to the people who are led by the church who share “limited” teachings; they don't want us to know too much about Christianity, they want us to continue to be confused and ignorant. According, to the video about Religious Pluralism by Marcus Borg, Religious Pluralism helps to enrich our understanding of Christianity and what it means to be a Christian.

## **Religious Pluralism**

Firstly, I think the church needs to start to teach a broader vision, that is inclusive of different cultures and promotes an understanding of other religions. We should develop a deeper understanding of every faith and culture and try not to push other people away because of their religion or culture. As we hold onto our beliefs, we encourage Christians to learn about other religions and learn how people see God from their own cultural traditions, beliefs, and perspective. We should no longer use marketing and force to make people aware of God and bring it into their lives!

The church could begin by taking small steps to engage Christianity's relationship with other religions to be strengthened by attending public events that promote or teach about other world-known faiths. Another small but significant step is teaching religious pluralism in Sunday school, so children do not become fearful of other faith communities. Creating a better relationship between Christianity and other religions can offer exchanges between other faiths like visiting temples, synagogues, or mosques to learn about Islam, Jewish, Buddhist faiths. Even more so, I think when we break the frame of the past and learn to understand different cultures, we will begin to understand more about God and God's creation.

**Article by: Chou Song Ying**

# Injustices in The Bible

## Que[e]ring Scriptures

During our last weeks in New Zealand we learnt about **Que[e]ring scriptures**. **Que[e]ring scripture** is to query the scriptures in order to retrieve the silent and lost voices in the Bible and to read against the grain of empire from the perspectives of the decolonized and the marginalized. Also, it involved interrogating the ways in which God is portrayed in the scriptures and to question the misrepresentations of God that validate the oppression of those in the margins of religions and society.

## The “so-called” Call of Abram

Now when I talk about trying to retrieve the silent and lost voices I reflect on the scriptures **Genesis 12:1-9**, where we learnt about the “so-called” call of Abram from God to leave his country and his father’s home and go to the land the Lord promised for him and his family. He took his wife Sarai, Lot his nephew and all the slaves they had acquired in Harem and started out for Canaan. The part of the story that intrigued me is verse 6-7 which states clearly that when Abram and his people arrived in Canaan, the Canaanites were still in the land as indigenous people.

**However, the Bible legitimatizes the entry of Abram in the land and depicts it as a blessing...**

Now reading from a colonial perspective, the Bible allowed colonization and slavery (slaves from Harem) from Abram to take place. Canaan had already belonged to the people and yet, the Bible remains on the side of the colonizer (Abram). Many churches today have focused only on singing praises about Abram getting the land of Canaan as a blessing from God and encourage people to have faith like Abram so they will be blessed like him. Supporting this story, supports colonization.

Similar to the story of Abram and the Canaanites, the missionaries who came to Africa and Zambia were inclusive in the efforts to colonize us and steal our wealth in the name of the Bible and God.

Unfortunately, no one talks about or focuses on the Canaanites in this story, they are the silent and lost voices, and the marginalized people we need to retrieve as we read and question the Bible. By bringing their voices to the surface of the text we are encouraged to read the Bible in a different way. This story of Abram depicts a group or community of people that lived in the “*pre-monarchic*” time. If the story is set within this time then the land did not belong to anyone but to God. One can argue that, this reasoning could be why Abram was “so-called” given the land by God, which would not be seen as colonization in any way.

## Looking for the Silent Voices

Secondly, we looked in the book of **2 Kings 5:1-19**, as we learnt about que[e]ring and retrieving the silent and lost voices of the marginalized. The story speaks about Naaman’s cure (the Syrian army commander) however, when discussing the story, we rarely talk about the young girl (servant/slave) who helped Naaman to be cured. We tend to focus on the “showing off” of the power of the prophet Elijah who healed Naaman. No one talks to the servant girl or even frees her from slavery for her kindness. When que[e]ring scripture these are the marginalized voices we need to fight for. After learning about this way of interpreting scriptures we were given assessments to challenge how we can accomplish this when we read the Bible.

**Article by: Wellingtone Bwalya**

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# Reading the Bible - A Marxist Interpretation

## A Marxist Interpretation

During my stay in New Zealand, I learnt a new way of understanding the Bible and God. I studied how to use Marxism as a critical tool to overcome an idealist interpretation of the bible. The writer, Jose Miguez-Bonino explains the biblical idealist imprisonment using Marxism. In the paper, he offers questions and tries to initiate discussion. Miguez-Bonino made a new attempt to explain the Bible. This paper provided a reminder of the stereotypes and misconceptions of Christians, and made them question themselves.

