

DERACIALIZING THE MATTHEAN JESUS:  
“KING OF THE JUDEANS” ON TRIAL

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Matthean passion narrative, questions surrounding the identity of Jesus come into sharp focus. The repetition of the title *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* in the trial scenes that comprise the passion narrative accents its pivotal role: the Matthean Jesus' ethnoracial identity as a marginalized Judean is reiteratively cited at key points, serving as the basis for his interrogation before the Roman governor Pilate (Matt 27:11-14), torture by the Roman soldiers (Matt 27:27-30), and mockery from the Judean leaders (Matt 27:41-43). The title is also publically displayed as a formal charge above the cross—a detail that is attested in all four Gospels (Matt 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). Made to hang from a Roman tree under an ethnicizing banner—*Οὗτός ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* (“This is Jesus: King of the Judeans” [Matt 27:37])—the gruesome execution of the Matthean Jesus by the Roman authorities is fraught with racializing implications. Yet despite the explicit citation of ethnoracial terminology, previous scholarship has understood the title curiously in non-racial ways.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, the terminology of race-ethnicity (e.g., race, racial, racialization, ethnicity, ethnic, ethnicization) is used interchangeably to signify dynamic, dialectical, and performative processes—not static concepts that refer to biological essences or material entities. The primary advantage of this approach, as will be developed in Chapters 2 and 3, is to situate the discourse of race-ethnicity within a dialectic of power relations, namely, of dominant-selfing and minority-othering. Suffice it to say at this point, the phenomena of “race” (typically understood as physical or phenotypical differences) and “ethnicity” (typically understood as cultural differences), while not identical, have histories that are very much intertwined. For example, during the latter part of the twentieth century, “race” fell out of favor as “ethnicity” became the preferred term in anthropological and sociological study. This terminological change, however, does not imply material or essential differences between the two, but a conceptual shift away from essentialist (biological) to constructivist (social) understandings of race-ethnicity. Therefore, hyphenating race-ethnicity in this project, or combining them—i.e., race-ethnicity, racial-ethnic, or ethnoracial—is an attempt to mark

The present project takes this peculiar omission in the history of interpretation as its point of departure. But rather than merely filling the lacuna of a racial reading, which this project nevertheless intends to do, it is also necessary to pose a more fundamental ideological question that interrogates the pattern of non-racial readings in the broader context of modern biblical scholarship. The central question of the project, therefore, is: How and why are dominant interpretations of Jesus' identification as  $\delta$  βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων in Matthew rendered in non-racial, non-ethnic terms? To develop an answer, the present project is organized in two parts.

The first half of the project (Chapters 1-2) offers a deconstructive analysis that traces the dominant narrative surrounding the interpretation of the title both in the world of production and in the world of consumption. To that end, Chapter 1 begins by identifying the readings and reading strategies that effectively render Jesus' identity as  $\delta$  βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων as a non-racial, non-ethnic entity. As we shall see, the exegetical history of non-racial readings is intimately tied to the non-racial reading strategies that produce them. Paying close attention to the link between the two, then, underscores how the underlying problem of the dominant narrative is methodological through and through.

After establishing the trajectory of non-racial readings and reading strategies, Chapter 2 turns to an ideological assessment of the readers and reading locations in the world of consumption. My argument is that the pattern, however subtle, of bypassing race-ethnicity, of effectively marginalizing its importance, is not an isolated phenomenon. It is rather predicated on and produced by deracialized readers and reading locations in the world of consumption. The argument from Chapter 2 to Chapter 3, in

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their overlapping histories. For further discussion, see Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity: Key Concepts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 51-72.

other words, is that the dominant narrative is articulated in and through the dialectic of dominant interlocutors. The pattern of non-racial readings cannot be viewed apart from the deracialized reading locations from which it stems. However, when contextualized within a broader perspective that spans the world of production and the world of consumption, the pattern of non-racial readings can be seen as merging two dominant discourses of modernity that represent Christianity and whiteness in similar terms as being universal and pitted against race-ethnicity. The vehicle that drives this ideology, I argue, is a deracializing logic of white invisibility in the world of consumption.

The second half of the project (Chapters 3-4) follows suit, in terms of method and interpretation, with a constructive proposal for an alternative narrative. If the argument regarding the dominant narrative is that the non-racial pattern of dominant readings and reading strategies in the world of production is actually a function of deracialized readers and reading locations in the world of consumption, then it is necessary to construct an alternative approach firmly situated in the world of consumption, before turning to an alternative narrative that represents the world of production. Specifically, what is necessary is a suitable framework of analysis that accentuates the discourse of race-ethnicity within the dialectical formations and relations of power.

Chapter 3, therefore, draws upon the insights of minority biblical criticism in order to introduce minoritized readers and reading locations into the conversation. To develop my proposal, I engage an important essay by Jeffrey Siker: “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus: Case Studies in the ‘Black Christ,’ the ‘Mestizo Christ,’ and White Critique.” This essay is particularly relevant because it helpfully frames a number of issues—including, minority vs. dominant representations of Jesus, how the discourse of

racialization relates to the world of production and to the world of consumption, etc. In this way, it provides a segue to my proposal for moving the conversation forward in a constructive manner.

Chapter 4 finally returns to the Matthean text to offer an alternative narrative of Jesus' identification as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*. The aim of my reading is a critical retrieval of the politics of racialization: I argue that Jesus is minoritized as a racialized-other. Just as important as its substance, however, is the basis for the alternative narrative. I offer a reading of Jesus' racialization in the Matthean passion narrative in light of the racialized experiences of U.S. minority groups, drawing on four conventional minoritizing tropes that have been historically used against Native Americans ("being proud"), African Americans ("being inferior"), Latino/a Americans ("being illegal"), and Asian Americans ("being strange"). These four tropes—alternatively summarized as being beyond, below, between, and besides the normative center of whiteness—furnish a critical lens to reframe Jesus' racialization in the Judean, Roman, popular, and divine trial scenes of the Matthean passion narrative. My reading is an attempt to underscore how Jesus is minoritized as a racialized-other through an analysis of how ethnoracial signifiers are mobilized in the courtroom scenes that comprise the Matthean passion narrative. Accordingly, the *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* title is not a positive messianic designation, but a racial slur that signifies Jesus' death on a Roman crucifix as a grotesque act of minoritization, and specifically, Judean racialization.

Overall, the central argument of this project is that the pattern of non-racial readings of *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* is not an isolated phenomenon in the history of modern biblical scholarship. It is rather one of the many instantiations of the dominant

narrative of Christianity as being non-ethnic, universal, and pitted against race-ethnicity. At the very heart of the dominant narrative, indeed the very discursive vehicle that drives it, is the modern deracializing ideology of white invisibility. The ultimate expression of this modern ideology is the dominant Western representation of Jesus as a white male with blonde hair and blue eyes.

To substantiate the claims of the project, I develop a discursive approach to deracialization in Chapter 2. My aim in doing so is to show how the ideology of white invisibility functions implicitly in the patterns and practices of modern biblical scholarship. Theorizing the ideology of white invisibility is primarily a deconstructive endeavor. But there is also a highly constructive possibility as well. To that end, Chapter 3 develops a dialectical approach to deracialization drawing on the insights of minority biblical criticism. The end result is not only to challenge dominant conceptions of race-ethnicity as a biological or cultural essence, but also to identify a way to move beyond the politics of invisibility (per dominant groups) and the politics of visibility (per minority groups) towards an alternative understanding of race-ethnicity—a point to which I return to in the Conclusion.



## CHAPTER 1

### IDENTIFYING THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE OF MATTHEW 26-27: NON-RACIAL READINGS AND READING STRATEGIES IN THE WORLD OF PRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

The basic task of Chapter 1 is to establish the pattern of non-racial readings in Jesus' identification as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*. I identify two exegetical strands that are representative of the dominant narrative in Matthean scholarship: traditional religious-theological readings and more recent socio-political readings. As we shall see, there is a peculiar pattern in both approaches of bypassing and overlooking the title's ethnoracial dimensions. That is, although the Matthean Jesus is racially marked as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* in the four trial scenes that comprise the passion narrative, he becomes racially unmarked in recent interpretations. To better understand this puzzling phenomenon, a larger view of Matthean scholarship is required. When the non-racial pattern in the history of readings is considered within a perspective that includes the history of methods, a more coherent account of their interdependence begins to emerge.

After a brief description of the exegetical issue, my argument to establish the non-racial pattern develops in three stages. First, I identify two tendencies in traditional religious-theological readings of *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* that constitute the non-racial pattern. Second, I turn to assess a more recent socio-political reading that has significantly expanded the narrow focus of the traditional interpretation. While this approach better accounts for the title's imperial dimensions, the non-racial pattern nevertheless continues. Therefore, in the third section I offer a broader methodological analysis of the non-racial pattern by contextualizing it within the history of reading

strategies. My assessment, in short, is that the dominant trend of locating the interpretive process solely in the world of production has created a rift not only between the world of production and the world of consumption, but also between the critic and the act of criticism.

Overall, then, the purpose of Chapter 1 is to trace the non-racial pattern of the dominant narrative surrounding ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων in order to show how the history of readings is invariably connected to the history of reading strategies.

### **The title in the Gospel of Matthew**

The title ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων occurs a total of four times in the Gospel of Matthew: once in the infancy narrative and three times in the passion narrative. The fact that the title frames the Gospel of Matthew, occurring at Jesus' birth and death, is indicative of its significance. Notably, all four uses of the title are attributed to Jesus in etic fashion, so to speak, from the outside by non-Judean Gentiles.

