

Social Location at the Margins: A Path to Wholeness in Theological Interpretation of Scripture

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In this paper, I intend to make the claim that explicitly contextual approaches to Scripture can be proper forms of theological interpretation of Scripture that can and should enrich the overall theological enterprise in important ways. To show this, I will attend to selected *evangélica* theology voices, a theological reflection done from the perspective of Latina Protestant women in the United States. I will conclude that attending to voices such as *evangélicas* is a crucial element for mediating wholeness in contemporary theological interpretation of Scripture.

**Theological Interpretation of Scripture and Social Location<sup>1</sup>**

While disillusionment with the modernist ethos's extravagant claims against theological traditions has become fairly commonplace within the contemporary theological scene, so too has an increasing longing to find alternative paths. Among those alternative paths is the contemporary retrieval of theological interpretation of Scripture (hereafter TIS). TIS is a fairly influential contemporary movement within the United States (and beyond) that prioritizes a posture of faith towards Scripture as a whole nurtured in the "spiritual practices" and "interpretive traditions" of Christian ecclesial communities, generally portrayed as distinct from modernist-leaning forms of historical criticism.<sup>2</sup> Despite its many positive accomplishments, the

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of social location is vast in scope and can be approached in a myriad of ways. For instance, notice the broad description offered by Sanou and Peckham: "social location refers to the sum total of human experiences that contribute to and shape a person's overall perspective on life. These human experiences not only include a person's physical location in age, gender, race, and community, but also the moral, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual atmosphere they live in, their social class, marital status, political convictions, language, nationality, history of the communities they belong to, etc." (Boubakar Sanou and John C. Peckham, "Canonical Theology, Social Location, and the Search for Biblical Orthodoxy," in *Scripture and Theology*. Edited by Tomas Bokedal, Ludger Jansen, and Michael Borowski (Berlin: de Gruyter, forthcoming). For purposes of this research I will largely approach the notion as it is engaged by the various authors referenced in this paper in the context of theological interpretation, as well as by highlighting particular elements from my own social location (see ahead).

<sup>2</sup> See Lim, "Critical Methods and Critiques: Theological Interpretation" in *T&T Clark Handbook of Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics*, 145. Proposals for contemporary theological interpretation of Scripture are not

movement's overall standing as a "post-historical-critical engagement of the Bible" has tended to exclude contextualized approaches that explicitly take into account the social location of scriptural readers.<sup>3</sup> This is partly encouraged by the flawed assumption that the latter ultimately conform to the unwelcome modernist ethos that TIS proponents consider detrimental to theological convictions.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of this, some TIS proponents have begun to show awareness of the importance of the context and social location of readers in theological interpretation. Such awareness has been particularly focused on the ways in which Christian communities at the margins of Western Christianity and the Western academy are to be considered and engaged.<sup>5</sup> However, TIS proponent Bo Lim has more recently taken the matter further by calling for other TIS supporters

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always explicitly identified with the movement known as TIS. Yet, many who explicitly identify with TIS as a movement often provide useful definitions and guidance from a variety of perspectives. See, for instance, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, general ed., Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier and N. T. Wright, associate eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); Stephen E. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009); Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); Craig G. Bartholomew and Heath A. Thomas, eds., *A Manifesto for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016). See also the *Journal of Theological Interpretation* edited by Tim Meadowcroft and published by Eisenbrauns.

<sup>3</sup> See Lim, "Critical Methods and Critiques: Theological Interpretation," 141.

<sup>4</sup> Lim exemplifies the problem well: On the one hand, TIS promotes "a conscious move away from historical criticism as a secular academic discipline;" on the other hand, "in doing so TIS distances itself from contextual interpretations, since they often draw from so-called 'non-theological' resources such as ethnic studies" (Lim, "Critical Methods and Critiques: Theological Interpretation," 145). Examples of this dynamic in conversation with the works of Ephraim Radner and Richard B. Hays can be found in Iriann M. Irizarry, "Which Reader? Interpretive Virtue, Ecclesial Context, and Social Location in Ephraim Radner and Richard Hays's Proposals for Theological Interpretation of Scripture" (upcoming PhD dissertation).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, in his well-known *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, TIS proponent Daniel J. Treier references the growth and impact of Christianity in the global South and encourages his readers to attend to the forms of Christianity thriving in that setting (See Treier, "From the 'Western' Academy to the Global Church?" in *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 157–86). Treier focuses his discussion on what he considers "hermeneutical realities at the intersection of Scripture and globalization" such as "postcolonial thought, and pentecostal faith," claiming that "theological interpretation of Scripture, to the degree that it does not engage these complex phenomena, is a movement that may prove hard to sustain" (Ibid., 161). He further argues that "beyond . . . formal matters of approach or method," what unites "many of the diverse non-Western theologies, it is perhaps an 'emphasis on divine compassion and justice' along with the reality of spiritual forces and their everyday effects" (ibid., 161). As he puts it, "thanks to the Holy Spirit, non-Western voices can no longer be marginal as they once were. We must listen" (ibid., 185).

