



## PREFACE



We present *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible* mindful of a cultural transformation going on around us. The United States is rapidly becoming a nation of widely different cultures with a multiplicity of worldviews. Similar diversification is evident around the globe, particularly in the major cities of the world. Before the midpoint of the twenty-first century, white people of European descent are expected to constitute less than 50 percent of the total U.S. population, in a nation with an ever increasing plurality of races, ethnicities, and cultures. This textbook embraces multiple cultural approaches that reflect the current and future cultural mosaic in our society. It relies on established historical-critical, literary-critical, and social-scientific approaches to the Bible, but also on the perspectives of postcolonial, feminist, and Afrocentric criticism, to name a few. Thus *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible* highlights interpretations that emerge from diverse and particular perspectives.

Our purpose in *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible* is to shatter the misperception that the Bible is somehow “color-” and “culture-blind.” We intend to open our readers’ eyes to the complex interactions of peoples, at cultural crossroads through centuries of history, that gave rise to our Bible. We mean to draw the reader into a new encounter with the Bible as the product of many ancient cultures, at home in many contemporary cultures, and to show that the Bible really is a peoples’ Bible. We seek here to draw people who have often felt left out and voiceless in their encounter with the Bible. In order to give voice to those readers and communities who have been

silenced by dominant narratives in Western culture, *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible* offers some of the best insights of scholars from a wide array of different cultures and ethnicities. The editorial team and writers comprise scholars from communities traditionally underrepresented in mainstream biblical scholarship in the United States: African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinas/os, and Native Americans. Some white interpreters who have a track record of offering rarely heard perspectives have also contributed to this textbook, and the editors have sought a balance of men and women writers as well.

*The Peoples' Companion to the Bible* invites a peoples' interpretation of these ancient writings through each reader's own unique social lens. How we read the Bible, like our understanding of life itself, is affected by many dimensions, including our age, gender, race, culture, socio-economic class, religion, ability, sexual orientation, and nation of origin. *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible* taps into this reservoir of feeling and insight to inform the reader's understanding of these ancient texts. Studying the Bible with only one's own set of lived experiences or educational viewpoints limits the possibilities for gaining meaning from biblical texts. This textbook brings together the interpretive lenses of scholars from many peoples, whose many perspectives produce a mosaic of wisdom and affirmation. We hope that the reader's own view is enriched by the vast cultural diversity of scholarly knowledge offered here, even as readers resonate with voices speaking from life settings similar to their own.

Not only does *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible* offer the reader the space to explore the Bible from multiple social locations, it also invites a fresh discussion of the critical issues facing citizens of the twenty-first century. Many people have dismissed the Bible as irrelevant and of little or no value for addressing contemporary racism and injustice. The writers in this textbook, to the contrary, engage with passion the Bible's potential for social justice and liberation, originally meant for times and peoples long past, yet still proclaiming a timely word today. They also describe how the biblical authors struggled with the limitations of their own settings as they tried to interpret what they understood to be their god's will and work. Scholars in *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible* speak with a refreshing candor about how, throughout history, the Bible has been manipulated and misused to support colonization, slavery, genocide, ethnic cleansing, sexism, and a host of other forms of oppression. The residue of oppression still marks much current biblical interpretation and theological musing, and that, too, is part of the context in which we write.

The contributors to *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible* envision the Bible as a crossroads: a place of both collision and convergence. On the journey of biblical interpretation there are collisions between one or another culture and the biblical writings, between cultures themselves, between dominant and marginal perspectives, and across imbalances of power in society. These realities are reflected here as scholars often present multiple perspectives on a biblical text. Yet the Bible is also a place of convergence, where people meet at the crossroads to find points of common ground and shared interest. We invite you to join us at the crossroads as you read *The Peoples' Companion to the Bible*.

## THE EDITORS

Because where we stand determines what we can see and hear, we have asked the authors of the following chapters to identify their own standpoints as they write about different books of the Bible and different aspects of its interpretation. Here are our own brief self-introductions.

*Curtiss Paul DeYoung* — I am a white male of Dutch and English ancestry who is a citizen of the United States. I am ordained in the Church of God (Anderson, Ind.) and Professor of Reconciliation Studies at Bethel University. My biblical interpretation has been transformed from what was a de facto Eurocentric bias to a more multicultural perspective through theological training at the historically black Howard University School of Divinity and through years of reading biblical scholars and theologians from Native American, Asian, Latin American, African, Arab, and African American perspectives. My racial self-understanding was interrupted at age fifty with the genealogical discovery of a black ancestor. My cultural self-understanding has been affected by socialization in African American communities and by having my consciousness raised by multiple visits to South Africa and Palestine and Israel. As a person with race, class, and gender privileges in the United States, I have committed my life to social justice and reconciliation. This collision of birthright privilege and experiential transformation informs my interpretation of the Bible.

*Wilda C. Gafney* — I teach the “Scriptures of Israel”—by which I mean a wealth of literature including the Hebrew Bible (the Scriptures of contemporary Judaism); the ancient Jewish writings treasured by many Christians as the Apocrypha or Deutero-canonical biblical writings; the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Jewish Scriptures made in North Africa; the Samaritan Pentateuch; and the writings represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a black feminist with postcolonial commitments to and beyond the African Diaspora, my interest in these overlapping bodies of literature and their languages leads me to explore how translations, theories, and practices either open up or cover up biblical texts. I am an Episcopal priest who is a member of two congregations, the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas and the Dorshei Derekh Reconstructionist (Jewish) Minyan, both in Philadelphia.

*Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz* — Just as the Bible has shaped the way I read and understand my life, my life has shaped the way I read and understand the Bible. Through my experiences as a Latina woman of Mexican heritage, born and bred in the bicultural borderlands between Mexico and the United States, I have come to appreciate and read the Bible as a hybrid text where many borders, voices, and meanings converge. So, as a reader, believer, and lecturer of the Christian Scripture, I find myself constantly negotiating and contesting the meanings and stories of the Bible as I seek responsibly to interpret and appropriate its message in a culture and time that is thousands of years and miles away from its original context. Ultimately, my goals as an informed reader of the Bible are to empower minority readers as agents of historical change in the ongoing process of decolonization and liberation; to dismantle interpretations of the Bible

that are oppressive; and to offer inclusive and transformative readings that can bring about justice and liberation for all of the earth's people and all that the Bible describes as God's creation.

*George "Tink" Tinker* — I am an enrolled member of the Osage (*Wazhazhe*) Nation and Professor of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology. I have taught at Iliff for nearly twenty years, bringing an Indian perspective to a predominantly Euro-American school. As an American Indian academic originally trained in biblical studies (Ph.D., Graduate Theological Union), I am committed to a scholarly endeavor that takes seriously both the liberation of Indian peoples from their historic oppression as colonized communities and the liberation of white Americans, the historic colonizers and oppressors of Indian peoples.

*Frank M. Yamada* — I am Sansei, third-generation Japanese American, who grew up on the west coast of California, which locates me one generation after the internment of over 200,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II. I grew up in a nominally Buddhist home, before converting to Christianity when I was in college. I received my training as a scholar at a Protestant seminary, where historical criticism was the dominant form of investigation. Ironically, this is also where I began to develop interest in the destabilizing practice of postmodern biblical interpretation. All of these forces of cultural conflict and fusion are reflected in my identity—a hybrid construction that seeks to refuse oversimplified characterizations of Asia or America in my Asian American body. Because of my identity, I am often drawn to conflicts and contradictions in the biblical text, seeing them not as a problem to be fixed, but as difficult and sometimes painful openings into another people's understanding of the world and God.