In the first occurrence, the title comes from the lips of the magi from the east who come to Jerusalem inquiring about the birth of ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων (Matt 2:2). In this scene, Matthew juxtaposes the kingship of Jesus and Herod through repeated reference to Herod's kingship (Matt 2:1, 3, 9) and through the description that Herod and all of Jerusalem were troubled to hear the news of Jesus' birth (ἀκούσας δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἡρώδης ἔταράχθη καὶ πᾶσα Ἱεροσόλυμα μετ' αὐτοῦ, Matt 2:3). In response, King Herod summons the chief priests and scribes, foreshadowing the alliance that will be forged between the Roman and Judean authorities in the passion narrative, in order to inquire about the precise location of Jesus' birth. The opposition between these two kings is

further heightened, on the one hand, as Jesus and his family are forced to withdraw to Egypt (ἀνεχώρησεν, Matt 2:14) and, on the other hand, as Herod realizes he has been duped by the magi (ἐνεπαίχθη, Matt 2:16), resulting in the infanticide of Bethlehem's young male children. It is not until King Herod's death that Jesus and his family return from exile (Matt 2:19). But even then, instead of returning home to Bethlehem, Jesus and his family take up residence in Nazareth—a more remote location in northern Galilee—since Archelaus was king over Judea (βασιλεύει τῆς Ἰουδαίας, Matt 2:22) in place of his father, King Herod. The narrative context of the first occurrence underscores ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων as a territorial signifier over a place and its inhabitants.

The next three occurrences of the title appear in successive fashion throughout the Matthean passion narrative. Here, the political connotations of the title are just as prominent as they were in the infancy narrative. The second occurrence, like the first, comes in the form of a question. During the proceedings of the Roman trial, the Roman governor Pilate asks Jesus pointblank: “Are you ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων?” (Matt 27:11)—to which Jesus responds ambiguously: “[If] you say so” (Σὺ λέγεις, Matt 27:11). The third occurrence of the title, unlike the first two, comes in the form of exclamation. After being sentenced to death by Pilate, Jesus is propped up and dressed in a scarlet robe with a crown of thorns on his head. With theatrical flair, the Roman soldiers kneel before him shouting, “Hail, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων!” The fourth and final occurrence of the title comes in the form of a *titulus* fixed above the Roman crucifix that publically announces the formal charge: “This is Jesus, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων (Matt 27:37).

This brief description of the title's four occurrences in Matthew underscores the deeply fraught and highly contentious nature of ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων as it is applied

to the Matthean Jesus. Given these four uses in Matthew, how has the title been understood in the history of interpretation? Two representative trajectories in Matthean scholarship may be adduced.

### **Religious-theological readings of the title**

The first major trajectory of interpretation is the traditional religious-theological reading of the title. The essence of this approach is translating ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων primarily in theological terms as a messianic title: Jesus' crucifixion as the "King of the Jews" confirms his identity as the Davidic messiah based on Matthew's genealogy (Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ, Matt 1:1). R.T. France is representative of this reading, though there are a number of scholars who follow the traditional interpretation.<sup>2</sup> For our purposes, there are two notable tendencies that elucidate the non-racial pattern of the traditional approach.

The first tendency is an emphasis on the theological dimensions of the title (e.g., ὁ βασιλεὺς) over and against its political dimensions (e.g., τῶν Ἰουδαίων). This tendency is made possible by reading ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων as synonymous with other messianic titles attributed to Jesus in Matthew (e.g., υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ [Matt 1:1]; ὁ χριστὸς [Matt 16:15]; θεοῦ υἱός [Matt 14:33]). For example, referring to the use of the title in the passion narrative, France writes:

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<sup>2</sup> France develops his case in an introductory volume: *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books, 1989); and a full-length commentary: *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

[I]n the mock homage to the ‘king of the Jews’ by the non-Jewish soldiers and the laconic charge written above Jesus’ head, and in the more theologically nuanced mockery by Jewish bystanders and opponents, Matthew expects his readers to catch the ironical truth of the honors heaped upon Jesus in jest and mockery: even in a setting of public humiliation and torture, this really *is* the king of the Jews, the temple builder, the Savior, the Son of God” (emphasis original).<sup>3</sup>

Further supporting this messianic reading is the connection between ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων and βασιλεὺς Ἰσραήλ in Matt 27:42. France surmises that although the former is used by Jews, and the latter by Gentiles, the two titles are virtually the same in substance. Based on this connection, he concludes: “‘King of the Jews’ is thus an appropriate translation of Jesus’ messianic claim into language a Roman governor could understand and must take seriously.”<sup>4</sup> What is relevant in these examples is that Jesus’ messianic identity as ὁ χριστὸς is virtually indistinguishable from his identification with other messianic titles, including θεοῦ υἱός, βασιλεὺς Ἰσραήλ, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, etc. For

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<sup>3</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1059.

<sup>4</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1048. This reading is common among commentators. So Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 396: “Jesus who is mocked as King of the Jews really is the Messiah (= King of the Jews), and so the soldiers unwittingly speak the truth in deed and word.” Cf. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2005), 109: writes, “‘King of the Jews’ is presumably meant to be an imprecise messianic designation on the lips of the Magi, of a kind that might be appropriate on the lips of non-Jews. In the Passion Narrative it appears again as a non-Jewish designation and again with messianic overtones.”

France, these different titles all refer to the same messianic reality: the Matthean Jesus is the messiah.<sup>5</sup>

Read in light of other messianic titles, the recurrence of *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* in the Matthean passion narrative is deeply ironic. With reference to Matt 27:39-44, for example, France writes: “Matthew expects his readers to recognize that what is being thrown at Jesus in jest is in fact true...he *is* the Son of God; he *is* the king of Israel, though not in the political sense his mockers imagine.”<sup>6</sup> On France’s reading, the title clearly signifies Jesus’ messianic identity devoid of any political meaning. In fact, whatever “political sense” the title may have had takes a back seat, as it were, to its more immediate and profound messianic significance. For in the end Jesus is ironically crucified for claiming to be who he really was—just not in the way that the Roman authorities had assumed. Yet what is notable again is the overall effect of foregrounding the theological over the political, of reading *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* messianically: Jesus’ Judean identity is diminished and downplayed. In this way, Jesus’ messiahship as *ὁ βασιλεὺς* obscures and overshadows his national identity as *τῶν Ἰουδαίων*.

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<sup>5</sup> The traditional reading finds more recent expression by Joel Marcus who argues that Jesus’ crucifixion *is* his enthronement, or what Marcus calls “parodic exaltation” (“Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125.1 [2006]: 73-87. For a critique of Marcus, particularly regarding his use of ancient sources to substantiate the link between crucifixion and enthronement, see: Adela Yarbro Collins, “Mark’s Interpretation of the Death of Jesus,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128.3 (2009): 545-554; here 550-54.

<sup>6</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1070.

A second notable tendency of the religious-theological reading is overlooking the marginalizing and dehumanizing nature of Roman crucifixion. This tendency is connected to the first, insofar as the basic conflict of the passion narrative is viewed in religious terms as a conflict between Jesus and the chief priests and scribes, and is facilitated by minimizing Rome's involvement. Pilate is thereby rendered a neutral figure who has to intervene and adjudicate a religious conflict between Jesus and the chief priests and scribes. In fact, Jesus' transfer to the Roman authorities, according to France, is "presented as a formality required to effect the execution the Jewish leaders have already decided on."<sup>7</sup> He continues: "Pontius Pilate appears almost as a stooge rather than as the ultimately responsible authority."<sup>8</sup> Both sentiments, which effectively diminish Pilate's role and Rome's culpability, are fairly common among religious-theological readings.

Some have even gone beyond a neutral reading and interpreted Pilate in a positive terms, referring to him as the first Christian.<sup>9</sup> Others have compared Pilate's attribution of

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<sup>7</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1008-9. Referring to the hearing before the Sanhedrin (Matt 26:57-68), France writes: "This is the point at which Jesus' death is sealed; all that follows involving the Roman prefect is only the formal implementation of a verdict already decided by the Jewish authorities" (1016).

<sup>8</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1009.

<sup>9</sup> So concerning Matt 27:17, Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 561: "Matthew's revisions make Pilate appear to take initiative for Jesus' release. Surely the crowd would not want that notorious prisoner Jesus Barabbas! Here we see Matthew's

the title to the first Christian sermon ever to be preached. For example, Frederick Dale Bruner says with reference to Matt 27:37:

Matthew's strong demonstrative-cum-indicative "this is" (*houtos estin*) turns the sign from an accusation to a proclamation, from a charge to a claim, from an indictment to a confession (cf. Senior, 131). It is a sermon—perhaps the earliest written Gospel of all: "The Gospel according to Pilate."<sup>10</sup>

For Bruner, the vicious beatings by the Roman soldiers, the torture that Jesus endures, and the ridicule that is cast upon him can all be seen as somehow revealing, confirming, and proving Jesus' messianic identity. In fact, so strong are the messianic overtones of the title that the salvific significance of Jesus' crucifixion prevails not despite, but actually through his brutal crucifixion as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*. This sort of reading comes very close to glorification of violence. At the very least, it overlooks the graphic and gruesome nature of Roman crucifixion—what Cicero referred to as "the most horrendous torture" (*crudelissimum taeterimumque supplicium*).<sup>11</sup> The overall effect of the second tendency is that the demeaning and dehumanizing aspects of Roman crucifixion are bypassed by virtue of the theological significance attributed to Jesus'

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first move to Christianize Pilate. Other moves will follow." Another example is that of Helen K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 124-37. See also Warren Carter's critique of Bond in *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 146ff.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick D. Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 735.

