

Globalizing Biblical Studies and the 21st Century

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Panelist:

Tat-siong Benny Liew (Presider), Laura Carlson Hasler, Chauncey Diego Francisco Handy, Johnathan Jodamus, Robert Myles, Philippa Townsend, and Sonia Kwok Wong.

Benny Tat-siong Liew: Welcome everyone to this webinar organized by the Society of Biblical Literature on Globalizing Biblical Studies and the 21st Century. My name is Tat-siong Benny Liew and I teach at the College of Holy Cross in Massachusetts, USA. Joining me today for this conversation are six scholars from different parts of the world, so let me take a brief moment to introduce them.

Laura Carlson Hasler is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Jewish studies at Indiana University, Bloomington, USA. Her research focuses on the relationship among space, place, imperialism, and texts in Second Temple Judaism. Her first book, *Archival Historiography in Jewish Antiquity*, came out last year.

Chauncey Diego Francisco Handy is a Chicano PhD candidate in Old Testament/Hebrew Bible at Princeton Theological seminary, USA. Prior to his PhD work, he received a Master of Divinity from Duke Divinity School and a MA in Bible from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel. He is ordained in the Presbyterian Church USA. His research focuses on ethnicity and the book of Deuteronomy and brings together theories of ethnicity, Latinx theories of identity, redaction criticism, and research in scribalism.

Johnathan Jodamus is Senior Lecturer of New Testament and Gender Studies in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa. His current research interests include Pauline studies, gender critical theory, identity theory, race theory, materialist feminisms, post-structuralism, socio-rhetorical interpretation, and issues related to mainstream epistemologies of gender and sexuality.

Robert Myles is Senior Lecturer in New Testament at Wollaston Theological College in Perth, Western Australia. He was previously lecturer in New Testament at Murdoch University, which is also located in Perth. Originally from Auckland, New Zealand, Dr. Myles completed his PhD at the University of Auckland looking at ideology of homelessness in the Gospel of Matthew. His research interests include ideological biblical criticism, historical Jesus studies, and Marxist exegesis.

Philippa Townsend's research focuses on the base of our kinship and ethnicity in early Christian texts. She did her undergraduate degree at Cambridge and a Master's at University College, London, both in Classics, before going to the states to pursue graduate work at Harvard and then Princeton where she got her PhD. She spent two years in Jerusalem on postdoctoral fellowships before returning to the States to teach in Ursinus College in Pennsylvania, USA. She is now Chancellor's Fellow in New Testament and Christian origins at the University of Edinburgh of the United Kingdom.

Sonia Kwok Wong is Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China. She received a PhD in Religion from Vanderbilt University. Her main methodology includes post-colonialism, psychoanalytic criticism, and call textual hermeneutics. Her essay, "Zelophehad's Daughters as Lienü (Exemplary Women): Reading Numbers 27:1-11 and 36:1-12 in the Discursive Context of Confucianism" is recently published in T&T Clark's Handbook of *Asian-American Biblical Hermeneutics*. Professor Wong has diverse interests, including swimming, scuba diving, hiking, singing, playing piano, and cooking.

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Thank you so much for being here today to help us think about globalizing biblical studies. I'm glad that we have all agreed to get rid of the formalities and address each other by first name so we can simply talk as colleagues and friends. As a way to begin our conversation, I wonder if some of you can share how you decided to pursue a PhD study in biblical studies in the first place. What attracted you to the discipline? What factors that you considered before deciding to do so? Can someone get us started?

Laura, I will begin with you.

Laura: Sure, happy to and hi everyone. Nice to meet you all. So I'll just jump in. So my own journey to the field... the wild world of biblical studies... was initially a parochial route in the sense that I went to divinity school first and then slightly redirected to biblical studies. And I turned to biblical studies because it occupied this intersection of literature and philology and religious thought, and it afforded me the opportunity to teach, which captured a particular blend of interest for me. And I should also say it may have been obvious from my bio, but I was trained and currently work in the United States, which is also where I'm from so that's the perspective that I'm bringing. As I was thinking about this question... I know that we often tell the story of how we get into this line of work, especially in the academy because of interest or desire or curiosity, but... and this conversation, especially, it might be worth aiming for, at least for me, the logistical and financial factors that allowed me to pursue this path. One of those for me was that my program offered a relatively livable graduate stipend, so that was a choice I was able to make. And part of the reason I decided to stay in the United States was that I imagined this may have been incorrect – it was very based on very anecdotal evidence- but I imagined it would be less costly for me financially, logistically, maybe even emotionally to stay home, broadly speaking, than to cross borders to study and work abroad. So that way of imagining things could be wrong, but I do think thinking about how logistics economics borders, real or imagined, might determine our paths in the academy is something that might be worth putting on the table, I think, in this conversation and I'd be interested to hear how you all kind of found those paths, because it sounds like there is a real diversity of experience here. So I'll leave it at that for me, but I'll be interested to hear how you all found your way to biblical studies as well.

Benny: Thank you. Jo?

Joe: Yeah. So, thanks, first of all Benny for this invitation and greetings to everyone. So my, my experiences were quite similarly... some overlaps with Laura, especially with regards to necessity when it comes to economics. But for me when I was growing up, I had absolutely no aspirations to be a teacher, or a researcher for that matter. In fact, I was quite uninspired by my teachers who, for some reason, didn't think that I was clever enough because I didn't have the requisite skills in math and the sciences that were actually the driving factors at the school that I attended. And so my interest lay out sweet. In fact, it was on the soccer field. And so I had aspirations to become a professional soccer player and some of my, my, my childhood friends actually went on to pursue those types of professional careers, especially soccer, even representing the national team. But my aspirations to become a soccer player was clearly stopped by my mother at the age of 15 when she said to me in Afrikaans, “en watter gemeenskap het die lig met die duisternis?” and so translated in English that means “What does the light have to do with the darkness?”. And so obviously my mom was quoting a biblical passage from II Corinthians 6:14, where Paul says, “Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. What fellowship does the light have to do with darkness?”. So I was really in a, in a conservative Christian home and in a traditional Pentecostal church, which taught that the Bible is the final model authority for all decisions. And so I dutifully obeyed my mother's wishes and gave up the pursuit for being a professional soccer player. And yet, I still believe that there had to be some way to engage critically with this ...to negotiate the sacred quality of, of biblical texts. And so the passage you read against the normative grain of believers found a good resting and a restless place for me

in my pursuit of a PhD. And I investigated constructions and representations of masculinities and femininities in one credential. And so almost two decades later, after my dreams to be a professional soccer player was dashed by my mom and implicitly by Paul, I find myself teaching in a university classroom, pierced, tattooed, hardly fitting the description of the quintessential professor of New Testament biblical studies. That's a lot of my journey.

Benny: Excellent. That's so interesting. I'm glad to hear that people have so many interests. Right? We know about Sonia's scuba diving. I was impressed by that too, but now we'll have a soccer player so that's excellent. Biblical scholars are multifaceted. We are not just one dimensional. So Sonia, what about you?

