New Testament Studies as a Kyriarchal Discipline:

Making the World Safe for White, Male, Capitalist, Imperialist, Christian Supremacy

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Abstract

This essay surveys four leading university-level, English language introductory textbooks to the Christian Testament and subjects them to a multifaceted kyriarchal evaluation along the lines laid out by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Despite differences in audience and context, each text has common traits, including idealist definitions of religion that reflect dominant trends in the discipline. Such idealist definitions of religion marginalize material interests, leading to interpretations of early Christian texts that impose capitalist ideology, privilege whiteness, assert Christian supremacy, support male domination, and justify empire. In this way, New Testament Studies provides ideological support for white, male, capitalist, imperialist, Christian hegemony.

Keywords: anti-Judaism, capitalism, gender, kyriarchy, New Testament introduction textbooks, supersessionism, whiteness

Introduction/s

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has been both a participant in and a critic of the study of the Christian Testament. In those dual roles she developed the concept of "kyriarchy" to help scholarship move past the gendered dualism of analysis in terms of "patriarchy." Kyriarchy frames oppression rather as a complicated interaction of multiple factors, for the rule of the kyrios—emperor, lord, master, husband, father, and elites—requires the interrogation of interrelated and mutually dependent structures of oppression that erase the experiences of wo/men.[1] Thus a kyriarchal framework integrates feminist, postcolonial, and other liberative analyses for the purposes of emancipation from empire.

> As an analytic category, kyriarchy articulates a more comprehensive systemic analysis of empire, in order to underscore the complex inter-structuring of dominations, and locate sexism and misogyny in the political matrix—or better, "patrix"—of a broader range of dominations… In short, this analytics does not restrict itself to gender analysis but seeks to comprehend the complex

[1] "Wo/man" as a technical term is an attempt to destabilize the "so-called generic male-centered language," forcing male readers to do what female readers have always had to do; namely, to learn to "think twice" about whether they are included in allegedly generic terms (Schüssler Fiorenza 2007, 6-7, esp. fn. 21).

> multiplicative interstructuring of gender, race, class, age, national and colonial dominations and their imbrication with each other (Schüssler Fiorenza 2007, 14).

This essay explores "the complex inter-structuring of dominations" in New Testament Studies. I argue that the "consensus in the discipline" interprets the canonical texts in ways that support capitalist exploitation, structural racism, Christian supersessionism, male domination, and global imperialism. A central facet of this academic kyriarchal discourse is a definition of religion that suppresses the material interests at stake in religious practice. But a kyriarchal analysis need not limit the discussion to one aspect of oppression, for the power of kyriarchy is precisely in its multifaceted structures of domination.

> Kyriarchy is best theorized as a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social and religious structures of superordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression. Kyriarchal relations of domination are built on elite male property rights as well as on the exploitation, dependency, inferiority, and obedience of wo/men who signify all those subordinated. Such kyriarchal relations are still today at work in the multiplicative intersectionality of class, race, gender, ethnicity, empire, and other structures of discrimination (Schüssler Fiorenza 2009, 9).

In this essay I do not attempt to survey research that challenges the disciplinary status quo. An academic discipline like New Testament Studies is a variegated field that resists generalization and there are numerous publications questioning the generally acknowledged majority positions in the discipline. But these diverse voices continue to be marginalized at the boundaries of the discipline. So this study focuses instead on the relatively stable core—the general, malestream consensus that dominates New Testament Studies.[2]

In order to get at this malestream consensus, this essay examines influential, widely-used introductions to the New Testament, paying special attention to how these introductions address issues of religion, economy, race/ethnicity,[3] gender, and empire. I focus specifically on textbooks in English because this has become the dominant language in the discipline, corresponding to the rise of American global imperialism since the mid 20th century. These English-language introductory textbooks have the explicit goal of introducing New Testament Studies and provide systematic discussions of the features deemed most important in current research. Moreover, thousands of students are required by professors to use them every academic term.

Since there are far too many such textbooks for a complete survey, I winnowed the large number of published introductions down to four using several criteria. First, the introductions needed to be aimed at an undergraduate rather than graduate

[2] For another critique of the discipline along these lines, see Penner and Lopez 2015.

[3] Both race and ethnicity are contested categories designating constructed collective identities based on biological and/or cultural heritage (Hockey and Horrell 2018). In this study I use "ethnicity" for ancient topics and reserve "race" for some modern ones.

audience because undergraduate texts focus on the fundamentals of the discipline while graduate "introductions" often assume a good deal of prior knowledge. Second, the introductions needed to be widely used. Unfortunately, capitalist publishing companies hide data about sales, so I had to glean information about usage from library catalogues,[4] from anecdotal reports of professors, and from colleagues in publishing. I then eliminated textbooks that have not gone into a second edition because multiple editions suggest disciplinary usefulness, and, to keep things current, the most recent edition had to have appeared after 2010. Third, the textbooks needed to indicate an awareness of disciplinary "consensus" positions because that consensus is the focus of my critique.

From this greatly reduced list I selected introductions that evaluate the Christian Testament from a range of confessional perspectives so that the analysis would reflect disciplinary discourses and not simply one confessional orientation. I did not, however, select introductions that speak primarily to one particular partisan Christian community because the academic discipline of New Testament Studies attempts to address audiences across confessional lines.

Using these criteria I settled on four introductory textbooks for examination: one from an empirical historian,[5] one from a Roman Catholic scholar,[6] one from a mainstream Protestant perspective,[7] and one from three fundamentalist Protestant co-authors.[8] The point of using different confessional orientations is not to contrast

[4] I thank Gary Wallin for locating more than 50 academic introductions to the New Testament published in English since 2000.

[5] Ehrman 2020b. "This is a *historical* introduction … rather than one that requires the reader (you) to accept any particular set of beliefs about God, Jesus, salvation, and so on.… Historians deal with past events that are matters of the public record.… Historians try to reconstruct what probably happened in the past on the basis of data that can be examined and evaluated by every interested observer of every persuasion" (18, author's emphasis). The same author has also produced five editions of *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* through Oxford University Press, with the fifth appearing in 2020.

[6] Brown 2016. This introduction "*aims to be centrist, not idiosyncratic*. To serve readers best this volume intends to judge what most scholars hold—even when on a particular point Brown (or the abridger) might be inclined toward a minority opinion. Inevitably, however, judgments about the majority stance are not totally free of one's own prejudices" (xi, author's emphasis). The first edition was granted the *imprimatur* of the Roman Catholic Church, which guarantees that the book is free of doctrinal or moral error (1997). Brown 2016 does not have the *imprimatur*.

[7] Powell 2018. The author does not overtly discuss his orientation but "mainstream Protestant" seems to me to reflect the general content and approach. Moreover, the author is professor emeritus at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, which describes itself in Protestant terms. "An institution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University is committed to expanding its students' discernment of faith, responsibility to one another and purposeful impact. That's forming leaders for Christ's church at work in the world" (https://www.capital.edu/trinity-lutheran-seminary-at-capital-university/). The company that published the introduction also has a Protestant mission. "Baker Academic serves the academy and the church by publishing works that further the pursuit of knowledge and understanding within the context of Christian faith. Building on our Reformed and evangelical heritage, we connect authors and readers across the broader academic community by publishing books that reflect historic Christianity and its contemporary expressions" (http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/bakeracademic/about-baker-academic).

[8] Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles 2016. These two quotes summarize the position of the authors. "All three writers of this book affirm that all twenty-seven books in the NT were written by the

those confessional orientations but rather to illuminate the academic discourse they affirm and the topics they ignore.

Because I am attempting to dissect a discourse, I do not use the names of the authors in my discussion but rather abbreviate my labels for their approaches.[9] The individual authors have all accomplished the goals of an introductory textbook in expert fashion. My goal is not to critique their work but rather to critique the discipline, raising questions about the discourse of New Testament scholarship by examining the treatment of religion, economy, ethnicity, gender, and empire in these exemplary textbooks.[10]

Using this multifaceted evaluation, I argue that an idealist definition of religion is connected to a marginalization of material interests. This definition is entangled with interpretation of early Christian texts that imposes capitalist ideology, privileges whiteness, asserts Christian supremacy, supports male superiority, and justifies empire. In this way, New Testament Studies provides ideological support for white, male, capitalist, imperialist, Christian hegemony.