to “acknowledge the ethnic diversity within ‘Western’ Christianity.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as he puts it, if “TIS asserts that Scripture is to be interpreted by the ecclesial community,” then there needs to be serious recognition that such community “is culturally and ethnically diverse.”<sup>7</sup> Particularly pointing to the enriching potential of Asian American theological interpretation of Scripture, Lim follows Amos Yong’s proposal that “Asian American Theology ought to serve not only Asian Americans, but also renew North American Theology.”<sup>8</sup> In his view, “if Asian American Theological Interpretation is to be received and valued by the church, a new kind of church that values such interpretation needs to emerge.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, while Lim sustains that “a mutual exchange of ideas must take place,” he regrets that “with a few notable exceptions, . . . theological interpreters do not view contextual readings as theological, and contextual interpreters do not see their identities and contexts acknowledged or valued by theological interpreters.”<sup>10</sup>

Although more could be said, here I simply want to sympathize with the prophetic critique Lim provides and this short presentation is partly an effort to engage in the type of work for which he calls. In my case, I will explicitly approach the dialogue from my social location as a Latina woman.<sup>11</sup> In doing do, I will be appealing to the branch of Latina Women’s Theologies

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<sup>6</sup> Lim, “Critical Methods and Critiques: Theological Interpretation,” 141n3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 146-147.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 146-147. In this regard, he writes: “one wonders what TIS as a discipline would look like if its practitioners engaged diverse social cultural contexts with the same dedication and vigor they engage other so-called ‘non-theological’ disciplines such as historical criticism and Western Philosophy” (ibid., 141-142). This is given that, as he sees it, “historical criticism continues to largely function as TIS’s main interlocutor, with modern philosophy a distant second, and ideological criticism is seldom engaged” (ibid.).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 145, 141-142.

<sup>11</sup> My *latinidad* (ethnicity) and womanhood (gender) are elements that I have chosen to highlight relative to social location. This implies and highlights that I am approaching the theological interpretive task explicitly and intentionally aware of the contextual elements I bring in as a Latina (Puerto Rican) woman who resides in the

known as Latina Evangélica Theology, which I consider to be close in many respects to my own social location, and which I believe can enrich the path to wholeness in theological interpretation of Scripture.<sup>12</sup>

Ironically, while evangélica theology proponents that embrace theological approaches to Scripture have been able to increasingly exercise their voices within settings in which non-theological approaches to Scripture are predominant, opportunities have been less available within settings in which theological approaches such as TIS are predominant.<sup>13</sup> However, regardless of the setting from which they speak, I believe that voices such as evangélicas speak both from within their social location as Latina women and from within the bounds of their theological commitments.

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continental United States. These elements have not been selected at random, but I consider these elements to be highly relevant for me and for others who fit these identities in the context of North-American society.

<sup>12</sup> I consider myself fitting in, broadly, within the evangélica ethos while appreciating the *en conjunto* mindset of evangélica theology proponents. For instance, I found the following rationale from proponent Loida I. Martell reassuring: “Like other Latinas, evangélicas are not uniform. We are diverse not just culturally, religiously, socioeconomically, and politically as a group, but also individually like any other individual human being. We have points of agreement and disagreement. . . . We expected that our theological understandings would have points of convergence and divergence, and we welcomed all this. . . . Scripture seems to point to the same conclusion: diversity and disagreement do not signal division, but rather are part of what it means to live in a healthy, living body (1 Cor 12:14–27). Throughout this project we took time to share in a reflective process and engage in *teología en conjunto*” (Loida I. Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Perez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 128-129. *En conjunto* is often translated as collaborative theology. Thus, while I approach their work also with an *en conjunto* mindset, I will naturally resonate with some aspects more than others.

