

Review of David G. Horrell, *Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities*

Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2020.

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Despite its provocatively complex title, the argument of *Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities* is relatively simple. Through careful examination of the texts of the New Testament, David Horrell works to undermine the dominant discourse within the field of biblical studies, which assumes “a persistent structural dichotomy... between an ethnically particular or ‘exclusive’ Judaism and an open, all-embracing ‘inclusive’ Christianity” (21). On the contrary, Horrell contends that despite the popularity of the dichotomous paradigm, the Judaism contemporaneous with the New Testament was, in many ways, inclusive; while the texts of the New Testament were sometimes ethnically exclusivist. Thus, he demonstrates that this persistent structural dichotomy is “implausible” (304) based on the historical evidence.

The book has three parts, with the introduction and part three, “Implicit Whiteness and Christian Superiority: The Epistemological Challenge,” forming a socio-theological inclusio. In part one, Horrell lays out both his methodology and an excellent analysis of the history of scholarship. The first chapter traces the persistence of the assumed “structural dichotomy” between an ethnically exclusive Judaism and an inclusive Christianity forward from F.C. Baur and the Tübingen School. Horrell’s second chapter spotlights recent challenges to this dominant paradigm. In his third chapter, Horrell lays out his own method for determining the validity of this structural dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity using “Social-Scientific” theories of racialization and ethnic identity formation. The theories Horrell selects come primarily from the field of classical sociology, but I will discuss his method in more detail later.

In moving to the second part of the book, Horrell then relies on sociological definitions of ethnicity and race to demonstrate that Jewish and Christian texts—and by “Christian texts” he means primarily the New Testament—should not be understood as binary opposites, especially on the subjects of “shared descent,” “a common way of life,” “homeland,” “community formation,” and “mission and conversion.” Part two will be familiar to New Testament scholars, as it largely consists of tried-and-true historical critical analyses of the texts. The sociological theories, when they do appear, generally add weight to the conclusions Horrell arrives at through historical criticism. Finally, the third part, which should be read alongside the introduction, explores the ethical—and to a lesser extent, theological—stakes of the project.

Readers from outside the field will benefit most from this inclusio, which can be read together as a sustained argument “raising fundamental issues of epistemology that should cause us [presumably, New Testament scholars] to think hard about how to conceive and practice the discipline in which we work [i.e., New Testament Studies]” (299). Horrell specifically points to the historical development of the field

of biblical studies “in the context of a wider narrative about European (racial and religious) superiority at a time of European colonial ambition” and suggests that New Testament scholars “consider how, and in what ways, the construction of the contrast between Judaism and Christianity might bear the marks of its production in this particular historical and geographic context—one with specific religious and racial dimensions” (309). I make a similar argument in my own work, and if I were to rephrase Horrell more forcefully, I would say that the field of New Testament Studies—and the latent antisemitism encoded in its “persistent structural dichotomy” between an ethnically exclusive Judaism and an inclusive Christianity—is a direct descendent of Anglo-European white supremacist and colonialist ideology (Tong 2020).

Horrell is courageous to make this claim, even in its tentative form, since, as he writes, “the discipline of New Testament Studies reflects a predominately Christian perspective, whether that derives from the personal commitments of many of its practitioners or the institutional contexts in which they work” (7). He risks much by clearly, yet gently, naming one of the most enduring paradigms within the field as racist. I applaud his gumption, especially since it was the hostility of the field towards this precise argument that significantly influenced my own decision to leave. I have no hope left for the field of Biblical Studies, and would hardly grieve were it to sink into the mire of white supremacist Christianity that threatens to destroy the soul of this country, if not the entire Western world (Butler 2021). So, I greatly admire those who see something redeemable within the field, and who still fight to save it from itself.

However, Horrell’s book itself demonstrates just how difficult this fight will be. For example, in his third part, Horrell cites numerous examples of “criticism of the Eurocentric character of established approaches in New Testament studies (and biblical studies more generally)... expressed in the fields of African American hermeneutics, Asian hermeneutics, and other forms of what has come to be known as minority criticism(s)” (366), and encourages “those of us who have identified, in whatever ways, with the white Christian traditions at the center of the discipline... be brought into robust and meaningful critical dialogue” with such critiques (344). However, in part one of the book, where Horrell lays out his methodology and the history of scholarship, his third chapter on “Ethnicity, Race, and Religion in Social-Scientific Perspective” (67-92) relies heavily on white American or European (and male) theorists of ethnicity and race, such as, Fredrik Barth (69), Stephen Cornell and Douglass Hartmann (70), Jonathan Hall (70), and Richard Schermerhorn (71).

Yet, if Horrell is correct—and I believe he is—that the field of New Testament Studies emerged under the influence of European intellectual racism, *kal vahomer* (is it not more so) for the field of Sociology? As Raewyn Connell declared in the *American Journal of Sociology*, “Sociology actually emerged from a broad cultural dynamic in which tensions of liberalism and empire were central. Global expansion and colonization gave sociology its main conceptual frameworks” (Connell 1997). Thus, by using sociological research to undermine the “persistent structural dichotomy” within New Testament Studies—and with it, attempting to exorcise the specter of whiteness that haunts the field—Horrell nevertheless summons the very same ghost he seeks to banish. It seems, therefore, that even a New Testament scholar so devoted to rescuing New Testament Studies from the grips of European racist imperialism, cannot help but be “far too wedded to ‘the master’s tools’—to

echo Audre Lorde’s famous declaration—to play any part in the critical dismantling of ‘the master’s house.’” (341).

However, this does not make Horrell wrong—far from it. His failure to escape the Eurocentricity of sociology does not undermine his ethical argument that (especially white) biblical scholars should become more familiar with “minority” scholarship. If anything, it strengthens it. This book demonstrates, in both its triumphs and its shortcomings, that biblical studies is stronger for its engagement with scholarship written by members of historically-oppressed groups, both from within the field, and in fields from which we draw our theoretical frameworks. It is not enough for biblical scholars to become well-read in “minority” biblical scholarship. Rather, they—we—must also become well-read in Black Studies, Diaspora Studies, Postcolonial Theory, Modern Jewish Thought, Queer Theory, and so much more.

Reference List

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Tong, M Adryael. 2020. “[Banishing Baur: The Antisemitic Origins of White Supremacy in Biblical Studies](#).” *Political Theology Network*.



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