

Activism in the Biblical Studies Classroom

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A Decade of Activism

I write towards the final editing stages of this special edition of the *Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies*. This coincides both with the ongoing lockdown precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic and with the Black Lives Matter mass protests reignited by the murder of George Floyd on 24 May 2020 in Minneapolis under the knee of a white police officer. The papers in this volume were written and mostly completed prior to these momentous events.

The whole past decade has been punctuated by large-scale events of activism – that is, of active and vigorous advocacy for social justice causes. The two years of demonstrations collectively called “the Arab Spring,” first initiated by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia in protest of police corruption and abuse, erupted in late 2010. Occupy (short for “Occupy Wall Street”) emerged in 2011 in New York City’s financial district to protest against widespread economic inequalities. Occupy went on to expand well beyond its place of inception, setting in motion a variety of forms of civil disobedience – such as occupation of premises, picketing, marches, and internet activism. From around this time and since, huge anti-austerity protests have also taken place elsewhere, such as in Greece, Iran, and Zimbabwe.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) was formed in 2013 and has carried out anti-racist advocacy and protests on the streets and digitally, both in the USA, where it originated, and well beyond, in recent weeks finally attaining visibility also in predominantly white spaces.

2013 also began to see large-scale marches protesting violence against women, first in India, in the wake of the brutal gang rape and consequent death of Jyoti Singh. Movements with this focus became organised and massive also elsewhere, including, since 2016, in Argentina, with the Ni Una Menos protests. In Latin America in particular, International Women’s Day 2020 was the occasion of huge rallies, calling for access to abortion and an end to domestic abuse and femicide.

The day following the inauguration of the USA’s 45th president, in January 2017, was the Women’s March, the largest single-day protest in US history, which spawned other marches for the protection of women’s and other marginalised humans’ rights the world over.

Like BLM, combining hashtag activism and in-person protests is the Me Too movement. While founded already in 2006 by Tarana Burke, it became fanned by the exposure of sexual

abuse allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein in late 2017 and went viral and global.

The year after, 2018, saw the formation of Extinction Rebellion (XR), an advocacy movement mobilising against climate change, species extinction and environmental destruction. This came in the wake of teenage activist Greta Thunberg's protests outside the Swedish parliament, calling for concerted action on climate change. Student strikes have since taken off in many parts of the world.

Other very young activists also made headlines in 2018, such as the teenagers from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High, scene of a deadly shooting on Valentine's Day of that year, who led the large protests called March for Our Lives. Naomi Wadler, the youngest speaker at the march on Washington, was just 11 years old in this year.

In 2019 mass pro-democracy protests began in Hong Kong in response to attempts by the administration of mainland China to undermine the region's autonomy and civil liberties.

Rumbling since 2018 in Haiti and erupting on a large scale in 2019 also in Latin America, spreading from Venezuela to Bolivia and Chile, Ecuador and Colombia, is a series of mass protests set in motion by the cost of living and economic inequalities, as well as by demands for economic and political reforms.

2019 also saw the largest Anti-Brexit rallies in the UK and in early 2020 large, violent and life-costing riots exploded in India in response to anti-Muslim discrimination of the Citizenship Amendment Act.

These are just some examples of recent and large-scale activist movements that have received widespread and international attention. They set the broader canvas for universities and, from there, higher education biblical studies classrooms.

Universities and Activism

Universities have also been in the thick of activism, with students and staff participating in all of the movements named above. In 2018 in the UK, the University and College Union (UCU) began strike actions in 64 universities as part of industrial action on account of proposed changes to the Universities' Superannuation Scheme. This would become the longest ever strike in UK higher education history, with an estimated 42,000 staff participating, sometimes (though certainly not always) with significant student support. In 2019-2020 UCU-led strike action continued, focusing also on pay equality, workload, casualisation of contracts and pay levels.