Religion: Material Interests Mystified

All four of the selected textbooks share a theory of religion that mystifies religion by privileging individual religious experience and then defining religion as ideas that develop around that religious experience. According to these textbooks, individuals have a powerful religious experience, they convert, and as a result they believe different ideas. The textbooks then insulate those religious beliefs as something separated from gendered, racial, economic, and political practices. In fact, this idealist definition of religion is a key factor for disciplinary descriptions of Christian origins in which the material connections to class, race, gender, and empire vanish, focusing attention instead on a limited range of abstract ideas.

While the textbooks share a mystifying approach to religion, the textbooks insulate religion from material connections in different ways. The historically-oriented introduction insulates religious experience by asserting that claims about experience are fundamentally inaccessible to historical method, which means one can only examine the ideas associated with that experience and inquire about the

persons to whom they were ascribed (the four Gospels, the Letters). We have included a strong defense of the apostolic authorship of Matthew and John and a rebuttal of the alleged pseudonymity of the letters written by Paul and Peter…" (xvii). "A preparedness to obey and to order one's life on the basis of Scripture is an indispensable prerequisite and predisposition for the proper apprehension and appropriation of the biblical message" (56).

[9] EH = empirical history = Ehrman 2020b. FP = fundamentalist Protestant = Köstenberger et al. 2016. MP = mainline Protestant = Powell 2018. RC = Roman Catholic = Brown 2016. Some of the textbooks also have coordinated websites and digital materials. I do not draw on those resources for this analysis. The textbooks themselves—at 346 pg., 587 pg., 591 pg., and 1130 pg.—are of sufficient length to address these issues.

[10] I do not provide a full review of these textbooks. I also do not claim that all historians agree with the reconstructions in this particular historical textbook, nor that all Roman Catholic scholars agree with the positions of the Catholic textbook I examine, and so on.

meaning given to the experience. The portrait of the apostle Paul provides an example. Paul did not write why he persecuted assemblies before his "conversion," so the textbook builds a probable reconstruction: before conversion Paul the Pharisee objected to the idea that someone like Jesus could be the messiah, and also the idea that a messiah could be crucified (which would violate the curse on anyone hung on a tree; Deut 21:32). This second blasphemous claim about a crucified messiah "would have given Paul sufficient grounds for persecuting the Christian [sic] church" (EH, 347).

But then Paul had a dramatic religious experience that he understood to be an appearance of the resurrected Jesus, which presents problems for a modern historian.

> It is difficult for historians to evaluate what actually happened to make Paul "turn around," the literal meaning of "convert." Both Acts and Paul attribute his conversion to the direct intervention of God, and this kind of supernatural act, by its very nature is outside the purview of the historian…. The historian can, of course, talk about a person's descriptions of divine acts, since narratives of this kind are a matter of public record. So we will restrict ourselves to what Paul claims to have happened at his conversion and consider how he understood its significance (EH, 348).

The discussion continues to focus on ideas and beliefs after Paul's vision of a risen Jesus.

> Did this experience, then lead Paul to reject his Judaism in favor of a religion for the Gentiles? Was this a conversion to a completely different and contrary set of beliefs? … We can approach the question by considering two related matters: aspects of Paul's worldview that would have been confirmed by an encounter with a man raised from the dead and aspects that would have been reformulated in light of the experience (EH, 349).

According to this approach, then, scholars should examine ideas and worldviews because the supernatural is impervious to historical analysis.

A second textbook insulates religious experience in a different way than the empirical historical textbook by attributing religious experience to divine power rather than by granting it immunity from historical investigation. The "Appreciation of Paul" chapter in this second textbook ends by asserting that Paul's gospel message had its own power that could not be stopped by worldly factors.[11]

> The ultimate gift of Paul is to have preached a gospel that had enormous power in itself and therefore could not be chained or silenced even when its proponents were. Readers who keep in mind *the apostle whose preaching unchained the gospel* will

[11] The chapter "affords a different kind of introduction, that is, one centered on appreciating this man who did more than anyone else in his time to lead people to see what Jesus Christ meant for the world" (RC, 159).

> not allow the Pauline message to be buried beneath details as we now consider the thirteen NT writings that bear Paul's name (RC, 162, author's emphasis).[12]

By attributing religious experience to divine power and associating that experience with particular ideas, the study of the Christian Testament does not need to worry much about economy, ethnicity, gender, or politics. These are apparently details that might bury the essential message.

A third textbook assumes that early Christian religious experiences were independent encounters with the divine realm, which were then understood through analogies from the material world. For example, in a discussion about patron-client relationships this third textbook insulates religious experience from social experience and adds a benign description of asymmetrical patronage relationships (MP, 32-33). Then in a crucial paragraph, the textbook suggests that religious experience ("divine-human encounters") is isolated from worldly influence, but that social patterns like patronage do provide models for humans to understand their religious experience.

> Patron-client relationships would form a significant backdrop for the development of Christian theology … [T]he phenomenon of patron-client relationships seems to have served as a rough analogy for divine-human encounters in which the constitutive elements are grace and faith: God gives to people freely and generously (grace), and this arouses within people an appropriate response of trust, devotion, and willingness to serve (faith) (MP, 33).

So this textbook posits the autonomy of powerful encounters of humans with the divine, and suggests that social relationships constitute a "backdrop" that provide ways of understanding the sui generis religious experience. Thus, religion is independent of, and insulated from, issues like economy, race, gender, and politics. In the process this definition of religion sanctifies asymmetrical patronage relationships by positing a structural similarity with asymmetrical divine-human relationships.

The fundamentalist Protestant introduction locates itself in this formal structure as well, albeit with its own emphases. For this textbook (its own type of) Christianity is characterized by a unique, divinely-instituted religious experience and all other religions are counterfeits.

> In the course of history, many have devised supposed paths of salvation. Virtually all man-made [sic] religions have one thing in common: they are based on human efforts. Among the major religions, Christianity is unique in that it focuses on what one man—Jesus Christ—has already done for all humans. Christianity revolves around what is now available for all on the basis of simple trust in Christ (FP, 621).

[12] This textbook also emphasizes that the love of Christ is at the heart of Paul's message, but "love" is described mostly in terms of a message and the sacrifices made to deliver that message (160-61).

For this textbook the Protestant Bible plays a special role since it is inspired by God and inerrant. Here Christian religious experience is insulated by an assertion of the Protestant Bible's power to mediate true ideas. As for interpreters, "A preparedness to obey and to order one's life on the basis of Scripture is an indispensable prerequisite and predisposition for the proper apprehension and appropriation of the biblical message" (FP, 56). This process of obedience and study will produce a Christian set of beliefs and also an allegiance in which Christians join "God on his mission to rescue a representative portion of humanity and to move history ever closer toward the final consummation of his purposes in the Lord Jesus Christ" (FP, 992, 1049).

Thus, the four textbooks agree that religion is about ideas and belief. Religion is thus detached from material interests and sequestered from normal analysis. The sections that follow provide more details about the insulation of religion from economics, ethnicity, gender, and empire.

Economics: Money is No Object (of Study)

If religion (defined as the beliefs that accompany genuine religious experience) is immune to material interests, economics is not an important object of inquiry. As a result, the discipline forgives sloppy economic analysis and imposes—almost without reflection—a capitalist orientation on the study of antiquity. In this section I argue that the capitalist orientation is rarely recognized but is manifest in three neoliberal assumptions that are presumed to be true in relation to the Christian Testament: the separation of economics from religious phenomena; the availability of entrepreneurial individual agency; and the importance of private property. The section concludes by observing that the primary way scholars avoid economic issues is through the deployment of the discipline's traditional historical-critical methodologies.