Sonia: Well, for me, like, my journey is like more or less an intellectual pursuit. So I grew up as a Christian. I was even baptized at the age of four. Having grown up as a question in colonial Hong Kong... post-colonial Hong Kong, it always puzzled me how the Bible has been used, immeasurably and irresolvable... irresolvably... some sort of like a colonial pool of texts and also, so, you know, for anti-colonial messages. And also it is used to confine women to place of, you know, domestic realm and limit our pursuit in public office... so put in a very disadvantaged position... and at the same time, feminists quoting the Bible in support of liberation of women. So it always fascinated me and how the Bible, the Scriptures, been used in my context. And in 2005, I started this theological journey and enrolled in the Master of Divinity program at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, where I am working right now. And I wanted to address all these questions, like how, you know, how come the Bible could be read in so many different ways. You know, by various interested parties, it could be used for the cause of social justice at the same time to maintain status quo or to legitimize social ills. And that was the initial quest. I want to look for the answer. So that was back in 2005. And I didn't really expect myself to become a biblical scholar at first place because biblical studies wasn't my first choice. My first choice was actually few theological studies. And. Okay. And. I'm embarrassed... a little embarrassed to say that the reason of choosing biblical studies wasn't that admirable. It was probably called for practical reason: if these are markets's demand. So I was told, if I become a biblical scholar, you know, it's, it's very likely that I'll be hired back home. If there was like, you know, like a surplus of theologians and a surplus of theological scholars, and so I, I made my choice. I went for my second choice rather than my first choice. And, you know, in retrospect, I'm actually glad that I chose biblical studies instead of theological studies. I think biblical studies gave me a wider scope. Not only that I'm, I'm not doing something just, you know, for my faith community. I think, you know, like it actually allowed me to look in popular cultures. And help me to understand, how we understand, you know, and, and just sort of like, make me realize who I am as a Christian, as Asian Christian and my position back home here and how I may contribute both to the society of Hong Kong and my faith community.

Benny: Thank you. Those financial considerations are real as Laura has alluded to as well. So...

Sonia: Yes.

Benny: Robert, what about you?

Robert: Yeah. Hi everyone. Thanks. Thanks Benny for the invitation. I have some similarities and differences from the other stories. I grew up in New Zealand, which is quite a secular country. I grew up in a non-religious family. The country has quite a large Christian minority that's been slowly evaporating over my lifetime. And I think as, as a teenager, religion more generally more broadly intrigued me quite a bit. I remember growing up particular events, like as a teenager, like the the September the 11th and those sorts of events and the connection with religion, but religion was mostly that I knew much about. But I was definitely interested in it. I wasn't a particularly academic student in high school, but I did go to University straight out of high school. I was studying philosophy. And then I took an elective class in

New Testament studies... Introduction to the New Testament, just kind of out of pure interest. And for want of better expression, I would say I just fell in love with the subject. It's kind of strange. And I've been, I've been unable to kind of leave it alone ever since. And it was just sort of basic nerdy things that I liked about it. Like, you know, the synoptic problem or just these little puzzles. And I guess a kind of a way of looking at the... the generation of these, of these texts that subsequently have had a really important significant history. But what we're, you know, in the kind of old school, historical critical questions, what, what were the, the kind of generating factors behind this, this literature... what were the original settings? It just really gripped me. So I subsequently enrolled in a theology degree. And I think kind of from that moment on, I was, I just was set doing anything to, to fall into a kind of academic career. Followed through, by enrolling in a PhD, which I also completed at the same university, University of Auckland. Again, to echo the previous speakers, I had considered other program moving overseas, but it just seemed practical to stay where I was. I got a pretty generous scholarship where I was. Yeah, all those, all those other kind of financial and social factors definitely come into play when making those sorts of decisions. So, you know, I mean, that's really it I think.

Benny: Okay, thank you. I want you to know that I also was a terrible high school student. Not even... not good, terrible, because I was playing soccer. Although, I know I've had the ambition to be a professional because I was just not good enough.

Philippa?

Philippa: Hi, everyone. Thanks so much for the invitation. It's great to meet you all and be part of this discussion. So in terms of my passage of biblical studies, I think like many people I have, I had a personal connection with Christianity. I was brought up in a Christian household, really conservative brand of Christianity. And I actually completely left the church as a teenager, partly because of precisely because I couldn't... wasn't comfortable with the way Christian texts were used to justify certain... especially attitudes to gender and things like that. And so I completely left the church...left Christianity. And I did classics as an undergraduate. And while I was studying classics, I, we had elective course on Christianity and Judaism and the Roman Empire. And it ... it was the first time that I'd really ...It really sort of hit me that these two worlds, this sort of personal world that I grew up with, this world of faith that I kind of left behind I thought, and then, you know, my academic interest in the study of the ancient world, you know, I realized, oh, it's the same thing. It's the same world. So I just was completely hooked in a way. I just thought I was fascinated by this. And the idea of, I suppose, going back to all those texts that I had that I had lived with as a young, as a young child and being brought up with, but with this different focus with this, with this academic approach, I just found that completely fascinating. So, I did a Master's after that in classics, but I was focusing more on... more and more on Christianity. And then, so then I decided to pursue PhD in biblical studies... well in religious... Religion, but yeah, focusing on Christianity. And the reason I decided to do it in the States was, I mean, there are a few different reasons. I'd always wanted to travel to live in different country. I had actually always wanted to do my undergraduate degree in the States. And it took me about, you know, as we were talking about the financial considerations... at that time it was... there was no tuition fees to do an undergraduate degree in the UK. And so the idea of going to the States... and having to pay you thousands of dollars was just impossible. So I didn't do it then, but then later on with the PhD with scholarships and so on, I felt this was an opportunity to do that. But it was really about also the people. I mean, US academic institutions have a huge prestige in the UK. And so that was very, you know, these were institutions I'd heard about scholars that I'd read their work. You know, I love the idea of working with some of these people so all those things attracted me to going to the States and do my PhD there. But also more practically, in the States, you have two years of coursework before you start writing your thesis, whereas in the UK, it goes straight into writing, writing a thesis. And as

somebody who hadn't really had much biblical studies background, because I had come from classics that I thought that that would be useful for me to have that training. So that was another practical consideration too. So, yeah, it's, it's very much it's about, as Laura said about interest intellectual interest, but also about these practical and financial considerations too.

Benny: Thank you so much. So you got your PhD from Princeton, so let's go to another Princeton person, Chauncey.

Chauncey: All right. Thanks again for the invitation. Really pleased to be here and it's been really wonderful to listen to everyone's story. I mean, there's some similarities and differences. You know, I like a lot of you grew up in a Christian community, but I grew up in the Pacific Northwest in probably one of the most liberal parts of the United States. So the town Bellingham, Washington is a very crunchy, so to speak, town and I fit in, in that regard, except that I was also religious. So I went to a pretty progressive Lutheran church growing up, and nobody had ever really told me very much about the Bible, they just used it. And so then I was, I was given the opportunity in some ways to develop a certain sense of curiosity. People are like, oh, what's this the word of God? And I was like, well, what does that mean? But then, you know, as, as you may have, might've... you might imagine, church people quickly grow skeptical of too much curiosity. But being a very stubborn person and willful child, I kind of kept going with those questions. And then by the time I got to undergrad, I was a Latin American studies and Spanish major in undergrad. And seeing the ways that the Bible was imposed colonially on Latin America by the Spaniards was very interesting and intersected with a lot of identity questions for myself as a Chicano. And I was like, okay, well, how does this all fit together? And then my senior year of university, I had kind of reversed senior-itis when I took my first biblical studies courses. I was in the library until it closed reading books. And I was like, what is going on? I might eat the library. Why am I here? And I just couldn't stop. And so then I was like, well, I'll, I'll need to go to the next logical step for me. I had no real idea that there were kind of secular programs that dealt with biblical courses. And so I went to Duke Divinity School and in the process realized that languages are a thing that drive me. I think they're fascinating and fun. And the more languages I got to work with, the happier I became, which was odd. You know, it's, it's a weird thing to admit to that kind of madness and you're like studying Hebrew paradigms for hours and you're like, this is great. But when I was taking biblical Hebrew for the first time I realized I had this really fantastic instructor, who was able to fold in a lot of... he was, he was Jewish and he could fold in a lot of rabbinic interpretation and kind of modern context, the State of Israel and Modern Hebrew and these sorts of things. And I suddenly realized that the texts that I had been living with for my whole life had been used by Jewish folks for thousands of years and nobody had said anything to me about it. And I was really embarrassed, like deeply, deeply embarrassed to have discovered this so late. And I went and spoke with an a friend and mentor of mine at Duke, Ellen Davis, and she said, "well, if you're interested in that, you'll need to go move to Israel and get your Hebrew better." And I said, "Move to Israel?" And she said, "Yes, Chauncey, this is the rest of your life we're speaking about. It's important to get it right." And so I started, you know, looking for ways to do what she suggested and I ended up moving to Jerusalem and I got a master's degree at the Hebrew University. And, you know, to be totally honest, I, at that point it was like, there was a lot of, I think I want to get a PhD in this, this seems like a logical step, I have more questions. And I really didn't think as much as maybe I should have in certain ways about the financial ramifications of living and studying in Israel for two years. Jerusalem is very expensive and not as fun as other expensive places, in my experience anyway. And so, you know, when I, when I was there, it was, it was this odd experience of taking archeology classes while tear gas was being fired into Palestinian slums down the hill, and really reframed a lot of, you know, being exposed to discourses of settler uses of the biblical text. And, and realizing that used in a way like, like Sonia and others of you have, have suggested, you know, so using these kind of modern