University students, too, have been mobilising on very many fronts, among them, alongside their participation in the movements already cited, resistance to rape culture on campuses, decolonising the curriculum (notably at SOAS University of London), "no-platforming" speakers deemed objectionable or questionable, and many more.

There is no consensus on whether activism in higher education settings has become more or less intensive or large-scale. Resisting the notion that student activism is alive and well, Mark Fisher (albeit writing in 2009) has pointed to what he calls the “reflexive impotence” of British students, when compared with their counterparts of the 1960s and 70s. Fisher characterizes 21st century students as a group who *knows* that things are bad but who feels hamstrung and pacified in terms of *doing* anything, instead regressing into “depressive hedonia”: an unhappy pursuit of gratification.¹ In a related vein, some argue that universities are part of neoliberal machinery, making those who work within them ground down and mentally ill.² Alternatively, however, there are those who argue that universities are bastions and hotbeds of left-wing bias and activities,³ or breeding grounds for “victimhood culture.”⁴ There is some support to be found for all of these positions.

Not only protests, research and evidence, too, show that institutions of higher education are very much in need of revamping, equity and, therefore, activism. When confining this to the UK and to Black and ethnic minority persons, this need is eminently clear in terms of representation across the board: in administration, among academics, and the student body, but particularly in positions of higher pay bands.⁵ There is a pay gap between staff of colour and equivalent white staff and an award gap when comparing students of colour with white students. When graduates of colour have degrees in a 2.1 or higher band, they still have

¹ See Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: O Books, 2009). I am grateful to my PhD student Sam Ross for making me aware of this text. Fisher was a strong opponent of online shaming or call-out culture, distinguishing it from and blaming it for the erosion of effective collective activism. Sadly, Fisher committed suicide in 2017, after long-standing and continual struggles with depression, so we cannot know if more recent protest movements might have led to him changing his mind, or seeing more hope for collective action, including among students.

² Jodie-Lee Trembath, “The neoliberal university is making us sick: Who’s to blame?”, *The Familiar Strange*, 14 June 2018. Available online: <https://thefamiliarstrange.com/2018/06/14/neoliberal-universities-whos-to-blame/> (accessed 10 June 2020).

³ The Times Higher Education (THE) ran items on 21 Feb 2019 by John Morgan (“Are universities hotbeds of left-wing bias?”) and on 30 Dec 2019, reporting on a Study of European Social Survey data (“‘Little evidence’ for claim universities are ‘left-wing bastions’”), see <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/> (accessed 10 June 2020).

⁴ E.g. see Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, *The Rise of Victimhood Culture: Microaggressions, Safe Spaces, and the New Culture Wars* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018). This text is focused on US universities. I am not in agreement with a number of the book’s claims and conclusions, but I agree that there are important things to discuss regarding the topics of focus, such as trigger warnings, safe spaces and no-platforming. Most important to approach critically are matters pertaining to power dynamics and representation: such as, who has power and representation and who does not.

⁵ There are many other groups disadvantaged in higher education in a variety of ways. A gender pay gap still exists in much of the sector, for instance, and there are other inequalities, too, on the basis of citizenship, social class, private vs state education, gender identity and sexual orientation, disability, neuro diversity and mental health, age, and religious identity, for example. This list is not exhaustive.

markedly lower representation in higher paying employment.⁶ The data is there, unequivocal and damning.

Some of what needs to happen in academia is clear – if far from easy, especially in a sector squeezed by a variety of pressures, including pressures on staff time and financial resources. The first step is honesty and transparency about inequity in universities, followed by commitment to address inequity actively. This includes reassessing all of teaching content and method, hiring practices, and student support provision. Most universities, unfortunately, won't be as quick and far-reaching in their response to the most recent BLM protests as Columbia Theological Seminary, which has been impressive.⁷ But there are steps that can and must be taken, on the way to and alongside other revamping, including by educators in the biblical studies classroom. What this volume seeks to do is offer some steps and suggestions towards this.

