9. Malagasy, Thai, and Norwegian Youths Reading Luke 15 Together

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Introduction

What would happen if a youth group read a biblical text with other youth groups living in other geographical and sociological contexts? In what ways would the different contexts influence their understanding of the biblical text, and how would they reflect on their different reading experiences?

This essay will present and discuss some intercultural experiences of a research project where three youth groups did exactly so, that is, reading a biblical text together. The youth groups consisted of 16–18-year-old girls and boys from Antananarivo (Madagascar), Bangkok (Thailand), and Stavanger (Norway). The biblical text they read together was the parable about the so-called prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32, and the joint reading took place in May to September 2014. The essay falls in four parts: (a) some words on the current research context; (b) an overview of the Bible study project; (c) the major bulk of the essay, an analysis of the reading reports from the three Bible study groups, and finally, (d) back to where I started, briefly reflecting on how the experiences of this project relate to the current research context.

A: Research Context

The academic discipline of biblical studies has for more than two centuries systematically contextualized the "author" of the biblical text. The term "author" is then used in a broad sense, also referring to historical context, tradition, genre, textual growth, editorial activities, and so on. Traditionally, biblical studies has allowed this historically contextualized "author" to play a significant

role in its establishing of a meaning of the text. As a consequence, however, the rather elitist emphasis of biblical studies on this "author" has led it to ignore the obvious role that the current reader—commonly referred to as "ordinary" readers of the Bible, that is, all those who are not trained in critical biblical interpretation—plays in the establishing of a meaning of the biblical text.

Admittedly, in recent years we have seen a reaction to this. Partly because certain literary critical models focusing on the reader have been attempted in biblical studies. Partly also because some deliberately ideological strategies of interpretation—for example from feminist or queer perspectives, or from liberation hermeneutical or postcolonial perspectives—have been used in Bible interpretation (Segovia and Sugirtharajah 2009). However, in spite of all the valuable insights gained by these literary critical models and deliberate ideological strategies of interpretation, they still resemble quite traditional historical-critical approaches in the sense that they reflect the interpretive strategies of a critically-trained elite. Neither of them is able to catch what we might call popular biblical interpretation, that is, the way the texts are read by the so-called "ordinary" readers. Actually, we do not know very much about the interpretation and interpretive strategies of the "ordinary" readers of the Bible, in spite of the fact that they constitute at least 99.9 percent of its readers (Malley 2004).

In recent years, however, the interpretation and interpretive strategies of "ordinary" readers of the Bible have gained some scholarly attention. An increasing number of studies have analyzed popular interpretation of the Bible (early examples are West and Dube, 1996, and Malley, 2004; more recent examples are Kinyua 2011, and Autero 2016). Of particular importance for the present essay and its intercultural focus are the studies resulting from a research network initiated by Hans de Wit, who, until 2015, occupied the Dom Helder Camara Chair for Peace and Justice at VU University in Amsterdam. In short, de Wit and his research network have developed a model where Bible study groups with different cultural, religious, social, economic, and geographical backgrounds read biblical texts together. That is, the groups read the text separately, then write a report which they share with the other group(s), and then they read the text over and over again, in the light of the reports from the other group(s) about how they experience the text (see more about the model below). De Wit and his network have managed to work with Bible study groups from various parts of the world to develop and test this model of reading the Bible "through the eyes of another," but also to accumulate empirical data and establish a critical discourse on this kind of intercultural interpretation of the Bible.

The first analysis that de Wit's research network carried out used the narrative in John 4 about Jesus and a Samaritan woman as a case text. The text was read by Bible study groups in various cultural, religious, social, and economic contexts, and the result was a brick of a book, Hans de Wit and all (eds.), *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (2004), with documentation and analysis of the empirical material. Over the next years, de Wit and his research network organized new Bible study projects and made critical analysis of them. One outcome is a website (http://www.bible4all.org/) and several workshops on "Through the eyes of another: Intercultural reading of the Bible." Another outcome is some essay collections furthering the discussion started in *Through the Eyes of Another*, such as Hans de Wit and Janet Dyk (eds.), *Bible and Transformation: The Promise of Intercultural Bible Reading* (2015), Hans Snoek (ed.), *In Love with the Bible and its Ordinary Readers* (2015), and Daniel M. Schipani and all (eds.), *New Perspectives on Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (2015). In addition, a third outcome is a book series, "Intercultural Biblical Hermeneutics Series," with titles such as Hans de Wit, *Empirical Hermeneutics, Interculturality, and Holy Scripture* (2012), Charlene van der Walt, *Toward a Communal Reading of 2 Samuel 13* (2014), and Eric Anum and Ebenezer Quaye, *Intercultural Reading of John 10:1–21* (2016).

