BIBLE AND TRANSFORMATION

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BIBLE AND TRANSFORMATION

THE PROMISE OF INTERCULTURAL BIBLE READING

Edited by

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Summary: "This book offers the results of research within a new area of discipline—empirical hermeneutics in intercultural perspective. Ordinary readers from more than twenty-five countries in interaction with a distant partner group engage the stories of the rape of biblical accounts. Interpretations from the homeless in Amsterdam, to Indonesia, from African Xhosa readers to Norway, to Madagascar, American youths, Germany, Czech Republic, Colombia, and Haitian refugees in the Dominican Republic offer a (road)map of the sometimes delightful and inspiring, sometimes rough and rocky road to inclusive and transformative Bible reading"— Provided by publisher.

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Contents

Part 4. Am I My Sister's Keeper? Case Studies on Other Texts

Introduction

Hans de Wit and Janet Dyk

Beginning as a grassroots movement, inspired by Latin American and other contextual hermeneutics, intercultural Bible reading has earned its own place within the field of biblical studies.

In 2001 the first phase of a worldwide initiative called "Through the Eyes of Another" was launched, and, with a focus on John 4, a method for bringing Bible reading groups to interact with one another was developed. The novelty of this project was not that readers from different cultures and contexts were asked to participate, nor that biblical scholars carefully began to listen or "read with" nonprofessional Bible readers. What was innovative was that distance was incorporated as a hermeneutical factor and that encounter and dialogue were organized between readers from different reading traditions and contexts.

The central research question was open and explorative: What happens when Bible readers from sometimes radically different contexts and cultures read the same Bible text and start dialoguing about its significance? Can this way of shared Bible reading become a catalyst for more openness and transformation? More than one hundred fifty groups from over thirty countries participated in the project. Its results were astonishing. Levinas's infinity—texts are inexhaustible—came to the fore. Over three thousand pages of vernacular readings of the story of the Samaritan women were collected. The theological reflection was varied and rich. Several participating scholars developed a qualitative analytical system for coding and decoding the material in order to detect which factors hampered and which promoted successful exchange and growth in intercultural and hermeneutical competence.

During the analysis of the empirical material, the question of the relationship between reading, (new) praxis, and transformation became increasingly intriguing. This relationship is almost always taken to be

strong, intimate, and immediate. We noted, however, that the relationship is, to say the least, complex and much less direct than is often claimed. In the three thousand pages of empirical material, we discovered only one example of a group that took immediate action as a result of the reading process. Even in those cases where groups had asked themselves explicitly which directives resulted from reading the text, the reply was almost always that of a *desideratum*: "we will/would now…," "perhaps we should… ," "could we not… ?" The question arose as to what extent a transforming, praxeological effect of intercultural readings could be mapped.

Out of this question, the second phase of the project was born of which this volume bears witness. The research questions are more precise: How, if at all, does transformation occur? Can cross-border encounters become a catalyst for the transformation of the reader, the text, and the perception and acceptance of the other reader? If so, under which conditions? In this second phase, groups mainly focused on 2 Sam 13 (the rape of Tamar) and John 20:1–18 (Mary Magdalene at Jesus's tomb), while a few groups interacted on the story of Cain and Abel, Ruth, the prodigal son, the inopportune guest, or the widow and the unjust judge.

Building on the project "Through the Eyes of Another," this new cycle of reading exchanges marks a step forward, not just more of the same. It culminated in a February 2013 conference in Amsterdam and the essays in this volume. Through a consolidation of insights, the results of the intercultural Bible reading process are brought into a framework in which the theological, sociological, psychological, and personal implications can be analyzed. Results of a cross-border practice of Bible reading are presented that account for the multiplicity of readings.