colonial contexts. And it was... it drove me to try and do more, realizing that there there's space to de-weaponize these texts and that that's unimportant and necessary thing for people to do and I, I felt that I could help in some way do that. And so when I applied to my PhD work, It was... these are, these are a lot of the concerns that I had... a lot of the identity questions about. What does it mean to be Latino in the United States? What does it mean to think about myself as kind of a multi-racial person? And reading these texts, forming identity in any, in, in antiquity. And then seeing their modern implications. All of these things kind of pulled me deeper into the study of the Bible as an academic discipline. And along the way I got ordained to teach in Spanish and that, I think, for some people ordination renders a kind of an unforgivable bias in a certain sense, but at least for me, it opens doors to actually have a space where I could, for lack of a better word, deploy some of the things that I had been thinking about and working with in religious communities, who would then arguably shape kind of social realities in the United States and otherwise, So, I mean, that's, that's how it all came together for me. Although there are, there are days where I'm like, maybe I should have become a professional fly fishermen that would've been fun. But I don't think, I don't think I would have made it... the languages... I would have got bored without the, without the Hebrew.

Benny: Those are great stories. Thanks for sharing. Many of you talk about church background, but not all of you. That is obvious. We all come into this discipline in different ways and from different backgrounds. I wonder, do you experience any kind of resistance advice from friends and say, "Oh, don't do this. Don't pursue a degree in biblical studies. That's a dead-end." Did anybody experience that?

Chauncey: Certainly. Certainly. Family members... random people in my religious communities throughout my life, I mean, they were very resistant to the idea of academic study of the Bible. And the further in you get, the more uncomfortable they became in my experience. They just stopped asking now. They don't, they don't, they don't want to know for the most part, which I think is probably better for them.

Benny: Robert, since you did not come from a church background. Did you do any, any resistance or advice from family or friends?

Robert: Yeah. I don't think anybody in my immediate circle actually knew what I was doing. I'm not sure if they're still know what I do. I mean, I was also the first in my family to go to university... well, not to go to university, but to complete a university degree. I had family members who had gone and not, not completed. So to then go down the path of a PhD and an academic career, I mean, yeah, my extended family didn't even know what a PhD was so there was that hurdle and then what's this really obscure subject that you're studying. And I think I think definitely the kind of the religious associations of the, subject itself, is part of what fascinated me about it because it does skirt this borderline between being a kind of secular academic discipline, while, on the other hand, you know, being kind of handmaiden to the church. And I know there are you know, intense battles fought over that terrain, particularly within the SBL itself. And again, I find that fascinating. I think for me as well, I've kind of through my own career. The film myself in these different worlds as well. Initially studying at a secular university, but then as of most recently, ending up teaching in a theological college. And these are very different contexts in which to be, from my perspective, trying to be undertaking the same kind of work, but people suddenly have very different expectations of you, assumptions about what, what the subject is what it offers and so on.

Benny: Hmm. Yeah. Now, I'm going to ask you to remember this is a round table conversation, so jump in and I'm not going to call on you, right? But as I have listened to all of you and knowing a little bit about you, that I know some of you finished your doctoral work in a different country, or even a different continent from where you are now teaching. Others of you, your place of training and are teaching is in

the same context. What do you see are the advantages and disadvantages of these two rather different paths?

Philippa: Well, I mean, as somebody who did my PhD in a different continent, I would say I mean that there are huge... I, for me personally, I hugely enjoyed it and with the experience of being in a different culture, different institutions and got a huge amount out of it. But I think there are costs as well in terms of, you know, maintaining networks. If you move the number of times that for example, I have and others in academia have, you know, it's hard sometimes maintaining networks. Family relationship and friendships can suffer. That can be difficult. And one thing that I, I found is, you know, coming back to the UK after a long time in the States, and elsewhere, I don't really, I didn't really know how academic institutions worked in the UK because I did my undergraduate degree here, but when you're an undergraduate, you don't pay any attention to that kind of thing. And then coming back here, I realized there are such huge differences just in their structures, Things like funding structures and relationships between academic institutions and the government, things like that, that you really have to just learn from scratch. And I think anyone moving between countries like that would, would face that kind of issue. So there's been a couple of things.

Chauncey: Yeah, I mean, Sorry... Laura, you go ahead. I didn't mean to cut you off.

Laura: Are you sure? Oh, sorry.

Laura: No, I was just gonna, I was gonna, sorry. I was gonna say just because Philippa, you named the network issue and you, it sounds like you have a little bit of a different experience than I have where I've just stayed in a single country, kind of all throughout. But I would actually name as I was thinking about this question, I was also thinking about the network problem that also that contributes to kind of in my situation. I will say that well, one of my colleagues, just to put a plug in for Indiana University, one of my colleagues there Imhoff recently wrote an article, I think in *Feminist Studies in Religion*, talking about the problem of manthologies, that is an edited volume with only male identified contributors, as a network problem that stems out of people's grad school, kind of somewhat insular grad school and early kind of professional networks, who they went to conferences with, who they trust, those sorts of things, how powerful those networks are. And I would say a drawback for me of staying, staying home, kind of throughout my professional trajectory, at least up to this point, is that my own professional networks are not not exclusively gendered in that way, but they are almost exclusively American. And that I count that as a real limitation. And for me, I would name the limitation, especially because a number of you a few minutes ago named kind of interest in colonial legacies, I have a particular discomfort with the homogenous kind of American scope of my professional networks because of the particular legacies of American and European colonialism as they're entangled with the discipline... like deeply entangled with the discipline. So I think that that's a problem. It's not an irresolvable problem, but it is an issue when it's a limitation. I think that can happen for those of us, I might be the only one in this conversation, who kind of stayed home, especially if that home is in kind of Western Europe or the United States.

And Philippa, you also named a few minutes ago kind of prestige, and so I'd like to put that on the table again, too. We can talk about it later. But how do we talk about where prestige comes from? Who, how do we map that prestige sort of globally? And how do we sort of perhaps... How did we get interested in dismantling some of those things or calling them to question? But I think the network issue is a huge one. So I'll leave it, leave it there.