However, only a tiny theory of Marxism was used as a tool for criticism. The proportion of the descriptions Miguez-Bonino uses in his paper are not well understood and the contrastive descriptions from existing theories are not well organized. Although the overall purpose and contents of the whole article were good, it did not use Marxism properly. Miguez-Bonino urges the reader to question the Bible and encourages them to take a new perspective and transform our minds. The reason for using Marxism was to challenge the reader by providing a new interpretation using social science theories, which seems to be irrelevant with theology.

## Theological Approach to Socialism

Since the Korean War, anti-communism has been rampant in society. If anyone pursued something that relates to communism, it was seen as an opposition force against the government. However, this is not the case in Korea today as the animosity against communism has now been resolved. As I was who majored in political diplomacy, I was intrigued by how the writer used Marxism to read the bible and since we have such a close relationship with communism I wanted to read this paper. I feel sorry that unfortunate society does not distinguish between Marxism and communism. Therefore, it is impossible to find a theological approach to utilizing socialism or taking advantage of social science theories in

Korean theology. It's a challenge using social-science theories in theology, but it's very important to break this bias, offer new ideas, and explore new fields. Though it has failed politically, it was necessary to understand and utilize the core of the Marxist heart, sympathy with social poverty and the courage and reason to change society. The church should not neglect the pain of society, discard the stupidity of being complacent, and share with people and history. We should continue to advance and change. The Church will disappear in history if it does not pursue further questioning and development.

## Time for Change

Progressive and changing life starts with having questions, but the Korean church denies this life theory. When we study bible in church, we are not allowed to have any suspicion, presupposition or question the bible. The writer keeps insisting that its crucial to ask about the ideological presuppositions and functions. We don't need to be afraid to question the bible. Ideological suspicion is a critical tool for interpretation. If we stop criticizing the bible, we become complacent. When we become complacent, we don't realize what's going on in wrong reality like the Holocaust which took place during WW2. The church needs to recognize change and advance with it because if the church doesn't it will die out.

Article by: Eunsoo Oh

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# Reading Islandly – Biblical Understandings

## Bible Study Tips!

Bible study challenges our faith and helps us to grow spiritually. It is not enough for us to hear Bible stories as we grew up, we know have to challenge what we have learned. We study, we learn, and provide knowledge about our understanding about biblical texts. Bible study is one of the significant parts of the Training in Mission Program (TIM) in Fiji. We start each morning (from 9am – 10am) with a Bible study done by one of the participants. Studying the bible here in Fiji is quite different than the way we did it in New Zealand.

The Bible is difficult to study, not only the words but its difficult to connect and relate it to our context and personal understanding. Nevertheless, we developed different techniques or ways of understanding scripture while reading the Bible. First, we learned not to get overwhelmed by exploring each passage for the deep meaning while reading the text for the first time Bible. Secondly, we learned to familiarize ourselves with the author's writing style, and question the main character's presence in the story, and the general message or purpose of the passage.

For a quick understanding of a Bible passage, it helps to read with a journalistic view using 5Ws: Who are the characters of the story? Where are they? *What* are they doing? *Why* are they doing it? What is the purpose of the story?

It's important to keep in mind that *studying* is different from *reading*. When you study something, you deeply invest your time and attention in what the subject or practice. A text like the Bible will deeply reward that investment, you'll learn more about ancient history and cultures, you'll be exposed to challenging moral and philosophical concepts, and most importantly, you'll come to understand more about the perspectives of God and Christianity. So, I encourage you to stop reading the Bible, but to truly start studying it to gain more understanding about the Christian faith.

**Article by: Felauai Opetai**

## Understanding the Bible through an Island Lens

While in New Zealand I did a critical analysis of the chapter "*Reading Islandly*" from the book '*Voices from The Margins*'. This chapter fascinated me because I come from an island (the Cayman Islands) and never realized that we bring a specific perspective when reading the Bible or any kind of literary work. "*Reading Islandly*" by Jione Havea sheds light on an "island interpretation" of the Bible and island cultures. The article gives insight into reading through an island lens; specifically, a Pacific and Caribbean lens. The essay "*Reading Islandly*" uncovers many truths behind the island context in regard to way of life (significance of ocean and land), postcolonial thinking, and communication methods.

Within the context, focus is given specifically to the ocean, land, and borders. Interesting insight is given to the role the ocean plays in the life of islanders. "*The moana (ocean), the huge watery space we call Oceania, is a shared home for islanders. It is a home that none of us owned; we belong to it...the moana largely defines our identity...the moana links islands together*". Havea shares a different perception of "*Moana*" (ocean), allowing us to see the ocean as a force that connects islands, an element or place where islanders find belonging, and as a vast force that no one aims to claim (like the ways of colonization). Havea raises the observation that many see the ocean as destructive, and further clarifies this universal fear when he highlights Day 2 of the creation story in Genesis 2 where God divides the ocean from the sky, "*Day 2 is the only day of the creation story when God did not say that what happened was good...*" Why was it not mentioned? Many see as the ocean as a destructive force. Did this verse cause that?