Central to this volume are the concepts "empirical," "intercultural," and "transformation." "Empirical hermeneutics" refers to an activity of researchers; it is a form of reception or reader-response criticism that analyzes how the interaction between Scripture and contemporary readers takes place. "Empirical" does not refer to a specific type of reading but to the object of analysis, that is, the detailed reports of what readers did in their approach to a specific biblical text. Interpretation practices of contemporary ordinary readers are assessed at the metalevel of theory formation, as well as at the microlevel of qualitative research. An important argument for using the term "empirical" is that the production of empirical data was necessary for a successful application of the method used in the processes analyzed in this book. Participating groups were invited to

record how their reading processes and encounters with partner groups took place. Exegetes leave the traces of their labor in books and commentaries, and those traces—empirical data—can be analyzed; however, little evidence is recorded, let alone analyzed, of the way in which the overwhelming majority of current ordinary readers approach biblical texts. The "Bible and Transformation" project concentrates on *their* interpretive practices. That is also one of the reasons why some of the contributors did not want to engage much in more critical, scholarly reflection but preferred rather to offer their readers the opportunity of becoming eyewitnesses to the way in which drug addicts and homeless people in Amsterdam, prisoners in Indonesia, or readers elsewhere read and appropriated the story of Tamar or Mary Magdalene. For several authors, this has been a conscious choice. By offering much of the raw data—almost verbatim descriptions of the reading process—they wanted to create space for the subaltern, enabling them to speak out and letting their voices be heard. The choice was thus not to allow scholarly reflection to overshadow and mute that process, that is, a choice for praxis first and only thereafter for reflection. "Empirical hermeneutics," as here defined, is not interested in the analysis of the genesis and transmission of the text, but explores what has been called "the foreground" of the text, that is, its capacity to shed light on new situations not seen by the original authors and its potential to engender new practices. We wanted to explore the space in which the effect of *reading the text now* becomes manifest, the space where the text becomes embedded in a new context, where, for better or for worse, processes of appropriation take place and readers try to understand the text as a letter directly addressed to themselves and their situation—the space mainly inhabited by ordinary readers.

Over the last decades, the concept "ordinary readers" has been broadly debated. To what extent can biblical scholars, who next to their interpretive interests almost always also have life interests that guide their practice, be considered ordinary readers? Can they ever become nonprofessional readers again? Is a second naïveté really possible? Can "ordinary" be defined according to and in contrast with what knowledge professional readers are supposed to have when they approach biblical texts? Does an Old Testament scholar become an ordinary reader when he or she reads a text of Paul or John? Is the concept class bound?

We propose here an alternative definition of the concept. By "ordinary reader," we prefer to understand both a *space* and *a way of reading*, an *attitude toward the text*. The space is where the *effect* of the process of

reading biblical texts is revealed, where Bible reading becomes decisive and ethical. It is the place where the overwhelming majority of Bible readers can be found, where the potential of biblical texts to affect behavior is activated, and where interpretation processes turn into social, political, and religious practices founded on biblical texts. In this space, reading processes become either life-sapping and excluding, or life-giving, liberative, and salvific.

By "attitude," we understand the way readers approach biblical texts. What is the status of the text for the readers, what are their expectations of the outcome of the interpretation process? Which questions would they like to ask the text? What results of the reading process are they looking for, what kind of interaction? Which metaphor would they apply to their encounter with the text—meeting a companion, an ally, a friend, a counselor, an enemy?

In his foundational article "What Is a Text? Explanation and Understanding," Paul Ricoeur (1981) distinguished between two attitudes with which a reader can approach a biblical text: a critical, analytical attitude and an existential one. This distinction is still valid and helps to solve our dilemma. By "ordinary reader," we understand the "existential attitude," an attitude, amply documented in our empirical data, that explores the text in its nearness. The keywords to describe this existential approach to the text are not analysis, history, background, or object, but nearness, expectation, present, and appropriation.

