MARK, MUTUALITY, AND MENTAL HEALTH

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MARK, MUTUALITY, AND MENTAL HEALTH

ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS

By

Simon Mainwaring

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All things are twofold, one opposite the other,
and he has made nothing incomplete.
One confirms the good things of the other,
and who can have enough of beholding his glory?

Sirach 42:24–25 RSV

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FOREWORD

Our custom in Semeia Studies is to allocate a member from the editorial board to work alongside the author or editor of the project submitted. As the General Editor of Semeia Studies, I usually try to identify someone from the board who would resonate with the project and offer support to the author or editor. In this case, I allocated myself!

Semeia Studies assigns itself the task of trawling the edges of the discipline(s) of biblical studies, in search of projects that push and transgress the boundaries and that offer innovative sites of interpretation and methods for interpretation. My own work inhabits not only the margins of the discipline(s) but also the margins of society. So Simon Mainwaring's project was of immediate interest.

Those of us who do our biblical studies in "the south" or "third world" are always drawn to colleagues in "the north" or "first world" who do their work on the margins of their world. We have little choice in working on the margins. Our communities summon us from our academies and demand that we deploy our resources with them as they struggle to forge redemption from a text that matters in their contexts. Fewer of our northern colleagues, inhabiting either the (tenuous but tenacious) empires of old in Europe or the newer empire of "America," seem to be summoned as we have been, so we pay attention when we witness such a summons.

Simon Mainwaring has been summoned by those who suffer poor mental health, and he has responded, coming alongside those on this margin and offering his resources to read with them. Mainwaring carefully locates himself among these marginalized people who reside in the cracks of empire. He also carefully locates himself among the experience and scholarship of those who have made similar choices. His detailed engagement with our work is a significant contribution of his book, bringing together as he does a range of diverse voices and sites of social location. Equally significant is how he constructs his own place within this work, as mindful of those he does his readings among as his academic dialogue partners.

The late Per Frostin argued many years ago now that liberation biblical and theological hermeneutics was distinctive in two related respects. First, social relations were seen as the primary site of doing theology; second, within the domain of social relations, a preferential option was made for the poor and marginalized. This commitment is more than an ethical choice; solidarity with the poor and marginalized has consequences for the perception of social reality; it is an epistemological necessity in the struggle for liberation.[1] Early forms of liberation theology did not recognize what Marcella Althaus-Reid refers to as the "indecent" margins of the margins.[2] Mainwaring has, and in doing so he serves us all, acknowledging the dignity of these people, allowing their readings of Mark to summon us to our own rereadings.

Itumeleng Mosala reminds us that only eyes shaped by marginalization can see particular dimensions of both context and biblical text.[3] This is why we must read with them. Until they have spoken, we cannot know what these texts (that matter in certain contexts) might mean. Mainwaring's work, and those he reads with, offers us resources both old and new.

Gerald O. West

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[1] Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988), 6–7.

[2] Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[3] Itumeleng J. Mosala, "The Use of the Bible in Black Theology," in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free: Essays in Black Theology* (ed. Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale; Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986),196.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Bib	*Biblica*
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
ExpTim	*Expository Times*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

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Introduction

> A woman paces from pew to pew around the church. She is shouting, "I don't know what to do, tell me what to do." She has been in and out of our lives for the past several days, homeless and destitute, struggling to hold onto a coherent thought and often displaying rapid mood swings. She has come early for the Alcoholics Anonymous group that meets in an upper room of the church building as one of hundreds of men and women that the church welcomes every week as they find their way back from the abyss on the strength of a community of witnesses to their journey of pain and hope. I stand with her, then we sit. We pray. She goes. And then, ten minutes after her AA meeting begins, I see her leave by the back alleyway door with a fresh cup of coffee in her hand.