<sup>11</sup> Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.5.64 (LCL: Cicero, *The Verrine Orations*, 2.651).



death. This is yet another instance of how *ὁ βασιλεύς*, as a signifier of Jesus' messianic identity, overwhelms *τῶν Ἰουδαίων*.<sup>12</sup>

Both tendencies underscore the pattern of how Jesus' ethnic identity as a marginalized Judean is made peripheral and of little consequence by the traditional reading of the title. Naturally this raises a number of questions not only regarding the origins of the traditional reading, but also the underlying non-racial pattern on which it is based. For instance, is it actually the case that all of the titles attributed to Jesus in Matthew—particularly, *ὁ βασιλεύς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*—point in the same direction towards Jesus' messianic identity? Are the two titles, *ὁ βασιλεύς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* and *ὁ χριστός*, virtually the same in meaning from two different perspectives—the former from a so-called “Gentile perspective” and the latter from a so-called “Jewish perspective”? Moreover, is the conflict surrounding Jesus' birth and death exclusively religious in nature? These questions point to some of the limitations of the traditional reading.

The fact that early Christians did not use *ὁ βασιλεύς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* as a source of veneration or worship casts doubt on the messianic reading and points, rather, to the

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<sup>12</sup> Relevant in this regard is Nils A. Dahl's assessment of the title in “The Crucified Messiah,” in *Jesus the Christ: The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine* (ed., Donald Juel; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 40: “that Jesus was crucified as King of the Jews is not a dogmatic motif that has become historicized in the passion narratives; precisely to the contrary, it is a historical fact that became centrally important for the formulation of the first Christian dogma: Jesus is the Messiah.”

controversial and highly political nature of the title.<sup>13</sup> At the very least, the absence of such a reference in the extant texts of early Christianity is sufficient to give one pause at the traditional interpretation. Another significant point that calls into question the messianic reading is that Josephus uses the title as a political designation, not a messianic one, with reference to Herod, a non-Judean Idumaean ruler appointed by Rome (*J.W.* 1.282; *Ant.* 14.9, 15.9, 15.373, 15.409).<sup>14</sup> In light of these considerations, the messianic reading is not as sound as it appears or is overstated at best. To say it another way, while the messianic motif may in fact loom large throughout the First Gospel, whether Matt 27:37 can be regarded as a legitimate proof-text for Matthew's messianic portrayal of Jesus is another matter. Only recently has scholarship drawn attention to the limits of the traditional religious-theological interpretation.

### **Socio-political readings of the title**

A second major trajectory of interpretation is the socio-political reading, which has challenged the myopic focus of the traditional approach. These salutary criticisms have opened the way towards a reading of Matthew with a renewed focus on the Roman

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 46.

<sup>14</sup> Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 45.

imperial horizon of the first century.<sup>15</sup> Warren Carter, who is representative of this approach, rejects the conventional de-politicized reading of the First Gospel.<sup>16</sup> On balance, Carter acknowledges the validity of religious concerns and expresses appreciation for the rich insights they have yielded in the history of Matthean scholarship. Nevertheless, he maintains that approaching Matthew exclusively with religious questions neglects other important aspects such as the Roman imperial context in which the New Testament writings took shape. In fact, Carter contends that much of Matthean scholarship is depoliticized and has overlooked the simple fact that Matthew addresses a marginalized community subject to Roman imperial power.

Carter's basic methodology is worth examining briefly as a way of outlining his socio-political reading of the title. Carter locates the authorial audience as a small marginalized community in post-70 Antioch and proceeds to read Matthew in light of his

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<sup>15</sup> These recent efforts are represented in the edited volume by John Riches and David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew in Its Roman Imperial Context* (London: T & T Clark, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Carter develops his case in four works, including an introduction in *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004); a full-length commentary in *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); a thematic study in *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001); and a postcolonial commentary in "The Gospel of Matthew" in *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (eds., Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah; London: T & T Clark, 2009), 69-104.

reconstruction. The rationale for this methodology, Carter claims, is the Matthean text itself, which presupposes intimate knowledge of the world of the Roman Empire.<sup>17</sup> By locating Matthew's authorial audience within the first century milieu of Roman imperialism, Carter is able to tease out implicit socio-political scripts which take on new meaning. His basic thesis is that Matthew is a counter-narrative that empowers a marginalized Christian community in Antioch over and against the Roman imperial claims of dominant society.

From the perspective of the authorial audience, then, Matthew's Gospel issues a radical critique of the Roman Empire not only by resisting its claims to dominance, but also by presenting its own theological and social challenges to Rome in imperial terms. Here, the claims of Roman emperors form an important background to Carter's reconstruction of the authorial audience. For example, with the death of Nero in 68 C.E., the Julio-Claudian dynasty came to an abrupt end. To support the Flavian dynasty, many of its allies appealed to oracles, omens, signs, and visions as proof of the gods' disfavor with the Julio-Claudian dynasty and, conversely, as proof of the gods' favor with

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<sup>17</sup> The advantage of this approach is that it makes explicit what the text of Matthew implies and draws connections that the text of Matthew assumes the original audience would have made. The other advantage is that the modern interpreter can become attuned to the ways in which the Gospel impacted the lifestyle and identity of the original hearers. The net effect of audience-oriented criticism is to supply the modern reader with the cultural and linguistic competence that Matthew's Gospel assumes of its original readers (Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, xiii, 4-5).

Vespasian.<sup>18</sup> Vespasian issued coins that presented himself as the recipient and dispenser of the gods' favor and blessings. In addition, Roman poets like Statius and Martial exalt Domitian, Vespasian's son, as "the world's sure salvation" (*Rerum certa salus*)<sup>19</sup> and as "that present deity" (*deus praesens*).<sup>20</sup> The most significant claim, however, was that the three Flavian emperors were chosen by Jupiter. Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius, for example, each attest to Jupiter's choice of Vespasian and Domitian. These claims formed the basis for the relationship between the elite and the non-elite and were expressed publically and ritually in liturgical events, public prayers, and festivals.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 22-23.

<sup>19</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 25, citing Martial, *Epigrams* (trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey; 3 vols.; Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 2.91.1. All Latin citations are from the Loeb Classical Library. Statius also calls Domitian the "Lord of the earth" (*potenti terrarum domino*) [*Silvae* 3.4.20] and "ruler of the nations and mighty sire of the conquered world, hope of men and care of the gods" (*regnator terrarum orbisque subacti magne parens*) [*Silvae* 4.2.14-15]. Martial calls Domitian "the world's sure salvation" (*Rerum certa salus*) [*Epigrams* 5.1.7], its "blest protector and savior" (*o rerum felix tutela salusque*) [*Epigrams* 5.1.7], its "chief and only welfare" (*rerum prima salus et una*) [*Epigrams* 8.66.6].

<sup>20</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 26, citing *Silvae* 5.2.170. Carter here either misquotes Statius or gives an incorrect reference. The Latin of *Silvae* 5.2.170 reads, "*proximus ille deus*," and not as Carter cites, "*deus praesens*"; Statius, *Silvae* 5.2.170 (trans. D. R. Schackleton Bailey; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 29.

Heard against this backdrop, Matthew's Gospel makes a resounding clash with imperial claims that the gods have chosen Rome to rule the world.<sup>22</sup> Yet, as Carter points out, much of Matthean scholarship has paid little if any attention to Roman imperial traditions, leaving the mistaken impression that Matthew only addresses religious issues.<sup>23</sup> As a corrective, Carter offers an imperial reading of five titles in Matthew's genealogy (e.g., the book of the origins, Jesus, Christ, son of David, son of Abraham). He argues that these titles, when read within the wider Roman imperial context of the authorial audience, present a cogent argument that "contests and relativizes Rome's claim to sovereignty and divine agency."<sup>24</sup>

To take one of these examples, Matthew's presentation of Jesus as the "son of David" collides with Rome in at least two ways.<sup>25</sup> Unlike Roman emperors who exploit the inhabitants of their empire, Matthew presents Jesus as a shepherd who provides deliverance and protection for his people. Second, over and against imperial claims that declare Rome to be the eternal city (*urbs aeterna*), the Davidic tradition presents a counter-claim, as expressed in Psalms of Solomon 17, that the "line of David, representing God's rule, will rule forever."<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Carter argues that the "son of

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<sup>22</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Warren Carter, "Matthean Christology in Roman Imperial Key: Matthew 1.1," in *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 143-165; here 150.

<sup>24</sup> Carter, "Matthean Christology," 143.

<sup>25</sup> Carter, "Matthean Christology," 159.

<sup>26</sup> Carter, "Matthean Christology," 161.

David” title refers to another tradition of David as healer. Thus in Matthew’s Gospel the title is attributed to Jesus in various places when he performs miracles and exorcisms. Carter cites 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30 as indicating that Jesus’ healings signify the “in-breaking of God’s rule.”<sup>27</sup> In this way, conventional definitions of healing and salvation in religious and moral terms are too restrictive; absent from the equation are the imperial problems from which and against which salvation is promised. Rather, salvation in Matthew’s Gospel entails deliverance from political oppression, and Matthew’s Gospel announces God’s empire that will one day result in Rome’s downfall. The “son of David” title is one example of how Carter broadens the religious-theological focus of messianic titles attributed to Jesus.