By "empirical" we refer to a specific research method, its direct object (reading reports), and the space from which we collect our empirical data (ordinary readers). To the term "empirical," we add another label: "intercultural." This more normative label refers to how we wanted our empirical data to be gathered and of which processes the data should bear traces. To go further than acknowledging that multiplicity exists and that everywhere—also, and especially, in the margins—the Bible is being read, we invited participants to read "with the other." The "inter" in "intercultural" stands for the normative dimension of the project and the method in which ordinary readers from different contexts were invited to read the same biblical text and dialogue about its significance with other readers, whereas "cultural" stands for the conviction that deep dimensions of culture play an important role in the interpretation process.

In this time of the great paradox of fundamentalisms, on the one hand, and globalization, on the other, we wanted to take up again the fundamental—but too easily forgotten—insight of Gadamer on the importance of

distance in interpretation processes. Not only wanting to hear the voices of readers from the margins, we wanted to *organize encounter*, integrating distance as a hermeneutical factor in the interpretation process and inviting readers of the margins to read *together* with readers from the centers: poor readers and more wealthy readers, readers from different ecclesial traditions, political convictions, and cultural settings.

The third component of this book is "transformation." Can Bible reading practices, confronted by exchanges in which distance and differences are made operative, lead to transformation? Can they contribute to open up closed, frozen positions? Can they help people to stop seeing themselves as owners of divine revelation? Empirical evidence is sought that would point to a relationship between Bible-reading processes and transformation.

Empirical data became available from ordinary readers from more than twenty-five countries in interaction with a distant partner group. In its portrayals of transformation and the framework of cross-border Bible reading, this book takes the reader to the contexts of the participating groups—from the homeless and drug addicts in Amsterdam to Indonesia, from African Xhosa readers to Norway, Madagascar, North America, Japan, China, Germany, Colombia, and Haitian refugees in the Dominican Republic. This volume offers a roadmap of the sometimes delightful and inspiring, sometimes rough and rocky road to inclusive and transformative Bible reading.

In a variety of ways participants addressed the three main concepts of the conference. The more theoretically and the more empirically oriented essays complement each other, offering responses to questions such as the place of intercultural Bible reading within hermeneutics, how culture influences reading processes, what is implied in group dynamics, how empirical data can be collected and processed in a responsible way, how Bible reading with others becomes a script for transformation, where and how transformation is to be observed, and which factors facilitate and which factors prevent transformation from taking place.

Several essays contain results not only of intercultural but also of cross-textual reading experiences (Peru, Indonesia, Madagascar). Cross-textual reading, as a specific form of interreligious dialogue, is only one step removed from intercultural reading. Both approaches involve "alterity" and "otherness" in an explicit way in the process of reading sacred texts. Whereas intercultural Bible reading remains within the Jewish-Christian tradition, cross-textual reading practices relate sacred

texts from different religious traditions. In this volume a choice has been made for the intercultural method for several reasons, one being hermeneutical: since intercultural Bible reading invites readers from different places who belong to the same religious tradition to read the same text, authority and ownership are problematized, Levinas's "infinity" becomes a prominent theme for reflection, and shared ownership and shared agency can more easily be strived for. The more practical reason for staying within intercultural exchanges is that it would not be easy to organize a cross-textual reading project at the level of grassroots readers with the extensive range of the current project. Furthermore, even if cross-textual reading becomes more important and urgent, the longing for transformation that characterized the current project could have easily been confused with a call to conversion. Analysis and comparison of results of interpretations of the same religious texts and the role culture plays in this are perhaps easier than interpreting two or more texts from different traditions. Finally, the confrontation with the other who also believes to be owner of the text, but nevertheless reads it differently, may take place at a more existential level than would be the case in cross-textual hermeneutics. What intercultural Bible reading strives for is that, within a profoundly divided Christianity, the intercultural encounter becomes a *script* for transformation and leads to *shared* ownership and *shared* agency for justice and liberation.