Chauncey: No, but that, that question of prestige and privilege and financial resources, I mean, that's a huge, those are huge overlaps, right? In a certain sense, when I decided to go and study in Israel to kind of address some of the question, it was, if there were benefits that came from it, educationally. I applied to

various PhD programs and was accepted to many, which is unusual. But they were, a lot of people were really excited that I had gone to Hebrew University and got a Master's degree there. And it was, you know, it was a very costly endeavor that I'll probably be paying off for the rest of my life, you know. And it just, you know, those, those realities of the opportunity to do these sorts of things that would have been on the table for somebody, you know, in my case, weirdly the federal government, the United States, federal government will actually give you loans to study in Israel. With that...and it almost in no other country, does it work that way. From what I understand, you can't get federal money from the United States to study in any other country, but Israel is fine. Which was convenient for me, you know, it's not, you know, there, there aren't very many people in the United States who have the capacity to say, well, it'll be fine. I'll just take on a ton of debt, you know these sorts of things. I mean, it worked out as far as I can tell, but there's no guarantee that it would. All this is to say, my experience studying in Israel and then moving back to the United States... I mean the network issue, I was, I was able to meet people abroad and that was, that was helpful. But it really... the reverse culture shock of studying in another country, and Philippa, I feel like you might've gestured to this in a way, when you are abroad for a number of years and kind of surviving in another culture, and then you come home in a sense, you're suddenly a stranger in your own land where you know, people in the Pacific Northwest for example, are, are rather passive aggressive and Israelis are not. And, and, and the furthest possible thing from passive aggressive Israelis are either the kindest people in my experience or the worst people. And it's not that all Israelis are bad. I'm not saying that, but they're, they're just very direct about who they are. And so, you know, right away. But people. Back home are not used to that sort of thing. So for the first time I was like, well, I was grading papers. I came back and I was grading papers and I was like, this sentence is unclear. And the professors I was working with... like, well, you need to maybe be kinder with the w with your words. And I was like, why, I wasn't being mean and I was just saying it was an unclear sentence. I don't understand, but it was, this is just the way Israeli professors grade your papers. And so there are these cultural contexts that you're suddenly missing. But you have to relearn or learn for the first time, maybe coming back.

Benny: Oh.

Philippa: Oh sorry.

Benny: I always use that phrase, this is unclear so.... Sorry, Sonia, go ahead.

Sonia: Yeah, I was going to add to what Chauncey just said. A stranger in my own place... My initial training is back home here. And then I went to Nashville, Tennessee for my MA and PhD. And I remember when I came back in 2016, I haven't finished my PhD yet, but like I came back to work as an adjunct lecturer. And what I've found is like, you know, like when I went to Nashville Tennessee, that was a big culture shock for me. And when I came back to my own place, it's supposed to be home, but it didn't feel like home at all. It felt more like another cultural shock. So that, that was the feeling that I had.

Back to the Benny's question, you know, having been trained at both in Hong Kong... initially in Hong Kong, in the United States, and came back here to Hong Kong to teach. I have to say that it's a great benefit of having this international experience. There seems to be a favorite of hiring people with international experience in Hong Kong. If I were to have my PhD here locally, I think my chance of getting hired here would not be that good, so that is definitely a big benefit. You know, among all my colleagues, I don't think... okay, let me just ask to me... I think about maybe like 80%, of us trained abroad overseas either in UK, US, or Germany. And I think just only like one of us trained locally... actually a couple of us trained locally and another one trained to locally, but received some sort of like international experience because he went to Yale for a year. So I definitely, I see people have favored

people with international experience. If you have trained, you know, in a prestigious university either, you know, in UK or US, that's sort of like...it's like a proof that you are able... you will thrive in scholarship. That's almost like, you know, a guarantee of success. Putting that, you know, like, you know, that Korea prospect aside, I would have to say that the years I spent in US was life-transforming... it was eye-opening and I think it was a right decision that I went to US for my training.

I think I, you know, there should've be any problem of getting a scholarship back home here if I, you know, did decide to stay. Well, I wanted to go, you know, any way I put Hong Kong, just to believe that international experience would, you know, help me to understand the world better, help me to understand myself better, you know? Placing myself in a place that is a strange, you know, in a new culture with strange people, it's kind of, you know, help... it kind of helped me too understand how everything worked, you know? Through this hermeneutic of difference I saw, I sort of like rediscovered myself. I still remember, like when I, the first week or month... first month in the United States we were having this seminar and one of the, you know, they were having this discussion and it was talking about how homogenous other cultures are and, you know, the United States is a very heterogeneous place with all sort of ethnic groups and, you know, there is a huge racial tension. I was sitting there as an international student and it felt so strange. And one of the things I felt was like, people didn't really understand Asia. People didn't really understand, you know, the other parts of the world. Maybe they never been to Asia. And Asia is really heterogeneous. You know, the first one arrived in United States, it felt like everybody is Christian You still like everybody's question or at least everybody claimed to be some shot of God...at least everybody claim to be some kind of God-believer. Here, we have Daoism, we have Buddhism, we have Confucianism, we have people who believe in popular, like, folk religion... Chinese folk religion, and Christianity. Only, like, less than 15% of the Hong Kong population claims, you know, to be some sort of Christian, so it's a different world. And for me, like, you know, this assumption of the other is always homogenous... no, the world is homogenous... it's a misunderstanding. And I think this international expand helped me to understand that our social location, our experience, our lived experience actually frame the way we understand things. And it's sort of like, you know, intensified awareness that I have to venture out. I have to go into a different place, a different culture... immerse myself there in order to help me to understand things better. You know, for example, biblical studies... you know, it's amazing to see how the Bible in a certain passage interprets in a different setting. I think the first semester, my supervisor, Professor Douglas Knight, you know, he had us read some feminist criticism, some liberation theology, and... and then what else... post-colonial criticism, and that was when I realized that... how my gender identity, how class, and how... how ethnicity could shape (how) one person think and understand the scripture differently. And, you know, I have to say coming back, it's like this whole experience put me in what postcolonial criticism called the "first space". This was hybrid space... that I'm exposed to the Asian culture and American culture. Having seen how the Bible being interpreted differently, it put me in the first space being able to critique my own culture and also the... American culture as well, and to see how much our...you know, the biblical scholarship has been influenced by you Western scholarship. The whole biblical study, the field, you know, is just shaped by and dominated by Western scholarship. I mean the few years I was here... how, how many, like Chinese biblical scholars was I introduced to? Hardly any. We were introduced to Julius Wellhausen, Gunkel, von Rad, like, you know, the big names in the West, in, in Europe, in US, but hardly any Chinese or Asian biblical scholars. You know, I was starting to question if there were any back then... I mean, like, you know, when I started the journey. So it, it really helped me. It really helped me to see that there are, you know, this big gap that we have to fill in. And I'm glad that people are filling it now.

Benny: Thank you, Sonia. Jo and Robert, you want to jump in?

Johnathan: Yeah, sure. I'd love to just echo some of what, what Sonia said, especially in the backend. And so I'm, I'm just a little too interested and I think it's going to come out later in the discussion as well with where the epistemological center lies and how easily voices get placed on the periphery. Also a really interesting is that it seems that there's a type of privileging or if I can locate and then allow enough voice as a speaker. So all of my, I would say, all of my teaching and learning experiences have been located in South Africa primarily because of opportunity and necessity. So for me, there wasn't really not because of a lack of trying, not because of a lack of ambition, not because lack of anything from my side, it just was an opportunity to get post-graduate training or even in a job actually, so really for me necessity was the name of the game. And in light of scarcity of academic positions, in light of austerity measures at various South African universities, all of my post graduate training was at the University of Cape Town, so UCT, and then primarily most of my teaching experience is also limited to the South African context. So I was fortunate enough to teach at five higher education institutions in South Africa in the past 10 years. So this could either indicate two things: could even indicate itchy academic feet or it could indicate actually the type of scarcity of permanent posts, especially in the South African context. You know, in South African context, the field of New Testament biblical scholarship is primarily white and male. And so black academics struggle to find permanent positions and my experience gained in a distance learning institution, The University of South Africa, a privately funded institution in Cape Town called Cornerstone Institute, a privileged, publicly funded university, the University of Cape Town, an emerged institution where I taught alongside Gerald West, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and now I teach at the historically disadvantaged institution called the University of the Western Cape. And these experiences are fundamentally shaped my pedagogical and research experiences. Despite the fact that each of the institutions promote the different graduate attributes and pedagogical models, the common philosophy that undergirded all of my teaching and learning experiences is that of social justice. The content of my teaching, the ways that I teach, my golden objectives of teaching, it was shaped by this philosophy of social justice and the commitment to intersectional and de-colonial pedagogies. And I think that one of the benefits then of having one of my, my training happened in South Africa is exactly that... It's this identification with what is seen as epistemological privilege coming from the global north and a recognition that indigenous knowledge systems has a place and has a power that often does not get recognized because of this skewing of epistemological privilege. So I think from my side, there's huge benefits, especially contextual immersion that has taken shape even in my teaching... that if I had being given an opportunity to travel to North America, for instance, to receive post graduate training, I would not be the scholar that I am today. And I think that I would not necessarily... I think it would have been... it would have had a negative impact on my scholarship as opposed to having a seemingly positive impact.