The capitalist orientation of English-language New Testament scholarship is rarely recognized. This ideological erasure is attributable to the fact that the disciplinary knowledge is produced by specialists whose labor is structured by capitalist relationships and who perform capitalism on a daily basis in their everyday lives. Among specialists who do discuss economics, some reject capitalism, some are critical only about aspects of capitalism, some accept capitalism as a fact of life, and some are advocates for capitalism. But regardless of these ideological positions, English-language New Testament scholarship is generated within capitalist social and economic relationships. Moreover, capitalist institutions frame the production, distribution, and consumption of New Testament scholarship. The public and private institutions of higher learning that support the work, the publishing companies that distribute the work, and the schools and churches where people consume the work are all capitalist formations.

Within this capitalist system introductions to the New Testament are an example of the many ways capitalist production of surplus value can skew the discipline. The profits in this case are generated by professors who, as part of their labor, require large numbers of students to buy or rent specific textbooks. If a particular textbook is successful, the publisher then produces a new edition of the textbook that drives the older editions out of the used textbook market. I have not been able to ascertain current profits for introductions to the New Testament in this system because, as noted above, these capitalist publishing companies try to hide their sales numbers from competitors and from the public. Some outdated numbers are available, however, from the years 2008–2010 and these suggest the scope of the problem.[13] During those three years the sales for US undergraduate introductions to the New Testament grossed between $9–10 million.[14] Moreover, the eight most-assigned undergraduate introductory textbooks for this period accounted for 54% of that market, which would be about $1.5 million per year (almost $4.9 million total). I am told anecdotally that authors might receive between 10–20% of those sales, depending on specific contracts and the volume of sales. So the publishing companies made enough profit on those eight textbooks to pay somewhere in the range of about $150,000–$300,000 annually to authors of those textbooks.

The complete integration of New Testament scholarship within capitalist institutions for the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge results in an unacknowledged disciplinary bias that I call "capitalist criticism" (Friesen 2004, esp. 336-337). I highlighted some of the features of capitalist criticism in an earlier, unpublished study of economic interpretation in some New Testament introductions (Friesen 2014). Three of those features of capitalist criticism provide the structure for the rest of this section.

The first feature of capitalist criticism that is evident in the introduction textbooks is the assumption that economics and religion are distinct phenomena, and so economics is irrelevant for the study of Christian origins. The suppression of economic topics is clear in the study aids of the textbooks. In the textbook glossaries, economic terms and concepts are rare: 6 out of 225 terms in one textbook (2.7%); 10 out of 397 terms in another (2.5%); and 1 out of 596 in the third (less than half of 1%) (EH, 557–568; MP, 553–575; FP, 1051–1080). The introduction that has study questions for each chapter raises economic issues in only one of its 259 study questions and that question—"What was the cause of the Thessalonians' deficient work ethic?"—was clearly not designed to encourage critical thought about economic relations (FP, 536). Another textbook has 89 "Take a Stand" topics for students to debate but not a single one of those topics deals with economic issues (EH). The content of the textbooks also suppresses important economic topics; e.g.,

[13] I thank Neil Elliott for pointing me toward some of the available data.
[14] This includes textbooks with a more devotional orientation that I have not included in my category of "academic introductions."

the reports of radical sharing of possessions in Acts are downplayed,[15] and Paul's collection among gentile assemblies for the poor saints in Jerusalem receives almost no elaboration, even though it was a large, ambitious, and risky Pauline project.[16]

The assumption that economic issues are irrelevant in the study of Christian origins is also manifest in the inability of the textbooks to integrate financial topics into their content. For example, introductions to the New Testament usually devote one or two paragraphs to the Roman imperial economy near the beginning of the textbook and then they seldom—if ever—return to the topic. This is the case with three of the four introductions.[17] The oldest of the three begins with a relatively optimistic, late 20th century view of the ancient economy, describing the Christ groups as a mixture of participants from different socio-economic strata.[18] This description, however, is mostly irrelevant in the rest of the textbook, leading to sins of omission and commission such as: it asserts that there is little value in social stratification theories for explaining problems with the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11; it describes the Thessalonian converts as gentile and "largely working class" but the subsequent discussion ignores the working class descriptor and discusses only the gentile factor; and it does not even attempt to elaborate on its assertion, "Sharing possessions is a principal Lucan ideal" (RC, 190, 165, 80).

More recent introductions tend to be less optimistic but equally inept in their descriptions of economic inequality in the early Roman Empire. One textbook begins with a bleak picture of Roman imperial society.[19] The rest of the volume, however, takes no note of those economic hardships and contains many internal

[15] MP has brief references at 206 and 227. RC has a sentence on 102 and speculation on 104-05 that "the Hebrews are attempting to force the Hellenists to conformity by shutting off common funds from the Hellenist widows" in order to force the Hellenists to respect the Jerusalem temple. FP includes a half-sentence on 423 and a paragraph on the next page that diverts attention away from the collection and toward the theme of purity. EH has a possible allusion to the collection in a half sentence, "…distributing funds that are raised and taking care of those in need" (327).

[16] MP: a paragraph on 276-77, but the collection does not appear in the chronological chart of Paul's life (261). RC mentions the collection on 155-56 (without noting the poor), 197, 208 (suggests Paul was worried about traveling, not about opposition), and 257. EH refers to the trip to deliver the collection as a "jaunt to Jerusalem" but recognizes that Paul is worried about opposition (407-08). FP has brief references to the collection as a source-critical issue (544), as a relief offering (569), as a sign that Paul believed in general equality (574), and as an effort to promote good relations between Jewish and gentile believers (600).

[17] The fourth textbook (FP) assumes economic issues to be so irrelevant that it does not even attempt a description of the Roman imperial economy.

[18] "[T]he situation of both groups of NT poor [i.e., rural farmers and urban poor] was economically better than that of the desperately poor of the modern world…Christian preachers made converts among the city poor and slaves, but they also made considerable inroads among the middle class. Although there were a few wealthy Christians, the least number of converts would have been among that social class and among aristocrats" (RC, 24).

[19] "In the early Christian world, there was no such thing as a middle class as we know it… In that world, only a few persons belonged to the upper class; nearly everyone else was in the lower. Few people had any hope for social mobility, slaves made up perhaps a third of the total population in major urban areas, and many of the poor were worse off than the enslaved" (EH, 42). The author goes on to mention wellness factors such as healthcare, infant mortality, fertility rates, and literacy that compare unfavorably to most modern societies.

inconsistencies. For example, readers are told, "It is nearly impossible to gauge what kind of people Paul's Gentile converts in Thessalonica were," but then the author contradicts this by saying, "we might suppose that for the most part the converts were not among the wealthy and the social elite in town, although certainly some may have been drawn from among the upper classes" (EH, 364). Note that socioeconomic description in this formulation is both nearly impossible but also relatively certain, and that the gentile converts are described as "not among the wealthy" rather than as poor. Another example of confusion is that readers are told that some rich individuals began to be attracted to Christ groups at two different times—in both the 1st century and in the 2nd century (EH, 364, 516). The confusion increases when readers are also told, without explanation, that in between these two dates the communities addressed by Revelation in the late 1st century were "among the poorer classes, who hate the rich and powerful" (EH, 547).

Another of the textbooks exhibits even more confusion in its socioeconomic descriptions. First it describes the Roman world in dire economic terms, "characterized by gross economic inequality" and with no middle class.[20] But three pages later the Roman Empire is described as something of a neoliberal utopia.

> [T]he Romans were very good at administration, and many things probably ran more smoothly under their control.… The extent of the Roman Empire, and its basic stability, brought an unprecedented unity to the world.… Trade flowed more freely than ever before, and both travel and communication (e.g., the sending of letters) became relatively easy" (MP, 34).

In regard to Judaism the same textbook tells readers that the Pharisees "were generally middle class" even though it earlier stated that the Roman economy had no middle class (MP, 44, 31). It goes on to assert that the diaspora included, "Jews who discovered that the *Pax Romana* allowed them to emigrate and live freely elsewhere. They did so for a variety of reasons: business opportunities, education, or a simple desire to see more of the world" (MP, 50). Thus, the perfunctory descriptions of drastic socio-economic inequality disappear from consideration in this textbook and are replaced by undocumented assertions about expansive economic opportunities in the Empire.