<sup>13</sup> In the case of evangélicas, this is largely a result of the *en conjunto* stance of Latino/a/x scholars at large, which has often opened up possibilities for the welcoming of various voices at the table, including evangélica voices. Francisco Lozada Jr. and Fernando Segovia exemplify this dynamic in Francisco Lozada Jr., and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *Latino/a Theology and the Bible: Ethnic-Racial Reflections on Interpretation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021). In it, Lozada and Segovia aim to show that it is important for Latino/a Studies to welcome theological approaches within the field, to the extent that Latino/a ecclesial communities embrace those approaches, thus honoring the lived experiences of the flesh and bone readers of the communities at hand. Although it is true that they point to this vision as a relatively recent development, their recent publication shows that theological approaches (including proposals relatable to TIS convictions) are increasingly finding places of commonality within the realm of Latino/a Studies. See Lozadas’s typology and perhaps point to specific examples such as Lozano and the Pentecostal proponent. See in particular Segovia, “Approaching the Bible in Latino/a Theology: Doing Theological Construction and Biblical Criticism in an Ethnic-Racial Key” (ibid., 3-26), “Approaching Latino/a Theology and the Bible: Doing cultural Analysis on an Ethnic-Racial Key” (ibid., 235-288), and Lozada, “How do Latino/a Theologians Employ Scripture?” which includes a useful section on “The Theological Approach” (ibid., 209-234).

In the following section I will offer a basic survey of evangélica theology, particularly highlighting aspects relevant to the present discussion.

### **Evangélica Theology**

*Evangélica* theology is a promising movement considered a protestant-leaning ecumenical viewpoint within the larger umbrella of Latina Women's Theologies.<sup>14</sup>

According to proponent, Loida I. Martell, evangélica theology attends to the experiences of Latina women, that is, “women from a Latin American or Latin Caribbean background who either reside, or were born, in the continental United States.”<sup>15</sup> Martell explains that their “pluriform existence” includes “biological, cultural, linguistic, and religious” fusions often described by terms such “*mestizaje*, *mulatez*, *mezconlanza* (mixture), *nepantla* (“land in the middle”) and *sata/o* (“mongrel” or “mutt”).<sup>16</sup> She adds: “Latinas are part of a community that though disparate, nevertheless faces a number of issues and shares common experiences of bilingualism, multiculturalism, popular religious faith, marginality, poverty, colonization, migration, and cultural alienation.”<sup>17</sup> Despite the challenges that they might face, argues Martell,

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<sup>14</sup> Note that evangélica theology proponents utilize “the nontranslated evangélica” in order to distinguish themselves from “the English evangelical” and in order to denote the “mestizo, mezcolanza, or nepantla” or “pluriform . . . popular Protestantism” they represent (Martell, *Latina Evangélicas*, 8). Elsewhere, Martell similarly writes: “The term ‘evangélica’ does not necessarily translate as ‘evangelical,’ which in the United States implies a particular theological and at times political position within Protestantism. Rather, ‘evangélica’ in Spanish simply denotes one as a Protestant,” that is, “a people of ‘The Book’—*el evangelio* or ‘good news’” (Martell, “Reading Against the Grain: Scripture and Constructive Evangélica Theology” in *Latino/a Theology and the Bible*, edited by Lozada and Segovia, 103-104).

<sup>15</sup> Martell, *Latina Evangélicas*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Martell argues elsewhere that the layered marginalization historically experienced by Latinas (both relative to gender and ethnic-racial identities) has posed and continues to pose serious social consequences to them, such as “myriad challenges of ethnic and linguistic discrimination, poverty, under- and unemployment, poor educational attainment, poor health care, subpar housing, institutional and domestic violence, and marginalization from those things that provide vital connections and quality of life” (Martell, “Reading Against the Grain,” 105).