Conversations matter. Connections matter. How people relate to one another matters. The above vignette describes one of many relational encounters that have served for me as a motivation to undertake the work that follows. It has been via conversations such as these that I have found both a passion and an intellectual interest emerge for how people relate to persons with poor mental health.[1] Even in this age of inclusion, of antidiscrimination legislation,[2] and of altered nomenclature,[3] fear and

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[1] I have chosen to use the term "poor mental health" rather than "mental illness" in respect for the many readers with whom I have worked through the course of this project. That is, in sharing texts with readers who experience poor mental health of differing forms, I have noticed a common resistance to labeling such as "mad," "crazy," or "lunatic," which to some of the readers has suggested a radical and perhaps even insurmountable alterity. By contrast, the term "poor mental health," while still being a label of sorts, is at least an attempt to describe a lived reality rather than an attempt to categorize persons as essentially different.

[2] See, for instance, the Disability Discrimination Acts (1995, 2005) and the Mental Health Act (1983) in the U.K. and Mental Health Parity Act (1996) and Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) in the U.S.

[3] For instance, "differently abled" rather than "disabled" and "developmentally challenged" and "mental distress' rather than mentally retarded and mental illness.

stereotypical representation of poor mental health and the denigration of persons with poor mental health are still commonplace in North Atlantic societies.[4]

This work is interested in the societal contexts of those who suffer poor mental health, and in particular the relational dynamics of those contexts, namely how identity, agency, and dialogue are negotiated in personal encounters. I am interested in these relational dynamics not merely for their own sake, but in how these contextual dynamics of relating might correlate with the relational dynamics narrated in the stories of ancient biblical texts, and then in turn how the reading of those texts might offer insights for those contextual dynamics.

This pattern of context to text and back to context is a well-worn path in biblical studies, and I will locate this particular work within that milieu in the pages that follow. It suffices to say here that this work seeks to serve as a heuristic, such that interested readers might better understand the dynamics of relational power that pervade encounters with persons with poor mental health. As a biblical scholar who is embedded not in the academy but in the contexts about which I write—working with those who struggle with the societal consequences of suffering with poor mental health on a daily basis[5]—this work is intended to offer an incitement for those who wish to engage with it to reassess how they relate to such persons. There are no models or prescriptions for behavior offered here. Rather, textual encounters are offered as vehicles for contextual reflection, and I hope that whoever the readers of this work might end up being, their views, both of the texts in question and of the contexts under consideration, might at least be enriched if not incrementally altered. In a sense,

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[4] I have chosen to utilize “North Atlantic,” referring to North American and European societies, rather than alternatives such as “more developed,” “First World,” or “Western” societies. I have done so mindful of critiques both of the notion of development as an acceptable delineation of nations in an era of globalization that has problematized such delineations, and of the notion of what constitutes “the West.” Given my interest in postcolonial studies, avoiding the use of “Western” is particularly significant. For instance, Benny Liew has offered a critique of the notion of “Western” as a kind of “cultural territorialism that ‘fossilizes’ different cultures in distinctly separate and definable spaces”; an endeavor proven “untenable in the light of history” (Liew 1999, 24).

[5] Currently, my social location for this work is in a beach community in San Diego, California, working with a homeless population among whom mental health challenges while hard to quantify are self-evidentially high and significant.

then, I hope that every reader of this work will end up being a contextual biblical theologian, such that through the interpretation of the relational dynamics narrated in ancient biblical stories the current pattern of relational dynamics vis-à-vis poor mental health, as much as they diminish human value, might be resisted and perhaps even begin to be reimagined and in doing so be incrementally transformed. Indeed, if all reading is a political act it is certainly my hope that this book will not prove to be an exception to that rule.