Regarding *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* itself, and in light of the preceding reconstructive work, Carter hears very strong imperial resonances as the authorial audience originally would have. He points out, for example, that *τῶν Ἰουδαίων* immediately recalls the opening conflict over the territory of Judea between Jesus and Herod. He writes:

The qualifier “of the Jews,” resembles “Judea” in 2:1, the territory where Herod is supposed to reign, and anticipates 2:5 where Judea is the location of Bethlehem from whom will come a ruler. Bethlehem was of course the place in which David was anointed as king (1 Sam 16) so evoking Bethlehem points to a Davidic king.<sup>28</sup>

For Carter, the juxtaposition between Jesus and Herod in the infancy narrative underscores the political, and not merely theological, dimensions of the conflict. This political dimension, Carter suggests, is also present between Jesus and Pilate—both are

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<sup>27</sup> Carter, “Matthaeian Christology,” 162.

<sup>28</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 161.

called “governors” (Matt 2:6, 27:2). He goes on to point out Rome’s harsh treatment of royal pretenders citing evidence in Josephus (e.g., the beheading of Simon [*Ant.* 17.273-76] and the capturing of Athronges [*Ant.* 17-278-85]). For Carter, Pilate is far from a neutral figure but a powerful and controlling figure.<sup>29</sup> His question in Matt 27:11 (“Are you ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων?”) is not primarily a theological one that concerns his messianic identity; instead, the force of the question is political, implying sedition against Rome.<sup>30</sup> The title announces the arrival of a new empire and names Jesus as the “leader of the resistance.”<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, the title “implies nothing less than Rome’s demise.”<sup>32</sup>

Carter’s socio-political reading of Matthew represents an important counterpoint to the traditional religious-theological approach to Matthew. In particular, his socio-political reading helps correct the second tendency of the traditional reading, which overlooks the marginalizing nature of Roman crucifixion. In Carter’s reading, Pilate is far from an innocent figure who is forced to give in to the desires of the masses and the envy of the chief priests. He is a powerful and duplicitous figure who washes his hands clean as “a disguise that seeks to mask the elite’s actions under the crowd’s demands.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 163.

<sup>30</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 161. Cf. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison observe that the before Pilate (Matt 27:11), the meaning of the title implies sedition (*The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1988), vol. 3, 581, 615.

<sup>31</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 524.

<sup>32</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 524.

<sup>33</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 166.



Moreover, Carter's socio-political reading does much in addressing the exclusive theological focus characteristic of traditional readings. His reading of ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων provides a sharp account of the imperial conflict and tension the title evokes between Jesus and Herod in the infancy narrative and between Jesus and Pilate in the passion narrative. The result is a greater sensitivity for how the Matthean Jesus, and the Matthean community by implication, is marginalized.

At the same time, his reading does not quite go far enough in appreciating the precise nature of Jesus' marginalization. To be sure, Carter correctly observes that the title "encapsulates challenge, threat, conflict."<sup>34</sup> He also gives brief attention to the genitive τῶν Ἰουδαίων in the title, of which he says, as quoted earlier: "The qualifier 'of the Jews' resembles 'Judea' in 2:1, *the territory where Herod is supposed to reign*, and anticipates 2:5 where Judea is *the location of Bethlehem from whom will come a ruler*" (emphasis mine).<sup>35</sup> Carter's specification of the geo-political territory over which Herod rules is a vast improvement from the virtual omission of τῶν Ἰουδαίων in the traditional interpretation. But his analysis stops short of exploring the relevance of Jesus' ethnic identity vis-à-vis his marginalization by the Roman authorities. Instead, his primary focus, as with the traditional interpretation, remains largely determined by Jesus' messianic identity. In fact, Carter seems to affirm the traditional messianic reading that he is in fact the "King of the Jews," reasoning that Jesus does not actually reject the title.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 161.

<sup>35</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 161.

<sup>36</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 161.

Overall, then, a few conclusions may be drawn in comparing the two major trajectories of interpretation. The overshadowing of Jesus' racial-ethnic identity is most prominent in France where the purported messianic significance of *ὁ βασιλεύς* eclipses Jesus' identity as *τῶν Ἰουδαίων*. As we have seen, this is largely consistent with the exclusive theological focus of the traditional reading, which, in turn, reduces Rome's involvement in Jesus' crucifixion to a mere formality. Yet there is also a sense in which the racial-ethnic dimensions of the title are overlooked by Carter, despite his careful attention to the politics of marginalization. For even though Carter's socio-political reading better accounts for the title's imperial connotations, the nature of Jesus' marginalization remains unspecified and, in some respects, still largely influenced by the traditional interpretation. In this way, both readings contribute to the peculiar non-racial pattern that obscures Jesus' racial-ethnic identity as a marginalized Judean.

The end result is that the dominant representation is made non-racial: the Matthean Jesus is rendered a theological or political figure, but not a racial-ethnic figure. But why? What are the factors that have led modern scholars to focus on Jesus' kingship as *ὁ βασιλεύς*—be it messianic (France) or imperial (Carter)—over and against his racial-ethnic identity as *τῶν Ἰουδαίων*? To answer this question, it is necessary to broaden the inquiry and dig deeper to the history of methods.

### **Dominant reading strategies of Matthean studies**

A broader analysis of the history of methods indicates that the non-racial pattern is produced and perpetuated through a decontextualizing trend in Matthean scholarship of locating the interpretive process solely in the world of production and separating the

context of the critic from the act of criticism. This assessment can be illustrated through a brief survey of dominant reading strategies in general and a few examples in Matthean scholarship in particular.

The history of Matthean studies represents an expansive continuum from text-centered to reader-centered approaches characteristic of the “linguistic turn.”<sup>37</sup> This

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<sup>37</sup> As the 2009 publication of *Methods for Matthew* (ed., Mark A. Powell; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) attests, recent Matthean scholarship has become much more open to a diversity of interpretative approaches. Prior to the 1970s, however, the historical critical method was the exclusive method used in biblical scholarship. The pluralizing of methods in Matthean studies did not take hold until the late 1980s and mid 1990s, decades after the rise of literary and cultural theory that swept across the humanities and social sciences in what has come to be known as the “linguistic turn.” For our purposes, this diversification of methods in the recent history of Matthean Studies underscores the hermeneutical principles underlying the dominant narrative—namely, the universalizing and de-contextualizing ethos of historical criticism. The publication of *Methods for Matthew* can be seen as part of a wider turn to method and theory in contemporary U.S. biblical scholarship. See also: See also: Mark A. Powell, *The New Testament Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999); Janice C. Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, *Mark & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); Joel B. Green, *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2010); Joseph A. Marchal, *Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012). For a broader overview of the implications of the

continuum may be mapped in terms of four major paradigms of interpretation: historical criticism, literary criticism, socio-cultural criticism, and ideological criticism.<sup>38</sup> During much of the modern period, historical criticism was the primary approach to biblical interpretation. Over and against the dogmatic readings of the Church, which focused on what the text means (exposition), the historical critical method focused exclusively on the question of what the text meant (exegesis). The ideal interpreter was one who set aside their own personal biases so as to avoid reading their own beliefs and assumptions back into the biblical text (eisegesis). Thus the primary goal of historical criticism was an objective interpretation which could only be achieved through a rigorous, scientific approach to history as expressed in the four methodological canons derived from Ernst Troeltsch (e.g., methodological doubt, analogy, correlation, and autonomy).<sup>39</sup> The

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linguistic turn on the New Humanities beyond biblical scholarship, see: See: Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield, *Cultural Studies and Critical Theory* (Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> For the critique that follows, I rely on: Fernando F. Segovia, “‘And They Began to Speak in Other Tongues’: Competing Modes of Discourse in Contemporary Biblical Criticism,” in *Reading from this Place. Volume 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 1-34.

<sup>39</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, “Über historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie,” *Gesammelte Schriften* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1913), 2:729-53; idem., “Historiography,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1914), 6:716-23. See also Van Austin Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (New York:

overarching burden of historical criticism, therefore, was to place the biblical text squarely in its ancient context, without any influence from the modern world of the critic,

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Macmillan, 1966); John J. Collins, *The Bible After Babel: Historical Criticism In A Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005), 4-11. The first is the principle of criticism or methodological doubt. This canon resists making the results of historical inquiry absolute, but rather contingent and measured by relative degrees of probability. Furthermore, it maintains that the results of historical inquiry are subject to revision in light of new evidence. The second is the principle of analogy. This principle posits an analogous relationship between the ancient world and the modern situation. Accordingly, the same natural laws that govern the modern world also govern the world of the ancient text. The analogy between the two provides the basis for historical inquiry and fundamentally makes historical knowledge possible. The third is the principle of correlation, which assumes that all historical phenomena are interrelated and interdependent. So not only is historical knowledge possible, but also the historical chain of cause and effect renders it certain. No historical event can be conceived of outside of this sequence. The fourth is the principle of autonomy. The conclusions of historical critical scholarship are not to be influenced by or to be subordinate to any authority such as church or state. A truly objective account of the past must exercise independence and autonomy.

using various scholarly tools—including, form criticism, composition criticism, source criticism, genre criticism, and redaction criticism.<sup>40</sup>

By the 1970s and 1980s, some of the methodological canons of historical criticism were called into question as biblical scholars began to look to broader trends in the humanities and social sciences, particularly literary and cultural theory. In Matthean studies, Jack Dean Kingsbury is widely regarded as one of the first Matthean scholars to use literary criticism, while Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey are early proponents of socio-cultural criticism.<sup>41</sup> In brief, the fundamental challenge literary criticism posed concerned historical criticism's conception of the ancient text, while cultural criticism challenged historical criticism's conception of the ancient context. Yet in spite of these critical modifications, the early iterations of literary and socio-cultural criticism did little to challenge the underlying premise of historical criticism in locating the interpretive

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<sup>40</sup> Donald A. Hagner and Stephen E. Young, "The Historical-Critical Method and the Gospel of Matthew," in *Methods for Matthew* (ed., Mark Alan Powell; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11-43; here 13.

