

Fuller Theological Seminary: Theological Identity & Distinctive Tenets

Fuller Theological Seminary is theologically grounded in the difficult-to-define, continually-reforming evangelical tradition. We are not denominationally centered but hail from and serve many communions and independent Christian movements. We engage students and the church globally, and our students, faculty, and executive leaders represent a vibrant variety of backgrounds and ethnicities. From this perspective – evangelical, ecumenical, global, multi-ethnic – we are dedicated to equipping women and men for the manifold ministries of Jesus Christ and his church, and to hosting those who speak prophetically to the church and society about pressing theological issues.

Like many religious institutions, we have a Statement of Faith. Each employee in a leadership role – so all faculty and the entire executive team, along with each trustee – affirm and annually reaffirm their heartfelt agreement with Fuller's. It is centered on Jesus Christ as revelation of the one true God, graciously revealed in Scripture, engaged through his church in the redemption of all that is redeemable. Importantly, our particular course as an institution has led to certain insights and theological perspectives, Tenets which we offer as gifts to the church and which distinguish Fuller from nearby travelers. The Statement of Faith and a summary of our Tenets follow.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

Under God, and subject to biblical authority, the faculty, managers/administrators, and trustees of Fuller Theological Seminary bear concerted witness to the following articles, to which they subscribe, which they hold to be essential to their ministry, and which are the foundation upon which the seminary has long-been based.

- I. By God's revelation, we know God to be the living and true God, perfect in love and righteousness, one in essence, existing eternally in the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- II. God, who speaks to humankind through creation, has done so savingly in the words and events of redemptive history. This history is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, who is made known to us by the Holy Spirit in sacred Scripture.
- III. Scripture is an essential part and trustworthy record of this divine self-disclosure. All the books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, are the written word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. They are to be interpreted according to their context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through them in living power.
- IV. By God's word and for God's glory, the world was freely created out of nothing. Made in the divine image, men and women are the crown of creation, created for fellowship with God. Tempted by Satan, they rebelled against God. Being estranged from, yet responsible to their

Maker, they became subject to divine wrath, inwardly depraved and, apart from grace, incapable of returning to God.

- V. The only mediator between God and humankind is Christ Jesus our Lord, God's eternal son, who, being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, fully shared and fulfilled our humanity in a life of perfect obedience. By dying in our stead, Christ revealed the divine love and upheld divine justice, removing our guilt and reconciling us to God. Having redeemed us from sin, the third day he rose bodily from the grave, victorious over death and the powers of darkness. Our risen Lord ascended into heaven where, at God's right hand, he intercedes for his people and rules as Lord over all.
- VI. The Holy Spirit, through the proclamation of the gospel, renews our hearts, persuading us to repent of our sins and confess Jesus as Lord. By the same Spirit we are led to trust in divine mercy, whereby we are forgiven all our sins, justified by faith alone through the merit of Christ our Savior, and granted the free gift of eternal life.
- VII. God graciously adopts us into his family and enables us to call him Father. As we are led by the Spirit, we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, freely keeping his commandments and endeavoring so to live in the world that all may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.
- VIII. God, by Word and Spirit, creates the one holy catholic and apostolic church, calling sinners out of the whole human race into the fellowship of Christ's body. By the same Word and Spirit, God guides and preserves for eternity that new, redeemed humanity, which, being formed in every culture, is spiritually one with the people of God in all ages.
- IX. The church is summoned by Christ to offer God acceptable worship and to engage in God's service by preaching the gospel and making disciples of all nations, by tending the flock through the ministry of the word and sacraments and through daily pastoral care, by striving for social justice, and by relieving human distress and need.
- X. God's redemptive purpose will be consummated by the return of Christ to raise the dead, to judge all people according to the deeds done in the body, and to establish God's glorious kingdom. The wicked shall be separated from God's presence, but the righteous, in glorious bodies, shall live and reign with Christ forever. Then shall the eager expectation of the creation be fulfilled and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new.

TENETS & DEVELOPMENT OF FULLER'S DISTINCT THEOLOGICAL IDENTITY

As evident from the Statement of Faith, Fuller Seminary – represented by its faculty, executive leaders, and trustees – walks the traditional path of evangelical theology, centered on Jesus Christ as revelation of the one true God, graciously revealed in Scripture, our inspired and authoritative guide for life. We share this road with many others but our particular path has led to distinctive insights and perspectives, Tenets which further define Fuller theologically, as an institution. We are:

Grateful Disciples: First, we affirm – as faculty, executives, and trustees – that our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ transcends and transforms all our roles and callings. We are followers of Jesus, called to faithful discipleship in every sphere of life. There is no separation between sacred and secular because all is united in mission: to equip men and women for the manifold ministries of Jesus Christ and his church, and to host those who speak prophetically to the church and society about pressing theological issues. This is how we serve and bear witness to the Triune God and advance the Gospel in the world.

Guided by Scripture: As in the Statement of Faith (article III), biblical scholarship at Fuller reflects deep understanding of historical, literary, and theological context: What was the situation when this was provided? What questions were being asked? And for what purpose? Then, how might it be understood and applied today? Obviously, our world is very different from first-century Palestine and the Roman Empire, let alone from the centuries in which the Hebrew Scriptures were composed. Yet our conviction is that deep understanding of context enables biblically-informed guidance today. This led us to back away from terms like 'inerrancy' and 'literal', associated with direct, even mechanical application of biblical passages, in favor of emphasizing the 'authority' and 'inspiration' of Scripture, and leading to the conviction that Scripture is the only 'infallible' rule of faith and practice.