Given its interest in text and context, this is a project that is broad in its range of interdisciplinary interests. Chapter 1 begins by laying out the background for this contextual biblical study by offering a description of what I argue to be the societal location of the relational dynamics of persons with poor mental health in contemporary North Atlantic societies. Following that fundamental contextual premise, and wishing to locate my own contextual biblical work within biblical and theological paradigms that have considered the societal location of poor mental health, I present an analysis of liberation hermeneutics.[6] While offering much to biblical hermeneutics and praxis in its wider appreciation of structural power and its call to prophetic pastoral praxis, I argue that liberation hermeneutics' fundamental flaws of textual selectivity, theological predeterminedness, and a limited analysis of power relations, severely constrict it as a paradigm for context and for its textual analysis of relational dynamics. Indeed, the most central critique of liberation hermeneutics is that inherent in the paradigm is the notion of progress from bondage to freedom in the motif of liberation from the margins. Such a motif is offered in the end, both to the reading of texts and to the praxes of contexts, as an aspiration or teleology without any significant suggestion as to how such a struggle for freedom might occur other than it should.

Thus, taking on liberation hermeneutics' interest in relational power yet also recognizing the deficit that I argue to exist in this paradigm with regard to its ability to articulate how power structures might be resisted, I then turn to a paradigm outside biblical criticism: the work of Michel Foucault and his analysis of discourse on “madness/unreason.” Making clear that he sees power not only as oppressive but also productive, I argue that Foucault’s work offers some of the conceptual tools that might enable an analysis of how struggles for power might be had not beyond “the margins,” but within them as struggles for power in relationship. That is, the focus that Foucault’s work offers is how struggles are had within oppressive power dynamics, thus resisting the move away from oppression that liberation hermeneutics tends to focus on. Thus I argue that despite some significant critiques that have been made of Foucault’s understanding of agency inherent in his concepts of discourse and power, his work points to the possibility of power in relation and counterdiscourse. Thus the core benefit of a Foucauldian analysis of the relational dynamics of poor mental health is the incitement to reimagine such hegemonic relational dynamics.

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[6] Throughout the book I refer to liberation hermeneutics as one whole collection of different forms of biblical criticism. While I do assess in ch. 1 the various ways in which this form of biblical criticism and theology has evolved since its Latin American inception, I assess its use as a way of thinking about the relational dynamics of poor mental health as reasonably unified. Thus the singular grammatical form being used here is not to suggest that liberation hermeneutics in all of its complexities and variations is homogenous; rather it is to suggest that its use by theologians who have been interested in poor mental health has been most closely tied to its earliest form focusing on the motif of "liberation from the margins."

Building on the insights of both liberation hermeneutics and Foucault, in chapter 2 I introduce mutuality as the core concept of this work. I argue that it is the Foucauldian analysis of relational dynamics operating within hegemonic societal power structures that prompts the exploration of mutuality as a way of conceiving of power within relational encounters. I also maintain that my analysis will be based primarily on the study of textual relational encounters rather than theological concepts or textual motifs. That is, unlike liberation hermeneutics, my own approach to reading biblical texts as a way of thinking about the real life relational dynamics of poor mental health will not explore texts for overarching themes, or theological frameworks, rather it will closely read encounters in texts as they occur between individual characters to see how the praxis of mutuality operates in those encounters.

In setting up this textual study, I assess the uses of mutuality as it has emerged in three paradigms: mental health literature, feminist theologies, and theologies of disability. Within mental health literature the use of mutuality is diverse, and I argue that as a consequence the concept retains a nebulous quality and holds very little explanatory power in terms of how the aspiration for mutuality might be attained or negotiated within relational dynamics. In this regard, theologies of disability are seen to be more descriptive of the tensions that the praxis of mutuality inhabits within relational dynamics, such as Nancy Eiesland’s work, which stresses the ambiguity of embodiment, such that relational dynamics are seen as the negotiation of a single space of difference and sameness. Thus Eiesland's work, despite utilizing the liberation paradigm, largely evades the binaristic oppressor/oppressed nature of that conceptual frame and invites a consideration of mutuality as the ambiguous exchange of relational dynamics. A similar appreciation of ambiguity is explored in the feminist theology of Carter Heyward and her use of mutuality as a core component of right relating that is inherent as a potential in encounters between persons. Heyward argues that the power to transform hegemonic power structures is not a power that needs to be given to persons; rather it is a power already present.

