JESUS ON ANGER: 
THE TEXT OF MATTHEW 5:22a REVISITED

by

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Dedicated to the memory of Professor Dr. Bo Reicke (17th of May, 1987)

The interpretation of Matt 5:22 has occupied the attention of exegetes since early patristic times. A considerable body of literature has examined the verse from a redactional or lexicographical perspective, but almost nothing has been written on the equally perplexing questions posed by the text of Matt 5:22a.¹ The most widely adopted text-form reads (as in NA²⁶):

ἐγώ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἄδελφῳ αὐτοῦ ἐνοχὸς ἔσται τῷ κρίσει.

The RSV translates this as follows: ‘But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.’ This is essentially the reading of virtually all modern translations, English and foreign.²

An alternative reading inserts εἰκῆ after πᾶς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἄδελφῳ αὐτοῦ. This longer reading is favored by the AV: ‘But I say


² An exception is the NKJV.
unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." The RSV margin gives this alternative reading ("Other ancient authorities insert without cause"), as do the margins of the NEB, NIV, NASB, and the Amplified Bible. It was supposed by Jerome that εἰς ξήνη was an intrusion into the text; he mentions that it was not found in the most ancient codices at his disposal (in plerisque codicibus antiquis sine causa additum non est). Erasmus thought it spurious, as did Mill, Bengel, Lachmann, Tischendorf, and Westcott and Hort. The UBSGNT adopts the shorter text-form, though with a "C" rating (= "considerable degree of doubt"). In contrast to this broad consensus, the reading εἰς ξήνη has enjoyed little support in modern times, Whitney and the Greek text of Hodges and Farstad being predictable exceptions. As far as I can tell, P. Wernberg-Møller has been its only other recent advocate.

Despite the frequency with which it has been asserted, the suggestion that εἰς ξήνη is a scribal addition can be challenged on several grounds, most of which have been overlooked in the literature. My purpose in this short study is not to provide a full scale defense of a particular view, but rather to demonstrate that the question of the text of Matt 5:22a remains open, and that the variant εἰς ξήνη, if not original, should at least be reconsidered in scholarly discussions of this passage.

1. In the first place, we need to decide more positively which reading is the most likely to have given rise to the alternative. The arguments against εἰς ξήνη have been succinctly set forth by Professor Metzger in the UBSGNT Textual Commentary: "Although the reading with εἰς ξήνη is widespread from the second century onwards, it is much more likely that the word was added by copyists in order