“evangélicas are profoundly theological women who reflect on the presence of God and its implications in the spaces of the everyday”<sup>18</sup> Thus, for Martell, evangélica theology is “a “grassroots reflection” that pays keen attention to the “flesh-and-bone” scriptural interpreter and to the ways in which she interprets and experiences the works of God in “*lo cotidiano*.”<sup>19</sup> Given their common history and circumstances, evangélicas have developed a careful balance between ecclesial and social responsibility. Indeed, according to proponent Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, while evangélicas “do biblical interpretation in relationship to the church and its theological framework,” they also pay attention to issues related to “woman’s moral agency and relations of power” thus seeking to become an “incarnated . . . liberating word.”<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, as Martell puts it, evangélicas “consider Scripture foundational for practice and belief.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, evangélica proponent Nora O. Lozano argues that the women with whom she often works “see the complete Bible as the inspired word of God.”<sup>22</sup> In constructive conversation with Mujerista theology proponent Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Lozano explains:

Her audience or readers allow Isasi-Díaz to articulate a theology where the Hispanic women’s experience and their struggle for survival become the starting point and the source of the theological task, and not the Bible. In contrast to this experience, the relationship between evangélicas and the Bible is different. Loida Martell-Otero has expressed it in this way: Since mujeres evangélicas stand in the tradition of the Protestant Reformation, the first and most obvious tool we bring to the table is the authority of Scripture. What the Bible says informs and critiques what the larger community may or may not say about a particular subject. The centrality of Scripture is revealed in many

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<sup>18</sup> Martell, *Latina Evangélicas*, 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6. Often defined as “day-today . . . religious belief” (Martell-Otero, *Latina Evangélicas*, 6), or “the space of daily life” (Martell, “Reading Against the Grain,” 106).

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas*, 78-79. This is in constructive conversation with *Mujerista* and Latina Feminist theology and its respective representatives, Ada María Isasi-Díaz and María Pilar Aquino (see *ibid.*, 78-80).

<sup>21</sup> Martell, *Latina Evangélicas*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Nora O. Lozano, “Is It Truly a ‘Good’ Book? The Bible, Empowerment, and Liberation” in *Latino/a Theology and the Bible*, edited by Lozada and Segovia, 90.

ways: in any theological argument put forth in a Hispanic Protestant community, you better have a chapter and verse you can quote to back it up. Our joys, our grief, our suffering, our fiestas, our anger and our triumphs are all expressed at some point with a Bible citation.<sup>23</sup>

Conde-Frazier similarly claims that evangélicas “teach, preach, and act in accordance with the word” with “assurance in Jesus, who makes the illumination of the word possible through the work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>24</sup> In addition, Martell explicitly welcomes a perspective that allows space for the historical works of God past and present. She writes:

Stories about loss of life, dislocation, healing, feeding, overcoming storms, and raising the dead are not metaphors or legends for women whose sons are shot while sitting on their stoops, who have lost their jobs and face eviction, or who have risked their lives crossing the border. Rather, scriptural *testimonios* are about real events that witness to the God who continues to act in their present lives and within their communities through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup>

That being said, evangélicas emphasize the authority of Scripture *praxeologically*, that is, as Martell puts it, “not because of some a priori theoretical argument of infallibility or inerrancy, but rather because it speaks to actual life realities facing the Latina community in the spaces of the everyday.”<sup>26</sup> In this regard, Conde-Frazier explains that whereas they do not reject the type of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 91. Further, while recognizing the need to “deal with . . . passages . . . that seem to have a negative effect on women in general” (ibid., 92), Lozano notes that “it will be hard for many among them to follow the strategy of other women theologians, such as Ada María Isasi-Díaz, who proposes a Mujerista hermeneutics that submits the Bible to a Latinas’ canon where ‘we accept as authoritative only biblical texts that are liberative for us’” (ibid., 90). Lozano thus argues that she (presumably along with other evangélicas) is in “need for a different strategy” (ibid.). She adds: “As a theologian, I am there to help them understand that God, through the Bible, is their friend and not their enemy. Furthermore, I am there to help them become empowered through the Bible to have better lives that are truly abundant” (ibid., 96-97). However, she clarifies, “I need to do it in a way that makes sense to them, according to their realities, with the goal of helping them construct a new meaning where they can find empowerment and liberation” (ibid., 92).

<sup>24</sup> Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas*, 77.

<sup>25</sup> Martell, “Reading Against the Grain,” 116. She similarly writes elsewhere: “Stories about healing, feeding, and restoration—often interpreted by many scholars as metaphors—are considered historical by grassroots evangélicas. These narratives provide hope for them: as God acted then, so God continues to save today” (Martell, *Latina Evangélicas*, 40).