At the same time, we also take note of where this has not been possible and where the limits of this method become manifest. Like all intercultural encounters, intercultural reading of Scripture is not the easiest way of reflecting on the significance of fundamental texts. The wounded heart cannot easily make the transition from pain to a reflection about how others read the text that one feels to be a mirror of one's own sorrows and grief. It is one thing to recognize yourself as one of the actors in the drama that the text unfolds before you, but it is quite another to read how your role is analyzed or how others do not recognize you in this role.

The essays in this volume could have been arranged in many ways. The difference between more empirically and more theoretically oriented essays makes the text a point of encounter, highlighting the truth of the old talmudic saying that "in dispersion the text is homeland." After the first part treating various aspects of the conceptual framework, essays relating to a particular Bible text are grouped together. The reader will be aware of the multiple thematic cross-connections between the essays.

Part 1. The Dynamics of Intercultural Bible Reading: Conceptual Framework

Within the field of contextual hermeneutics, intercultural Bible reading is a recent offshoot. It distinguishes itself from previous contextually and locally determined Bible-reading processes by defining the concept of communitarian reading in a new way, stressing the need for intercultural encounters and transborder exchanges. The distinctive place of this new field within biblical studies is progressively clearer as the fruits of this type of Bible reading become available.

Fernando F. Segovia addresses the question of the place and role of intercultural biblical hermeneutics within the field of biblical studies, which involves both the conceptualization and formulation of this particular critical approach and its relation to other critical approaches in contemporary biblical criticism. Intercultural reading coincides with the call on the part of political analysts for a return to liberation and embodies such a turn in that it brings a new edge to the hermeneutical mediation of liberation.

In his essay, Hans de Wit scrutinizes the empirical foundations of the universal assumption that reading the Bible does something to the reader, that the dynamics of the encounter has an effect. He attempts to corroborate a workable definition of transformation with an empirically sound understanding of the concept. The question is posed as to what extent cross-border Bible reading should be seen as a quality of the interpretation processes and under which circumstances it can result in transformation of the self, of the social context, of the other reader, and even of the text. This touches the heart of Bible reading and hermeneutic reflection among those who do not want to regard the ancient text solely as an archaeological *deposit* but as a letter addressed to present-day ordinary readers. It is precisely because of the "global presence" of the Bible and the endless procession of people who interact with the Bible that posing the question about the effect of that interaction is so urgent.

Following the methodology of the intercultural reading process, John Mansford Prior examines the integrity of the reader, of the other, and of the text. *The reader*: the greater the openness both in relation to oneself and in the relationships within a group, the greater is the potential transformative power of intercultural readings. *The other*: the other's integrity is respected to the extent readers become bicultural. The more sensitive we become in the conversation with our partner(s), the greater

will be the integrity with which we acknowledge their reading. *The text*: no single interpretation is exhaustive. The more we question and probe each other's readings, the greater will be the integrity with which we read the text. Prior's essay closes with an examination of the values behind our reading of the Bible, concluding that intercultural readings clarify not only which God we actually believe in and who our neighbors are to us and we to them, but also the role religion plays in our lives in ideologically framing our reading. We violate a text when we read into it a message that undermines the God of life and love.

From the point of view of practical theology, Daniel S. Schipani explains that four perspectives on intercultural reading are possible: descriptive-empirical, pragmatic, interpretive, and normative. The process of intercultural Bible reading can be seen as a spiritual journey for which five elements are constitutive: a safe space; the moment of incubation through imagination; space for plurality and new insights; the eureka moment that can be full of catharsis or mourning and shared memories; and the moment of acquiring a new identity. On the basis of empirical data, he further defines, analyzes, and evaluates transformation in interdisciplinary terms. He articulates guidelines for further praxis and emphasizes the importance of the factor of spirituality.