While Eiesland and Heyward's notions of mutuality as ambiguous, and the inherent power in relating, are significant conceptual developments, what I argue to be absent from these explorations is the strategic element that a praxis-oriented approach to mutuality requires. In the end, the work of these thinkers still leaves the explanatory power of the concept of mutuality at a loss, and is still more aspirational than it is descriptive of how power is reimagined. In search of a more strategically inclined understanding of mutuality, I then seek to locate the concept within the paradigm of postcolonial criticism in the work of Homi Bhabha in particular. What I take from Bhabha's work for the exploration of mutuality as a postcolonial praxis is twofold. First, with his own strategic elements of postcolonial praxes in mind—hybridity, mimicry, sly civility, and so on—mutuality can be situated as one strategy among several. That is, when textual relational dynamics are explored, mutuality should not be considered as a praxis that operates in isolation, but as one that interacts with other praxes influencing their effectiveness and vice versa, as well as merging with them to form a composite postcolonial praxis. Second, and responding to the critique of Bhabha's work that it seems to limit the notion of resistive agency to struggles for survival within hegemonic discourse, I argue that what Bhabha's *Third Space* agency offers my exploration of mutuality is the notion of postcolonial praxis operating more at a liminal level, or in appreciation of James C. Scott's work, at a hidden level of relational encounter. Thus, via Bhabha, mutuality might be conceived of as a postcolonial praxis that exercises incremental and supplemental agency within the structures of power.

I also argue, somewhat as an extension of Bhabha's work, that as a postcolonial praxis, mutuality might be seen to push at the boundaries of postcolonial thought as a strategy not only for reactive survival within power structures but also for the transformation of those structures. Thus, while wishing to explore mutuality as a strategic praxis, I also seek to retain its aspirational qualities as held to be significant by the theologies of Eiesland and Heyward. Pulling these various strands together, then, I conclude chapter 2 by presenting my own understanding of mutuality as a strategic praxis of resistance and transformation that will be considered as a praxis for contemporary contexts through the reading of ancient biblical texts.

It is to this act of reading that I then turn in chapter 3. The texts used in this contextual biblical study are all taken from the Gospel of Mark. I selected Mark due to its potential as a text rich in points of tension between the different characters in the stories narrated. The six pericopae selected within Mark all narrate encounters had by Jesus and other characters and were chosen for their interest in the relational dynamics between Jesus and those characters: Jesus, "the Pharisees," and the man with the withered hand in the synagogue (3:1–6); Jesus, his family, and "the scribes" (3:19b–35); Jesus and the demon-possessed man among the tombs (5:1–20); Jesus, Jairus, and the woman with hemorrhages (5:21–43); Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman (7:24–30); and Jesus before Pilate (15:1–5). The hermeneutic utilized in reading these texts draws on the impetus of mutuality as the core concept of this work and postcolonial criticism as the core paradigm for its exploration. I explore the potential of postcolonial biblical criticism as a hermeneutic for reading via an outline of the broad clusters of this hermeneutic in general, and then via an assessment of how postcolonial criticism has been applied to Mark in particular. The potential of postcolonial biblical criticism in general is that it stands as a hermeneutic spacious enough for multiple questions and multiple answers to be offered of texts, generating multiple interpretive perspectives. This has been seen in a number of different ways, with some forms of postcolonial biblical criticism interrogating ancient texts for their colonial contexts, others attempting to uncover the so-called hidden or at least submerged voices within texts, and still others exploring the potential interlocution offered by extrabiblical literature. As well as these, there is the strand that is of most interest to this work, that seeks to utilize the insights of postcolonial criticism as offering heuristics for the reading of texts. The potential of this particular hermeneutical strand applied to Mark has been used to question the notion of agency in the reading of that gospel. I analyze Benny Liew's questioning of the predominance of an over-romanticized interpretation of Jesus and his argument that suggests that Jesus mimics rather than contests colonial power structures. As a contrast, I consider Simon Samuel's suggestion that the postcolonial lens renders a more fluid and ambiguous Jesus whose agency is not always easy to place. Arguing along the lines of Samuel's stress on the fluidity and ambiguity of agency in Mark, I propose my own model for how the characters in Mark might be seen to engage in a contested space of agency, wherein power is negotiated between characters and is not the sole reserve of some at the exclusion of others.

