Jeanrond, Werner G., and Andrew D. H. Mayes, eds.  
_Recognising the Margins: Developments in Biblical and Theological Studies_  

Reviewed by  
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Like a number of Festschriften in recent years, this volume of eighteen essays honoring Professor Seán Freyne of Dublin, on his seventieth birthday, covers a wide range of subjects. Freyne’s academic discipline is biblical scholarship, but he has been involved in engaging the biblical text in the modern and postmodern contexts, so that a volume honoring him that encompasses a wide variety of subjects is a fitting tribute. In addition to essays on biblical and theological studies are essays on cultural and ethical themes. Exegetical treatments of the teacher in Isa 30:20 (Joseph Blenkinsopp) and Exodus (Mayes) are followed by those on subjects such as The Eye of the Soul: The Doctrines of Higher Consciousness in the Neoplatonic and Sufic Traditions” (John Dillon); “The Future of Christianity in Europe” (Werner G. Jeanrond); and The Quest for Freedom in a Culture of Choice” (Stephen J. Duffy).

No reviewer can claim the expertise in such a range of subjects to do justice to the claims of these articles and the arguments advanced in their defense (see below for a complete listing of essays). I therefore confine the limited space available in a review to those essays that directly intersect with my own area of study: New Testament textual criticism and its bearing on exegesis.

Martin Mangel’s discussion, “The Messianic Secret in Mark,” shows how a master workman treats a well-worn topic. He locates the origin of the secret not in the “Christological presentation of the evangelist” nor in “the post-Easter ‘community’ behind which an originally ‘unmessianic’ Jesus is hidden,” but in the activity of Jesus himself, “so that one may speak of the ‘secret of the Messiah from Galilee’ “(25). Neither the recognition by the demons, nor the command to keep silent, nor the ignorance of the disciples (as Wrede imagined) is the proper locus of messiahship, but tradition whose Palestinian-Jewish origin “goes back to Peter” (45).

Critical to Wrede’s view of the messianic secret is Jesus’ command to keep silent about healings. Hengel, by contrast, claims that “with the healings of Jesus Messianic status is not involved at all” (31). He notes mat there are only three relevant texts, stating that Mark 8:26 does not contain a command to keep silent, which is missing from the “best textual witnesses” (31 n. 35). But if the original text read, “Do not tell anyone in the village,” in line with Markan usage, this would add a fourth instance and an important one, coming just before the confession of messiahship in 8:27-30.

Textual criticism may also be helpful in contemporary discussions on New Testament ethics. In “Specifying Meaning: Jesus, the New Testament and Violence,” Nigel Biggar offers an extended critique of Richard Hays’s _The Moral Vision of the New Testament_, which he calls, “an egregious instance of contemporary Christian pacifism” (254). A portion of Biggar’s argument deals with anger. He cites Matt 5:22, noting that “the anger Jesus prohibits is qualified by abuse”
(264). But neither Biggar nor Hays include the important variant reading “without a cause.” Although probably not the original reading, it does not follow that it is irrelevant. As Bart Ehrman, David Parker, and others have shown, variant readings give us valuable windows into the earliest Christian theological and ethical debates. Such a qualification as the additional “without a cause” indicates one way the early followers of Jesus interpreted and applied his words.

The presence or absence of textual variants could also prove an important factor in the final essay, in which Elaine M. Wainwright reviews current debates on human sexuality and the changing patterns in the interpretation and application of Scripture. Wainwright sees the biblical text as “process rather than product” (341) and its interpretation as pilgrimage rather than proofexting. By way of example she notes that on the matter of divorce the Matthean and Markan communities “nuance Jesus’ teaching differently” (343). But the situation is much more complex than this. On matters such as divorce and remarriage, where the stakes are higher, we observe a proliferation of variations in the sayings of Jesus. This pluriformity of text is reflected in verifiable differences on the matter in the early church (contrast Tertullian and Callistus). By contrast, we observe that in Rom 1:26-27 (one of the admittedly few texts on same-sex relations in the New Testament) the two variations listed in NA27 are stylistic and not substantive. Whereas there seemed to be a variety of acceptable views in the earliest period on the former matter, it was not so for the latter. Recognizing the margins of the New Testament text can offer valuable data about its earliest interpreters and insight for their contemporary counterparts.

If the textual critic finds such stimulation from this collection of essays, it is likely that the same will be true for those working in other areas of exegesis, theology and ethics.

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