Christopher G. Frechette, Christopher R. Matthews, and Thomas D. Stegman, eds.


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In honor of their Jesuit teachers and mentors, Dan Harrington and Dick Clifford, some of the finest scholars today offer an incomparable collection of essays showing how their work has intersected with and been influenced by two scholarly giants: Mark Smith, Jon Levenson, C. L. Seow, Gary Anderson, John J. Collins, Carol Newsom, John Endres, Christopher Frechette, Eileen Schuller, Thomas Stegman, John Donahue, Christopher Matthews, Donald Senior, Harold Attridge, Pheme Perkins, Adela Yarbro Collins, Eldon Jay Epp, and Carolyn Osiek. Although a Festschrift is published not for its original contributions but as a testament to the venerable reputations of its recipients, this Festschrift is commendable for bringing together a collection of essays that offer fruitful reflections on issues across the field of biblical studies. The essays have been arranged under four headings: “Portrayals of God,” “Second Temple Recastings of Scripture and Tradition,” “New Testament Deployments of Scripture and Tradition,” and “Early Reception of New Testament Texts.” Throughout the volume run the themes of gender, rewritten Bible, and sources of imagery. In keeping with the Jesuit identity of the honorees, several contributors have connected their essays with issues of worship and the Jesuit order.
From my own Catholic perspective, the two essays I found the most creative in engaging with the Jesuit Catholic identity of the honorees were those of Jon Levenson and John Collins. Taking as his point of departure the confrontational approach toward scripture evinced by the volume’s honorees, Levenson addresses the concerns of Athalya Brenner and Elizabeth Achtemeier about the inclusion of Ps 137 in Jewish and Protestant liturgy. Levenson prefers to read the psalm in its literary-historical context rather than from a merely ethical perspective. When the biblical authors praise dashing enemy babies on rocks in Ps 137:9, for Levenson, they envision the reversal of the scenario faced by conquered Jews. Though the infants of enemies would have had no direct culpability for the sins of their elders, identity in the ancient Near East was “more familial: the borders between the individual and the family/clan/tribe/nation were more porous, and thus an individual’s identity extended beyond his or her personal death.” For Levenson, the Orthodox inclusion of Ps 137 is appropriate because it retains the horror to be found in biblical history and the theological opportunity for serious reflection. Even bolder, however, is his cogent and unique insistence on the place of the literary-historical method in daily religious practice.

Equally innovative and masterful is Collins’s “The Legacy of Canaan in Ancient Israel and Early Christianity.” In deft, Jesuit-like maneuvering, Collins laments that Pope Clement XI refused the claims put forth by Jesuits in China that the Catholic God could be called by Chinese names and that Confucian ceremonies constituted civil rites in which Christians could participate in good conscience. As Collins proceeds to elaborate, one of the Hebrew names for God, El, is identical to the name of the Canaanite high god. Moreover, Hellenistic Jewish authors such as Aristobulus advanced the notion that the Greek poets wrote of God even though they used the names Zeus or Dis. The beast of Revelation goes beyond its source in Daniel 7 with its seven heads, reminding those versed in Canaanite traditions of the seven heads of Shilyat of seven heads in Ugaritic texts. Thus, for Collins, the “Jesuits who went to China were wise to seek continuities with native beliefs rather than to dismiss the pagan world as wholly other.”

The implications of gender for the understanding and development of tradition receive careful consideration in the essays of Smith, Epp, and Osiek. Smith surveys the implications of the movement toward a monotheistic God for the gender expression of the deity. Though God is predominantly described as male in the Hebrew Bible, there are also images of God as a mother or midwife. Smith contends that this fluidity of divine gender lends support for inclusive language in liturgy. Epp’s contribution describes textual variants that have sought to minimize the role of women in the church. In Acts 1:14, for instance, Codex Bezae (D) adds “and children” after “women,” shifting the emphasis away from women in ministry. Pauline D-Text witnesses change Col 4:15 from greetings to “Nympha and the church in her house” to that “in his house.” Finally, there is
the famous case of the nineteenth-century change of female apostle Junia to male Junias, though ancient witnesses concurred that Junia was a woman. The strong evidence for women’s participation in the early church is also a theme found in the essay by Osiek on martyrs. Covering Blandina, Perpetua, and Felicitas, Osiek examines the challenges female bravery posed to Roman assumptions about women and social class.

The question of the cultural sources of biblical imagery features in several essays. Newsom cautions against imputing intentional intertextuality with the Baal cycle on the part of Dan 7. Seow interprets Behemoth as an “exalted creature” who represents a biblical tradition that differs from other traditions in that Behemoth is placed above even the human beings, who are normally considered “the epitome of creation.” This beast that humbles humans thus fits perfectly into the book of Job, a tale of humanity being thwarted at every turn. Like Newsom, Seow wants to underscore the message of the biblical author, who has not simply drawn Behemoth from his various Near Eastern mythological options. Seow calls the proposal that the Ugaritic texts suggest Behemoth might be similar to Mot, deified Death, among those theses that are “purely speculative.” That the biblical authors prioritized their own theological messages cannot be emphasized enough, but Anderson also provides a refreshing reminder from Ricoeur that imagery and metaphors must have a basis in the lived experiences of authors.

The most numerous invocations of the legacies of Clifford and Harrington, though, come in the chapters that deal with rewritten scripture and the formulation of Jewish and Christian communities in the Roman era. The editors of the volume do the reader a great service in offering a full range of perspectives that complement one another. After Anderson explores the various metaphors for sin and debt in the New Testament and rabbinic literature, Schuller highlights that “missing from Biblical Antiquities are prayers of penitence and confession.” Endres and Frechette delve into the development of angelology in the use of creation motifs in Jubilees and the use of Jubilees in the Song of Three Jews in Dan 3. Stegman collects the ways in which scholars have observed that Paul alludes to scripture and even quotes passages, changing key verses for his own theological exposition on Christ. Thus, there is a rich scriptural texture to Paul’s letters that cannot always be precisely correlated with any one theology in his Old Testament sources. Donahue, noting the scriptural texture of Mark, calls attention to the continuing challenge of reading with “stereo-vision” as Mark focuses on proclaiming Christ. Mark’s theology, as Senior writes, is augmented by Matthew, who must repurpose Mark for his Jewish-Christian community. Continuing the Jewish-Christian inquiry, Matthews argues that the penultimate scene in Acts, one of dispute between Paul and Jewish leaders in Rome, need not indicate a separation of Judaism from Christianity as much as an intra-Jewish conversation. Luke-Acts emerges from a community in the center of a continuum of Jewish engagement with Jesus. For Matthews, Acts 28:23–28 is an “open-ended”
conclusion. Attridge, meanwhile, concludes that John adopted some of the strategies of Palestinian Jewish dualistic discourse like those found at Qumran, and Perkins suggests “one should read the Gospel as engaging elements of diverse, free-floating messianic speculation” like those in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Overall, it may be said that the authors have given the reader a picture of the development of Judaism and Christianity that shows each text’s audience working out its own place vis-à-vis Judaism and Jesus. Firmer definitions, delineations, and canons of Judaism and Christianity remain products of later generations.

Given the erudition of the scholars contributing to this volume and the scope of the collection, this tome will be of immense value for general readers, those teaching introductory courses, and those researching the history of biblical and Jesuit scholarship. This Festschrift bears witness to the exemplary teaching, mentorship, and friendship of Richard Clifford, SJ, and Daniel Harrington, SJ. The depth of analysis of each essay successfully combines with the more casual (and reader-friendly) style of the Festschrift to produce a book with something for everyone interested in modern biblical scholarship and Jewish and Christian antiquity.