Descriptions of the socio-economic locations of Jesus and Paul also reflect a discipline in which there is no real interest in economic analysis. One textbook tells readers that Jesus the *tektōn* (woodworker) was a blue-collar worker[21] and another describes him as a Jewish peasant,[22] while the other two textbooks show no curiosity about the socioeconomic status of Jesus. The descriptions of Paul are even more

[20] "The Roman Empire was characterized by grotesque economic inequality. There was nothing comparable to what we call a 'middle class'; for the most part, people were either extremely rich (about 3 percent of the population) or extremely poor (about 90 percent). Most of those who belonged to the latter group lived at or near a subsistence level, making just enough to survive, with little hope of saving anything" (MP, 31).
[21] Jesus "might be compared to a blue-collar worker in lower-middle-class America" (RC, 24).
[22] Jesus was "a Jewish peasant who works as a *tektōn*" (MP, 81).

dissonant, for readers are told that Paul was: among the impoverished but perhaps "a step above" subsistence level because of his trade as a tent-maker (MP 260); or, from a family of leatherworkers whose family business thrived and became moderately wealthy (FP, 457–458); or, "among the lower classes" with a basic education, "a step higher than a freedman,"[23] and "an itinerant artisan who would have had to struggle with all aspects of life" (RC, 152, 160); or, a highly educated man who engaged in manual labor, which meant "he was not an ordinary 'blue-collar' worker" who would have befuddled an average person (EH, 362). These descriptions of Jesus and Paul reflect disarray in the discipline regarding socioeconomic description, but the important point to note is that the confusion does not matter to the discipline because economic issues are considered to be irrelevant to Christian origins.

A second feature of capitalist criticism found in these textbooks is a fascination with the productivity of individual entrepreneurial agency. Readers are told, for example, that Corinth was a bustling commercial center that "attracted a cosmopolitan population, and many of them soon became wealthy" (RC, 185). Another textbook asserts, "The Corinthians had it all. Many were wealthy in this thriving seaport, and with this affluence came the arrogance that so often accompanies possessions" (FP, 555). Scholars readily identify individuals from the texts as possibly or probably wealthy (e.g., Aquila and Prisca, Chloe, Gaius, Erastus, Paul's family) but there is no such eagerness to identify individuals as possibly or probably poor (FP, 559; EH, 377; MP, 293; FP 457–458). For examples of possibly poor individuals, readers are left only with some muddled statements about Jesus and Paul, with occasional side references to the twelve disciples, or with isolated comments about some people in the Corinthian Lord's Supper (MP, 32, 300; RC, 190).

This ideological valuation of entrepreneurial agency is regularly superimposed on the ancient world. Consider this reconstruction that treats Paul like an entrepreneurial Christian missionary in a capitalist free market setting.

> [H]ow did a Christian [sic] missionary like Paul, after arriving in a new city where he had no contacts, actually go about meeting people and talking to them about religion in an effort to convert them? Perhaps their mission proceeded something like this. Paul and his two companions arrived in the city and as a first step rented out a room in a downtown insula. Insula were the ancient equivalents of modern apartment buildings…. They had a ground floor containing rooms that faced the street for small businesses…. Did Paul and his companions set up a small business, a kind of Christian [sic] leather goods shop, in the cities they visited? If so, this would explain a good deal of what Paul recounts concerning his interaction with the Thessalonian Christians [sic] in the early days. He and his

[23] Note the confusion of the legal category "freedman" with the socioeconomic category "class."

> companions toiled night and day while preaching the gospel to them (1 Thess 2:9) (EH, 358, 361–362).[24]

One might set up a business in this manner in a few places in the 21st century world if there are rationalized business procedures and competitive markets, but it would not work that way in ancient Thessalonica. The description effaces the effects of patronage, family, guild, and ethnic networks on rental space, supply chains, and sales. The point here is not to deny that Paul engaged in commerce. Rather, the point is that the discipline describes Paul's commercial practice in terms that support modern neoliberal capitalist ideologies without critical reflection.

The introductory textbooks also express disdain at points for those who do not engage in entrepreneurial practice. A case in point is commentary on the command, "Anyone who is unwilling to work should not eat" (2 Thes 3:10b). One textbook explains the text in this way.

> Paul insisted that the church must not support the idle. A few pangs of hunger would be just the motivation needed to inspire productivity in those unwilling to earn. Paul even urged the church to initiate a process of compassionate church discipline in order to encourage the idle to change their behavior (FP, 534).

A third feature of capitalist criticism found in the textbooks is the retrojection of modern capitalist ideologies of private property onto ancient societies. An example of this is the treatment of Paul's collection for the poor in Jerusalem in one of the textbooks. That textbook devotes only two paragraphs to the description of Paul's collection, which is the lengthiest description of the project in any of the four textbooks (MP, 315). The discussion is subsumed under the heading, "Fundraising" and readers are told they can assume that Paul often "solicited donations," framing this project as a capitalist charity rather than as an innovative redistribution of surplus (Schellenberg 2018, 215–236; Friesen 2022, 41–78). This ideological redirection is reinforced when the textbook invokes modern American Christian practice, stating, "[T]hese two chapters [2 Cor 8-9] are often used by Christian churches to teach financial stewardship and encourage generous giving" (MP, 315). The discussion then explains that the collection is based on the wise use of personal property and defends this conclusion with inappropriate proof-texting from other Pauline statements. The result of this modern mash-up is that readers are led to believe that Paul's collection for Jerusalem was an appeal for ancient Corinthians to donate some of their private wealth to a charitable cause.

Rather than confronting these issues, capitalist criticism diverts attention away from economic topics by focusing instead on traditional historical-critical issues like the authorship of the texts. For example, one textbook has 20 pages devoted to the Pastoral Epistles. Five of those pages discuss debates about whether Paul authored these letters. Even though the Pastoral Epistles have quite a bit to say about financial

[24] For more on the ideological implications of portraying Christ group leaders as "missionaries," see below.

issues, here is the sum total of attention given to those issues in this textbook: widows "would be without personal wealth (5:5, 16), and so the church provides for them from the common goods;" and "one may notice a particular distrust of wealth in 6:5-10, 17-19, including the famous "The love of money is the root of all evils" (6:10)" (RC, 231–51; quotes form 240 and 242).

For another example, the Letter of James is particularly strident about issues of poverty and economic inequality, but again traditional historical-critical questions divert the discussions. One textbook has seven pages attempting to show that the letter of James was written by Jesus's brother, six pages on theology (Christology, eschatology, faith and works, and wisdom and ethics), but less than a page on economic issues (FP, 797–827). The theology section says nothing about economics beyond noting that James's ethics includes "avoiding preferential treatment of those of a higher socioeconomic status in society (2:1–13)" (FP, 825).

Another set of historical-critical questions that divert attention away from economic issues involves source criticism, such as the partition theories about 2 Corinthians. Second Corinthians 8–9 tries to persuade Paul's gentile assemblies to share money with the poor saints in Jerusalem. However, one textbook has a full page on partition theories for the epistle and only a paragraph or so on the Jerusalem collection, while another textbook devotes three pages to partition theories but says nothing about the Jerusalem collection (RC, 194–200; EH, 383–387).

The modern struggle between capitalist and Marxist ideologies sometimes lurks just below the surface of capitalist criticism's efforts to divert attention away from economic topics. One surprising appearance comes in the discussion of James mentioned above. The textbook has little to say about economic issues in James, but a "Something to Think About" box does take up James's theme of hypocrisy (FP, 823). As a quintessential example of someone whose life "abounded with hypocrisy and self-contradiction," the authors selected Karl Marx. The box does not engage with Marx's economic thought at all. It only berates him as someone who claimed to advocate for the working class while he underpaid his servants and lived off his inheritance and family money. It concludes, "When contemplating the outcome of Karl Marx's life and of others like him, we should say, 'There, but by the grace of God, go I'" (FP, 823).[25]

This indirect attack on Marxism in an introductory textbook reminds us that New Testament Studies in the West operates within capitalist institutions and is permeated by capitalist discourses. In the next section I argue that such capitalist criticism of early Christianity is further inflected to support white supremacy and Christian supersessionism.