<sup>26</sup> Martell, *Latina Evangélicas*, 12. While Martell places an emphasis on the praxeological element of Scriptural authority rather than on theoretical notions of inerrancy or infallibility, I do not take her to be framing the

exegesis that “can situate the text historically and culturally and also make accessible the original languages,” evangélicas aim to “take into account the questions readers may bring to the text or an understanding of the text’s response and questions to the reader.”<sup>27</sup>

All in all, evangélica scriptural interpreters aim to hear the text from the midst of their experiences as Latina women, and yet aim to do it *theologically*, that is, within a posture of faith and trust in Scripture and from within the nurturing context of their ecclesial communities. Yet, evangélicas do assert that their theological approach is not “from the center,” but rather they “theologize from peripheralized places of powerlessness and voicelessness,” from a place of *marginality*.<sup>28</sup> And it is precisely from their viewpoint of marginality that I believe their voices enrich the path to wholeness in theological interpretation of Scripture.

In the following sections I will briefly address two particular examples that I believe can show their contribution.

### **Evangélica Discernment and Ecclesial Interpretations of Scripture**

Evangélicas who explicitly approach the scriptural text from their social location of marginality are often keenly aware of how Scripture has been used as an aid in the processes of colonization of Latin American peoples and cultures, along with its varied consequences. Therefore, evangélicas broadly embrace a “Hispanically oriented reading of [the] Scriptures and Christian history” that seriously considers the “realities of conquest, colonialism, migration, and

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matter as necessarily dichotomous or mutually exclusive. Yet, this is a topic that deserves further study. In this regard, notice that Conde-Frazier clarifies that whereas “the Bible has always held special authority in the evangélica community,” yet “the nature and theological implications of that authority are understood in different ways” (Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas*, 74).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 76. I similarly understand Conde-Frazier as welcoming a nuanced yet not necessarily dichotomous perspective in this regard. See previous note.

<sup>28</sup> Martell, *Latina Evangélicas*, 37, 35. See also Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas*, 78.



biculturalism,” as well as, a “Spanish” reading of the Bible which acknowledges a “‘non-innocent’ history that deals with issues of power and powerlessness.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, evangélica theology proponents emphasize how women in particular have suffered the consequences of vicious readings of Scripture even within “ecclesial bodies that marginalize them.”<sup>30</sup> For instance, Lozano notes how “the Bible has been used as a tool to attempt to limit and control women.”<sup>31</sup> And she writes the following in reference to the women that she works with: “Since these women consider the Bible as the word of God, when the Bible is used against them in order to question women’s status, call, capability, and competence, it feels as if it is not only the Bible who is against them but also the God of the Bible.”<sup>32</sup> And she adds: “The result is a sense of disempowerment that can lead women to be paralyzed: who wants to be against God?”<sup>33</sup> Lozano then poses a key question: “is it possible for these women to separate the Bible from its many

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<sup>29</sup> Martell, “Reading Against the Grain,” 108. This is in reference to Orlando E. Costas and Justo L. Gonzalez’s proposals respectively. Martell argues that “while those efforts were a critically important step for Latin@ contextual theologies, absent from them were experiences of gender oppression” (ibid.). That being said, Martell mentions several other supporting elements such as: “long history of invasion, colonialism, and neocolonialism;” “European military and missiological forces that justified this theft as well as their genocidal impulses with Scriptural and theological warrants;” “Manifest Destiny;” “Women have been raped and exploited, treated as ‘things’ to be used by whoever has been in power;” “For such corporate entities, we Latin@s are simply ‘raw material,’ available for their manipulation;” Martell, *Latino/a Theology and the Bible*, 105-106. See also what Conde-Frazier says in this regard: “the Bible is not a neutral book. . . . What these sacred texts have represented for the peoples who have claimed and used them has been a dialectic between the powers of conquest and liberation across the years” (Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas*, 74).

<sup>30</sup> Martell, *Latino/a Theology and the Bible*, 107. Martell also points to a similar situation within other “social institutions” and “even within family structures that are supposed to be sanctuaries for them.” (ibid.) As I see it, these other categories are closely interrelated to the ecclesial context of evangélicas, which is the more specific focus of this paper.

<sup>31</sup> Lozano, *Latino/a Theology and the Bible*, 90. Further, for Lozano, these uses of the Bible have turned it into an oppressive book that, instead of bringing good news for women, seems to be the bearer of bad news for them” (ibid.).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

interpretations?”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Lozano’s questions and concerns point to the reality that, given the weight of history, evangélicas have been often compelled to question aspects of ecclesial reception history.