Activism and Biblical Studies

This special issue focuses on creative and engaged strategies for teaching, demonstrating or promoting activism in the context of the higher education biblical studies classroom. There are already some excellent publications on both practical strategies for teaching biblical studies⁸ and for teaching for social justice,⁹ including a recent journal focused on liberative pedagogy in the context of religious studies. The topic of this journal is clearly very much “in the air”.¹⁰

⁶ This is borne out again and again in multiple studies, including the report by Universities UK and the National Union of Students “Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #closingthegap” (May 2019) and one recent article in *The Independent* (15 October 2019) reports on such discrepancies (see: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/university-black-minority-ethnic-pay-gap-academics-professors-ucu-staff-a9155451.html>, accessed 20 June 2020).

⁷ The Seminary's campaign is called “Repairing the Breach” and is outlined in more detail here: <https://www.ctsnet.edu/home/repairing-the-breach/?fbclid=IwAR2Htbqei4UXTVxaavnncnURR5rxtbqw1mjZHJcLJ82DQvMkdzYeJJJOAQIA> (accessed 20 June 2020).

⁸ One very good resource here is Mark Roncace and Patrick Gray (eds.), *Teaching the Bible: Practical Strategies for Classroom Instruction* (Atlanta: SBL, 2005).

⁹ I particularly like Maurianne Adams and Lee Anne Bell, with Diane J. Goodman and Khyati Y. Joshi, *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* (3rd edn.) (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁰ See, *The Wabash Center Journal on Teaching* 1/2 (2020) (see: <https://serials.atla.com/wabashcenter/issue/view/183/115>). This excellent open-access volume provides a forum for teacher practitioners in the study of religion to reflect critically on their pedagogy. Those who want to pursue some of the topics explored in this current *JIBS* volume more fully, will find the Wabash Center Journal very useful, including on the topics of teaching Early Christianity (explored in this issue by Shepardson), flipping the classroom (explored in this issue by Greenough), teaching in the context of the struggle for freedom (explored in this issue by West and Zwane), and teaching in theology programmes (explored in this issue by Reaves).

Biblical studies is not detached from the world beyond its offices and libraries, walls and doors. This could, arguably, be challenged by the many publications in the discipline that continue to emphasise the excavation of biblical texts' original form, meaning, setting, author, or purpose, as well as by scholars' claims to or assumptions of objectivity and of "letting the text speak for itself". But even an interpreter's selection of texts for interpretation is guided by subjectivity and susceptible to the wider world in which it takes place¹¹ – as is made clear by several of the contributions to this volume and articulated concisely in a quotation by Nyasha Junior.¹² While there are those who may think that biblical studies *need* not be activist or that activism in the biblical studies classroom is not for them – and there may be some legitimate points to be made regarding both – biblical studies *is* affected by and responsive to what is happening elsewhere, including in terms of social justice activism. This has become acutely visible in recent days, as numerous institutions and organisations responded to worldwide and ongoing protests. These include statements from the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) of 2 June 2020,¹³ the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians ("the Circle"),¹⁴ and the Society for Old Testament Study (SOTS),¹⁵ both of 9 June 2020.¹⁶

While the rush of statements can and has been faulted (most prominently on Twitter) for being largely performative and opportunist, SOTS committee members close their statement with an acknowledgement of complicity and an endeavour to foster "the critical study of the Bible among much wider and more diverse sections of society, and promoting study emerging from such wider groups", while SBL has sent emails announcing their pursuit of "concrete steps that SBL can take to support the scholarship and careers of Black scholars

¹¹ The most recent volume of *Journal for Biblical Literature*, *JBL* 139/1 (2020), featuring Gale A. Yee's presidential address (see the reference below), contains no other contributions reflecting the endeavour to infuse biblical studies with activism. None the less, some of the content (e.g. on regional accent, ethnic stereotyping, and women's contributions to ministry, for instance) while focused on biblical texts and the time of their composition, reflects matters in the domain of diversity and inclusion, which are very topical in our present.