<sup>41</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); *Gospel Interpretation: Narrative-Critical & Social-Scientific Approaches* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997); Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey. *Calling Jesus Names: The Social Value of Labels in Matthew* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1988); Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh. *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); Bruce J. Malina, *Windows on the World of Jesus: Time Travel to Ancient Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993).

process solely in the world of production. Rather they simply sharpened the ways to better accomplish this task through a more rigorous and robust account of the literary and sociological contexts of the ancient world.

This is also evident from examining the role of the critic, which by and large remained the same in the first three paradigms. In historical criticism, the role of the critic was envisioned as detached, neutral, and universal. Historical criticism's pursuit of scientific objectivity was initially conceived as a response to break from ecclesiastical and dogmatic constraints. But it was the means of achieving that objectivity that would prove to be problematic. The basic problem was that the context of the critic was viewed as something to be overcome in the pursuit of objective scholarship, and the way to overcome personal bias was through the rigorous use of scientific methods. Subjective experience and objective scholarship were, therefore, sharply differentiated, creating a gulf between the scholarly task and the personal self.<sup>42</sup> This meant that in scholarly reconstructions of the ancient past, the context of the modern critic was to be bracketed, not only deemed irrelevant but also counterproductive to the interpretive task. The ideal critic, in contrast to the lay person, was one who was divested of personal bias and maintained an objective distance from the object of study. In this way, historical criticism decontextualized the role of the critic in the name of objectivity.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, ed., *The Personal Voice in Biblical Interpretation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

<sup>43</sup> For example, Jon Levenson points out the bias of Christian scholars who, under the veil of historical criticism, have transmitted their religious-theological beliefs in their scholarship. See: Jon D. Levenson, "Theological Consensus or Historicist Evasion? Jews

Although literary and socio-cultural criticism were critical of historical criticism in some respects, the distinction between the professional scholar and the personal self was only slightly modified. For example, instead of a universal reader, as with historical criticism, literary criticism posited an implied reader, and social-scientific criticism, an implied audience, reconstructed through their respective methods.<sup>44</sup> In both cases,

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and Christians in Biblical Studies” in *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 82-105.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Jack D. Kingsbury (*Matthew As Story* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988]), who is often cited as the first scholar to apply the insight of literary criticism to the First Gospel. For an overview of literary approaches to Matthew, see: Mark Alan Powell, “Literary Approaches and the Gospel of Matthew” in *Methods for Matthew* (ed. Mark Alan Powell; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 44-82. Mark Alan Powell organizes applications of literary approaches to the First Gospel in three categories: an author-oriented hermeneutic; a text-oriented hermeneutic; and a reader-oriented hermeneutic. For an overview of social-scientific approaches to Matthew, see: Bruce J. Malina, “Social-Scientific Approaches and the Gospel of Matthew” in *Methods for Matthew*, 154-193. Carter’s approach is an interesting example of a hybrid audience that is a crossover of literary and social-scientific approaches, though Carter himself does not identify his approach in these terms. He refers to the “authorial audience” or the “contextualized implied reader.” In Part One of *Matthew and Empire*, entitled “The Roman Imperial System,” Carter reconstructs the Roman imperial system, Roman imperial theology, and Matthew’s audience in Antioch. His work highlights the social history of the First Gospel. Part One forms the “contextual basis” for the thematic



however, the modern critic was eclipsed by the interpretive process. In other words, the first three major paradigms of interpretation proceeded in such a way so as to decontextualize the critic from the hermeneutical process either as a universal reader (viz. historical criticism), a reconstructed social reader (viz. social-scientific criticism) or an implied reader (viz. literary criticism), but not as the actual flesh-and-blood reader (viz. ideological criticism). While later forms of literary criticism, especially reader response theory, would introduce different ways of accounting for various readers, the decontextualization of the modern critic would remain a basic pattern of biblical scholarship through the 1980s. It was not until the rise of ideological criticism in the 1990s that the basic premise of historical criticism would be challenged, giving way to a

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and exegetical studies that follow in Parts Two and Three. Carter utilizes historical-criticism to reconstruct the “authorial audience” of Matthew’s Gospel. While the original audience of Matthew’s Gospel is lost forever, Carter believes that it is possible to reconstruct an authorial audience that overlaps with the original audience. He defines the authorial audience as the “contextualized implied reader” based on various historical, linguistic, social, and literary data. By locating Matthew’s authorial audience within the Roman imperial situation, Carter teases out the socio-political implications of Matthew’s Gospel. The advantage of this approach is that it makes explicit what the text of Matthew implies and draws connections that the text of Matthew assumes the original audience would have made. The other advantage is that the modern interpreter can become attuned to the ways in which the Gospel impacted the lifestyle and identity of the original hearers. The net effect of audience-oriented criticism is to supply the modern reader with the cultural and linguistic competence that Matthew’s Gospel assumes of its original readers.

process of reading that necessarily involves the contexts and locations of real readers.<sup>45</sup>

The emergence of the real reader in contemporary biblical scholarship can be seen as having originated far beyond the strict disciplinary boundaries of biblical scholarship in

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<sup>45</sup> By the 1980s and 1990s, ethnic studies programs, such as African American, Latino/a, and Asian American studies, began to sprout in major universities in the U.S.. Similar changes began to take place in religion and theology departments, though at a much slower pace. The demographic of biblical critics in general and Matthean scholars in particular throughout much of the U.S. history of Matthean studies has been made up of elite, privileged and educated white European and American males. This is seen in the prevalence and dominance of the historical critical method well into the 1980s. Two ground-breaking volumes were published in 1995 that would chart an alternative path: Fernando F. Segovia and Mary A. Tolbert, eds., *Reading from This Place* (2 vols.,; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). A third volume explores the pedagogical concerns and implications in acknowledging social location in biblical interpretation: idem., *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1998). For a discussion of the significance of these volumes, see: Francisco Lozada and Greg Carey, *Soundings in Cultural Criticism: Perspectives and Methods in Culture, Power, and Identity in the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013); Gerald O. West, "Reading From This Place, V 1: Social Location And Biblical Interpretation In The United States," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 103 (1999): 94-100. This thumbnail sketch helps to situate recent minority approaches to biblical interpretation.

the social revolutions of the 1960s.<sup>46</sup> In the last decade or so, the diversity of reader-based methods and approaches by African American scholars, Latino/a American scholars, and Asian American scholars is indicative of the changing tides in contemporary biblical scholarship.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The work of Steven Seidman (*Contested Knowledge: Social Theory Today* [Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013], 203-220) is particularly helpful in recounting the impetus for many academic and activist identity-based movements, including the emergence of Racial-Ethnic studies.

<sup>47</sup> Several noteworthy volumes include African American approaches: Randall C. Bailey, *Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Brian K. Blount, Cain H. Felder, Clarice J. Martin, and Emerson B. Powery, *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Felder, *Stony the Road We Trod*; for Latino/a approaches: Miguel A. De La Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002); Ada M. Isasi-Díaz, and Fernando F. Segovia, *Hispanic/ Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996); Segovia, "Toward Latino/a American Biblical Criticism"; for Asian American approaches, see: Liew, *What Is Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics?*; Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey K. Kuan, *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2006). See also: Vincent L. Wimbush, *Misreading America: Scriptures and Difference* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

But the dominant epistemology has not been without critique. Three criticisms concerning this modernist epistemology may be noted for our purposes. A first criticism is the myth of objectivity—that some forms of knowledge can be classified as objective and impartial. A truly objective account of the past was regarded to be possible only by overcoming the personal biases of the critic, resulting in the split between the personal and the professional. This anxiety surrounding the non-confessional/ professional identity of the biblical scholar has resulted in a hyper-historical discipline. In fact, no other discipline has been more invested in divesting the personal from the professional, the historical from the confessional, than modern biblical scholarship.<sup>48</sup> Many of these tendencies have come under fire, resulting in some methodological modifications in

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<sup>48</sup> Moore and Sherwood (*The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, xii) put the matter in this way: “What other discipline in the humanities has striven more determinedly to perform the separation of the properly critical subject from the properly studies object? What other discipline has been more anxious to separate the professional from the confessional, the public from the personal, through the development of ever more meticulously honed critical tools?...For almost all biblical scholarship has been enacted within the edifice of the Enlightenment Bible, it seems to us, by which we mean that almost all biblical scholars have thoroughly internalized Enlightenment modes of relating to the Bible—modes anxiously marked as distinct from the devotional and the confessional, the pietistic and the homiletical, through a fetishistic display of methodological expertise as the primary badge of professional identity.”

dominant biblical scholarship.<sup>49</sup> Yet on the whole, contemporary historical critical practice remains resolutely convinced of the necessity to be a neutral and disinterested critic, to transcend the particularities of one's context, in order to fulfill the task of history.<sup>50</sup> With the so-called "death of the author," however, there has been a shift in thinking. Meaning is not so much found or irrevocably recovered as it is contextually produced. All meaning arises in particular contexts and, like language, is social.