As we have seen, Evangélicas’ questioning stance does not arise from a place of faithlessness or from a critical posture towards Scripture. While Martell and other proponents of evangélica theology often talk about their approach as making space for “a hermeneutic of suspicion,” they are also often clear that evangélicas do not exercise suspicion against Scripture, but are mostly interested in directing their suspicion toward vicious interpretations of Scripture that are detrimental to them and their communities.<sup>35</sup> As Martell sees it, although Scripture “has admittedly been used to justify atrocities,” it “has also functioned as a source of subversive transformation for the powerless” and “in many cases, it has been the means by which people have affirmed their humanity in dehumanizing circumstances.”<sup>36</sup> And it is in that sense, according to Conde-Frazier, that evangélica interpreters read Scripture “from within and beyond the Tradition.”<sup>37</sup> Martell similarly writes:

While the faith and teachings of our *abuelitas* serve as a foundation for our theologies, we also honor the Protestant principle of *ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda*—the church reformed and always reforming—that allows us to grow, contextualize, question, and provide constructive suggestions to the traditions we have received.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Martell, “Reading Against the Grain,” 117. With this statement, Martell is making reference to a specific example from Luke 7, but I believe it is applicable more broadly. Indeed, for evangélicas it is crucial to clarify, along with Martell, that “the biblical evidence does not point to an experience of abusive power. It is not a power over but rather a liberative power imbued with grace, love, and justice” (ibid., 112).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>37</sup> See Conde-Frazier, “Evangélicas Reading Scriptures: Readings from Within and Beyond the Tradition,” in *Latina Evangélicas*, 73-89.

<sup>38</sup> Martell, *Latina Evangélicas*, 8-9. “Abuelitas” means “grandmothers”.

Most importantly, according to Conde-Frazier, such critical dialogue arises out of the spiritual practice of discernment, based on the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, while TIS proponents call for a priority of ecclesial spiritual practices and interpretive traditions, evangélica voices, in their theologizing from a social location of marginality, renew the ever-relevant task of distinguishing between the message of Scripture and the messages of human scriptural interpreters highlighted within ecclesial reception history. Their voices, if rightly heard, remind us that forgetfulness about this crucial dialogue might lead to Latina women (and similar others) confusing submission to God's word with submission to the limitations and abuses sometimes imposed on them by the agency of ecclesial bodies.<sup>40</sup>

### **Evangélica Attentiveness to the Scriptural Text**

Evangélicas who explicitly approach Scripture from their social location of marginality exercise poetic attentiveness to the scriptural text in ways that are relevant to the lived realities of evangélica everyday readers. As Martell puts it, “on the one hand, God speaks to them through Scripture. On the other hand, they interrogate the text, bringing to it the questions and concerns that arise from their social location.”<sup>41</sup> In that way, argues Martell, evangélica scriptural interpreters, from their “lens of marginality,” illuminate texts and themes “not normally highlighted by theologians from the center.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Conde-Frazier, “Charisms of the Holy Spirit: Call, Authority, and Structure” in *Latina Evangélicas*, 95-99.

<sup>40</sup> The philosophical problem of separating God's word and agency from the ways that it has been interpreted and articulated within ecclesial reception history in one way or another is an ongoing one and might not be ever solved from a limited human perspective. However, I suggest that such distinction is maintained, although problematic to some extent, so that a necessary tension can exist that allows interpreters such as evangélicas to understand that vicious interpretations *about* God's word are not necessarily to be confused with divine intention.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>42</sup> Martell, “Reading Against the Grain,” 114-115.