Danie van Zyl discerns distinct levels of transformation affected by group dynamics and makes explicit the necessary conditions for a meaningful process to be lasting. Religious communities often develop closed frameworks of understanding within which texts are read, and they become defensive when confronted with those who differ with them. Intergroup exchange of readings is potentially highly challengingly to the groups involved, particularly on the level of integration and (self-)critical reflection. Without some level of self-criticism, the chances of transformation in intercultural exchange are limited. Issues like the choice of texts and the choice of which groups to link together seem to play key roles in the effectiveness of the transformative experience of intercultural Bible reading.

Werner Kahl shows how, from its earliest beginnings, Christianity has been a cross-cultural phenomenon. Cross-cultural processes represent a central feature of the spread of early Christianity, as is seen in Gal 3. Kahl argues that intercultural biblical hermeneutics not only reflects what lies at the heart of early Christianity—a divinely commissioned crossing of boundaries by undermining exclusive claims to salvation—but that it also pushes for further crossing of boundaries. In the situation in which there

is little contact between the many African migrant churches and German churches, intercultural Bible study can serve as a space for a propitious encounter of Christians with different cultural and confessional backgrounds within the same neighborhood.

Part 2. Rape and Outrage: Case Studies on 2 Samuel 13

A large number of groups engaged with the story of the rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13). Some essays reflect the interaction between globally separated groups in which cultural differences often play a role (part 2.1), while others show the exchange within a locally confined environment where the differences still could be so great that the communication was difficult or broke down completely (part 2.2). In one case, essays dealing with the dialogue between two globally separated groups (Indonesia and Germany) is reported from both perspectives, and the transformation of the strategies and ethics of the interaction with the partner group is analyzed.

Part 2.1. In Her Memory: Tamar's Story in Global Perspective

In the exchange between Indonesia and Germany, Batara Sihombing analyzes the interaction with the German group from the Indonesian point of view. Semantics appears to weigh heavily on the intercultural reading process: the groups use different terms and definitions for the same cases—"rape" (German group) versus "sexual transgression" (Indonesian group). The cultural dimension of collectivism and its influence on the interpretation process are examined. The German group started to see David in his role as father through Indonesian eyes, not as an individual, but as part of a collective—a failed father. This changed the German perception of the plot. The Indonesians, as prisoners, had ample time to gossip and offer new insights into the role of Jonadab. The Indonesian group saw him as a "puppeteer of gossip," and this changed the German groups' perception of Jonadab. In spite of a willingness to learn from the other, both groups also showed a reluctance to change due to their own cultural backgrounds and doctrinal positions, demonstrating that certain attitudes can hamper the promise of transformation in achieving its full potential.

On the other side of this exchange, Rainer Kessler describes how the German middle-class Protestant reading group appears to think they are able to maintain a neutral position in evaluating the partner's interpretation of a biblical passage. While reading the reports and responses of the

partner group comprising Indonesian prisoners, an ethical problem arose within the German group. As it was known that some members of the prisoners' group were incarcerated for sexual crimes, German readers were in danger of showing a lack of respect for the partners by replacing a dialogue with them with an attempt to analyze them. Only after discussing the ethical problems was the group able to benefit from the partners' readings. The essay exposes certain colonial mechanisms at work and how these had to be deconstructed before a less biased exchange could take place.

La Rip Marip of Myanmar emphasizes the need for readers to be interested both in connecting the text to one's own context and in understanding the partners' cultural background. Both the Myanmar and the Dutch reading groups recognized injustice and the abuse of power in their intercultural dialogue on 2 Sam 13, but the Myanmar group related their Bible reading to their whole community whereas the partner Dutch group related it to individuals. The more the asymmetry between reading groups comes to the fore in the dialogue, the more transformation can contribute to the well-being of the other. The desire to understand the culture of the other led the groups further toward understanding the biblical text and toward social justice.