Chauncey: I mean that makes a lot of sense to me, I mean, especially the question that you and Sonia have both raised about the privileging of Western epistemology. You know, for myself as a Latino in the United States, I don't often belong to what is categorized as Western because those of us employing theories and ways of thinking that correspond to our communities get kind of marginalized in that space in a way. And even pivoting from traditionally Western ways of thinking that I learned in Israel or so on, so forth to more socially located work, I've kind of, you know, I I've, I've found a lot of really great community with scholars who I really enjoy being around, and at the same time have experienced just a level of getting some side-eye from people, if you know what I mean, just, you know,... what is this work that you're doing? This doesn't count as biblical studies. So that all makes a lot of sense to me.

Philippa: Yeah, if I could come in and just pick up on a couple of those points because I, I...there's just so much in what people have said, but I think these issues of privilege and networks and all these things so connected. One thing that I think about that... that really enabled me to go to these different places

and, and be reasonably comfortable, not completely comfortable, it's not just about money, it's also about networks. It's about having people to welcome you and, and help you and all these kinds of things. And that of course depends very much on where you come from and who happens to be in your circle and, and... so and so. There's all kinds of issues with that that are all related to privilege that aren't just about finances. And I'm thinking about it from the point of view now as a, a member of academic staff, you know, from the other end, not just from, from my experience of going through that as a student, but how can we then as faculty members in institutions sort of help and support students from different backgrounds in different locations if they come to our institutions? I think about this a lot from the context of the University of Edinburgh.

You know, it's... it's... you know, it's one thing to try to be global... it's trying to make global connections to try to bring people from, from all over the world, but when they come they don't have support systems or they face racism, or discrimination, or social isolation, or other things, you know. Then, you know, it's not enough to do... and kind of just bring people over and give them a library access and "okay, now we're global, now we're connected", you know, because there are all those social personal contacts that are just as important to producing scholarship as the sort of more obvious kind of institutional ones. So that I think is something that is really important for those of us who do hold positions at universities to think about.

And one thing that we do at Edinburgh is we have these sort of lunches and get together as postgraduate students, where we have different topics that we talk about, but it's really an open discussion and it might be about gender, or it might be about what's it like to be an international student, or it might be about race or/and ethnicity, things like that, but it gives students the opportunity to actually talk about what are their experiences and what are the challenges they face, and the barriers they face and so on. And, you know, it's amazing to hear what students have to say, what people have to say... things that you might not necessarily be aware of... I'm talking about myself from my own particular location that I might not necessarily be aware of... and just actually giving students the voice to talk about that. I think it's really helpful in thinking how to develop our institutions supportive way that kind of promotes equality and inclusion. So, those were just some of the things I was thinking about as, as people were talking, just from the other perspective actually not being on the other end of that.

Johnathan: Philippa, can I just echo what you're saying? So it's, it's one thing to have this type of symbolic inclusion, but when people's lived realities, the systemic marginalizations are not taken into consideration, then the symbolic inclusions really become counterproductive, right? So I, I, I just wanted to echo that, yeah.

Benny: That's great. This gets to a question that I want to ask. You know, I have a colleague in the academy who says that the result of globalization is not creating a global village, but facilitating a kind of global pillage. And other scholars have talked about globalization from above in a different kind of globalization from below, so given the topic of this webinar, may I ask you what globalizing biblical studies may mean to you? What does that mean to globalize biblical studies?

Maybe I would start with Robert.

Robert: When I, when I hear the word "globalization," I kind of can't dissociate that from, I guess like mere liberalism, you know, the global capitalist system and so on. And because, you know, this is language that has a meaning within the realms of business and economics and the way in which business economics interacts with governments, and so on... and yeah, I mean, globalization is now conceivable,

it's kind of on our horizon, or we can think about it and talk about it whether in relation to biblical studies or whatever because it's part of the global capitalist system. So immediately I start to think of connections between the global capitalist system and biblical studies... the way in which our... and I think the way that some of the comments that have been made in response to the previous question and to tie them to that, my own thoughts on this has to do with attending academic conferences which tend to be... in the northern kind of places of epistemological privilege as has been mentioned before. And I did my PhD... I did all my studies in my home country, in New Zealand, but, as a PhD student, I did go for several months as a visiting student in the UK. And while I was there, I started attending conferences and I realized, oh, you know, on the one hand, it's great that we have these kind of opportunities to, to move around to communicate, to have quite rapid communication and collaboration, but on the other hand, the nexus of power and the kinds of questions that we ask of the texts and are allowed to be asked don't seem to change much. They seem to be reinforced by the fact that, yeah, conferences... places where academic conversations are happening where books are published and so on and so forth, all seem to stay within the same kind of places, the same networks. So globalization for me is, and globalizing biblical studies is a bit of a double edged sword. That means that we can do awesome things like this, like communicate online, so long as you know, you can coordinate times zones and things like that. And this has been interesting in the past, in the past year for me through COVID, where, you know, suddenly it's great. We can have all these online conferences, except for me, they mostly happen when it's 2:00 AM in the morning, so I miss out. So, yeah... so it's a double edged sword.

Laura: Can I speak to that too? I mean, I resonated so much with what you said, Robert, and I think to think kind of practically, I was thinking along the line... along the same lines about the ways, the kind of multiplicity of ways that global globalizing and globalization and all the different associations we have with that term can signify. And I think I'll be curious to hear kind of how you all are thinking about this as well, but it seems to me that anything, any kind of globalizing that's worth its salt... I mean, speak to it, I think Jonathan just named... first of all, we have to think about what materially actually promotes access. And also it will probably involve practically speaking, interrogating kind of habituated practices, some of which, I mean, conference locations, those sorts of things, thinking about research languages. What language do we have these conversations in? Is it English, French and German always, always? Is it always English? And also think about in more abstract terms how we begin to dismantle or decenter - this word has been used a lot already in this conversation - sites of prestige, aspirational sites of prestige, and those regions that are dense with this kind of prestige and, I think, assume for those of us who have attended institutions like this and these areas, that they have a proprietary relationship with the canons and central conversations and epistemologies of biblical studies. What's interesting about this... like, I mean, I think the irony is that, that, I mean, we'll get to this question I think if we talk about the different relationship between contextual and globalizing... irony is of course that so many of these centers of kind of prestige and their guiding epistemologies are deeply contextual and very parochial. We know this, a lot of us have experienced this if we've been in Christian kind of adjacent or Christian, Christian kind of biblical studies training, but they're kind of masquerade or give off the illusion of being central or global in certain ways; whereas, other types of epistemologies that Jonathan I think was just naming, maybe more local or activist epistemologies... openly local are seen as contextual or niche, I think was sometimes the language that was used in my graduate training. So it raises for me a whole host of issues, but a lot of it has to do with conversations, really honest conversations about the practicality of decentering different conversations, and yeah the language of prestige, I think, comes up for me a lot.