For instance, Conde-Frazier highlights how evangélica scholar Daisy Machado’s reading of the story of “the concubine of Judges 19” is attentive both to the text as well as to the situation of many Latinas today, as she “correlates the violence that this woman suffers with the violence experienced by an immigrant woman whom she meets in a South Texas shelter.”<sup>43</sup> As Conde-Frazier sees it, Machado shows how “the passage challenges us in our time and situation to a courageous and just action,” that is, to a “response against violence toward and disempowerment of immigrant women.”<sup>44</sup> Consider also how Natalia Kohn, Noemi Vega Quiñones, and Kristy Garza Robinson contextualize various narratives of women in the Bible as a way to nurture and empower the Christian witness of Latina women.<sup>45</sup> As the authors of *Hermanas* show, when evangélicas exercise poetic sensibility in attentiveness to the scriptural text, Esther becomes a “*Mestiza* For God’s Mission,”<sup>46</sup> the bleeding woman an example of “Mija Leadership,” and Rahab an “Atrevida, Allied, and Faithful Liberator.”<sup>47</sup> The story of the Canaanite Woman they

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<sup>43</sup> Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangélicas*, 82. Conde-Frazier further explains: “The status of both women, concubine and undocumented immigrant, leaves them unprotected. The way that neither is valued leaves them unnamed in their respective societies. In both stories the women are seen as objects; their bodies are used, abused, and tortured, and no one comes to their aid. The men and forces of their time that act against them are beyond the women’s control” (ibid., 82-83).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 82. Conde-Frazier further argues that Machado “reads the text by making correlations between the biblical narrative and our own present realities...[She] points out to us that the biblical story ‘concludes with three imperatives[:] consider what you have seen, take counsel on what action to take[,] and speak’” (ibid.). And she further writes: “where the stories have shown us the depths of death, the biblical imperative urges us to actions that bring life. We can understand by this that the story of the anonymous concubine is not an example of what to do but of what not to do” (ibid.).

<sup>45</sup> Natalia Kohn, Noemi Vega Quiñones, and Kristy Garza Robinson, *Hermanas: Deepening our Identity and Growing our Influence* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019). Interestingly, Vega Quiñones particularly points to the influence of “Latina historians and theologians such as Daisy Machado, María Pilar Aquino, Loida Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Pérez, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz, Teresa Delgado, Arlene M. Sánchez-Walsh, and many more . . .” (Vega Quiñones, *Hermanas*, 134). She also identifies *Latina Evangélicas* as the resource that “has had the most significant impact on my formation” because it “spoke directly to my evangélica experience in the United States” (ibid., 206-207).

<sup>46</sup> In this context, “mestiza” refers to a biracial and bicultural woman.

<sup>47</sup> “Mija” literally means “my daughter.” It is often used as an endearment term.

consider a “Breakthrough at the Margins,” Ruth embodies a border crosser in “Crossing Borders and the Heseed of God,” and the story of Tabitha highlights topics such as “Misión Integral y En Conjunto.”<sup>48</sup> Kohn, Vega Quiñones, and Garza Robinson, encourage their readers to “read with eyes to see” the latent scriptural possibilities and correlations between these biblical women and contemporary evangélicas, as their “narratives form us and shape us, calling us to a place of deeper trust and faith.”<sup>49</sup>

Thus, while TIS proponents call for a posture of faith toward Scripture as a whole, these examples broadly illustrate how evangélica voices from within their social location of marginality, and in faithful attentiveness to the scriptural text, reclaim angles and corners of the biblical narrative often neglected by other scriptural interpreters and yet deeply relevant to everyday evangélicas. In doing so, they illuminate silences from within ecclesial reception history, reminding us of the important task of engaging in a faithful retelling of the biblical story that is relevant to our ecclesial communities today.

### **Conclusion: A Path to Wholeness**

Although there is much more to say, given time constraints my conclusion will be brief. As way of conclusion, I join Martell as she writes: “it is not my intention to set aside the wonderful work of my colleagues in biblical studies and theological hermeneutics. Rather, I propose an additional tool, one that ensures at the very least the incorporation of the larger

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<sup>48</sup> The terms are often translated as “integral” or “holistic mission” and “collaborative theology” respectively. Both are important themes for evangélica theology, as well as for the broader Latino/a/x fields.

<sup>49</sup> Kohn, Vega Quiñones, and Garza Robinson, *Hermanas*, 3, 196. It is in that sense that they write: “Our heart is that Latinas would feel mentored in their faith and ethnic journey, experiencing how these themes build on one another to form our voice” (ibid., 11-12).

nonacademic community, and in particular, the voices of grassroots evangélicas.”<sup>50</sup> In this way, emergent voices such as evangélicas in their social location of marginality, entreat our ecclesial communities to enriching—although at times corrective—dialogue as we carve a path to wholeness in theological interpretation of Scripture.

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<sup>50</sup> Martell, *Latino/a Theology and the Bible*, 119.