[25] This is also the only textbook of the four that criticizes the materialism and affluence of Western capitalist society (FP, 555, 843, 992), but materialism is framed as a matter of bad personal choices and not as a systemic problem.

Whiteness, Majoritized Criticism, and Christian Supersession

"Minoritized criticism" appears frequently now in New Testament Studies signifying a range of interpretive positions based in underrepresented racial communities. Such terminology implies—but does not quite admit—that the "consensus" positions in New Testament Studies represent "majoritized criticism" that is rooted in white power in Euroamerican societies. In this section I first remind readers that majoritized English-language New Testament scholarship is specifically a white discourse. Then I argue that as a result of its whiteness, majoritized scholarship has not sufficiently problematized race and ethnicity. Instead, majoritized scholarship adopts uncritically the ancient binary of Jew/gentile, and then confuses it with the binary Jew/Christian in ways that support Christian supersessionism and anti-Judaism. Thus, New Testament Studies is not simply a patriarchal discipline but rather a racialized, Christianized, capitalist, kyriarchal discipline.

The demography of textbook scholarship reflects the racial bias of the discipline: academic introductions to the New Testament in English are written by white scholars, and their recommendations for further readings overwhelmingly endorse other white scholarship.[26] In this aspect, the most "diverse" of the four textbooks is the introduction in which 4% of the recommended readings are authored by people of color (12 out of the 296 readings) (MP).[27] Another textbook has 2% of the recommendations authored by people of color (the 183 recommendations include 2 African American scholars, 1 Asian American, and 1 Latinx) (RC). A third textbook has an excursus on "Methods of Ideological Criticism" that the author outsourced to a female colleague of color to write. The outsourced excursus recommends readings from 10 BIPOC scholars: 4 Latinx, 4 Blacks, 1 Asian American, and 1 British Sri Lankan (EH, 193–195). When that excursus is set aside, the rest of the textbook has less than 1% of 287 other suggested readings from non-white scholars (1 Asian American, and 1 Iranian American).[28]

While the white demographics are important, the crucial question is how this racial bias disfigures the content of the discussions regarding ethnicity and race, and my first observation is that white scholarship seems unequipped to deal with ethnicity in a sophisticated manner (Park 2021, 443–445). As an example consider this superficial, confused generalization about ancient ethnicity: "The Christian readers of 1 Peter may be literal gentiles (in terms of ethnic identification), but apparently they no longer think of themselves as being gentiles; now they see

[26] Since 2000, the only exception of which I am aware is Smith and Kim 2018.
[27] The 12 suggestions involve only 6 authors: 3 Asian Americans and 3 Latinx (two of whom are a married couple).
[28] Because FP has very large bibliographies, I note only that the Luke chapter recommends 31 pieces written by white scholars and 1 by an Asian American, while the Revelation chapter has 55 recommendations authored by white scholars, 1 authored by a Black scholar, and 1 by a Pacific Islander scholar.

themselves as part of Israel, God's chosen people" (MP, 484). Notice that nearly the entire non-Jewish population of the Roman Empire is subsumed under the rubric "gentiles," that "ethnic identification" is literal rather than constructed, that a lifetime of "ethnic identification" could simply end by thinking differently about oneself, and that people could choose to see themselves as part of Israel. Such formulations reflect a discipline that has not reckoned with its own whiteness and that has not yet grappled with issues of ethnicity in the ancient or contemporary eras.

At times, there is a recognition of the complexities of modern ethnicity but the textbooks seem unable to treat ancient phenomena with similar nuance. One textbook, for example, uses a modern illustration to drive home the importance of a robust approach to ethnicity. "[S]omeone in an impoverished black church in Soweto, South Africa, would hear a very different kind of sermon on a biblical text (even the very same text) from someone in a white upper-class church in a suburb of San Francisco" (EH, 183). This modern illustration rightly draws socioeconomic stratification, race, colonialism, political oppression, nationalism, and regional variation into the process of biblical interpretation. But on the very next pages the same textbook discusses the social history of the Johannine community and there is no consideration of economics, ethnicity, imperialism, or regional variation. There is only a discussion about the inclusion or exclusion of Jews from synagogues on the basis of differing beliefs about Jesus (EH, 184–189). In this case, "ethnicity" collapses into a simple disagreement over religious ideas.

The preceding examples already allude to my second observation about the debilitating effect of whiteness on the discourse of ethnicity in Christian origins: instead of problematizing ancient ethnicity, the textbooks accept uncritically the ancient ideology of Jew/gentile. The glossaries of the textbooks reflect this problem of ignoring ethnic issues not related to the Jew/gentile ideology. For example, the largest glossary in these four textbooks has 589 entries (FP, 1051–1080). Of these, 70 entries involve concepts, texts, objects, individuals, groups, or deities related in some way to ethnicity, but 62 of the 70 deal with the traditions of Israel.[29] A second textbook has 397 terms in its glossary, with 54 items related to ethnicity, but 47 of the 54 terms are connected to the traditions of Israel (MP, 53–75).[30] The other textbook with a glossary has 225 terms that include 28 entries related to ethnicity, with 23 of the 28 related to Israel's heritage (EH, 557–568).[31] Thus, in these introductions to the Christian Testament, ethnicity is not important unless it relates to Jews and gentiles.

[29] The eight entries are Chaldean (which also has a distant connection to the traditions of Israel through Abraham), Dionysius [sic, should be "Dionysus"], ethnarch, Hellenism, Kabiros, mystery religions, paganism, and Sarapis.
[30] The seven entries are Hellenism, Hellenistic, pagan, pagans, Seleucids, social location, and sociological criticism.
[31] The five entries are the Egyptian, Isis, Mithras, paganism, and resident aliens.

The reduction of ancient ethnicity to a simple Jew/gentile binary is seen in more detail in the description of Rome's Christ groups from the mid 1st century CE. The Christ groups in Rome would have faced complicated multiethnic interactions, for Rome was a city of unparalleled size and complexity, with inhabitants from many different cultures who had arrived there either by compulsion, by choice, by accident, or by birth. But in these introductions such dynamics all collapse into the binary Jew/gentile, as in this reconstruction of the situation in the assemblies in Rome between the edict of Claudius (which ordered the expulsion of Judeans from Rome in 49 CE) and the arrival of Paul's letter to the Christ groups there a few years later.

> [T]he Roman churches were dominated by Gentiles during the five years or so preceding the letter [from Paul]. However, a sudden influx of Jewish believers into the Christian community caused such conflict to erupt that it threatened the unity of God's people in Rome. The historical circumstances suggest that the church was of mixed composition—predominantly Gentile but with a growing number of Jewish believers (FP, 600).

Here the flat category "gentile" hides what must have been a complicated negotiation of many ethnicities in the urban Roman assemblies. But this simplification of ethnicity begins to take on anti-Jewish overtones when the textbook sets its homogenized category "gentile" in opposition to "Jewish believers" who suddenly return, ignite conflict, and threaten "the unity God's people in Rome."

That example leads to my third observation about the white discourse on the topic of ancient ethnicity: the Jew/gentile binary becomes confused with a Jew/Christian binary, which helps white scholarship retroject Christianity back into the first half of the first century.[32] In fact, one of the most prevalent agreements among these four textbooks is the anachronistic use of the term "Christian" for individuals in the first century CE. One of the textbooks even recognizes that this is a problematic formulation,[33] but then continues to discuss a "Christian" phenomenon separate from Judaism in the mid 1st century.[34]

The inaccurate retrojection of the Jew/Christian binary back into the first century generates a proliferation of misbegotten ethnic and religious labels, suggesting serious confusion in the disciplinary historical narrative. Readers are told that before his vision of Jesus, Paul "recognized the serious threat Christianity posed to the

[32] This effort by scholars to classify and separate traditions as distinct "religions" is similar to "apartheid comparative religions" described by David Chidester (2018, esp. 124-131).