¹² Please see the contribution in this issue by Reaves, which cites and discusses Junior.

¹³ The statement can be found here: https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/2-June-2020_Statement_on_Black_Lives_Matter_Right_to_Protest_and_Bible_as_Prop.pdf (accessed 12 June 2020).

¹⁴ The statement can be found here: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/other-ecumenical-bodies/statement-by-the-circle-of-concerned-african-women-theologians> (accessed 17 June 2020).

¹⁵ The statement can be found here: <https://www.sots.ac.uk/statement-on-behalf-of-the-society-for-old-testament-study/> (accessed 12 June 2020).

¹⁶ Activism has characterized the Circle since its foundation in 1989. Among its actively pursued aims have been the promotion of women theologians and their research, the elimination of violence against women and girls, and of HIV and AIDS and the stigma, poverty and oppression associated with them. SOTS, very much unlike the Circle, has not been noted for its overt commitment to activism or equity and the statement is, consequently, more surprising.

(at all career levels including graduate students) in our field” and inviting “ideas and reflections”.¹⁷

There is a legacy of Bible activism to build on – liberation theology,¹⁸ as popularized by Gustavo Gutiérrez is just one compelling case in point – and there are plenty of recent examples, too, of using the Bible for activism as one part of large-scale protest movements. Mitzi J. Smith’s powerful scholarship propels social justice, including, to give one example, by bringing interpretation of the biblical story of the Syrophenician woman into focus alongside analysis of the life and death of Sandra Bland, one of the key figures of the BLM movement.¹⁹ Ruth Everhart, to give one more illustration, uses inspiration from and analysis of multiple biblical texts alongside momentum from the #MeToo movement to advocate for changes to church structures and practices.²⁰ Neither scholar-activist is unaware of the Bible’s potential for legitimating and propelling damaging ideologies but both also demonstrate the Bible’s usefulness as a tool for commentating on and addressing the present and for facilitating powerful advocacy. The Bible is useful for getting attention: its status, its popularity, its gravity, its well-known stories and characters and above all its diversity of content make it a useful toolkit for a wide spectrum of users, including activists.

This dexterity of the Bible, alongside the expressions of commitment by SBL, SOTS, the Circle and others, hold out promise for activism-purposed Bible-teaching. Moreover, Gale A. Yee, has just stepped down as the first Asian American and first woman of colour to be SBL president. Significantly, Yee was openly activist in her role and her presidential address doubled as a rallying call, closing with the words,

The Bible has played a major role in legitimating matrices of power across different categories of identity. My own political commitments to help eradicate inequality in our day and the matrices of power that ... create it compels me to think about the Bible intersectionally. In this endeavour, I invite you to join me.²¹

Yee reminds us here that activism is not only appropriate and necessary as part of the study of the Bible but conducted by individuals who are shaped by their identities and experiences. This compels me to say something brief about my own motivation for editing this journal.

¹⁷ The quotation is from an email sent to SBL members on behalf of current president Adele Reinhartz on 11 June 2020.

¹⁸ The work of the Ujamaa Centre in South Africa, of focus in the contribution to this volume by West and Zwane, is another example of liberation theology with decades of experience.

¹⁹ See chapter 3 of Mitzi J. Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (in)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* (Cascade Books, 2015), 28-45.

²⁰ Ruth Everhart, *The #MeToo Reckoning: Facing the Church’s Complicity in Sexual Abuse and Misconduct* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

²¹ See Gale A. Yee, “Thinking Intersectionally: Gender, Race, Class, and the Etceteras of Our Discipline”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139/1 (2020): 7–26 (26).