Broadly speaking, the research discourse established by de Wit and his network is the research context of the present project on Luke 15. Towards the end of this essay, I will return to this research context to locate my project and its findings. Before that, however, I will briefly present the context and structure of the project, and then turn to the major bulk of the essay, an analysis of the reading reports from the three Bible study groups that were involved in this project.

B: Bible Study Project on Luke 15

Back in 2003, the Church of Norway—the Lutheran, majority church in Norway, with approximately 80 percent of the population as members—initiated a Catechumenical Program for children and youths up to eighteen. The program acknowledges the necessity of research related to the faith and life situation of the target group, and this focus is the immediate background of the present project. In the Church of Norway's Plan for Christian Education, it is emphasized that the Bible has a potential of being a source for life interpretation and coping throughout the various age groups from birth to eighteen. Reading the Bible, however, changes throughout these age groups, with a gradual deepening of the hermeneutical challenges of reading the texts and constructing meaning in relation to actual life situations. The present project—which was partly funded by the Church of Norway Catechumanical

Program—connects with the oldest age group, the 16-to-18-year-olds. Through an investigation of a dialogue between three groups of 16-to-18-year-olds, coming from Norway, Thailand, and Madagascar, respectively, the project aims at analyzing a use of the Bible that is consciously contextual:

- Partly from a local perspective, by analyzing the "creative potential" of reading biblical texts and constructing meaning in relation to the contextual experiences and life situations of groups of 16-to-18-year-olds.
- And partly from a global perspective, by analyzing the "interpretive corrective" brought up by the introduction of a socially and culturally "other" reader of the Bible, serving as a window to alternative interpretations and a mirror of one's own contextuality.

The project organized a dialogue on the relationship between the Bible and life challenges encountering the three groups of 16-to-18-year-olds. The reading reports of their dialogue form the empirical basis of the analysis of the present essay. The 16-to-18-year-olds read biblical texts in relation to the experiences and concerns of their own context. Two texts were particularly focused—Luke 15:11–32, with a theological focus: God's love, and 2 Samuel 13:1–22, with an ethical focus: responses to sexual harassment and rape—of which the first one is followed up here. Each of the three groups of 16-to-18-year-olds devoted three meetings to each of the texts, and they worked according to the following procedure (inspired by de Wit et al. 2004:5 and *passim*):

- In the first meeting, they read Luke 15 together and reflected about its meaning in the light of their own experiences and life situation. The reflection of each group was then transcribed (main points written down, translated to English) and shared (via e-mail) with the other groups.
- In the second meeting, they once again read Luke 15 together and reflected about its meaning, now in the light of the contextual readings of the two other groups. Again, the process included a transcription and sharing of the readings.
- In the third meeting, they once again read Luke 15 together and reflected about its meaning, now in the light of the texts from the second meeting of the two other groups.

The third reflection is particularly important, as the groups here were challenged to try to understand how the two other groups had understood their first, contextually informed reading of the text.

Having facilitated a contextual reading of Luke 15:11–32 in the three youth groups, the next step was to challenge the contextuality of these

readings. A general problem of this kind of contextual readings of the Bible is that "ordinary" readers often lack a critical distance to the encounter between text and context. As such, they may need an interpretive corrective that can help the grasp their own contextuality. In this project, such a corrective was brought up by the introduction of a socially and culturally "other" reader of the Bible, an "other" who serves both as a window to alternative interpretations and as a mirror of one's own contextuality.

The choice of dialogue partners in Thailand and Madagascar was partly to include the width of the global reading community of the Bible, and partly to include churches having a history of interaction with the Church of Norway. As mentioned above, the project was partly funded by the Church of Norway Catechumenical Program, and this funding enabled us to meet face to face after the dialogue through e-mail reports had come to an end. The Thai and Norwegian groups met with the Malagasy one in Madagascar for talking, praying, and playing together, and also for re-opening the dialogue on Luke 15 and clarifying interpretive experiences and problems that still were there.