[33] "From our perspective it might seem like Paul became a Christian after Jesus appeared to him; we might at least say that he became a 'Jewish Christian' or a 'Christian Jew.' But Paul himself does not use such language…. He went from being a Jew who did not know the truth about Jesus to being a Jew who did know the truth about Jesus" (MP, 253).

[34] For example, regarding the letter of James: "Though it is unmistakably Christian, the book has a very Jewish feel to it" (MP, 461); and "The letter was written not for Jews (the 'twelve tribes' in a literal sense) but rather for Christians (2:1). Still it may have been written for Jewish Christians (i.e., Christians who belong to the literal twelve tribes), or at least for Christians who have a strong appreciation of their Jewish heritage" (MP, 466).

Jewish religion" (FP, 460); that there were "aspects of the Christian religion" that preceded Paul and that some scholars speak of early Christianities and Pauline Christianities (EH, 432, 435); that there were "Jewish Christians" in Rome before the edict of Claudius (49 CE) (FP, 601); that there were "Jewish Christians," "Hellenistic Jewish believers," "Hebrew Jewish believers," "conservative Hebrew Christians," "conservative Jewish Christians," and "Jewish-Christian syncretists" (RC, 157, 104-105, 269, 480); that there were "Jewish-Christian adoptionists" (EH, 48); and that there was a "'mainstream Christianity,' an integrated faith that provides a synthesis of numerous strands of traditions" (MP, 482). These inappropriate and ill-defined categories accept an ancient ideology of Jew/gentile as a substitute for serious theorizing about ethnicity, and then use that ideology to project the later distinction of Jew/Christian back into the 2nd quarter of the first century CE.

The incoherence and magnitude of this fundamental definitional problem suggests that ideology is at work, and the name for that ideology is Christian supersessionism. White New Testament Studies requires its "Christianity" to be a replacement for "Judaism" from the very first decade after the execution of Jesus. This anachronism is accepted by each of the four textbooks in its own way. One textbook simply embraces supersessionism, stating that Jesus and his disciples take the place of the Jews and warning Jews against "presuming upon their Jewishness" for salvation.

> Yet John [the Evangelist] does not teach that the church replaces Israel. Instead, he identifies Jesus as Israel's replacement: *he* is God's "vine" who takes the place of Israel, God's OT "vineyard" (Isaiah 5). John acknowledges that "salvation comes from the Jews" (4:22), yet he portrays Israel as part of the unbelieving world that rejects Jesus. Jesus's "own"—the Jews—do not receive him (1:11), and in their place the Twelve (except for Judas), who are now "his own," are the recipients of his love … John does not mean to suggest that the Jews are now shut out from God's salvation-historical program—especially since "salvation is from the Jews" (4:22)—but that they, like everyone else, must come to Jesus *in faith* rather than presuming upon their Jewishness (FP, 376; authors' emphasis).

Another introduction takes a different approach: it denies that there was supersessionism in Acts and describes the gentile mission in Acts as part of Israel's mission. According to this textbook, some individual Jews may have strayed but all the major missionaries in Acts are Jewish believers, so success among Gentiles in Acts "is portrayed not as a replacement of mission to Israel but rather as a continuation of that mission" (MP, 217–220).[35]

A third textbook deploys anti-Jewish tropes without admitting it when the textbook recasts supersession not as a religious transition but rather as a shift from Jewish anger to Christian rationality. This textbook focuses on descriptions of angry

[35] See also 490 for more ambivalence about possible supersessionism in a canonical text.

Jewish opponents in Acts when it states, "Annoyed at the boldness of the religious proclamation of the apostles … the Sanhedrin authorities blusteringly cut short debate and arbitrarily order Peter and John not to speak in the name of Jesus" (RC, 103). In this textbook Paul's letters are contrasted with alleged angry outbursts from Jewish opponents.

> In Paul's thought the jealous Jews at Thessalonica who harassed both him and those who came to believe in Jesus would represent what Rom 11:25 calls the part of Israel upon whom "hardening" (= the "wrath" of 1 Thess) had come. If before Paul arrived, Jews who observed the Law had attracted some God-fearing Gentiles and prominent women (Acts 17:4), understandably they might have been infuriated when their converts went over to Paul's proclamation of the Messiah in which Law observance was not required (RC, 167).

Paul the apostle, however, is presented in this textbook as one who has learned to control his inherited anger management issues. "Paul is furious over the situation [sexual immorality noted in 1 Corinthians 5], but he is equally irate with the church's attitude toward it … Paul's outrage may betray his Jewish roots, but he bases his argument on the observation that such behavior was not tolerated even among Gentiles" (RC, 188). A different textbook is even more graphic in its fantasies of Jewish fury: "Paul's zeal in persecuting the church, then, was like the savage rage of a hungry predator frenzied by the taste of blood" (FP, 461).

The fourth textbook describes Christian supersession as a historical process, absolving the canonical authors because they were vulnerable minorities, but blaming later powerful followers for taking these scriptures too literally.

> What had started as a defensive posturing of an insignificant and powerless minority group became a view shared by prominent members of the Roman bureaucracy … Synagogues were burned, properties were confiscated, and Jews were publicly mocked and sometimes subjected to mob violence. Leading the way were Christians, who took the defensive rhetoric of their predecessors in the faith all too literally and acted on it by striving to deprive Jews of their right to exist (EH, 494–495).

Nowhere is the disciplinary failure to deal with ethnicity and anti-Judaism as evident as it is in the textbooks' discussions of the so-called "blood curse." In Matthew 27:25 the "Evangelist" has the Jewish crowd affirm Pilate's assertion that the Roman official was innocent, and then has the crowd say, "His [Jesus's] blood be on us and on our children." This kind of statement would be denounced in any nonbiblical text, but none of the four textbooks condemns such speech in the Gospel of Matthew. Three admit that the verse has resulted in tragedies over the centuries but they claim the text has been misunderstood: only the chief priests and elders were to blame; or, the curse was a legal formula that was completely fulfilled when Rome destroyed Jerusalem; or, it was meant ironically and "the Jewish people are not evoking a curse upon themselves but instead are unwittingly praying for

salvation" through the blood of Christ (EH, 146; RC, 71–72; MP, 138). The fourth textbook apparently accepts the curse at face value, noting only this without comment: "Pilate washed his hands in a symbolic attempt to alleviate his guilt in Jesus's execution while the Jews accepted full responsibility for Jesus's death" (FP, 258).

Thus, the domination of white Christian scholars in English-language New Testament Studies continues to exact a terrible price. Instead of a critical appraisal of ethnicity in Christian origins, racially biased majoritized criticism adopts an ancient ethnic ideology of Jew/gentile uncritically as an explanatory framework for the earliest Christ groups. A later binary of Jew/Christian is then superimposed onto the Jew/gentile binary, creating an alleged distinction between "Christianity" and "Judaism" from the 30s of the first century CE. This effort to make early Christ groups fit later ideologies of Jew/Christian allows introductory textbooks to support and to excuse anti-Jewish Christian supersessionism. In the process, every year tens of thousands of students are inducted unwittingly into a long tragic history of Christian animosity toward Jews and Judaism.

Gender: Men Explain Things to Us[36]

Introductions to the New Testament show only marginal influence from decades of feminist, womanist, or gender scholarship on Christian origins, for the textbooks treat gender superficially and tend to excuse the oppression embedded in the canonical texts. Thus, the economic, racial, and religious hegemony of the discipline has a gendered aspect as well. In this section I look at the textbooks' marginalization of gender in authorship, in citation, in the choices of study aids, and in the content of particular discussions.

One factor in the ongoing marginalization of gender is the male bias of authorship: almost all introductions to the New Testament are written by men. I was not able to find an academic introduction to the New Testament in English authored solely by a woman.[37] Moreover, the men who write introductions to the New Testament primarily cite other men as sources. Consider the suggested readings in the four introductions.[38] The lists in the empirical historian textbook are only a little less male-centric than the others, with 21% female scholars (65 women, 246 men),[39] while the mainstream Protestant textbook has 16% female scholars (47

[36] The section title is inspired by Solnit 2014.