More importantly, Havea gives a voice to islanders and gives insightful justification to how "*Reading Islandly*" helps people to understand the ignored issues that the Pacific faces such as the impacts of postcolonialism and climate change. Nevertheless, he provides an effective framework of contextual interpretation through the eyes of the island context and an understanding of how different components effect the way islanders read the Bible, relate to others, God and life.

**Article by: Renita Barnes**

# Bau Island – A Rare Gem of Fiji

## A Weekend on Bau Island

Life on Bau Island revolves around church, the village, the flowers, food gardens, beautiful palm trees, watermelons, coconut water, blue sky, and fresh air. While this may sound insular, you'd be hard-pressed to find a more open and welcoming population like this in society today. I was privileged to have the opportunity to be part of this amazing community for a weekend (July 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup>) along with the other TIM 2017 participants and be among these happy and beautiful people. Coming from Europe, I first thought that Bau Island was poor and lacked the basic advancements (electricity, running water etc.) as I didn't see any hospital nearby. Immediately realized how westernized my perception was and how wrong I was for thinking that the Bau village didn't have everything required for a community to function.



friends and immerse themselves in the Fijian culture. What makes Bau so unique isn't the must-see sights or the experiences of drinking Kava or playing in the water but it's the people!



## What Big Cities Lack

Though the realities of local life are less exciting than the big city and there was a sense of unity that cannot be found today in big cities. Bau Island was more communal than individualistic. Everyone shares everything: soap, clothes, food, to even mobile phones. Even the children in Bau Island understand that everyone is united as one family and that sharing is caring! It was amazing to see this love and connection even through the way the children interact with each other. Now I know what makes Fijians famous and so loved by people who visit their islands because they truly welcome you to their home...and they mean it. Their hospitality and warmth makes it easy for visitors to make.

Where I walked on the island whether it was by the beach or passing the village houses I was always greeted by a genuine smile. The same can be said for Suva (city in Fiji) as I walk through the cities, college camps, and nearby parks not a moment goes by without someone greeting me with a genuine smile, or greeting me by saying "Bula". I get goosebumps as I recall the traditional and beautiful songs from our welcome and farewell; even though we were just visiting for three days, it felt like of a big family reunion. I wish that most countries could keep their cultures alive like Bau Island because doing so is what truly makes Fiji unique.

**Article by: Agnes N.**

# Culture & Theology

## God – Householder of the Earth

In the Bible, there are two primary affirmations:

The first is that God is the source of life. The two creation stories in Genesis 1 & 2 emphasize this as God is the one who creates life. Hence, any system that kills or creates death is a rejection of God as it is the opposite of life. The second affirmation is that God is the God of “*oikos*”, meaning household and thus it refers to God as being the householder of the Earth. Since God is our householder, we are all God’s children and part of God’s family.

The term “*oikos*” is also a root word in economics along with the word “*nemein*”. When both words are joined together it becomes the word “*oikonomia*”, which means management household. In households, the number one priority is life and to sustain it. For example, parents feed their children so that they can sustain their life as well as take care of them when they are sick. Overall, the functions of the economy should be to give and sustain life. However, as we see today the opposite is happening as we have changed this basic function of the economy to a new function, which is the accumulation of wealth and capital by any means necessary. The world today has taught us that the accumulation of wealth means power, therefore, whoever owns the most capital has the most power in the world.

## The Loss of Ubuntu

Globalization is not necessarily bad, and according to many economists it is actually a natural process that has been happening for years through war and ancient trade and religious expansion. In recent times globalization has allowed us to advance technologically and stay connected with people from around the world. Unfortunately, due to greed, the global economy has lost its sense of “*Ubuntu*” or its human-ness and in turn globalization has also lost its sense of Ubuntu. Globalization has gone from being about sharing what other countries have and improving the lives of the people (a symbol of life), to being about money and the fast accumulation of it (a symbol of death). The change in the global economics because of globalization has made big corporations and people rich by exploiting the poor and the environment. These big corporations have

exploited both the people and the land through indentured labour and free trade. Many factories all over the world exploit their workers by giving them low wages with very long hour shifts and force them to work in terrible conditions. This is known as sweatshops and according to Karl Marx it’s the: “*forced appropriation of the underpaid labour of workers*”. However, many large companies like Nike and Samsung deny the exploitation of workers as they have rules and regulations in place. The problem is that even though these rules are in place, many factories do not follow them because they need to keep up with the production targets or orders for that day.