Chauncey: I would love to piggyback on some things that you just said, but I'll, I'll just... the idea that you and Robert both captured on globalization, globalizing being at this double-edged sword. There's a, there's a table that we want people to come to, but then the question is what is the shape of the table? Who

is actually welcomed in what capacity? I was thinking, as I was thinking about this, what I was thinking about globalization, I was realizing that for an indigenous scholar say who magically happens to get access and training in Mexico to biblical studies. Would that person be able to come to the table a speaking Nahuatl or Spanish for that matter? In my own, in my own experience, applying to PhD programs, I was accepted to a school where, I will not name them, but when I went to go and visit the, the scholar who in theory I would be working with, I had asked him, can I use Spanish as a research language... I speak it, I read it, I write it, it makes sense to use it. And he said, "No, we won't... we don't need that. You will... you'll only need French and German." So in essence, even just somebody with the requisite training, you know, with the, with the kind of... the things that folks wanted, I was asked to kind of cut part of myself off before starting the degree. I didn't go there, but this is the question for me, right? If we're, if we're asking and wanting people to come to this table, that we've kind of created, how do we make it equitable and just in a sense that people, you know, these... like, like somebody was speaking about, how many... I don't read Chinese as much to my shame, I would love to, but I'm sure there's, there's a lot of people... There are things being published in Chinese that would be very useful and important drivers for conversations in the field, but because of the way research languages are framed that's not going to count as an academic background for a lot of people who were kind of gatekeepers of the tradition. So, you know, globalization could be a good thing, you know, but then the question that Laura raised about materially is it and how do we make sure that people who might want to come could do so and not be totally isolated and lost at sea as Philippa was mentioning.

Johnathan: Yeah... (inaudible) So yes, you can...because the theory, the method, the engagements are deeply exposed using a certain privilege. And we all really placed into these little silos of, okay just add context and stuff, and that becomes sufficient, right? And that so we already in our own knowledge systems, we are placed on the periphery. But I remember I've been privileged to come to the Society of Biblical Literature conferences for five occasions now, and on each of those occasions, I had to travel more than 24 hours. I get to these conferences being completely jet lagged. I then feel completely out of place because I am one black face among plenty of white faces. You just feel out of place. You just feel completely out of place. And, and, and people coming from two thirds will often have to travel, not only physically long distances, but they also have to travel epistemologically longer distances; whereas those coming from the global north just automatically because of where they are located, the agency is automatic. And we have to always this dis-identify. We always have to contest. We always have to decolonize or do some kind of decentering. So I think these are, these are the really important conversations that need to be had. And that... like Chauncey was saying. So, yes, you get an invitation to the table, but at what cost and oftentimes people coming from third world cities, the cost is so high. And so we need to be speaking about the reparations. We need to be speaking about people coming from the global north. Instead of having us be invited to a table in that specific location, maybe it's changing.. come to Africa, come to South Africa and have a look at Table Mountain, as opposed to us being in a conference venue in North America.

Chauncey: How many times can Chicago be exciting? You know, if I compare everything anyway. Sorry. I didn't mean to knock Chicago for people who love it, but, you know.

Benny: I love this conversation. So we talk about the hospitality that Philippa talks about, right? It's not just about epistemology, about the head, but you all began to talk about the importance of material condition, but also embodiment that the fact that you have to travel and the jet lag and all of that. So that is, that is wonderful. I want to pick up on a word that both Laura and Jo have already mentioned. That word would be contextualization... context, right? There's a term that we have been hearing quite a bit in our discipline for a few decades now. I think when I was in graduate school with that term has already

been in... So now, how do you understand biblical studies being contextual and being global? Are these contradictory emphases, are they supplementary to one another or are they one and the same? How do you understand the relationship between these two things?

Sonia: I think it all depends on how you define global. I was thinking about your question earlier. When If we were talking about global as in globalization from above, I would say that biblical studies is pretty much globalized. You know, like Bible is a legacy, a colonial legacy in many countries now. And those countries that, you like, treat the Bible as a colonial legacy and value as a colonial legacy would have their own theological seminary or divinity school so in a way it would be pretty much globalized, but globalized from above... global in a sense, you know, from above, you know, if we make some sort of like colonial text within the Western discourse. In that case, I wouldn't say it's contextualized. I mean, it could be the same... It... It could be both. It depends on how you look at global. The way that, you know, but biblical studies has been globalized is not contextualized. It's like I told you, I spent three years here, you know, in the MDiv program here right at home, but all I learned is just like Western European American scholars, with maybe like one exception, my own teacher. Okay, so that was it. In that case, you know, it's globalized, but it's not contextualized. But I think what we're aiming for is, you know, to, to have some soft globalization from below, not from above, and try to contextualize it and realize that. we have to look in the Bible, you know, like from all different sort of ethnic, gender, and social location and how that would affect how the interpretation of the Bible. And having, you know,.. and also learned a critical theories... the cultural theories that would aid us in, in doing this job... globalizing the field. So, this is my response. And I, you know, I totally agree that we have to aim for de-centering, you know, more diverse, more inclusive discourse and... may I use the word, "liberating" biblical studies from the epistemology of the West.

Benny: Thank you. Others?

Robert: I think that the... I find the question itself really interesting, you know, what's the relationship between biblical studies as contextual and as global? I think... I think in some ways, when I was reflecting, when I reflect on this question, there is the kind of necessary relationship between the contextual, the local circumstances that we find ourselves in, how these affect biblical interpretation, how we engage in biblical studies, participating with discipline, and whether individually or community, but also again with, with the, with the global political economic system which is the totality that ultimately gives rise to these individual contexts and as the kind of, in a sense, unsaid master signifier or overarching thing that gives meaning to these niche, context, and in some ways can be... well, there's the point of, of of commonality that we can have conversations between different contexts. It's in thinking in terms of that that bigger totality, that how is my niche, you know, bespoke reading sites or, or, or the particular issues that form that context whether gender, class, race, culture, colonialism, ecological crises, political crises, and so on. How are these all connected to the big totality that is global state of affairs?

Chauncey: Yeah. That's a quite spinning question in some way, for me as well. Pushing, you know, thinking about the Bible as a global document, right? Well, it was not prepared in most of the places that we live, right? These texts were written in the Levant for the most part, you know, thousands of years ago, so they're already at a great distance from most of the contexts that they're studied. But then there's the added element of most of these people were colonized, oppressed people, themselves, writing these documents. In the Hebrew Bible, for instance, trying to write a Torah as a way of resisting the imperial impulse to assimilate these people who have been deported to Babylon and so on and so forth. I think it's really important that we do the sort of acknowledgement that both you and Sonia are talking about, right? That there is this... there's this globalizing force that's rendered biblical studies kind of homogenous in a certain way, in the way that gets... that shows up in various countries. But, you know, I think that has to

be resisted in a way by, by just the nature of like the idea that the context is everything, right... that these things that are talked about as niche from the kind of dominant "universal perspective". Well, you know, everything is, is niche. Everything is contextual. You know, experience shapes cognition. We literally can't read from the same place mentally. And it seems that, you know, if we're honest about that, hopefully there could be a way to push, but, but as you noted, with you and Sonia, the material interests of the kind of global system that give rise to the questions point in a certain direction. So it's a, it's a strange problem with mobilization to ask different questions. How do you get resources for things that don't materially benefit the people who push the engine, so to speak.