C: Analysis

Luke 15:11–32 tells a story about a father with two sons. One went abroad with his father's money and wasted it all. Still, when he returned home he was forgiven and embraced by the father. The other remained at home all the time to work in his father's fields. However, when he saw how the father celebrated the return of the brother who had wasted all his inheritance, he became envious.

The three youth groups met three times to read this text, each time writing a reading report. In the following, I will approach the reading reports from three perspectives: their comprehension of genre, their cultural reflection, and their theological reflection. It must be admitted that the cultural and theological reflection overlap (which is actually a major point of mine). Still, as an analytical perspective, a distinction between the two may be useful.

Let me start with their comprehension of genre. In the background material, I had prepared for the three groups and their first meeting, the Luke text was referred to as a "text" and "narrative." The Malagasy group immediately identified it as a parable, whereas the two other groups did not use this interpretive term. Still, all three groups intuitively understood the genre and were able to see that the text has a message exceeding that of an everyday family tale. The Malagasy group reported that everyone knew the text, as it was regularly read in the Sunday school. The point of the text, they said, is to show us that God loves sinners. They noticed that the text describes the father

as loving and patient, but they also understood the behavior of the sons. The Norwegian and Thai group said more or less the same, it is a text about God welcoming sinners.

The parable's potential for existential identification, primarily with the two sons, was soon noticed. The Malagasy group reported that they mainly identified with the prodigal son (Mad May 2014), and so did the Norwegian group, arguing "It is difficult to compare ourselves with the one who stayed at home, because we are not as kind as him." (Nor May 2014). The report from Bangkok allows some individual voices to be heard (Thai May 2014):

- I am the oldest brother, because I always obey my parents even though they complain a lot and treat my siblings better.
- I am the youngest brother, because I do things without thinking about me and without caring about the consequences.
- I am the oldest brother, because sometimes I am envious of the younger brother.
- I am the youngest brother, because there have been times when I have gone away from God, just like him. But every time I come back, God is there for me and blesses me.
- I am the father, because I am always ready to give a second chance to those who repent.

The latter voice from Thailand may be somewhat surprising, but it shows the potential for new understandings of the text. Regardless of this last voice, the text is known to the groups from beforehand, and they have experience in terms of how it is interpreted within the teaching and preaching of the church. With this as a starting point, the analysis proceeds tq consider how the three groups engage in reflection in relation to culture and theology.

The project as a whole had a strong intercultural perspective, consisting of three groups from three geographical and cultural angles of the earth. However, it was clear to us all the time that in addition to the three groups, there was also a fourth actor, namely text. Reading the Bible is in itself an intercultural enterprise, in the sense that a reader more or less consciously relates two to three thousand years old texts to one's contemporary context. Some readers are so familiar with the biblical texts that they ignore the cultural challenges of bridging the gap between their own context and those of Jerusalem or Galilee in biblical times. Others may have a sudden experience of cultural diversity, when the texts depict scenes that are experienced as foreign. An example of the latter was when the Norwegian group saw that the preceding text, Luke 15:8–10, depicts a woman who has lost a silver coin and then

sweeps the whole house searching until she finds it. One in the Norwegian group asked rhetorically: "who would not sweep the whole house if he/she had lost a silver coin," and the answer is simply "laughter."

The first and perhaps most obvious example of cultural difference between the three groups emerged around the question of "shame." The Malagasy group raised the question in their first report, and they also kept the issue alive throughout the discussion. In Madagascar, they said, a behavior like that of the prodigal son would be perceived as shameful by the surrounding community, and the family would be blamed. If a young person would pursue something like the prodigal son, the parents would do everything in their power to prevent it. If this did not succeed, society around would consider the parents as weak (Mad May 2014). Against this, the Thai group argued that if there is a matter of shame, it is not for the parents, but rather for the prodigal son himself (Thai June 2014). The Norwegian group emphasized this perspective even more strongly:

> We do not think that people around would have thought that the parents had done a poor job, even though their son had run away. People around would have thought that this is stupid, but they would not have blamed the parents. The perspective of "honoring the parents" is not very strong in Norwegian culture; parents and society expect one to find one's own path. It is up to each person to decide how one's life should be lived; it does not have much to do with parents.…In a Norwegian context, most people would have thought negatively about the son who ran away, while they probably would have felt sorry for the parents. (Nor June 2014)