Personal Reasons for Activism

I was drawn to activism well before I began studying the Bible, becoming involved, first through my parents, in my childhood and teens, in a variety of political and human rights causes and groups. Particularly formative for me was the 1981 Springbok Rugby Tour of Aotearoa New Zealand. “The Tour”, as it’s known to New Zealanders, happened shortly after I moved to Wellington from Germany, with my mother and sister, at the age of 11. Our participation in the Anti-Tour protests was my first involvement in demonstrations. Others, for a range of causes, would follow. The Bible, on the other hand, only became a presence in my thought-world when I began the study of Biblical Hebrew and, through this, biblical studies, during my undergraduate degree at the University of Otago. While I had some exposure to feminist criticism, thanks to my lecturer Judith McKinlay,²² the majority of my classroom experience was not overtly political, let alone activist.

As my study of the Hebrew Bible moved on to an MPhil, I continued to focus on language and textual study and to conduct any activist activities in separate settings. With my PhD, supervised by Robert Carroll,²³ this began slowly to change. I do think, though, that my early life in Germany had instilled in me a sense that “things to do with politics and religion” had no place in the classroom. And this proved hard to shake for me. On account of Germany’s history, it was unlawful to say anything that could be interpreted as partisan in a school classroom. Whether I had internalised this in some way, I certainly kept my studies and activism separate. When I started teaching, while a PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow, if asked in a classroom setting about my religious or political investments or commitments, I steadfastly refused to answer, because I believed this would bring cracks to my scholarly persona. Clearly, I regarded my role as a scholar and teacher as separable from and as important to keep separate from my political and social justice proclivities.

This changed when I moved to southern Africa²⁴ to teach at the University of Botswana.²⁵ In Botswana I met Musa Dube who had long since felt compelled to merge her commitment to activism – against racism, for women’s rights, towards reducing the spread of HIV and eliminating stigma against persons with HIV and AIDS – with her commitment to teaching and

²² Judith McKinlay, a feminist and postcolonial scholar of the Hebrew Bible brought a sensitive and astute dimension to her scholarship. Judith was a teacher who had profound influence on me. She was the only female educator I had in all my years studying Hebrew language and Bible and also the only one to incorporate creative strategies (such as dramatization of biblical stories and reflective logs) into teaching. Johanna Stiebert, “A Response and Tribute to Judith McKinlay.” *The Bible & Critical Theory* 15/1 (2019): 10-14.

²³ Robert P. Carroll, who died suddenly in 2000, was a brilliant scholar and inherently rebellious. I thrived on his provocations and am indebted to him for the inspiration to practise ideological criticism.

²⁴ I talk about my transition towards blending scholarship and activism in my inaugural lecture. Available online: <https://mymedia.leeds.ac.uk/Mediasite/Play/825c3218c67c4ba6a4e1c23d0b339fef1d> (accessed 13 June 2020).

²⁵ I have written about this elsewhere. Johanna Stiebert, “Of Borders, Crossings, Colours and Botswana.” In Johanna Stiebert and Musa W. Dube (eds.), *The Bible, Centres and Margins*. (London and New York: T&T Clark 2018), pp. 15–23.

research. Dube's contribution to this volume documents the range of her activities and the inseparability of her activism and scholarship. When I attended conferences in South Africa, I met Gerald West, Sarojini Nadar, Elelwani Farisani, Madipoane Masenya and Makhosazana Nzimande. They, too, were matter-of-fact about the integral relationship between their activism and scholarship. They had always been activist – how could their study and their teaching not be so, too? Wasn't social justice too important to keep it out of everyday life, including work? The contribution to this volume by Gerald West and Sithembiso Zwane exemplifies their deep and long-standing commitment to activism, and their certainty that the Bible offers ways for attaining social justice. These biblical studies educators I met in Botswana and South Africa were activist for survival and out of forceful conviction. It was as in that verse in Amos – "A lion has roared, Who can but fear? My Lord GOD has spoken, Who can but prophesy?" (3:8): urgent, self-evident, impossible to do otherwise. For them, activism was not something to do on the side, when it moved one to do so, when one had time, when work didn't keep one too busy. And that's what it had been for me. Meeting Dube and others was a check on and a reminder of my privilege.