Jeff Moore reports on two groups of women, one from the Netherlands and one from a shelter for homeless women in St. Louis, Missouri, who identified and discussed hegemonic language and harmful assumptions across contexts and across time. Their questions and responses opened up a further conversation for a group of ecumenical clergy on the importance of encountering Scripture in context and experiencing transformation therein. Four effects of the intercultural encounter were observed: the groups displayed solidarity with the other, previously unknown group; new interpretive clues were offered; the partner group helped to unmask hegemony; the exchange helped to disentangle ideological codes frequently used in one's own context. This essay reflects on the ways in which hegemony in the text and in front of the text hides the coercive nature of discourse on gender and power, making it seem benignly persuasive, and how readings by ordinary readers expose this hegemony as ideology and lead to a discussion of how working for change and empowerment can be achieved.

Part 2.2. In Her Memory: Tamar's Story in Local Perspective

The exchanges between three pairs of Amsterdam groups who read the Tamar story are presented by Willemien van Berkum: groups from the

Drugs Pastorate, Street Pastorate, a middle-class church, evangelical young people, Dominican migrant women, and women without a direct church affiliation. Van Berkum reflects on how and to what extent the text is freed from its historical setting, is embedded in present life, and is able to empower participants. The aim is to see what conditions may encourage exchanges between multiple sites within the same context to achieve a transformation of attitude toward partner groups.

Godian Ejiogu reports on how the reading with the group of the Amsterdam Drugs Pastorate created a context in which painful personal experiences were shared while reflecting on the Bible story. This group, whose members came from different cultural and national backgrounds and who met only for this occasion, constituted itself as an interpretive community of the Tamar story, and cultural differences were no longer an obstacle to the interpretation process. The hermeneutical process moved from the text to life and back again. Safe space is highlighted as essential for a fruitful reading process. Whereas the Amsterdam middle-class partner group maintained distance to the story and was interested mainly in questions of translation and historical background, the Drugs Pastorate group read the story as though it happened today—which it does. Through the sharing, God's story became one's own story. Using this method to transform culture presents major challenges to the participants since culture represents the deepest levels of human nature, stronger and deeper than love.

Reading with the Amsterdam Street Pastorate group, Luc Tanja explores the limitations of cross-boundary Bible reading and the power of analogy. A reading strategy was developed that did not look for meaning in the text, but focused on reading the story in a direct and personal way, as though one were reading a newspaper. Participants were transformed and felt like actors in a movie about their own lives. Because appropriation was so immediate that there was no place for a more objective reading, a reading report by another more intellectually oriented group, who did not read the text in a personal way, remained empty and meaningless to the Street Pastorate group. The failure to achieve a meaningful exchange with the partner group shows that the manner of engaging with the text can pose limitations to interaction in intercultural Bible reading.

As Charlene van der Walt and Kim Barker make clear, sexual violence is endemic to South African society. Besides being victims of sexual violence, women are often silenced, being perceived by ideologies of male dominance and stripped of hope within a culture of violence. While

conducting a qualitative research inquiry exploring the dynamics of the intercultural Bible reading space, especially focusing on the strategies of power and the implications of ideology, the researchers became aware of the inherent possibilities of that space to address issues of sexual violence. Their essay reflects on possible effects that the intercultural Bible reading can have by creating a supportive environment in which women and men may reflect on issues of gender-based violence in the light of biblical stories.

Using Michel Foucault's undeveloped but suggestive notion of "heterotopia," Gerald West explores ways in which the particular reading approach developed in South Africa—Contextual Bible Study—is a heterotopia. The first focus is on how the *reading processes* might be considered as heterotopic. The second focus considers how the processes construct *the biblical text* as a heterotopic site. The essay then explores in detail how the biblical text is an intercultural site, enabling lines of connection to be found and forged between the biblical text and the reception context. The story of the rape of Tamar is used in assessing to what extent this text provides resources for an intercultural dialogue between ancient "biblical" and contemporary "contextual" conceptions of masculinity.