With this conceptual alignment within postcolonial biblical studies in place, the fundamental gap in this milieu that I argue this work wishes to fill is the one that I take to be present in Gayatri Spivak's paradigmatic shaping question: "Can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak 1995). Spivak wishes to problematize the notion that the oppressed, if given the chance, "know and can speak of their conditions" (25). She argues that in this searching out of previously unheard voices, the "rendering of the individual" is lost to a rendering of the structures that the individual finds herself in and has been hidden by (28). That is, Spivak's critique is that the search for particular histories and voices of oppressed persons is subsumed in the analysis of the structure of power and knowledge that has led to the oppression of the oppressed in the first place. What Spivak's argument brings to the fore is a crucial distinction between the consciousness of the intellectual who encounters "the subaltern" in textual analysis and the subaltern herself/himself. That is, the insurgent voice is, according to Spivak, uttered from an "irretrievable consciousness" (28). For, as the voice of the "other" is heard it is transcribed into a *grammar* that is not its own. And so the voice of the oppressed in the dialect of the academy is not one that ever speaks of itself.

However, one of the searing ironies of postcolonial criticism's concern for the voice of the "other" is the absence of the subaltern's voice in postcolonial academic writing.[7] Furthermore, the vocabulary of the postcolonial

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[7] A similar argument has been put forward by Rieger with regards to liberation theology's interest with "the margins" as a paradigmatic marker of theological inquiry. Rieger argues for "creating broader alliances with people at the margins" and the need for a "connection to the margins" with theology articulated "from the perspective of the subaltern" (see Rieger 2004, 211–15). However, while Rieger argues that "we" should give up our conventional assumptions, his own exploration of the possibility of "creating broader alliances" still looks to fall within the dichotomous paradigm of classic liberation theology, utilizing statements such as, "truth thus conceived can only be perceived from the margins." Left unanswered by such a stance are questions as to how different "truths" might interrelate, and in his own essentializing of "the margins" as a site of hermeneutical privilege there is no sense that there might be struggles within

genre is oftentimes so dense and jargonized that it is hard to imagine many who are not in "the know" of the postcolonial lingua franca being able to engage in a dialogue with postcolonial critique without first having to learn another grammar. It is here that the irony lies: not just that postcolonial criticism is at times an inaccessible and overintellectualized form of academic parlance, but that it inhabits a practice of exclusion.

In response to Spivak's assertion that the subaltern cannot speak in the textual expressions of the academy, this work seeks to directly address the absence of subaltern voices within postcolonial biblical criticism by inviting them to the table of textual interpretation. This is not at all to dismiss the profound challenge that both assessing the social location of and engaging with so-called subalterns in the reading of texts poses. What it is aimed at doing, though, is to open the somewhat closed-off system of postcolonial criticism to other voices, keeping in mind that this endeavor will be an imperfect expansion of this hermeneutical frame, yet an expansion all the same.

With this aim in mind, the second strand of concern in developing the reading strategy is how the core concept of mutuality and the paradigm of postcolonial biblical criticism might be applied to the field of dialogical hermeneutics. Tracing the development of the field, particularly with the work of Gerald West, I explore how the dialogical approach to contextually interested biblical studies offers much in its engagement with the so-called ordinary reader, thus breaking the isolation of biblical studies from the interlocution of those who are often socially disconnected from the contexts of such ordinary readers. What dialogical hermeneutics contain, then, is the potential to have room for difference.

