

## And Finally...

### **A new methodology? Writing a collaborative commentary\***

35 scholars from 19 countries and 5 continents sounds like too much diversity to work together on a single text. But it happened with a recent commentary on 1 Peter (SCM, 2020). One of the greatest and most challenging opportunities I've had as a scholar was the invitation to convene such a gathering as part of preparing biblical materials for the Lambeth Conference. We worked in smaller groups, each focusing on a chapter of 1 Peter and responding to a set of guiding questions. Over a period of 3 days, we came together to discuss wider themes, finer details, and discern where work overlapped and where it was unique. Colleagues inspired by a particular topic—such as exiles, power, or reading difficult texts—wrote short pieces that became excurses in the commentary.

But our diversity was not limited to the place we called home. We represented numerous disciplines, ranging from biblical scholars and historians to liberation, post-colonial, and systematic theologians. We brought with us a faith commitment which for this gathering was primarily Anglican, but also included those from Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions and several Protestant denominations including United Methodists, Presbyterians, and the Uniting Church in Australia.

One might imagine that such a gathering with such a diverse range of approaches, commitments, and experiences would be bound to fail. On the contrary, the conversation was challenging and enriching. In biblical studies, scholarship that represents a particular perspective on a text—womanist, Asian, postcolonial—is often presented as an alternative to historical criticism. Such a range of interpretive communities, however, is essential not only for addressing issues of power in the field, but also for epistemological reasons. Our knowledge is broader and richer because of such conversations.

Personally, I was challenged by readings of the biblical text I'd never considered, listened to reflections on hospitality and exile that moved me to tears, and grappled with language differences to describe difficult texts and what we do with them. A deaf colleague encouraged us to engage Scripture visually and created a visual commentary reflecting on art from around the world. As we grew to trust one another, reflections on the text and its key themes evoked wisdom, scholarship, and testimony that one might only expect with intimate friends. And that is what many of those esteemed colleagues gathered became: friends.

The final product is, of course, not seamless, and drawing together the writings of a few dozen colleagues was difficult. How to be faithful to their words without jeopardising the coherence of the final text was always in mind. Something we decided was that no names would be attributed to the written text so that it could not be pre-judged or disregarded because a reader assumed they already knew what someone would write if they were from England, Kenya or India, were female, or all the ways we judge one another.

Is this a method for academic writing that could be emulated? Absolutely. In our increasingly divided and judgmental world, how can we work together in our writing—not just contributing separate chapters to an edited volume, which is important collaborative work—but writing a volume together, grappling with questions together, and bringing our words together into a coherent whole? It takes courage, vulnerability, and trust to engage in such conversations. I am grateful to 34 colleagues for doing exactly this and teaching me so much. Might other colleagues be willing to approach such a task with one of the other books of Scripture?

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