[37] There are two introductions co-authored by a man and a woman: Carter and Levine 2013; and Smith and Kim 2018. I do not include here Chase 2010, which was written for middle schoolers, the age when children in Protestant churches often receive a Bible.

[38] These reading suggestions are always organized by chapter in the four textbooks. If more than one publication by a scholar appears in the reading list of a particular chapter, I only count that person once because this would be clear to a reader. If, however, publications by a particular author appear in more than one chapter I count the author once for each chapter because the duplication would not be obvious to a reader.

[39] This percentage minimizes the extent of the problem. Eleven of the 65 references to female authors come in "Excursus 3: Methods of Ideological Criticism" (EH, 193-95). This excursus was not written

women, 249 men), and the Roman Catholic textbook 8% female (14 women, 169 men). The fundamentalist Protestant textbook has such extensive bibliographies that I only analyzed the recommendations in the Luke chapter (3% female; 1 woman, 31 men) and the Revelation chapter (9% female; 5 women, 52 men).[40] These numbers remind us that the discipline has been, and continues to be, dominated by scholars presenting as male.

Three of the four introductions have glossaries or lists of key terms and these study aids also reflect the marginalization of gender in the study of the Christian Testament. One textbook has 225 key terms. The key terms include no concepts about gender and 4 female figures (Isis, Perpetua, Sophia, Thecla), but 81 names of men, male deities, or male offices (EH, 557–568). Another textbook has 397 terms in its glossary, including 12 related to gender and 2 female entries (Ave Maria, widow), but 53 men or male figures/offices (MP, 553–557).[41] The third glossary contains 589 terms: 1 related to gender ("egalitarian") and 4 terms related to women (Gospel of Mary, Sibylline Oracles, deaconess, and Babylon as a female figure symbolizing the Roman Empire), but 198 men or male terms (FP, 1051–1080).

Two of the textbooks have other study aids that also marginalize gender in the discipline. One textbook has "Take a Stand" sections after most chapters that encourage students to take a position on a controversial topic and argue for it, whether they agree with the position or not. Out of 84 total topics throughout the book, students are asked to debate only 3 topics about gender (= 3.5% of topics) and these three are restricted to the chapter on women in Pauline churches (EH, 476). The other textbook has study questions after most chapters. Of the 259 total study questions, 4 are related to women (= 1.5%): 3 questions about church leadership in the chapter on the Pastoral Epistles, and a question about the meaning of "chosen lady" in the chapter on the Johannine Epistles (FP, 755, 925).

When we move from the study aids to a consideration of the content of the actual discussions, it is clear that gender and sexuality have not been integrated into the disciplinary discourse and that there is almost no discussion of LGBTQ+ topics. Instead of receiving sustained discussion, gender and sexuality tend to appear in a short section dedicated to the topic. After that, gender and sexuality mostly disappear, sometimes surfacing in scattered occasional sentences as secondary factors of little consequence. The most substantial treatment comes in the empirical

by the author but rather by Shaily Patel, the author's "erstwhile student" (EH, xxiv). Another 12 female scholars appear in the reading suggestions at the end of chapter 24, "From Paul's Female Colleagues to the Pastor's Intimidated Women." If one excludes the "further readings" from the ideology criticism excursus and from the chapter on women in Pauline churches, the rest of the volume lists 42 women (15%) and 233 men.

[40] I chose those chapters for my sample because I thought I they might cite more female scholars since Luke's gospel emphasizes gender issues and Revelation has a stronger history of recent research by female scholars.

[41] The terms related to gender: Abba, circumcision, eunuch, feminist criticism, fertility, *Haustafel*, homosexual acts, mujerista criticism, same-sex acts, social location, Social Gospel movement, and womanist criticism.

history textbook, which devotes a chapter to women in the Pauline and post-Pauline churches including a three-page discussion of ancient gender ideologies and the churches (EH, 472–476). The mainstream Protestant textbook has a few scattered paragraphs and statements, but the other two textbooks do even less (e.g., MP, 276 and 354). As a result, none of the four textbooks pays attention even to fundamental issues such as the celibacy and renunciation of marriage by Jesus and Paul, the two most prominent figures in the Christian Testament.

In the rare discussions of gender and sexuality there is often—but not always—a recognition that the ancient texts are problematic for many contemporary readers. In these passages the men who write introductions tend to absolve the men who wrote the Christian Testament. One strategy for absolving the ancient male authors from guilt is to claim that there was no abuse of power because the sacred texts put more pressure on the powerful party to love than on the subordinate party to submit. Consider, for example, the way two male-authored textbooks side with the male author of Ephesians 5 without regard to asymmetrical gendered power.

> The lyric language of [Eph] 5:25-27 brings Christ and the church into the relationship of husband and wife, so that respectively the subjection and the love are given a uniquely Christian stamp. The obligation of the husband to love is treated more extensively than the obligation of the wife to be subject (RC, 227).
>
> [T]he traditional *Haustafel* is set here within a context of *mutual* submission (Eph 5:21), and the overall focus is shifted toward responsibilities of the more powerful party…. Most notable, perhaps, is the notion that husbands are to love their wives in the same way that Christ loved the church…. This call to husbands probably is based on a social distinction rather than on gender characteristics: the main point is that the impact of Christ's universal call to self-denial is proportionately related to status and power (MP, 354; author's emphasis).[42]

In other cases, the modern male authors protect the ancient male authors with speculation that the ancient texts were not directed at women in general but at particular ones—e.g., wealthy women who invited false teachers into their homes and became spokespersons for their errors—or that persecution and heresy forced the churches to become more authoritarian to keep the faith alive in the face of difficulties (RC, 241, regarding 1 Tim 2:8–15; MP, 428, regarding the Pastoral Epistles in general).

One of the textbooks, however, does not find the kyriarchal gender pronouncements in the Christian Testament problematic. The textbook approves of Paul silencing women in the church if the women undermined the authority of their husbands or questioned the legitimacy of their husband's prophecies, which would violate "the wife's role of submission" (FP, 568–569). It also agrees with the Pastoral

[42] A similar judgment is found in FP regarding 1 Peter: "The command to husbands [to honor their wives as weaker vessels and co-heirs of grace] balances Peter's previous commands to wives, making clear that the call to wives to submit to their husbands is in no way a license for the latter to treat their wives in a dominating, oppressive, or abusive manner" (FP, 846).

Epistles when they prohibit women from exercising "teaching or governing authority over the church" and it does not problematize the hierarchical gender roles of the *Haustafeln* (FP, 749–750, 671).

Thus, these introductions do not critique or condemn the Christian Testament for its ideologies of gender or sexuality. As representatives of the discipline, the men writing the textbooks try to preserve the authority of the texts by absolving the ancient male authors through special pleading for difficult passages, or through accepting the ideologies of the texts at face value. These introductions refuse to disagree with the ancient authors, and so they reproduce the ancient kyriarchal structures of gendered, religious, racial, and economic oppression manifest in the New Testament.

Imperialism and the Beneficence of Empires

The four widely-used textbooks under examination here all promote an innocuous appraisal of empire. There are, to be sure, some negative comments in the textbooks about empire that note economic hardships, political domination, dynastic brutality, exploitation, violence, and martyrs. But these problems are usually treated as isolated phenomena in stand-alone statements about exceptions. Broader, more positive conclusions about empire are seen in the benign general descriptions of empires, in the conceptualizations of Paul as missionary, and in the inability to critique imperial domination.

The textbooks tend to suggest that, despite occasional abuses, empires are generally beneficial in the long run. The most positive textbook describes a teleological sequence of empires that prepared the way for the Christ: Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian (Alexander), Seleucid, Ptolemaic, Maccabean/Hasmonean, and finally Roman. Because of this imperial sequence, "conditions were indeed ideally suited for the coming of Jesus due to factors such as (1) the Roman peace; (2) Roman roads; (3) the Greek language; and (4) Jewish messianic expectations" (FP, 66–89; quote from 88).[43]

Another textbook is less teleological but still positive regarding the consequences of empires over the *longue durée*: Alexander and Hellenization produced cultural unity and Roman conquest produced political unity.