A second criticism is the myth of methodology—that the meaning of the historical past can be properly recovered through the meticulous use of scholarly tools and methods. The four canons of historical criticism have long guided the guild of modern biblical scholarship. But if all meaning is socially, culturally, and contextually conditioned, then not even scholarly methods such as historical criticism are impartial or context-free. Just as words do not have inherent value, but find their meaning based on their use in particular historical, social, and cultural contexts, so, too, the very methodologies that have governed dominant biblical scholarship. According to the myth of methodology, the premise on which Historical Jesus scholarship is predicated, of getting back to the "real" Jesus, if not fundamentally flawed, is at least methodologically naïve.

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<sup>49</sup> So F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Rethinking Historical Criticism," *Biblical Interpretation* 7.3 (1999): 235-71.

<sup>50</sup> See Collins, *The Bible After Babel* and Donald Hagner, "The Place of Exegesis in the Postmodern World," in *History and Exegesis: New Testament Essays in Honor of Dr. E. Earle Ellis for His 80th Birthday* (ed. Sang-Won A. Sons; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 292-308.

A third criticism is the myth of universality—that knowledge is univocal and acontextual. Similar to the first two criticisms, what underlies the myth of universality is a decontextualized view of meaning’s production. But if meaning can no longer be reliably secured by authorial intent or a stable text, according to one possible counterargument, then surely meaning must be an entity that readers produce. However, not even this account is wholly satisfactory, for the question of authority has simply changed hands from the “author” to the “reader” without closer inspection. A more promising move involves an account of the complex interaction between authors and audiences, texts and contexts, readings and reading strategies—all of which should be properly situated among real flesh-and-blood readers.<sup>51</sup> In other words, such a move calls for an honest acknowledgement of the limits of contextuality—all critics are socially situated in any number of overlapping contexts, just as all forms of criticism are ideologically located in any number of overlapping contexts.<sup>52</sup> Without critical attention

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<sup>51</sup> Fernando Segovia, “Cultural Criticism: Expanding the Scope of Biblical Criticism,” in *The Future of the Biblical Past: Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key* (eds. Roland Boer and Fernando Segovia; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 307-336; here, 311.

<sup>52</sup> According to Jeffrey T. Nealon and Susan S. Giroux, *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 101: “There is no simple escape from ideology, just as there is no premise-free (that is to say no merely ‘objective’) knowledge: All meaning is contextual; all contexts are social; and all societies have ideologies, recognitions of common sense. The task of literary and cultural theory, then, is *not to escape* ideology

to these assorted contexts, the complex of power, agency, and authority remains latent in one's interpretive framework, simply changing from one guise to another.

In light of these challenges, some have argued that the critique of historical criticism's claim to objectivity is overstated and that current uses of historical criticism no longer claim absolute neutrality or objectivity. For example, for Hagner and Young the idea of a "purely objective and detached scholarship, though common not many decades ago, has clearly run its course."<sup>53</sup> It is important to note, however, that these perspectives are still very much alive and well in contemporary biblical scholarship, including Matthean scholarship. For example, Davies and Allison's three-volume commentary is highly regarded as the premiere North American commentary on the Gospel of Matthew to date. This claim is not without warrant given the impressive breadth and acumen of scholarly analysis Davies and Allison provide. Yet the commentary is also indicative of the fact that scholarly objectivity remains an indelible hallmark of contemporary biblical scholarship. In the preface to the first volume, for instance, Davies and Allison write: "Although we cannot be sufficient for this, our aim has been to be loyal to the tradition of disinterested and objective study in biblical criticism. We hope that this commentary will prove not unworthy of it."<sup>54</sup> To take another example, Dale Bruner uses similar language to describe the exegetical process as a

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but to account for its workings in the seemingly disinterested and neutral presentations of culture, as well as in our interpretations of those cultural artifacts."

<sup>53</sup> Hagner and Young, "The Historical-Critical Method and the Gospel of Matthew," 12. Cf. Collins, *Bible after Babel*, 3, 29.

<sup>54</sup> Davies and Allison, vol. 1, xi.

dialogue with “the faithful, scientific, and rigorously objective historian” who “uncovers and translates the text in all the glory of its original meaning.”<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, Matthean scholars who depart from more traditional methods nevertheless operate within a similar framework as historical criticism. Carter, who as we have seen is critical of the narrow religious-theological focus of traditional scholarship, takes a far more conscious approach that recognizes the selective and contextual nature of reading.<sup>56</sup> Carter readily admits that his construction of the Matthean authorial audience is one that “approximates, though is not the same as, the actual audience.”<sup>57</sup> Yet lurking beneath these acknowledgements is a strong impulse to get back to the original audience in the world of production. So even if they are not one and the same, Carter’s authorial audience nevertheless “overlaps a real audience.”<sup>58</sup> Another example is the way Carter differentiates his context as a critic from his reading of Matthew through the lens of marginality. His description is worth quoting at length:

To read from and live on the margins is to see life in ways that is not seen at the center. It is hard for those who do much of the scholarly writing and publishing on Matthew, members of university and seminary faculties in the Western world, with access to immense educational resources, numerous scholarly and publishing opportunities, prestige in scholarly guilds or ecclesial groups, stable political and social environments, and often comfortable salaries and lifestyles, to think about Matthew on and from the margins. But while difficult, it is not impossible. We can learn to see as others see, at least to some extent.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Bruner, *Matthew: The Christbook, Matthew 1-12*, xxxii.

<sup>56</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, xvii.

<sup>57</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, xvii-xviii.



Carter locates himself, along with other Matthean scholars, as being part of the center and not on the margins in contemporary society. Reading Matthew as a text that addresses a marginalized community in the first century, therefore, presents certain challenges. In order to read Matthew in the way he proposes, Carter must not read according to his privileged situation in the world of consumption, but “learn to see as others see” in the world of production. These examples highlight the continued influence of the decontextualizing tendency of historical criticism in dominant reading strategies.

Overall, then, this brief sketch of dominant reading strategies reveals two significant breaches in the history of methods. The first is the sharp separation between the world of production (i.e., the world of the biblical text) and the world of consumption (i.e., the world of the modern critic). Historical criticism, literary criticism, and cultural criticism all ask different questions and have their own distinctive methods for answering those questions. But they all share a similar premise: the goal of interpretation is to reconstruct the world of production as objectively and accurately as possible. Moreover, they all generally agree that the historical, literary, or cultural past can be recovered through the meticulous use of the right scholarly methods and tools. The second is the separation between the context of the critic and the act of criticism, which is closely connected to the first. If the goal of interpretation is an objective rendering of the historical, literary, or cultural dimensions of the ancient text in the world of production, then it is necessary for the modern critic to transcend their own subjective context inasmuch as this is possible. Both separations underscore a decontextualizing tendency whereby the context of the critic in the world of production is viewed as something to be overcome in the name of objectivity. Both separations have resulted in a hyper-historical

discipline. In fact, no other discipline has been more invested in divesting the personal from the professional, the historical from the confessional, than modern biblical scholarship.

There are two significant points regarding this decontextualizing tendency for our purposes in situating the non-racial pattern. The first point is the underlying religious-theological framework out of which historical criticism originated. Against the dogmatic constraints of the Church, the decontextualization of the modern critic ensured a measure of objectivity. But as scholars such as Jon Levenson have pointed out, implicit religious assumptions have unwittingly shaped the results of modern biblical scholarship.<sup>60</sup> In fact, it is within this broader religious-theological framework in which both readings makes sense: the traditional religious-theological reading of the title has been destabilized by a more political approach. This explain why, in the broader context of Matthean studies, ὁ βασιλεὺς overshadows τῶν Ἰουδαίων, and why even when τῶν Ἰουδαίων is emphasized, it is Jesus' religious identity as a Jew—not his ethnic identity as a Judean or specifically as a Galilean from Nazareth—that prevails.

The second point is regarding the underlying Eurocentrism of modern biblical scholarship—a problem that Jonathan Sheehan has dubbed, “the Enlightenment Bible.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 33-61.

<sup>61</sup> Jonathan Sheehan (*The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* [Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2007], 260) describes this phenomenon as “an attempt to recover the religious truth of the Bible through means of investigation

Although differentiating the worlds of production and consumption was designed to achieve objectivity, what it actually conceals is a Eurocentric bias at work in modern biblical scholarship such that “almost all biblical scholars have thoroughly internalized Enlightenment modes of relating to the Bible.”<sup>62</sup> The critique of historical criticism’s Eurocentrism, or de-Africanizing the Bible (i.e., the turning of “Egypt and the making of Israel into a proto-European group”<sup>63</sup>), has been made by Cain Hope Felder, among others.<sup>64</sup> The paradoxical effect of this decontextualizing tendency is the simultaneous

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compatible with secular categories.” See also Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 47: “contemporary biblical scholarship, including even those developments within it that most readily invite the label ‘postmodern(ist),’ is still fundamentally predetermined and contained by the Enlightenment *épistémè*, and far more than is generally realized.”

<sup>62</sup> Moore and Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, xii.

<sup>63</sup> Bailey et al., “Toward Minority Biblical Criticism,” 23.