Laura: Yeah, it strikes me that... so much. And I think we've just maybe just to reiterate what I think a number of you have named, is that this isn't... and I'd be curious to hear from you Philippa, who's training is also in classics what kinds of conversation are there analogous conversations that you at least got wind of in your experience in that discipline.... But part of our problem is also the particular, very particular, very contextual legacies of the Bible. And so how does that kind of contribute to our conversation about the practices, the institutions, again, the kind of per particular parochial that, that became global contexts and legacies of this document that we're now grappling with, how to kind of do and, and do in an international context? And I think my question about maybe just broadly about what it means to converse globally about any kind of academic discipline, especially in the humanities. Do we need it to be globally legible? We've all talked about personal experience of kind of advantages of having these cross-cultural experiences where I've lived, many of you have, but what it means to have biblical studies with any kind of legible center, kind of canonically in terms of who, how we talk about history and methods of biblical interpretation, you know, Sonia you talked about we all learn Wellhausen... do we need to, you know, those sorts of things... but, but even that kind of in a more, that that's sort of a small example, but do we need global to face to have a kind of a legible center that we all learn? Is it okay for it to be illegible? Are we comfortable with that? Are we comfortable with not gathering in the kind of ways that we do with 10,000 people at a November annual meeting? Can it look smaller? Can it look more local, especially now that we've had COVID and know how to do this in different ways and know how to connect in a different, in smaller ways? So I don't know. I think that that's a question that I've like put on the table too, is if we, if we agree that we want some sort of global iteration, ideally of biblical studies, what would that actually look like and does it need to look in the kind of traditional formats that we've become used to?

Robert: I mean interesting. Just a quick thought. In Australia where I work now, most, well, probably almost all biblical studies, I can think of one or two exceptions, has a kind of weird relationship with universities. It's not in many universities, except religious universities, and it's almost entirely propped up by the churches, religious organizations and so on. And so that economic basis to what keeps the discipline going in this country ultimately frames, you know, what can be done, how things can be. But, you know, it's very difficult to shift that or even to ask those sorts of questions. I think you can have a lot more freedom to do that sort of thing in the place that doesn't have those, in a context that doesn't have those kinds of religious clutches on, on the discipline.

Philippa: Yeah, just to echo a couple of things people are saying. I mean this, the... what Laura brought up about classics is really interesting because I think both classics and biblical studies have these really particularly privileged places in the history of colonialism and so on. And so the conversations that go, are going on around both those areas, I think, are, are really useful. And I think that it is encouraging that it seems, at least in the UK, you know, a real momentum to talk about issues of decolonization and so on at the moment. And I think that, you know, whatever the particular problematic aspects of some of those discussions might be or limitations might be, I think that that's a real opportunity to really, you know, not, not only, you know, to kind of push away from it, just being about diversifying, you know, reading less a

little bit and things like that, but really think about how these, the sort of principles of decolonization, if you, if you want to use that term, can be embedded in all aspects of academia. You, you know, to, to think about it, the material aspects to think about it, you know, in terms of staffing and hiring, in terms of finances, in terms of, you know, library resources, even in terms of student support... all kinds of different aspects. And all these, all these things I think are so important. I mean, Johnathan, what you said really resonated with me about why is it that we always go to Chicago for conferences or, you know.... it's thinking much more, much more broadly, not just about kind of diversifying reading lessons, but actually all these other conditions that contribute to some voices and some positions being privileged and how do we challenge that on, on a deeper kind of level. That's an incredibly difficult task and challenge, but I think it is an important one to really to think about and see what can be done.

And just coming back to the issue of contextualization and globalization, I mean, I agree with everybody who said that that's still very much the assumption in my experience that you have to kind of prove yourself through the historical critical, those sort of traditional western methods first, and then you can kind of go off and do the kind of marginal stuff. And that's still how, how things are set up. And it is still seen as, as, as kind of often academically suspect, or it's not as rigorous. And so that I think that power structure is still very much in place. That's something that does need to be challenged.

Johnathan: Yeah. Can I just also respond to that Philippa? The latter part of what you said for me was pivotal for this question, especially getting the balance of power right. I mean, this notion of getting it right is also questionable with what is right. But I also think we shouldn't kind of dilute the conversation to relativistic nothingness where anything and everything goes because of the sake of being inclusive and contextual. I do think out of necessity, biblical studies has to be contextual. We do need a socially engaged biblical scholarship. And I... Robert mentioned something earlier that I also pick up on in my notes that I scribbled down for this, for this particular question: this notion of, of synergy, this notion of, of interrelatedness, interconnectedness. So, biblical studies out of necessity, yes, has to be contextual, but we also needed to be global because we also need that interrelatedness. We need our voices to be, to be carried over to different contexts. And so I think synthesizing difference without diluting difference or calling for some type of assimilation. And so like the, the, the balance of power needs to be really fine-tuned and it's something that needs to needs to be sainted. And it's not going to be easy because like Philippa said, these, these imbalances of power have been so concretized, have been so embedded in biblical studies that it's difficult for us to shift the balance of power without saying that the feelings, the conversations happening are only...that you need historical criticism for some reason. Why? Why do we need historical criticism?

Chauncey: Right? Show us its value. Don't just take it for granted... what does it do, right? As you were talking, I was listening to Philippa, I think I was realizing, you know, the question that might serve analogy for what we were thinking about is, is in a way...thinking about the problem as, as what's more of a metaphor, I suppose, but anyway, but what does it mean for us to allow more people to stay home in a way? Not like a COVID sense, but to operate from the place where they live, and the place that they think, and the place that they breathe, and eat, and do all of the embodied things. And then to be comfortable and celebrated in the place where they live so such that they don't always have to leave home to make sense to other people. Sometimes people have to come visit them to make sense to their context, you know, and I, I think, you know that that seems really important. You know, what is, what does it mean to celebrate the, you know, celebrate and amplify the embodied particularity of as many people as possible?

Johnathan: Yeah.

Benny: I'm hearing this wonderful balance that that you are talking about... Laura talking about. Maybe there can be multiple centers, but not in the sense of silos. That there's still this connection that Jonathan is this is referring to, right? So maybe center A and center B can connect, and maybe center B and center E would connect at a later point. So it's, it's a wonderful kind of a configuration that I'm hearing.

Finally, can I invite you to share your thoughts on how we can be globalizing biblical studies in the next decade better? Whatever sense, you mean by globalizing developers studies, but I want to make it a little bit more personal or contextual. What will you do or what would you like to see happen in the next decade within the discipline?

Sonia: I have this fantasy. So, like, I don't know, like for the past few decades, I... it's definitely like a unidirectional thing that people in... going to the west for theological education...for higher theological education. I'm hoping to see a reverse. Like, you know, people in UK, in US, in Europe, they decide to get a theological education in Asia, in Africa, in other continents. Yeah... I have this fantasy. Hoping that one day, it's like, you know, a two way traffic. We both learn to appreciate each other. We both learn to refund the other's perspective.

Chauncey: That makes a lot of sense to me. I think one of the dreams that I have for, in particular, you know, my own context in the American academy is that people in the United States would own the fact that Spanish is a legitimate language of inquiry and that people of Latinx descent are valued voices at the table in so far as the gatekeepers assume that they're valued voice. And not that I want the structure to remain the same, but I really... it does... the kind of stranglehold of Euro-American epistemology, values, and language doesn't make sense in our context and I would like to see that change. I would like to see more resourcing for people in Latin America to where, to where folk don't have to come, like you're saying, that folk don't have to come to northern continents to get the education that they want. That there's kind of a global privileging, in a way hopefully not necessarily to say again, they're not the same structure of privilege per se, but that studying in El Salvador would be just as academically valuable, which I think it really is, but that's not most people's understanding. You know, these sorts of things that, that folk could go and get the resources they needed at home and get the training that they wanted at home and that they wouldn't need to, you know, be molded into someone else to get what they wanted.

