

Book Reviews

Thematic

*Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities.*¹ David G. Horrell. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2020. Pp. 432.

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David G. Horrell's recent book, *Ethnicity, and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities*, goes deep into the heart of New Testament studies to examine how this line of inquiry has shaped Jewish and Christian identities in historical narratives. Horrell argues that, despite significant developments in this field and periodic paradigm shifts in scholarly thinking, the idea of a structural dichotomy between Jewish and Christian identities still prevails, a dichotomy which insists on Jewish particularism and Christian universalism.

Horrell's objective is to understand the origin of this assumed dichotomy and then to demonstrate to what extent scholarly perceptions about Jewish and Christian identities have changed over time. He approaches this research in three ways: by surveying New Testament scholarship from the late nineteenth century to the present, by analyzing ancient sources to compare certain practical and ideological aspects of Christianity and Judaism, and finally, by reflecting on his findings in light of socio-political changes and epistemological factors. The nine

1. Editorial note: given how relevant this book is to the theme of the present volume, we've accepted two reviews of it – presented in succession – as each review highlights different facets of the book.

comprehensive chapters of the text progress slowly from a broad introduction to New Testament studies to a critical observation about how and why some of the most dominant but inaccurate theories and concepts about Jewish and Christian identities still exist in scholarship.

To understand the scholarly origin of this “structural dichotomy,” Horrell begins with nineteenth century New Testament studies based on the critical works by Ferdinand Baur, E. P. Sanders, and James Dunn, and demonstrates that Western colonialism and racial ideologies of White Christian superiority influenced nineteenth century New Testament studies. These scholars suggested that Jewishness was a form of ethnicity or racial identity, one that was exclusive. At the same time, Christianity was an all-embracing and inclusive faith – in a way, a multi-ethnic community. Development in the social scientific studies in the works of Johnson Hodge, Philip Esler, and others, according to Horrell, reconstructed these ideas as a response to socio-political developments of the post-war era, such as the civil rights and feminist movements, and later within “whiteness studies” in the 1990s. However, the widely accepted dichotomy remains a dominant part of race and ethnicity studies, despite significant shifts in scholarly thinking.

The core of Horrell’s research takes place in the second part of his book. Horrell’s objective in this section, which contains the bulk of his chapters, is to find the origin of the “structural dichotomy” in Jewish and Christian ancient texts. He focuses on some practical and ideological aspects of Judaism and Christianity, such as genealogical kinship, cultural and social practices, territoriality, self-consciousness, ethnicity, and conversion – factors often related to or seen as part of ethnic identity. Horrell demonstrates that while their socio-cultural practices differed to a degree, one can categorize both Christians

and Jews as ethnic groups because genealogy, kinship, and religious identity created a sense of peoplehood and cohesion. Both Jews and Christians valued socio-cultural practices as a source of community life, not exclusive of their religious beliefs. Often ethnicity and religion are presented as being interconnected or overlapping with one another. As both these identities are socially constructed, boundaries between religious and ethnic discourse can often be blurred – a phenomena clearly visible within Christian and Jewish ancient texts and practices.

Horrell ultimately shows that scholarship still has a long way to go to understand the complexity of Jewish and Christian identities. In many ways, both religions use discourse and social practices to construct their ethnic identities. However, the distinction between religious and ethnic identity is often difficult to discern and hard to extract from ancient texts. Focusing on whiteness studies in the last section of his book, Horrell concludes that Christian whiteness, superiority, and universalism is a socially constructed concept and an ideologically driven method that lacks objectivity. Horrell suggests a more thorough investigation of New Testament studies, as the source and origin of this dichotomy, to determine the relationship of ethnicity and religion in cohesion, not in contrast.

In recent years, events such as the American election, the Black Lives Matter movement, the progression of the Palestinian and Israeli crisis, the Mediterranean migration, the growth of nationalism around the world, growing anti-refugee, anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim sentiments, and, more recently, anti-Asian hatred, tells us that Horrell's book is relevant not only to New Testament scholarship but as a source that brings attention to some of the underlying issues of our contemporary societies based on assumed "differences" in race, ethnicity, and religion.

Horrell shows that framing Christianity as a cohesive “inclusive” White society inadvertently places Christians in opposition to “racial others,” thus enforcing nineteenth century ideas of colonialism and religious superiority. Horrific realities such as discovering the unmarked graves of children in residential schools in Canada make this socially constructed identity of “inclusive” Christianity questionable. The concept of Christian universalism goes against the harsh realities of our much-divided societies, racially and religiously. Horrell may not offer a specific solution to these issues; however, he contributes to a much-needed conversation about the responsibility scholars have in exploring, revising, and reinterpreting “traditional” notions about race, ethnicity, and religion. Challenging dominant and previously established theories while considering current socio-political developments may divert us from writing static historical narratives based on contrast and division rather than similarities and cohesion.