<sup>64</sup> Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters*; idem., *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); idem., “Cultural Ideology, Afrocentrism, and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, eds., James H. Cone and Gayraud Wilmore (2 vols.; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993), 184-95. For further discussion, see Brown, *Blackening of the Bible*, 35-52. For further bibliographies, see: Hopkins and Antonio, *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, 107, 323-327. For a critique of the de-Africanization of the bible, see Michael Joseph Brown, *Blackening of the Bible: The Aims of African American Biblical*

normalizing of a Euro-American form of criticism, even as the Euro-American self is concealed from the act of criticism. This decontextualizing pattern helps to explain why both the traditional religious-theological and socio-political interpretations have underread, or misread, ethnoracial markers in the Matthean passion narrative. There are certain theoretical limitations endemic to the historical critical method itself, with its heavy reliance on textual and philological analysis, that privilege certain ways of thinking (i.e., Euro-American) and not others. If race-ethnicity is a modern concept that originates in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, then it has no value in the study of the biblical world in the first century. Moreover, only certain kinds of phenomena—that which computes within a historical, textual, and authorial framework—and certain vantage points—that which is above the object of inquiry—are deemed worthy subjects of analysis. In this way, the modern category of race-ethnicity is deemed *eo ipso* inappropriate and anachronistic to the first century world of Matthew.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of Chapter 1 was to identify the pattern of non-racial readings of the title. This was accomplished by looking at two representative readings of the title in the history of interpretation. The traditional messianic reading has overemphasized religious-theological matters. Although the socio-political reading has broadened the exclusive religious focus of the traditional approach, the non-racial pattern by and large continues.

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*Scholarship* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2004), 3-6, 16-19, 24, 157-159; my thanks to Benny Liew for this reference.

Moreover, while both readings ask different questions and yield different results, there is a common methodological premise on which both rely. The decontextualizing tendency helps to situate and understand the non-racial pattern. The modernist epistemology of historical criticism has led to two separations regarding the purpose of criticism and the role of the critic. The first separation is between the world of production and the world of consumption. The primary task of biblical criticism was conceived of as an objective enterprise of rendering the biblical text as it actually was in the first century world of production. The second separation is between the critic and the act of criticism. Both separations were necessary in order for to achieve objectivity. But what these separations conceal is an underlying religious-theological and Eurocentric agenda.

Overall, the primary aim of the preceding analysis was to show that the non-racial pattern of the dominant narrative is not only specific to the history of readings, but also reinforced more generally by the broader history of methods that are located exclusively in the world of production. To further investigate the non-racial pattern, then, it is necessary to understand its logic not only in the world of production, but also in the world of consumption.

## CHAPTER 2

### SITUATING THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE: DERACIALIZED READERS AND READING LOCATIONS IN THE WORLD OF CONSUMPTION

#### **Introduction**

Having identified the non-racial pattern of interpretation in Chapter 1, I turn in Chapter 2 to situate it more broadly in the world of consumption. As we shall see, the coding and decoding of this pattern largely depends on the perspectives and parameters of one's reading location. For example, when located solely in the world of production, religious-theological and socio-political readings of the title appear to be an objective, bias-free rendering of the Matthean Jesus as he actually was in the first century world of production. But when situated in a broader perspective that spans both worlds of production and consumption, the non-racial representation emerges not as a neutral or disinterested account, but one that is ostensibly shaped by and susceptible to dominant ideologies in the world of consumption. In fact, as I will argue, the non-racial pattern bears a striking resemblance to a deracializing logic that is pervasive in contemporary U.S. society and culture—namely, the ideology of white invisibility. Indeed, when situated within a larger economy of representations, the non-racial pattern can be seen as inextricably linked to deracialized readers and reading locations in the world of consumption.

Chapter 2, therefore, calls for a critical assessment of the dominant narrative, but it does so under an agenda that markedly differs from the scholarship it critiques. Rather than contest the precise details or produce yet another reconstruction of Jesus as he actually was in the first century world of production (e.g., based on a new configuration

of historical, textual, and social data), Chapter 2 takes a different point of departure. It conducts an ideological investigation of the underlying dynamics of context, power, and representation by which scholarly reconstructions of Jesus are fashioned in the present. First, I outline a theory of deracialization as a way of framing the analysis. In particular, I develop a working definition of deracialization as white invisibility, drawing on the work of Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown and the insights of Whiteness studies. Next, I show how a deracializing logic can be seen at work in the way dominant Matthean scholars discourse about race-ethnicity and early Christian origins. Finally, using a broad brush, I further situate this deracializing logic within a larger economy of representations in the world of production. For only then, I argue, will the deracializing logic of the dominant narrative emerge as problematic.

Following from the previous chapter, then, Chapter 2 contends that the non-racial pattern of readings and reading strategies cannot be viewed apart from the deracialized readers and reading locations from which it stems. Only by approaching modern Jesus reconstructions from the standpoint of the world of consumption—rather than exclusively from the world of production—does one see that the non-racial pattern is not an isolated phenomenon. It is rather complicit in maintaining, if not mobilizing, the dominant deracialized representation of Jesus in the modern racial imaginary.

### **Deracialization as white invisibility: A discursive approach**

As a way of proceeding, then, it is necessary to identify a suitable framework of analysis in order to better understand the politics of deracialization. There are a number of excellent studies that have theorized race-ethnicity in a variety of ways on the

continuum of primordialist to constructivist approaches. For our purposes, and for reasons that will be made clear, I prefer a constructivist approach. In what follows, I draw on an approach to race-ethnicity by Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown in order to develop a theory of deracialization.

Miles and Brown present a salient discursive framework to theorize the process of racialization. They stress the need for an analytical approach to the language of race-ethnicity because much of its everyday use is often unreflective, uncritical, and taken-for-granted. Moreover, they are keen on presenting a theoretical—rather than a social or scientific—model because race-ethnicity is often stigmatized morally and politically.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, they develop their definitions deductively, based on conceptual utility, rather than formulating an empirical definition derived inductively or historically. Their definitions of racialization and ethnicization are as follows:

Racialisation is a dialectical process of signification. Ascribing real or imagined biological characteristics with meaning to define the Other necessarily entails defining Self by the same criteria...By virtue of sharing in that common world of meaning, the Other may adopt the content of the racialized discourse to identify itself as Self. Thus, populations that were racialised and excluded by the European discourse of race have appropriated and legitimated that discourse as a means by which to identify Self and Other.<sup>66</sup>

...we define ethnicisation as a dialectical process by which meaning is attributed to socio-cultural signifiers of human beings, as a result of which individuals may be assigned to a general category of persons which reproduces itself biologically, culturally and economically. Where biological and/ or somatic features (real or

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<sup>65</sup> Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown, *Racism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.

<sup>66</sup> Miles and Brown, *Racism*, 101-2.



imagined) are signified, we speak of racialisation as a specific modality of ethnicisation.<sup>67</sup>

There are several noteworthy aspects in their definitions that may be enumerated for our purposes. First, their definitions display theoretical consistency and clarity. In arriving at these definitions, Miles and Brown work through a number of examples of conceptual inflation in the scholarly literature whereby definitions are so broad so as to be virtually undifferentiated from other forms of oppression such as sexism, classism, etc.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, they also reject examples of conceptual deflation where the meaning of racialization/ ethnicization becomes limited only to certain times, groups, or events such that any example that falls outside these pre-determined boundaries are excluded from consideration.<sup>69</sup> Miles and Brown, therefore, strike a fine balance between either extreme. By reflecting theoretically on the transhistorical and social processes by which meaning is negatively attributed to certain biological and cultural signifiers, Miles and Brown offer an analytical model of racialization/ ethnicization that can be utilized across any number of contexts.<sup>70</sup>

Second, their definitions foreground the discursive and ideological nature of race-ethnicity. Miles and Brown take seriously the form and function of racialization/

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<sup>67</sup> Miles and Brown, *Racism*, 99.

<sup>68</sup> See chapter 2 in Miles and Brown, “The Unity of Racism: A Critique of Conceptual Inflation,” 57-72.

<sup>69</sup> See chapter 3 in Miles and Brown, “The Diversity of Racism: A Critique of Conceptual Deflation,” 73-86.

<sup>70</sup> Miles and Brown, *Racism*, 87.

ethnicization, rather than specifying the exact content of what these processes might entail. Why is it necessary to signal the process of interpellation over specifying the content of race-ethnicity? Simply put, race-ethnicity means different things, at different times, and in different situations. Beyond acknowledging the multiplicity of meanings involved, their approach, more fundamentally, understands racialization/ ethnicization as dialectical processes involving self and other. The main difference is that racialization involves interpellating biological or somatic signifiers (e.g., skin color), while ethnicization involves interpellating socio-cultural signifiers (e.g., language). Yet the discursive nature of the two is the same. According to a discursive approach, then, race-ethnicity is not a biological or cultural essence that is fixed, but a meaning-making device, a strategic coding of human difference. More specifically, it is a discourse whereby the self represents the other, in hierarchical fashion, through images, beliefs, and evaluations on the basis of biological or cultural signifiers. To say it a different way borrowing the language of J.L. Austin, race-ethnicity is a quintessential speech act—not a constative utterance whose locutionary content faithfully describes reality, but a performative utterance that, by its illocutionary force, brings about the very thing to which it refers (i.e., the racialized-other).

A third advantage is that Miles and Brown's framework highlights the corollary process to racialization. Although they do not use the term deracialization, their dialectical approach recognizes that any explicit act of othering on the basis of ethnoracial signifiers necessarily, if implicitly, involves a simultaneous process by which the self is effectively deracialized. The very criteria by which the other is represented

functions as the same foil by which the self, too, is represented.<sup>71</sup> For if the beliefs, images, and evaluations attributed to the other are negative and signify inferiority, the very same beliefs, images, and evaluations implicitly attributed to the self are positive and signify superiority. The other occupies a position of subordination but only in relation to the self who occupies a position of dominance. In this way, Miles and Brown's framework levels the playing field, so to speak, by emphasizing how the deracialized-self and the racialized-other are both implicated by the discourse of race-ethnicity. Simply put, there is no other without the self—or, in Jacques Lacan's turn of phrase, "The subject is the discourse of the other."<sup>72</sup>

In sum, these advantages highlight the conceptual, ideological, and relational dimensions of race-ethnicity. Together they point to the theoretical premise for the argument of this chapter: that which is regarded as "the non-racial" must be analyzed alongside of that which is regarded as "the racial," since the two are fundamentally connected. For if racialization and deracialization are interdependent processes, a framework that only highlights one part of the equation (i.e., the racialized-other) is at best partial. A fuller treatment requires a lens that keeps both the racialized-other and the deracialized-self in plain view, and this is precisely what makes Miles and Brown's discursive approach compelling. Yet there is a small wrinkle in all of this. Because their model remains at a theoretical level, leaving unspecified the content of racialization, it is necessary to turn elsewhere for a critical vocabulary to name the implicit construction of

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<sup>71</sup> Miles and Brown, *Racism*, 19.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield, *Cultural Studies and Critical Theory* (Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press, 2000), 144.

the deracialized-self. For this, I turn to Whiteness studies, a subfield of critical ethnic studies.