Part 3. Together at the Tomb: Case Studies on John 20

Again a pair of exchanges is presented, this time involving Bolivia and Indonesia. Reflecting on the Indonesian side of the exchange, Batara Sihombing observes that the Indonesian and Bolivian groups showed a willingness to learn from each other, but also a reluctance to change their own cultural backgrounds and doctrinal positions. The intercultural reading offered an opportunity to learn from the differences and to encourage transformation, but became as well a place to judge others and justify oneself. Factors that obstruct openness and growth are reflected upon. The place of Mary in the story led both groups to reflect on the position of women in their churches. A change of perspective occurred when the Bolivian group became more familiar with the partner group's social position and context.

Esa Autero explores this encounter from the Bolivian side. In striving to map the hermeneutical processes and transformation versus freezing points, he presents an analysis of the exchange and encoding of empirical data. Social and psychological insights and intergroup relations are implemented. He reflects on the extent to which the Bible is merely instrumental

or has an added value in these types of exchange processes. References to the ancestral Batak culture of the Indonesian partner group helps the Bolivian group to gain insight in the text and the role of Mary: Mary is the only one who has courage to stay at the tomb, a place of ghosts and darkness.

Eric Nii Bortey Anum offers an analysis of an exchange between eight groups (from Colombia, the Netherlands, and Ghana). What happens if your Easter story is read by your partner group during the Christmas season? By involving the "unfamiliar" (another liturgical time for reading the resurrection story) as a hermeneutical factor in the interpretation process, the "familiar" dominant reading tradition is problematized. New meanings of the text are discovered, and the process of appropriation is reinforced through a new sensitivity to one's own context. Social transformation is aimed at as participants see the importance of developing their lifestyle so as to become a role model in their society like Mary Magdalene was.

Ignacio Antonio Madera Vargas analyzes an exchange between a Roman Catholic group from a slum area in Bogotá and several other groups, in particular a Dutch Reformed middle-class group. Ample reflection is provided on the differences between the groups in reading attitude, approach to the text, and appropriation processes: life and embedding over against reason and distance; reading in a modest home (Colombian group) over against reading in a church building (Dutch group); interest in the foreground of the text instead of in its background; dedication, recognition, and surrender over against reason and logic as interpretive instruments; trust in the resurrection over against questions about the historicity of the resurrection. Where differences were based on prejudice, the Colombian group felt they were being stereotyped. In response, the Colombian group asserted and affirmed their life-loving attitude in spite of adverse circumstances. Thus the differences and even prejudices had a positive transformative effect of making the Colombians more aware of their own identity.

Ricardo González Kindelan describes how, through the input of the Dutch partner group, cultural values existent in the Cuban culture, in particular violence, are problematized. The Dutch partner group offered a biblical-theological perspective that invited the Cuban group to rethink the position and experiences of women in the church and society. The personal testimonies of two women affirm that contextual and cross-border Bible reading can help expose and protect against fundamentalist reading and belief systems. The encounter with these new modes of reading opens

new horizons and leads toward a transformation of lifestyle and of position on the hermeneutic playing field, thus inspiring to a new perception and practice of faith and leading to joining a new community of faith. It is demonstrated how the Bible can help Cubans look beyond their fragmented horizon and reflect on their responsibilities to their ecclesial and societal environment.

Marisol Ale Díaz and Manuel Obeso Perez show how the Peruvian ancestral veneration of the dead gives the story of Mary at the tomb a new significance. John 20 appears to be a story of processing trauma and offers the opportunity to convert mourning into a celebration of life. Mary's despair and search for Jesus's body is well understood in the Peruvian culture, where the bodies of so many loved ones have disappeared. A tomb without a body is meaningless. The tomb, as the resting place of the body of the dead, is a place where the community is renewed, memories are reenacted, and reconciliation celebrated. Fidelity to the dead is at stake. The essayists analyze how, through intercultural Bible reading, ordinary readers in the Peruvian context are enabled to reconcile themselves with their original culture.