I'm still not the activist that I could and want to be. I still come up against, uncomfortably, the edges of my shortcomings and easy assumptions. With the recent pressure within my institution to get earnest (finally!!) about decolonising the curriculum, from individual modules up, so that compulsory and optional courses in every degree programme foster critical reflection on all that elides, marginalises, or brutalises disadvantaged and oppressed minority groups, that will continue. There is much to do – through my work as an academic (in the classroom, in my research, in meetings and at conferences) and in my life in the other communities I belong to. Like others, too, I imagine, I often feel that whatever I do is paltry and that the amount there is to improve and remove is overwhelming. But to learn from, be with, and be inspired by others who are also activating helps. My own blending of activism and work takes two prominent forms, both highly collaborative.

First, at the University of Leeds, I have had the good fortune to work with colleagues, students and other members of the public who engage in a considerable range of social justice causes. Currently, I co-direct with Caroline Starkey, the Centre for Religion and Public Life, while our colleague Adriaan van Klinken is on research leave. The Centre has been a hub for academics and practitioners inspired collectively by the "Leeds Approach", which can be summarized as contextual, critical, committed and collaborative. It is contextual in that it is "empirically oriented, investigating the concrete and lived manifestations of religion in localities ... as well as the impact of religion on socio-political practices and on issues of public concern in local, (trans-)national and global contexts." It is critical, including in terms of recognising "the study of religion as an academic field with problematic histories and trajectories, for instance steeped in Eurocentric, patriarchal and (neo)colonial modes of thought and practice" but also in terms of stimulating commitment "to exploring innovative multi- and transdisciplinary methodologies that take seriously the challenges posed by feminist, postcolonial, queer and other critical lines of thought, and that acknowledge the importance of positionality and (self-)reflexivity." It is committed and collaborative, above all

in the endeavour to bring about “constructive social change.”²⁶ One vehicle for the Centre and its aspirations has been its blog, “Religion in Public” and noteworthy here is the blog’s most recent series “Faith & Activism”.²⁷

Second, is my work with the Shiloh Project. This project was founded in early 2017 and is co-directed by Caroline Blyth, Katie Edwards and me. It is focused on gender-based and sexual violence, rape culture and the Bible and takes its name from the women of Shiloh in the book of Judges, women who appear fleetingly when the men of Benjamin seize them as wives. The mass rape of the women, and the fear, trauma and long-term harm that rape and sexual slavery give rise to, receive no mention. The Shiloh Project seeks to confront and to resist such passing over of crimes and to draw attention, too, to the many other phenomena that construct and enable rape culture.²⁸ As with the Centre at Leeds, work for the Shiloh Project has been energising, not least, because it brings different people with a common purpose together.

Collaboration – and this is confirmed by this volume – is important for effective activism, including in the biblical studies classroom.

This Volume

Each of the contributors to this volume has their own story and most give some glimpse of it – we find out where they teach (a college or university in the US “Bible Belt”, a rabbinic college, a centre for Christian study in the UK, a hub for socially-engaged scholarship in South Africa...); we hear about what motivates them, and – over and over again – how much they care about their students, the teaching of their subject, including about the responsibility they feel in teaching about a text as influential as the Bible (e.g. Shepardson), and making a

²⁶ The full text can be found in the document “Centre for Religion and Public Life: Annual Report, academic year 2018-2019” (July 2019), “Appendix V: The Leeds Approach to Religion and Public Life”, pp.22-23. The statement on the Leeds Approach was composed with input from many Centre members and finalised by Adriaan van Klinken.