## The Influence of the World Trade Organization

One of the reasons why Globalization is part of our society today is the support from big corporations like the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO has influenced governments to deregulate trade and create free trade. By allowing the WTO’s influence, governments have lost their control over the trade market and have made these big organizations “untouchable” and above the laws of the country. The result of this has caused the increase in exploitation of workers who work in the large factories/farms and the exploitation of the environment.

Globalization is one of the factors that has created the society we have today and we cannot deny that. However, it has become so focused on the accumulation of wealth that it has also brought death through the exploitation of both creation and humanity. The questions today are, can we change this mindset from the love of money back to the love of people and the environment; back to a life-giving economy? Or, has greed become so ingrained in globalization and our society that there is no turning back? **Article by: Stuart Morrison**

**Can we change this mindset from the love of money back to the love of people and the environment; back to a life-giving economy?**

# Capitalism's Effect on Climate Change

## Capitalism's Effect on Climate Change

Capitalism, which is a surplus production system, where a person enslaves a fellow human and rapes the planet earth for private ownership profit, has created an imbalance within the earth's ecosystem. Global warming is happening because humans have exploited nature and taken more raw materials from the earth than what we really need.

During the monarchic period, humans had value and worth but now the only value is in wealth. People from pre-monarchic period did not produce any surplus yet they were still able to share what they had with others. For example, if we look at the bible before King David's period, we can see that the people did not own the land and lived together with no boundaries to divide them. Moreover, the nature of the earth and God's creations were not exploited and abused. Currently, we are producing more than what is necessary, yet hunger, poverty and inequality increase on a daily basis. The death rate of hunger and cancer are increasing every

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second. Scientists have predicted that we are fast approaching the 'Tipping Point'. Which is caused by the greenhouse. Just like with a pressure cooker, the heat from the sun is not reflecting back into outer space but has become trapped in the earth's atmosphere and this has increased the surface temperature of the Earth. The increase in temperature has started melting the ice-caps which in turn has caused the sea level to rise. The Beautiful but tiny island of Kiribati will be gone sooner or later because of this. Human creativity is not the cause of global warming and changes of climate but rather this anthropocentric mind-set that is the problem.

According to Naomi Kent, abolishing the current Free-trade system and re-localizing our economy by: reducing massive production, replantation for agriculture, shutting down dirty energy extraction projects, only using local products and stopping the surplus consumerism will sustain the current condition of the climate.

Therefore, Scientists, the media and industries have to work together. Current situations are too high for us to make most absolute changes. Though we cannot solve and omit all the past complications, we can find a way to neutralize by being free from the 'Market', sharing what we have and living like pre-monarchic people would be the best choice for the future generation.

**Article by: Van Lal Zawmi**



**Human creativity is not the cause of global warming and changes of climate but rather this anthropocentric mind-set that is the problem.**



# First Impressions



## My first experience in Fiji

Hello, I am Royden Campbell-Andries from Guyana. I am glad that I am finally able to join the other participants for the 2017 Training In Mission (TIM) programme. My first experience of Fiji was on the aero plane, looking through the window I was amazed! It was so beautiful. When the plane landed I was reminded of back home (Guyana) because the atmosphere was similar the coconut palms trees and the weather is very similar to my country; even some of the Fijian food is like the food in Guyana. When I arrived at The Pacific Theological College in Fiji, I was greeted by Mrs. Arieta Tirikula

she made me feel at home and told me that she will be my mother while I'm here in Fiji. So far, I have been enjoying my time in the programme especially with the warm welcome from my roommate Stuart Morrison and the rest of the 2017 TIM team. The lectures by professor M.P Joseph, are similar to what I experienced in University. I must thank him for opening mind and eyes to viewing the bible in a different way and understanding how the world really works in regard to Economics, Globalization, and Capitalism.

Article by: Royden Campbell-Andries

## Getting to Know the TIM Participants

### Van Lal Zawmi – Presbyterian Church of Myanmar



Minga Lar Bar, Hello. My name is Van Lal Zawmi from Myanmar. I was not able to find proper satisfaction in my life until I started working as a volunteer teacher for disabled students in Yangon. Those children do not blame others for their suffering, accept the reality and were able to smile from the bottom of their heart, which makes me realise that happiness is not from receiving but from sharing and giving. This experience leads me to the place I stand now. Outside appearance can be deceptive but God knows our heart!

### Wellingtone Bwalya – United Church of Zambia

Hello, my name is Wellingtone Bwalya from Zambia. A quote that truly inspires me is *"If it's good to be true, then it's true to be good"*. This is one of the many quotes that I believe in and hold on to for guidance through life and any challenges I face.