That said, while this potential for having room for difference is there in dialogical hermeneutics, I argue that the reality has proved harder to achieve. Central to this has been the role of the reading facilitator as an "interested reader" and the way in which this facilitator retains the right to arbitrate difference when interpreting texts with others. I argue that this distinction between so-called ordinary and trained reader proves to be unhelpful and propose instead a more flat model for reading wherein no arbitration of difference is offered. Laying out my own reading strategy, then, I describe how the relational dynamics of textual narratives are explored in a succession of prepared and spontaneous questions. True to

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marginal spaces for discursive voice; multiple levels of power, and voice, and "truth." Indeed, it is exactly this multiplicity of struggle that I seek to explore.

the affinity that dialogical biblical criticism shares with reader-response criticism,[8] the questions posed of Mark treat the pericopae being studied as stories. Therefore, fundamentally, an in-front-of-the-text approach is taken toward this Gospel with questions framed so as to probe the relational dynamics between characters in the texts via questions that ask group readers to explore both the actions and the imagined thoughts and feelings of those characters. Within such questions, the relation of texts to both the contexts of readers and their experiences of poor mental health in society is explored.

Drawing on this reading strategy, the middle chapters of the book turn directly to the text. Via an analysis of six encounters with Jesus and focusing on the relational dynamics of these encounters, I explore the major themes of identity, agency, and dialogue, the three aspects of relational dynamics that I argued in chapter 1 to bear the marks of hegemonic forms of relating. This analysis is designed such that the insights of biblical scholars are placed alongside the insights of reading groups. Building upon the emphases that group readers provide, and placing those emphases in relation to scholars' insights, I then work through each pericope assessing the core thesis that mutuality is an effective postcolonial praxis of resistance and transformation.

Thus there are three sets of voices in this work's dialogical method. The first set of voices are those of biblical scholars, samples of whose interpretations are touched on across a diverse range of biblical criticisms inasmuch as they focus on the relational dynamics of the texts in question. This sampling approach is followed in order to look for interpretive tendencies and patterns across a range of scholarship, rather than go into depth in any one form of biblical scholarship. Furthermore, what is pursued is not a dialectical model with differing interpretations analyzed in such a way as to sublate the difference other interpretations present, leading to some sort of synthesis for reading. Rather, a dialogical approach is pursued that views competing interpretive voices as creative of openings for reading pushing at the limits of stated framings of the text.[9]

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[8] The sort of dialogical reading that my own work represents can be seen to directly respond to Hans Robert Jauss's critique of this form of biblical criticism as stated by George Aichele et al.: "As long as biblical reader-response critics concentrate on the implied reader and narratee *in* the biblical texts, they will continue to neglect the reception *of* biblical texts by flesh-and-blood readers" (1995, 36). A similar critique is leveled against ideology criticism, which, similar to my own work, is interested in the dynamics of power that texts inhabit; yet ideology criticism remains at the level of theory and "rarely listens to ordinary readers" (de Wit et al. 2000, 31).

The second set of voices is made up of those with whom I shared interactive Bible studies in four settings in the metropolitan Boston area of Massachusetts. The readership of these studies was rich and varied. What I shall call Reading Group One was based at a day treatment center for seniors with poor mental health. Reading Group Two formed at a drop-in center for working-age adults with poor mental health. Reading Group Three was based at a residence where persons who experience various forms of poor mental health live in community while holding down professional jobs and courses of study during the day. Reading Group Four was based at a residential project that offered its residents help with substance abuse along with problems with poor mental health.[10]

In each of these settings, the populations of the reading groups were varied across ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender lines, and it was rare that one week's group members were the same as the next. Difference was also present in terms of the readers varied faith perspectives: from those who forefronted a Christian faith, to those who explicitly viewed the Markan texts strictly as stories. The multiple subject locations of the group readers rendered a rich array of interpretations that I placed in "dialogue" with the interpretations of the first set of conversation partners, from the academy, in such a way as to expand views of text and context retaining difference within the tensive openings readings offered.