Robert: I think... just to just hark back to some of the things that Jonathan was saying in response to this question about how to make biblical studies more global, I do have that issue, perhaps with the word "global". You know, Is it global... is it global that we want biblical studies to... Do we want biblical studies to be more global? I prefer to use the terminology perhaps of "internationalist": in the sense of, you know, how can we unify or collaborate from our differing contextual locations as participants towards a common goal or set of goals? That for me is a kind of distinction- I'm not sure where I pick it up from - between the languages "internationalism", "globalism", or "globalization". "Internationalism" is sort of more deliberate... In a deliberate attempt to, to speak across contextual locations. And personally, I see that primarily in terms of, of social and political struggles. So how can we join forces from our various social locations in terms of the work that we're doing in biblical studies or perhaps more broadly and, and yeah speak across contexts to, to determine the ways in which we really talk about the same things or very similar things, just happening in different ways.

Johnathan: For me, I really liked this last question because it, it became personal and went from the collective "we" to the "you" and so I kind of fought about it. And I like what Sonia said, it originated with me. I was reading most of recently... newest publication of 2020 and in that she speaks about African feminist futures and, and she brings up this narrative way. She goes to a conference and she speaks to someone coming from the global north and that person says to a wall, "Is this a fantasy or is this

something that is possible in the future?” And, and the reason I think with what Sonia said, I'd like this to be an actually future. And, and, and so going back to the earliest conversations we had, it's, it's within our reach. We need to do the hard work. And the question for me about... is not so much about making biblical studies more global, but about making biblical studies more responsive to multiple contexts and also responsible for the ways in which we engage those multiple contexts.

Chauncey: Right. I mean, one of the things that comes to mind when you're saying that is what does it mean for the biblical studies to be something that folks with limited access to resources get to participate in? Right? Because I think one of the problems in a certain sense is that, you know, for people to, as if it was named various times privilege and financial access, but if we really want the conversation, as you're talking about to, to include multiple contexts, but we don't want to just see everyone from the same social class at the table. You know?

Johnathan: Exactly.

Chauncey: It's necessary that poor folk get to be here too if we're, if we're taking that seriously. So yeah, that makes sense. That's great.

Laura: Yeah, because I think I'm just building off of that. I mean, I think we talked about this a little bit or talked around this a little bit because it's not even an issue of...in the United States, my experiences, it's not just a majority white, majority male, majority American conversation, it's also a majority upper class, upper middle-class and above conversation. Those who are going to pursue higher education in this particular field, especially so promoting kind of material access, coming back to that, seems imperative for kind of a robustly equitable configuration of what this conversation can be. And I, I'm just echoing this language as I think about this as personally for me, what it means to really pursue an established kind of multiple centers, that language that you use, Benny, I think, it's resonating with me and it's language that I'll kind of carry forward through collaboration, through conversation partners. Will it mean that prioritizing other sites of collaboration beyond, I mean, you talked about the kind of international SBL, I sort of go to metaphor that we all go-to site that I think we all have familiarity with, but really what does it mean to make... prioritize travel and engagement and collaboration across and beyond kind of the western European, Anglo context.

I think also just the other thing that I would add for me as a scholar, but also as a teacher... a teacher who is teaching in again, majority American white Protestant context is to make the... when I teach, especially kind of history and methods and those sorts of things, even to undergraduates, is to render that particular context strange and particular and not determinative or forte, but this has, is a particular in strange legacy that is powerful and has had power. And we should grapple and reckon with that because we still feel it as we've recognized in this conversation, but it is a very peculiar one that we should be able to recognize pretty explicitly as well.... so implications in my, in my own scholarship and also teaching as well.

Laura: Yeah. I agree with a lot of what everybody has said and thinking about it from the point of view of being somewhere like the University of Edinburgh.... thinking about not just how we can make our university global in the sense of bringing people from elsewhere, but also how we can go elsewhere, whether intellectually, whether actually physically in different ways and, and make it more of a kind of a two way process, multiple process, rather than one way Sonia as you put it. And that just necessarily as we've, said throughout this conversation, really does require thinking about material aspects, practical aspects, power structures, things like that. And they just have to become part of the conversation. Part of what we talk about. That it can't just be something about, oh, you know, we kind of have it have a nice dialogue, you know, without talking about those kind of inequalities. They just have to be part of it... part of all the conversations we have, I think. And I really liked Laura that you brought up teaching because I

think that's so important. And I think opening up these conversations that, that we're having also with undergraduates, with students, postgraduates too, of course, but, but undergraduates and not just in senior year, advanced classes, right from the beginning, right from the first two first biblical studies class they take, let's talk about these things. Let's talk about how a biblical study is formed as a discipline. Let's talk about, you know, the kind of privileging, a particular epistemology and so on. Let's talk about the structural issues, the issues of power. And I found that actually, you know, sometimes you don't even have to initiate those conversations. Students, students get that. A lot of students get that. They want to talk about this and they have, you know, often they're kind of three, I feel like they're three steps ahead of me in some of these things. So I'm actually talking about this with students too and learning from them. I think it's important as well.

Johnathan: Can I also just add, I think, we will say that I have to be quite deliberate, not just talking about it, but actually implementing. So if we're thinking about the politics of citation, be practical in your undergraduate course curriculum. Quote African feminist scholar, quotes scholars whose voices haven't been heard in your context. I think that's really important as well... that deliberate, practical act, within our teaching learning pedagogies. Yeah. Yeah

Chauncey: That also implies pushing beyond what we, what we do in our field, right? You'd have to read other books. You have to listen to music. You know, do your normal people, things.

Robert: Here's a practical idea. Can we... can we start referring to the international SBL meeting as the annual SBL meeting and refer to the annual SBL meeting as the United States meeting, or perhaps even the Chicago meeting? Can we actually do that? Seriously, because it it's always baffled me ever since I first heard about the SBL as, as an international member, why those things are named in the way they are... and I know why they're named the way they are, but why are they still named in that way. The international meeting is some kind of, you know, secondary... just by the naming of it. It's marginalized.

Benny: That's a good point.

Johnathan: So to the power... the power of naming... position that in a seemingly subordinate way.

Chauncey: I feel like I cut you off, were you saying anything? Were you saying something?

Benny: No, no, I think, I think we're good. I was going to say that it reminds me of, you know, we call Christianity and then world religion as if Christianity was not a world religion. We have, we have all these naming things that both Robert and Jo are pointing out. This, this has been great. I've been hearing emphasis on multi-directionality multi-centering. And again, going back to the naming: I have another Latino friend who used to... who loves to tell me a classroom is often the rule of class. So we cannot forget that. And then there's also a sense of responsibility that I hear very clearly, right... whether you use the term "internationalizing" or "globalizing", the responsibility that we may have. So that's been a great and rich conversation. Thank you so much for your time and for your thoughts and insights. Well, it will be interesting to see how our discipline would develop in the next decade or in this century. So, again, thank you so much.

I also want to give a shout out to a LaToya Leary, who has been assisting us behind the scene to make this Zoom meeting possible. So any last questions or concerns that you did not have a chance to share that you want to share?

Johnathan: I think from my side, Benny, just a big thank you for the opportunity to be part of this type of discussion. I think that it was really, really essential and just to my fellow colleagues in the gallery, a big hello to you from Cape Town, South Africa. And hopefully this won't be the first and the last time that

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we synergize with each other this way... that it opens up an opportunity for further collaboration and networking. So I look forward to that in the discussions that will ensue. So thank you.

Benny: Thank you, Jo. You are too kind. And it's just the beginning, like Laura talking about, you know. Maybe at times one's network could be limited, but now, you know, each other, so hopefully that will be all the kinds of collaborations.

Any last concern or questions?

Chauncey: I think I just want to echo what Jo was saying. I mean, this has been a fantastic opportunity. Thank you so much for the invitation. And it's been a real pleasure to get to speak to all of you and to have found so many birds of a feather and thinking about the field and what our responsibility is beyond publishing and writing as biblical scholars, I think it's, it's really inspiring. So...

Philippa: Great. Thank you so much, everyone.

Benny: Yeah. Yeah, it's been great. So thank you so much. Thank you. Bye-bye.

Sonia: Thank you all!

Laura: Thank you!