> [T]he eastern Mediterranean that emerged in Alexander's wake experienced a form of cultural unity and cosmopolitanism…. The Roman Empire arose in the context of the Hellenistic world and took full advantage of its unity—promoting the use of the Greek language, accepting aspects of Greek culture, and even taking over features of the Greek religion—to the point that the Greek and Roman gods came to be thought of as the same, only with different names. This complex unity achieved culturally through Hellenization and politically through

[43] This evolutionary approach is similar to "imperial comparative religion" described by Chidester (2018, 116-123).

> the conquests of Rome … is summed up by the term "Greco-Roman world" (EH, 43).[44]

A third textbook notes the ancient world's dramatic economic inequality but then praises the Romans for achievements that would be highly valued in a neoliberal capitalist system: efficient administration of empire, law and order that suppressed piracy for safe trade and travel routes, commitment to infrastructure, and success in establishing stability and unity (MP, 31–32, 34; quoted above). The fourth textbook says little about the Roman imperial system beyond charting dynastic struggles (RC, 18–22).

The depth of the discipline's commitment to imperial paradigms is manifest in the use of the imperial topos "missionary" to describe the activities of Paul and other early Christ group leaders. Any use of the term missionary in contemporary English also evokes the modern imperialisms by which Christians (and sometimes other religious groups) have expanded into colonized areas. As such, missionary work is entangled in the imperial tasks of occupying land, extracting resources, and exploiting labor (Dunch 2002, 301–325; Vaage 2006, 14–17; Conroy-Krutz 2015; Chidester, 2018).[45] Paul and other early apostles, however, had a very different relationship to empire. They were not imperial colonizers as most modern western Christian missionaries have been. Rather, the apostles (understood broadly and not only as major figures like Paul, Cephas, Apollos, Junia) operated as colonized actors. To call those apostles missionaries is to deny the imperial implications of the modern term while misrepresenting ancient practices.

These textbooks, however, persist in portraying the apostles as missionaries. One textbook has a section in the Paul chapter entitled, "Missionary Work in the Mediterranean World." It follows the standard practice of accepting the version of Paul's itineraries found in Acts, treating the itineraries as historical facts, and then redescribing them as Paul's first, second, and third missionary journeys. In addition, readers also learn about Paul's "missionary work," his "missionary strategy," and his "missionary team" (MP, 255–61). Later the anachronisms compound in statements like, "We do not know when Christianity came to Rome or who was responsible for the first missionary work there," which suggests that "Christianity" was an independent phenomenon well before Paul and that missionaries were transporting it to various locations (MP, 273).

One of the other textbooks makes moderate use of the missionary topos (RC, 141–143, 154–157) but a third suggests that Paul engaged specifically in a European mission, which elevates the status of European Christianity and justifies later

[44] On the previous page the same textbook emphasizes not a complex cultural unity but rather economic inequality, lack of social mobility, poverty, disease, infant mortality, and other difficulties. These are not, however, connected to imperial rule. They are simply part of "the early Christian world," a.k.a., "the ancient world" (42).

[45] I thank Sarah Rollens for alerting me to the chapter by Vaage.

imperial missions by making the European mission a model for later Christian expansionism.

> Rather than making Rome the final destination of his impending visit, Paul intended for Rome to be merely a stop on his way to the far western frontiers of his European mission. In this Paul serves as a model of a frontier missionary, his aim being "to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that I will not build on someone else's foundation" (15:20) (FP, 618).

These positive imperial missionary ideologies in the textbooks make it more difficult for them to explain ancient critiques of imperial power in the Christian Testament, such as Revelation's vehement condemnation of the Roman imperial system. One textbook remains vague about the reason for Revelation's anti-Roman stance, with scattered comments that suggest it might have been because Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70 CE, or because of emperor worship, or because of martyrdoms. This style of interpretation focuses on isolated incidents or on the failings of a specific emperor rather than on systemic injustice (RC, 292, 294, 195).[46]

Another textbook limits the criticism to some empires. First it commends Revelation for "portraying unrighteousness not just as personal immorality but rather as systemic evil and social injustice." Then, it goes on to suggest that Revelation's critique of systemic evil only applies to an "anti-God society," without clarifying what characteristics might make a society pro-God (MP, 549).

The other two textbooks treat Revelation's audience as outliers. One does this by describing the author's assemblies as poor people who hated the rich and powerful, which is in contrast to the textbook's general description of the assemblies as mixed social classes (EH, 547, 374). It also treats John as an exception among early Christian authors for his critique of Rome's domination, exploitation, oppression, and blasphemy (EH, 547, 550).[47]

The fourth textbook simply summarizes Revelation's anti-Roman themes and makes no attempt to integrate them into its other overall descriptions. Instead, it deploys Revelation to criticize modern secular America, invoking individualistic right-wing Euroamerican Christian politics of the last half-century. The textbook says that Revelation's description of the fate of beast-worshippers and Lamb-followers "is indeed a timely message in the post-Christian West at the beginning of the third millennium where (according to Francis Schaeffer's prophetic words) personal peace and affluence reign—even in segments of the evangelical subculture" (FP, 992).

When it comes to injustice, however, the Revelation chapter of this fourth textbook can muster only one modern example in a "Something to Think About"

[46] The textbook is much more concerned with possible dangers of millenarianism, devoting two pages to the topic.

[47] The textbook does not describe apocalyptic texts like the *Shepherd of Hermas* or the *Apocalypse of Peter* as opposed to the Roman Empire, so Revelation is treated as an outlier even among Christian apocalyptic texts (551-54).

sidebar (which are oriented toward the application of scripture). Authored by three white professors, the attempt to make Revelation relevant seems a bit self-serving and it is perhaps tinged with implicit racial bias. "When we look at this world … hardworking teachers command only a basic salary—though they are trying to be content and make ends meet as best they can—while celebrity athletes make millions" (FP, 991).[48]

Thus, the introductory textbooks treat the Roman Empire, and the phenomenon of imperialism, as mostly beneficial, for empires bring people together politically and make it possible for missionaries to bring the message about Jesus to new frontiers. When imperial injustices are acknowledged, they are exceptions and barely worthy of comment in the interpretation of the New Testament.

Conclusion

These four widely used introductions to the New Testament teach students that the discipline of New Testament Studies protects religious experience, practice, and belief from normal critical analysis. With this approach that privileges religious experience through an idealist definition of religion, one need not account for material conditions. Such a mystification of religion conceals kyriarchal oppression and insulates kyriarchal systems from critique, thereby making the world safe for white, male, capitalist, imperialist, Christian supremacy.

We should not think, however, that introductory textbooks are the root of the problem. An examination of other influential introductions would produce similar results, for the textbooks are the symptoms of deeper structural issues. These introductions illuminate fundamental presuppositions of the discipline of New Testament Studies in the English-speaking world: patriarchy, whiteness, capitalism, imperialism, and de-materialized religion.

There are, of course, studies that take on one or another of these issues, but these studies are usually marginalized and treated as minority opinions. For that reason, I have chosen to focus in this article on the majoritized consensus and its commitment to the multiplicative structures of injustice in the ancient and modern worlds. A kyriarchal analysis along the lines laid out by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza requires us to recognize the urgency of these issues in the study of religion, and particularly in the study of Christian origins. For New Testament Studies as a discipline will not be an emancipatory practice if it does not come to terms with its support for economic inequality, racism, sexism, imperialism, and the mystification of religion.[49]

[48] I have shortened the quotation because the original is not a complete sentence.

[49] I thank Fernando Segovia for encouraging me to elaborate on capitalist criticism, and Susanne Scholz for her comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

Abbreviations

EH = Ehrman 2020b

FP = Köstenberger et al. 2016

MP = Powell 2018

RC = Brown 2016

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