It is here, at these points of tensive opening, that I chose to add the third voice: my own. There is no attempt for me to present the interpretations that follow as the work of a somehow neutral and objective arbitra-

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[9] What my approach offers to the competing scholarly and group reader interpretations is a response in part to de Wit's challenge that given the voluminous quantity of "popular readings of the Bible" collected to date, especially in the Southern Hemisphere, and the relative scarcity of systematic research done on it, there is a need to produce some sort of "theoretical framework" or "coding system" for those readings (see de Wit et al. 2004, 16). De Wit's response is to propose a new form of "empirical hermeneutics" (41) wherein his project's products are placed side by side and analyzed almost as scientific data. My own approach is also to place reading products side by side but in a way that does not only seek to describe the patterns that emerge, but also to question them, probe the points of emphasis and tension and then consider avenues that such a contrapuntal association suggests.

[10] The exact identity of these locations and groups is not given in a desire to protect the confidentiality of group participants.

tor of interpretive difference. Not only does the dialogical hermeneutic I have employed preclude such notions of arbitration and objectivity, it sees them as profoundly limiting. My own interpretive voice, then, is a subjective and socially located part of this dialogical exchange. Particularly, this includes my "subject location" of being an English man, educated in the academy of biblical scholarship, ordained in the Anglican Church, with little direct personal experience of marginalization along lines of socioeconomic disadvantage, ethnic background, sexual orientation, gender, or seasons of poor mental health.[11] At another level, there is my experience more indirectly via relationships with persons in my own life, and indeed via transitory relationships with readers and people I meet through my work as a parish priest, of the hegemonic societal reality (as well as the psychological and spiritual reality) of being designated as other in the discourses of mental health.

With this reading strategy in place, the six pericopae under consideration were divided into three pairs, each taking up a chapter of the book. In chapter 4 the first pair considers the question of identity and how acts of labeling and exclusion pose threats to the abilities of characters to self-identify in the narrative of the texts. In the first pericope (Mark 3:1–6) I consider the strategies of relating that are employed by Jesus and a man with a withered hand to reimagine notions of identity and agency. On one hand, I argue that the agency narrated in 3:1–6 is an instance of mutuality and hybridity acting as praxes both of resistive survival and of relational as well as physical transformation. On the other hand, the consequences that readers imagined there might be for such spectacular acts of resistance are severe, suggested by the plot to "destroy" Jesus (3:6) narrated at the end of the pericope.

By contrast, the strategy of ambiguity that I argue to be at the heart of Jesus' response to charges in 3:19b–35 that he has lost his mind and his theological credentials (3:21–22), while an act of resistive survival on the part of Jesus, appears to be less able to bring about any sort of transformation either to that relational dynamic or to ones that follow it in the text. What emerges from these two pericopae that focus on identity, then, is

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[11] Although it is not insignificant that I have experienced on several occasions shorter periods of poor mental health, which although never leading to hospitalization, medication, or the complete debilitation of functioning, have been times of depression that make me able to empathize a little with those who have experienced more acute episodes or seasons.

a conclusion that the praxis of mutuality is one that operates transiently within relational dynamics. That is, what I argue to be the transformative impact of the praxis of mutuality, in its operation with other postcolonial praxes, is that it occurs as a momentary reimagining of power structures, not as their overcoming.

In chapter 5 the second pair of pericopae consider how gender and ethnicity further complicate the dynamics of power in the exercise of agency in colonial relational dynamics. The first pericope considers the contrasting strategies of agency practiced by Jairus, a prominent synagogue leader, and a woman who has been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years (5:21–43). Both of these individuals seek healing and go about it in different ways: one exercising agency in the open, publicly attempting to negotiate a healing for his daughter; the other exercising a surreptitious agency, reaching out for the corner of Jesus' clothing, attempting to take healing unnoticed. What I argue female agency in this pericope reveals is the necessarily supplemental and incremental struggle for power that the power differential between genders within colonial relational dynamics demands. Thus the praxis of mutuality in this pericope between male and female is limited within the thin space of colonial discourses on gender and agency. Contrary to some feminist re-readings of this pericope, then, I argue that reciprocity is not in the end gained for the females in this encounter; rather it is because of reciprocity's denial that the necessarily supplemental agency of the woman with hemorrhages is exercised in the way that it is.

