



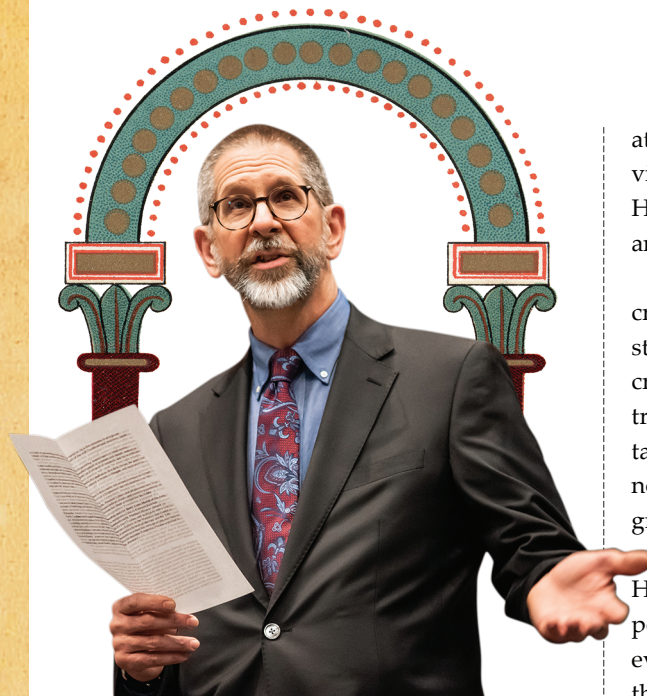
Höfling reenacts moves from a manuscript created by Mestre Vicente Pastinha.



Pastinha founded the first capoeira angola – or traditional-style – school in 1941.



He illustrated his manuscript by tracing the work of photographer Pierre Verger.



PROPHECY AS POETRY

Jews and Christians typically study the Bible – the world’s most widely read book – to learn about their God and how they should live.

But how often do people open the Bible to enjoy it as art?

Dr. Christopher Hodgkins’ newly published “Literary Study of the Bible: An Introduction,” 25 years in the making, brings that possibility to the forefront for both scholars and ordinary readers.

“My book explores imagination throughout the Bible,” the professor of English says. “And how – through lyric poetry, narrative, and drama – we are given kaleidoscopic ways of understanding God and his people.”

The Wiley-Blackwell publication takes its name from a course Hodgkins has taught since 1994 and follows some of the structure of that class as well as the structure of his Renaissance literature courses.

He begins with short lyric poems, in this case the Psalms. Starting with those brief poetic works, he says, best prepares the reader to approach longer narrative sections, such as Genesis, in a more meaningful way.

The goal is to give readers a familiarity with the artistic and poetic conventions

at play. These include repetition, multiple viewpoints, and ironic dissonance, says Hodgkins, citing the creation story as an example.

“The Babylonians portrayed the creation of the universe as a deadly struggle for power, but the Bible retells creation as the work of a serene and transcendent poet, yet also of an intimate, tactile sculptor. At the heart of reality is not a death match, but an art of universal grandeur.”

In “Literary Study of the Bible,” Hodgkins often relates biblical texts to popular and literary culture – and to the even more ancient works that influenced them. “Looking back, we hear echoes of ‘Gilgamesh’ in Genesis, of Hammurabi’s Laws in Exodus, and of Egyptian love lyrics in Solomon’s Song.”

Looking forward, he adds, “we can draw lines connecting Genesis and Jefferson, Moses and Martin Luther King, Job and George Bailey, Delilah and Dark Ladies, Ecclesiastes and existentialism.”

When seen as “cosmic theater,” Hodgkins says, “the Bible contains the great plot lines that still animate our favorite entertainments: from the alienated outsider hero to the king incognito; from the ‘Jezebel’ to the social prophet; and from the One Who Lived to the One Who Died. Luke Skywalker, Peter Parker, Harry Potter, Steve Rogers, Carol Danvers – they’re all there.”

The book also showcases recent scholarly findings on how many Biblical elements that appear chaotic, random, or overly repetitive to a modern Western reader have been carefully crafted over centuries of collaborative work.

“The Bible brings together the Hebrew commitment to multiple viewpoints, the Greek rational philosophical tradition, and the Anglo-Saxon statement of one true thing,” Hodgkins says. “When you recognize these cultural traditions interweaving through time, you experience the scripture as a remarkable work of art.”

By Susan Kirby-Smith

*Learn more at go.uncg.edu/litstudybible
english.uncg.edu/hodgkins*