In the third and final round discussing this text, the Malagasy group made the question of shame their main point. Having heard from how the issue of parental shame is downplayed by the Norwegian and Thai groups, the Malagasy group wanted to give a definition of "shame." "Shame," they said, "is all that you do against the tradition of society, what we call ancestral traditions." And, they provided some examples to illustrate their understanding of "shame":

> It is a "shame" if the man who is asking a father for his daughter's hand does not first pay what we call *vodiondry* (which literally means "the buttock of mutton"), which is considered as the best portion from mutton meat. You should also feel "shame" if you are not dressed properly. Elders should be respected—you should say sorry in case you trip over an elderly person, and you should give a seat to an elderly person—if not, it is a "shame." (Mad Sept 2014)

This understanding of "shame" seems to reflect a society where collective concepts are valued more than what is typically experienced in a Norwegian context. Horizontally, in relation to the ones who surround us, the fear of

being marginalized is very strong. And vertically, in relation to the ancestors, it "has never hurt anyone" to respect and honor those "we all come from."

Another example of cultural difference between the three groups and their interpretation of the Luke 15 text relates to the educational responsibility of the father and the older brother *vis-à-vis* the younger one. The Thai group emphasizes—in accordance with traditional Thai culture—that the father and the older brother should have taught the younger brother how to behave, in order to avoid the kind of problems the younger one got into:

> The father loves his son. He would give anything and do whatever for his son. And he is the one who forgives his son's mistakes. I think it will be better if he can prevent his son from making mistakes by teaching him. (Thai May 2014)

The point that the older brother should be a kind of role model for the younger one came as a surprise to the Norwegian group. "It does not work like that in Norway," they said. "We can look up to those who are older, but it is not particularly important" (Nor June 2014). In Madagascar, however, the Thai perspective makes sense:

> He should be a role model in a good way. This means that he must inspire the younger one to be obedient and he must take good care of the family estate while he is at home. However, he is no role model when it comes to his jealousy. (Mad June 2014)

A third example of cultural differences between the three groups and their interpretation of the Luke 15 text may be the tendency of the Norwegian group to give psychologizing explanations, and then the Malagasy team's reaction to this. The Norwegian group argues that the reaction of the father when the son comes home is somewhat exaggerated. He is "crazy." He gives his son a robe and a ring, and he slaughters a fattened calf. What the father instead should have done, the Norwegian group says, is to confront him with what he had done, and not just give him everything into his hands. Moreover, when it comes to the second son, he is then the one who has the sympathy of the Norwegian group: "His father had a lot of love. Yet it does not seem as if the son who stayed home got so much of this love" (Nor May 2014).

Thus, the lack of being loved by the father explains why the son who had remained back home all the time behaves as he does, and "we understand him," the Norwegian group concludes. The Malagasy group, however, thinks this went too far. The father has indeed not failed to show love to his older son. The son had all he needed, and a party—which is the example used by the older brother—is not the only way of showing love. In the end, the Malagasy group rejects the psychologizing explanation of the Norwegians,

instead offering a Malagasy perspective on who owes anything to whom in the parent/child relationship:

> When it comes to the feeling of being appreciated—or not valued—in the family (ref. the Norwegian group), then it is so we generally do what we can to bring joy to our parents, and not necessarily to get some recognition back. (Mad June 2014)

I now turn to their theological reflection. The Luke 15 text has an obvious potential as an invitation to theological reflection, given its genre—as a parable—and its focus on key topics such as father/child and love. A question which then arises is how and to what extent the groups are able to build text and interpretation into larger theological structures.

An example that can illustrate this is the fact that the groups so quickly identify the father in the text with God. The question is what kind of consequences this identification has for the understanding of the text. One consequence could have been that it would restrict the freedom to criticize the father. Though, this was not reflected in all groups. As mentioned above, the Norwegian group expresses a psychologizing perspective, arguing that the father "should have confronted the [youngest] son with what he had done" (Nor May 2014), and when it comes to the oldest son, they argue that he had hardly experienced as much love (Nor May 2014). The Thai group is a bit more reluctant to criticize the father. They think that he should have taught his sons to avoid this kind of situations, and they suggest that he is a little unfair in relation to the sons (Thai May 2014). The Malagasy group is provoked by this last hint, and they answer:

> Some of the group members said that if we really are Christians, we know that God does everything is a righteous way, as he is righteous. Others said that even though we are Christians, such a response [as that of the Thai group] is quite natural because of our human nature. (Mad June 2014)

Here, the interpretation of the father as God is taken for granted. Although the Thai group had only suggested that the father in the text was a bit unfair, the Malagasy group immediately takes this as a somewhat illegitimate criticism of God. And when they said "if we really are Christians, we know," it was the sharpest exchange of viewpoints between the groups during their interaction, which was a reaction that the group in Thailand politely choose to ignore. The Malagasy group continued to discuss the question of whether God is righteous, and in their third and last report on this text, they argued that God indeed is righteous, but that our perceptions of "righteousness" may be different from the perceptions we find in the Bible. Nevertheless, they

said, the father in Luke 15 treated his two sons in the same way. The youngest received what he needed, and the eldest already had what he needed.

When the groups intuitively identify the father of the text as God, it had another consequence for the understanding of the text, namely that God's attributes as omniscient and omnipotent are read into the text and transferred to the father. The Thai group put it this way:

> The father was conscious and gave freedom to his children and would not force them to do what he himself wanted. According to Scripture, he knew—as he shared the legacy—how it would go. Yet, he let his children take a free decision. (Thai May 2014)

A possible consequence of this understanding of the father is that he is allowed to ignore what would be considered the traditional responsibilities of being a father. He "knew" that his son would squander the inheritance, still, for pedagogical reasons, he allowed the son to do so and then face the consequences of his choice. Perhaps one can say that this understanding takes away some of the sting of the text, that the son who "came to himself" and then without deserving it, he meets a forgiving father. The under-communication of the sting becomes quite evident in the second report from the Malagasy group, when it is said that we do not need to feel shame as long as we regret, because when we regret our sins, we can safely return home and rejoice, knowing that that God will accept us (Mad June 2014).

In conclusion, the preceding analysis shows that the youths intuitively understand the genre of the text, and they are able to illustrate and—to some extent—reflect on cultural and theological questions emerging from their different readings and repeated interaction.

D: Localizing the Experiences of the Bible Study Project

I started the essay with a survey of the research context of this project on youth groups reading Luke 15 together, and now I will return to where I started and briefly reflect on how the experiences of this project relate to the current research context.

Reading it backwards, that is, reflecting upon the literature I referred to above, there is one particular tendency that sticks out: a gradually increasing focus on the transformative potential of intercultural Bible reading. The perspective is admittedly present already in the first major empirical study in the field, the now classical essay collection *Through the Eyes of Another* (de Wit and all 2004:30–32). Still, a decade later it has become the major perspective on intercultural Bible reading, as demonstrated by Schipani and all

2015, where the first half of the book focuses on "transformation" (from case studies as well as more theoretically oriented studies) and further by de Wit and Dyk 2015, where the concept of "transformation" has become the main focus in the title (and in most of the essays).

Many of the essays in these two collected volumes address questions of how to understand the transformative potential of intercultural Bible reading. One that is particularly interesting in the present context is an essay by Taggert E. Wolverton (Wolverton 2015). He conducted a PhD project (supervised by Hans de Wit) on "our" text, Luke 15:11–32, with youth groups in various parts of the world (Wolverton 2014). In his essay, he discusses how this transformative potential can be measured, and, focusing on spiritual growth, he points to three characteristics of the expected transformation: "learning to read the Bible differently," "learning to see oneself differently," and "learning to see others differently." I tend to think that the intercultural Bible reading project that is being discussed in the present essay confirms and illustrates Wolverton's three characteristics. There is a deepening of the understanding of the three actors in the project—"I," "you," and the Bible—and I will try to demonstrate this through a case.

I asked the groups whether the text they were reading is appropriate to express the gospel about Jesus, and the responses point in slightly different directions. The Norwegian group responded that the text "is not particularly well suited" to express the gospel, and they let one of its members justify the answer by saying: "I would choose a story that is about Jesus, what he did and not just what he said" (Nor June 2014). The answer is pragmatic, but underneath is a theological focus arguing that the life and death of Jesus is more important than his words.