In the second pericope of the pair (7:24–30) the gradations of power and gender are further complicated by the impact of ethnicity. That is, within an ethnically charged exchange of words between Jesus and a Syrophoenician woman, where Jesus appears to throw insults as well as metaphorical food, the agency of a doubly othered woman emerges along the Bhabhian lines of mimicry. Thus, arguing again differently from certain feminist rereadings of this text, I suggest that that there is not mutual transformation in this story; rather, what is seen is mimetic agency that renegotiates the terms of the relational dynamics of power present between Jesus and the woman. Furthermore, I argue that there is no textual sense in postulating that Jesus has been transformed in this pericope anymore than the woman has; rather, what emerges from 7:24–30 is the ambivalent agency of Jesus, whose indeterminacy precludes definitive conclusions being reached about the nature of transformation in the story.

In chapter 6 the final pair considers the question of dialogue and its potential as an emancipatory tool that is seen both to lead to the opening up of new possibilities for life and to its closing down. The first pericope, 5:1–20, explores the potential of dialogue as an emancipatory tool in the encounter between Jesus and a man who lives among the tombs. In exploring the thicker description of the alterity of the man that group readers offer, I argue that the engagement between the man and Jesus is a central element of the story. The significance of this engagement, though, is not seen as the healing that the man receives at the hand of Jesus; rather it is the potential it opens up for the man to articulate his own talent for survival and his own way to healing. Furthermore, the significance of the commission of the man to go back to those who had chained him in the first place is argued to be paramount to an understanding of the postcolonial reimagining of these colonial relational dynamics, with 5:1–20 presented less as an act of miraculous healing and more as a recovery story enabled by dialogical engagement.

By contrast, the efficacy of dialogue in the final pericope, Jesus' so-called trial before Pilate in 15:1–5, appears to be at a loss from the outset, with Jesus' silence in that exchange taken by several interpreters as a sign of a passive acceptance of victimhood. Arguing along a different trajectory via the emphases of group readers, I suggest that Jesus does not passively acquiesce to his fate, but rather chooses to dialogically engage Pilate, rather paradoxically, through the employment of a strategy of silence. I explore the potential of this composite praxis of silence and mutuality as a way of opening up the thin space of the relational dynamics Jesus is faced with for others to enter into mutual relating. While in the end I argue that as a praxis that seeks to resist external hegemonic power this strategy fails, its significance lies as a strategy of internal resistance that allows for a mutuality with the self to emerge when all other hopes for mutual relation are seemingly lost.

Chapter 7 brings this work back to its stated contextual concerns by assessing how much mutuality has operated as an effective form of resistive and transformative postcolonial praxis in the textual interpretations that the previous chapters have practiced. Specifically, I assess the efficacy of the praxis of mutuality as it operates within the structures of hegemonic relational dynamics. I also explore mutuality's operation delineated by gender, by open and hidden agency, as well as its operation complementary to other postcolonial praxes and as supplemental to hegemonic power.

Along with this, I close with an exploration of some of the perceived benefits and limitations of the hermeneutical model pursued.

I hope that readers of this work might include those who live with, relate to, care for, advocate for, or take an interest in persons with poor mental health and discourses on mental health. Similarly, I hope that this work might be of interest to those whose work is to offer criticism of ancient texts and the reading of such texts, and in particular I hope that those whose own work leads them to dialogue with others might find the hermeneutic and insights of this particular attempt at dialogical biblical interpretation a source of interest. Yet more than anything else I hope that this work is able to engage those who struggle for transformed relating in the everyday encounters of persons with poor mental health and so might offer some encouragement not only to continue in that struggle but to engage critically with the issues such struggles raise. Indeed, if there is one ethical imperative that the political act of reading calls for, it is that conversation continues to go on, and that participants continue to be found, engaged, and, one hopes, even changed.