²⁷ The series, consisting of regular publications of succinct pieces, each on a discrete topic, demonstrating how faith, scholarship and activism can come together in ways that move and inspire, was launched in January 2020 and may be of interest to the readership of this journal. One item, by Mmapula Diana Kebaneilwe (12 March 2020), entitled “When Faith Gets Practical: Bible and Activism in the Classroom” is particularly pertinent. The series can be found here: <https://religioninpublic.com/category/faith-activism/> (accessed 18 June 2020).

²⁸ The Shiloh Project has its own blog (see here: <http://shiloh-project.group.shef.ac.uk>) and book series with Routledge Focus. The inaugural volume of the series explains the concept of “rape culture” and the inter-relations between the Bible and gender-based violence in contemporary times, particularly in the wake of MeToo. See: Johanna Stiebert, *Rape Myths, the Bible, and #MeToo* (London/New York: Routledge, 2020). June 2020 also saw the launch of “The Shiloh Podcast”, which explores themes relevant to the project in regular episodes. For the first episode, see: https://open.spotify.com/episode/58i8rMN0aefn3krJ8y9T8N?si=r9L29SofSFOhHXLnHc_w2g&t=0 (accessed 19 June 2020).

contribution to betterment (*passim*). There is acknowledgement that change happens through direct interaction and conversation, or touching lives, and that this needs to happen whether we share much in the way of common ground and ideals or not – and, actually, particularly when we don't. Over and over again, there is testimony of learning from teaching, of adapting teaching in response to who is and what happens *in the classroom*.

One notable feature of this volume is the high proportion of co-authored contributions. Contributors met as teacher-and-student (Kahn-Harris and Ashworth-Steen) or have taught a course together (Domoney-Lyttle and Nicholson); they have conferred about how to integrate a particular event – like the 2018 fatal antisemitic attack in the Pittsburgh synagogue – into their teaching (Rollens, Vanden Eykel and Warren) and joined forces to work with and represent marginal or excluded members in their communities, such as unemployed youth (West and Zwane) and disabled persons (Koosed and Schumm). What this shows is how significant and meaningful relationships are in activism – both between colleagues and between teaching staff and students. There is much said in these contributions about empowering students – such as by flipping the classroom (Greenough), sharing vulnerability (Kahn-Harris and Ashworth-Steen) and sharing the space on the presentational stage (Domoney-Lyttle and Nicholson). Many show tremendous insight into and sensitivity for the students in their classroom (e.g. Graybill and Shepardson). Many demonstrate the risks they take by teaching material that might shock (e.g. Tombs).

Also notable about this volume is the generosity of contributors. Contributors share their mistakes (e.g. Domoney-Lyttle and Nicholson) and their resources (e.g. Reaves, Hamon). There is much here to inspire us to take chances, to set new readings, trust students, hand over control, read familiar texts in unfamiliar ways. I know my own teaching will draw on and become in many ways more conscious and more experimental on account of reading and thinking about these contributions.

There is a diversity of activist causes reflected in these articles – and most cover more than one, in acknowledgement of intersectionality and complexity (see especially Shepardson). There is focus on environmental activism (Hamon), disability activism (Koosed and Schumm), sexual violence (Tombs), queer reading (Greenough, Kahn-Harris and Ashworth-Steen),²⁹ antisemitism and supersessionism (Reaves, Rollens, Vanden Eykel and Warren), race and class (Dube, West and Zwane), and gender (Dube, Graybill, Domoney-Lyttle and Nicholson).

The contributions in this volume offer a variety of examples of activism in the biblical studies classroom. They are not comprehensive and do not address all causes that require active and vigorous participation or resistance. All contributions are by experienced and committed teachers who are willing to experiment. All are inspiring to read.

²⁹ The last issue of JIBS, edited by Caroline Blyth, is focused on transgender and genderqueer readings of the Bible and also of interest to classroom activists. See: <https://jibs.group.shef.ac.uk/current-issue/>.

I have rarely enjoyed editing so much as with this issue. My hope is that this volume will inspire teachers and learners of the Bible and persuade many that activism has earned its place in the biblical studies classroom.

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