Hans Snoek explores different visions on how Bible texts are read and appropriated and relates these to different cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Most Dutch groups reject an historical reading of John 20 and prefer a more symbolic approach, thus corresponding to a major trend in Dutch society. According to statistics, a growing segment of the Dutch population views the reader as the key, not the text and its historical trustworthiness. This marks a shift from an orientation focused on God to one focused on the person, implying that the individual and his or her personal opinion become more important than the opinion of another, for example, the text. This difference in attitude can form a major obstacle to transformation in the exchange between groups.

Part 4. Am I My Sister's Keeper? Case Studies on Other Texts

Knut Holter presents an analysis of an intercultural dialogue on the Cain and Abel narrative in Gen 4 between two Bible study groups in Madagascar and Norway. Though the participants come from similar sociological and ecclesial contexts, different cultural and historical experiences during the colonial period led to divergent readings on key topics, such as the two kinds of sacrifices and the fate of Cain. The analysis focuses on the question of divine and human justice, asking to what extent the encounter

with the other reader in the partner group had a potential for increased understanding and personal transformation.

Digna María Adames Nuñez describes how two different cultures that view the other as a threat—Haitians and Dominicans—were brought into contact in an intercultural Bible reading project in the Dominican Republic in 2009, thus bringing about an encounter between two societies that never socialize. As a result of preconceived ideas, inhabitants of both countries have developed a view of the other country based upon prejudice and rejection. Sitting side by side around the holy Scriptures offered the possibility of breaking the imaginary boundary that made them enemies. A new way to look at the world was born, with all its mystery and richness. For this experience, the story of of Ruth (Ruth 1), the migrant worker, was chosen, with immigration and women as main topics. Transformation was observed especially in the way the groups were led to a new perception of the other. Her observations are particularly relevant for the current situation of global migration, not only in Central and Latin America but particularly in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe, where on a daily basis countries have to deal with a massive flood of refugees and migrants.

As described by Louis Jonker, a research project in the Western Cape of South Africa read Luke 11:1–13 and took as its point of departure the hypothesis that a development of hermeneutical skills for reading the Bible together with "the other" could contribute significantly toward the fostering of interculturality in the broader South African society. Additionally, it was hypothesized that studying the process of intercultural Bible reading could provide insights into the dynamics of a shift from multiculturality to interculturality in South African society. It has been established that fear for and a lack of knowledge of "the other" are important factors in the lack of interculturality in society and that the Bible—as liminal meeting place for people from different cultures—can foster a sense of family and hospitality in the South African nation.

Taggert E. Wolverton examines the results of a multiyear study of intercultural Bible reading of Luke 15:11–32 with youth aged thirteen–twenty, involving a total of fourteen groups from North and South America, Western Europe, and Asia (China, Vietnam, Japan). An analysis of the reading reports and transcripts led the author to propose that the youthful participants did indeed show signs of spiritual growth as evidenced by shifts in their understanding and interpretation of the biblical text (acknowledging plurivocity is assessed as growth), changes in their view of themselves, and a modified view of their exchange partners.

José Vicente Vergara Hoyos analyzes an exchange on Luke 18:1–8 between twenty Latin American groups (Peru, Colombia, El Salvador, and Guatemala) whose context is marked by conflict, premature death, and impunity. Through a sincere and supportive interaction between those who share the same reality of pain and suffering due to the reigning impunity, the search for justice can be intensified. Sharing memories and discovering previously unknown places of struggle result in the processing of trauma, and contribute significantly to posttraumatic growth and the overcoming of the trauma. Vergara Hoyos shows how processes of appropriation redirect and activate spiritual and nonviolent resistance.

In the concluding reflections, the editors summarize the main lessons learned from the essays in this volume and the implications for a process in which Bible reading becomes life giving. Conditions for the latter are explicated, and the limitations inherent in the method pointed out.

References

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