Grounded in Tradition, Engaged with Modernity: When Fuller was founded (1947), fundamentalist movements in North America were increasingly isolated as the so-called higher criticism and its often-harsh critique of Scripture gained influence. Fuller's founders and early faculty believed that modern academic insights could deepen biblical understanding, that engaging the academy would both counter its critical extremes and lead to reform of fundamentalism – all to encourage evangelical faith. To this day, the faculty engages modern research and insights alongside historical views, seeking to reveal truth.

Concerned for Justice: Fuller grew rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s, a period in which social justice issues, especially related to race and gender, were raised with increased intensity in America. Guided by contextually-informed exposition of Scripture, Fuller was convicted that we are to recognize the *Imago Dei* in every person, that God's gifts are distributed broadly among various races and ethnicities and among women and men, and that we are to encourage all members of the body to contribute their unique personal gifts. These beliefs are reflected in continued concern for justice in the Church and in society, and in our egalitarian convictions about church leadership. With that in mind, Fuller is committed to inclusion without regard to race, ethnicity, or gender – and we take great joy in the vibrant variety of our fellow travelers.

Committed to Biblical Guidance for Marriage & Sexuality: Although advocacy of same-sex marriage often employs the rhetoric of biblical justice, we do not believe that the practice is

consistent with biblical guidance. We do not contest bonds of affection between same-sex partners and certainly affirm protection against legal and societal discrimination. However, Fuller Seminary holds to the historic biblical understanding of marriage as a sacred covenant between a man and a woman, designed by God for mutual sanctification, companionship and love, and for the procreation and education of children. It is a lifelong bond so powerful that Paul draws on it as metaphor for Jesus and his Church. We further affirm that marriage, although consecrated, is not superior to singleness and celibacy, nor is it essential for Christian discipleship.

Concerned for Emotional & Spiritual Health: In the 1960s, a series of exceptionally challenging lectures led to founding a local center for psychological services, then to the Fuller School of Psychology (now including Marriage & Family Therapy). It was the first school of clinical psychology in a USA-based theological seminary, dedicated to preparing Christian psychologists and therapists through concurrent and integrative study of psychology and theology. Fuller affirms that emotional health and spiritual formation are connected, that therapeutic care can be part of God's redemptive work, and that human flourishing encompasses communal healing, reconciliation, and restoration. Again, Fuller's path merges evangelical faith with modern insights.

Engaged Globally: Fuller presses contextualization of Scripture and concern for justice into global service. As the church grew rapidly in the Majority World, Fuller became a, arguably *the* leading theological voice associated with the global evangelical Church, nourishing local leaders and missionaries worldwide as they guided the church theologically. The majority of the global Christian community is now outside the West, and Fuller is committed to serving and learning with mutuality.

Engaged Hospitably: We take joy in learning from nearby travelers and share the conviction that civil and hospitable engagement is essential to our continued vitality. We welcome students and guests with different points of view. In various areas, we know where Fuller stands: the magnificence of the Trinitarian God, the authority of Scripture contextually understood then fairly applied, the God-given beauty and gift of each human being and the distribution of gifts among them, the importance of biblical guidance for relationships, the value of mental health insights for the Church, the unique beauty of perspectives from other cultures. We share these foundational convictions but do not advocate complete unanimity on often-subtle topics, and recognize that Jesus-followers, informed by study and prayerful reflection, sometimes reach different conclusions.

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We pitch a big tent and our community – students, faculty, executives, trustees – includes Christians from many denominations and independent movements. Yet we are defined institutionally by the Statement of Faith and by these Tenets. Our shared perspectives allow us to joyfully engage inquiring students and guests, to interact with resolve as we explore new areas, and to learn with and from others. To enable meaningful exchanges we commit to hospitality, including fair representation of opposing as well as complementary views and respect for those who reach different conclusions, all in the hope of uncovering truth and strengthening the bonds of Christian community.

The church and our societies need informed, engaged, and hospitable leaders. Perennial issues are gaining new energy, including those related to just war and pacifism, to democratic capitalism and redistribution, to immigration and nationalism, and to corruption within the Church and society.

In the West, pressing topics include human identity, gender and sexuality, technology to enable genetic selection, and surrogacy. Artificial General Intelligence mimics, some believe extends cognitive life. And all these ideas and technologies are exported globally.

The Majority World – now home to roughly two-thirds of Christians and projected to account for three-quarters by mid-century – is home to many of our colleagues and presents particular issues. The local church is often home to a numerical minority among over 97% of the world's Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Atheists. Christian communities and witness are often restricted. Material conditions are generally more difficult than in the West and resources more limited, so the challenges of life are often more existential. And many of these issues are brought to the West through immigration.

Fuller is concerned for each of these topics, searching for ways to advance Jesus' redemptive purposes through his Church, guided by deep exploration and application of Scripture, engaged with modern insights and technologies, deeply concerned for justice, always with a global perspective. To that end, we are committed to learning from a variety of perspectives, to reflecting deeply, to communicating clearly, and to the sort of hospitality that enables others to engage with us and to learn together.