The Thai group, too, emphasized a pragmatic aspect, but with the opposite conclusion when it comes to whether the text is appropriate to express the gospel about Jesus:

> In Thailand, people who hear the gospel about Jesus will have a stronger experience if everyday situations and examples can be dragged into the gospel. They will then in a way to be able to relate to the situation of the father or one of the brothers. (Thai Sept 2014)

The Malagasy group argued in a different direction than the Norwegian and Thai groups. They did not focus on the text's more or less pragmatic potential, but rather on the potential of expressing key aspects of the gospel:

> The text expresses the gospel about Jesus in the sense that Father is still willing to forgive us our sins, and he showed this by sacrificing his only son to save us. We

> can here refer to the fatted calf—the best in the flock—which the father sacrificed to celebrate that the prodigal son had returned home. (Mad June 2014)

What we see in the Malagasy report, is that the central, Christian doctrine of God giving his son as a sacrifice for our sins is read into the parable. In this way, the concept of the father—that is God—loving his children is elaborated. God's love for his children—although they are sinners—is not something abstract; it is very concrete. The ultimate expression of this is when he gave his only son as a sacrifice for our sin. The Malagasy group elaborated on this in their third report, pointing to biblical texts like Matthew 11:28 ("Come to me… and I will give you rest") and John 14:27 ("My peace I give you"), and they conclude that "The father's home is a place for peace. There is no peace anywhere else than with him" (Mad Sept 2014).

The question of the suitability of the parable about the prodigal son to express the gospel about Jesus came up again when the three groups came together in Madagascar after a year of joint Bible studies. On one of the days, we had a round of personal faith stories. The Thai youths then pointed out a major challenge of minority churches, namely that people around them do not have any idea of what Christianity means. In such a context, the point of the genre becomes evident. Everyday situations have the ability of creating intelligible images of what the gospel is about. In Malagasy and Norwegian folk church contexts, however, the situation is different in the sense that at least parts of the people around them have some knowledge about the Bible and Christianity. Regarding the Norwegian group's lack of faith in the suitability of the genre of the parable in relation to a more comprehensive understanding of the Christian faith, it may be that this, too, is culturally determined. With the danger of generalizing on a thin empirical foundation, it could be argued that the concept of God as an always attentive and loving father is not experienced particularly radical in a Norwegian context. Perhaps, it is a kind of intuitive theological reflection from the Norwegian youths' side that allows them to emphasize a need to say something more specific about what Jesus actually did and not "just" what he said. Similarly, when it comes to the Malagasy group's ability to read central doctrine into the text, it is tempting to think that this reflects a preaching tradition and preparation for confirmation that focuses on doctrine and catechism, and perhaps also a cultural context where ritual sacrifices are less distant and exotic than what it is, for example, in a Norwegian context.

Nevertheless, as we sat down together in Madagascar, jumping back and forth between personal faith stories and the question whether the parable of the prodigal son is suitable for expressing the gospel about Jesus, the youths realized, I think—and to some extent even verbalized—what the current research context refers to as transformation. This reflects what Wolverton

defines as key characteristics of such a transformation: the text has a many-faceted potential, and reading it means a constant negotiation between the text and its very different readers, such as the ones of our three groups.

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To Pam and Charlie Scalise,
mentors and friends for the journey,
from Beth

To Mom
from Jon

"So do I write, and color the runes."
Håvamål (stanza 158)

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Foreword

Five years ago, Knut Holter and Jon Skarpeid started the cluster group "Classical Sacred Texts in Global Contexts." This was part of the research area Religion, Culture, and Globalization, a collaboration between the University of Stavanger and VID Specialized University, Stavanger, Norway. "Classics," as we like to call it, started with only a handful of people, and we presented papers to each other and discussed issues related to the challenges of engaging religious texts in a globalized world.

When Knut received funding for his Maasai project, PhD and post-doc students became part of the research cluster. The globalized world started to be reflected in the members of the group. One of the PhD students that became part of the Maasai project was Beth Elness-Hanson, and other scholars, as well, became affiliated with Classics.

The question arose as to whether the group should pursue a publication, and we decided to develop an anthology. Since there was quite a broad span in the research fields among them members of Classics, we decided to send an invitation to everybody affiliated. For the preparation of the anthology, we arranged a couple of seminars in Stavanger. We ended up with nine chapters, which, in various ways, discuss sacred texts in global contexts. These include sacred texts among diaspora community, in secular state institutions like hospitals and educational contexts, and cross-cultural readings. Sacred texts seems to weave their way into nearly all aspects of life, in one form or another.

—Jon Skarpeid