The primary way in which Whiteness studies scholars have conceptualized whiteness is by the ideology of white invisibility. According to this notion, the social, economic, and political advantages the dominant white majority enjoys are not necessarily visible to them—the chief among them being the very category of race-ethnicity. In other words, a widespread assumption that prevails in dominant U.S. culture is that white people are not ethnic; they are just people.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Seidman, *Contested Knowledge*, 235. Cf. Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 5. This sentiment finds expressed in oft-cited words of Toni Morrison: “In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate.” On closer examination, however, the very language and terminology of “white/ non-white” reveals the default and normative status of whiteness. Identifying numerous heterogeneous populations by what they are not (i.e., white) represents a paradoxical category of differentiation that unwittingly perpetuates the ideology of white invisibility. For example, “people of color” is a phrase that is often used as being politically correct. But on closer inspection it is nonsensical for what it implies—that some people may be described as “people of color” in contrast to people who lack color, or people who are colorless, or, simply, “people.” My point here is that the very category of non-being or non-existence, when utilized in the discourse on race-ethnicity, is profoundly ideological and nonsensical. The terms white or whiteness, for our purposes, then, are not a “real” category that names a racial-ethnic essence (i.e., white

This ideology conceals two types of privilege, the first of which is social. Although whiteness exists in dialectical relation to other racialized identities, it enjoys a position of power and privilege precisely because it is viewed in non-racial terms.<sup>74</sup> Whiteness is unmarked and assumed. It is a social location that is hidden from view, a normalized identity that is above scrutiny, yet one that forms the implicit standard by which other racialized identities are measured.<sup>75</sup> As Margaret Andersen says, “Whiteness just is; no white person is seen as representing their race.”<sup>76</sup>

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persons); rather these terms refer to ideological devices and social norms that have been established in modernity to make and manage human relations.

<sup>74</sup> Karen Teel, “What Jesus wouldn’t do: A white theologian engages whiteness.” Pages 19-36 in *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* Edited by George Yancy. London: Routledge, 2012), 21: “To be white, we think, is to have no race. To be white, we think, is to be a unique, individual expression of universal humanity, while to be raced is to be conditioned, contingent, a less-than-adequate representation of universal humanity. By and large, white people believe to be white is to be ‘normal’ and therefore requires no reflection; when we do notice whiteness, we may insist that we are really observing something else.”

<sup>75</sup> Woody Doane, “Rethinking Whiteness Studies” in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism* (eds. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva; New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 3-18; here 7.

<sup>76</sup> Margaret L. Andersen, “Whitewashing Race: A Critical Perspective on Whiteness,” in *White Out*, 21-34; here 26.

The second form of privilege that the ideology of white invisibility conceals is material. Scholars have been quick to point out that whiteness is not merely an issue that affects individuals. Rather it is a structural phenomenon that influences social relations, the division of labor, and the allocation of material resources. Woody Doane writes, “What is overlooked—or deliberately masked—is the persistence of racial stratification and the ongoing role of social institutions in reproducing social inequality.”<sup>77</sup> He goes on to describe how this inequality is ideologically produced and perpetuated:

Because whites tend not to see themselves in racial terms and not to recognize the existence of the advantages that whites enjoy in American society, this promotes a worldview that emphasizes *individualistic* explanations for social and economic achievement, as if the individualism of white privilege was a universal attribute (emphasis original).<sup>78</sup>

Both forms of privilege, moreover, are interconnected. The social privilege that the dominant white majority enjoys in not having to self-identify in ethnoracial terms, in turn, maintains a structural system that accrues certain benefits and rewards. Yet ironically both processes are disguised by a rhetoric of meritocracy and individualism. In this way, the ideology of white invisibility maintains its hegemony precisely by diverting

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<sup>77</sup> He writes: “In essence, the ‘color-blind’ society is not a utopia where racial inequality has been eliminated; it is simply a discourse in which it is not permissible to raise issues of race—except perhaps to condemn *individual* acts of racism. Within the discourse of ‘color blindness,’ inequality is explained away as the result of individual or communal failings, not the persistence of racism, and is therefore not considered a problem requiring structural change” (Doane, “Rethinking Whiteness Studies,” 13).

<sup>78</sup> Doane, “Rethinking Whiteness Studies,” 14.

attention away from itself as a discourse that maintains a structural system of social privilege and material advantage.

In sum, then, to circle back to the discursive framework of Miles and Brown, what Whiteness studies provides for our purposes is a critical lexicon to name the implicit construction of the deracialized-self. Accordingly, the unmarking of the deracialized-self is not only a form of social privilege—particularly, in a context where the racialized-other is racially interpellated and reiteratively marked. It is also a form of material privilege that accrues certain structural advantages in society. In what follows, this discursive approach to deracialization provides a lens for making legible the politics of white invisibility in the patterns and practices of Matthean scholarship.

### **Deracialized critics in the world of consumption**

There are a number of possible ways to go about establishing a connection between dominant readings and reading strategies in the world of production, on the one hand, and dominant readers and reading locations in the world of consumption, on the other. In this section, I take a general approach that examines the way dominant Matthean critics discourse about race-ethnicity, before turning to a more specific example in the next section. Naturally, this would seem to be a logical place to begin in light of the discursive approach to racialization/ deracialization previously outlined. Theoretically-speaking, that is, if race-ethnicity is a discourse that simultaneously signifies self and other, then identifying the kinds of conversations that take place around race-ethnicity in the world of consumption is an effective way of contextualizing the real readers and reading locations of Matthean scholarship.

In what follows, I appeal to the work of Hazel Rose Markus and Paula M.L. Moya who identify a number of racial scripts that mark contemporary discourses surrounding race-ethnicity in U.S. culture and society.<sup>79</sup> Their central concern is to show how ubiquitous ethnoracial politics are in the warp and woof of American society. Racism takes a number of forms. But not all social interactions involving race-ethnicity can nor should be classified as racism. Markus and Moya thus use the phrase “doing race” to account for the pervasiveness of racial deeds and discourses, intended or unintended. For anyone who lives in a race-based society, they argue, is “doing race” whether they realize it or not. While Markus and Moya have in mind contemporary U.S. society, my argument is that these scripts can also be detected in the patterns and practices of modern biblical scholarship. In developing my case, I outline three racial scripts that are representative of modern biblical scholarship. These scripts provide a typology in which to locate the non-racial pattern and identify the way Matthean scholars are “doing race.”

The first racial script is arguably the oldest and most common perspective in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century: “Race is in our DNA.” Modernity has been described as an effort to constitute the ideal modern individual (i.e., “the human”), which assumed the

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<sup>79</sup> Hazel R. Markus and Paula M. L. Moya, “Doing Race: An Introduction,” in *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2010).

Taken together, these scripts throw light on the normalized assumptions that are often taken for granted, but nevertheless shape the “routine social interactions as well as the institutional policies and practices of our society” (5).



form of a white Euro-American male.<sup>80</sup> During the Enlightenment period, the scientific language of race-ethnicity—understood as a fixed, stable, biological given—was coined to demarcate this idealized modern individual from that which was regarded as inferior. The discourse of race-ethnicity functioned as modernity’s code, marking off everything that the idealized modern individual was not—white, wealthy, Western, heterosexual, and male. Consequently, the discourse of race-ethnicity created a hierarchy positioning the ideal modern man as superior to the Negro, the Oriental, and the American (i.e., Native Americans).

The underlying premise of this first script is to naturalize race, to see it as encoded in certain biological and genetic features that all human beings have by birth. A classic 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century example of this naturalizing tendency is the commonplace

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<sup>80</sup> J. Kameron Carter and Adam McInturf, “Race: A Theological Account: An Interview with J. Kameron Carter,” *Cultural Encounters* 5.2 (2009): 77-86; here, 80: “Modernity, arguably, is the effort to constitute ourselves. It is an effort built into the entire architecture of the West. The West does not merely connote a geographical locus, a space on the map. The West connotes an idea, and not just an idea, but the ideal that is the West, where it is always positioned next to an exterior called ‘the rest.’” Cf. Randall C. Bailey, Tat-Siong B. Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, “Toward Minority Biblical Criticism: Framework, Contours, Dynamics” in *They Were All Together in One Place: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 6.

representation of ‘blacks as lazy, ignorant, and inferior.’<sup>81</sup> For if the primary difference between white and black people is cultural, then the hierarchy is subject to revision. However, if this difference is represented as being natural, the racial hierarchy is fixed. No amount of social or political intervention can change the status quo. In this way, the naturalizing logic of the first script, as Louis F. Mirón and Jonathan Xavier Inda perceptively point out, function as a “scheme calculated to fix difference forever, to secure discursive closure.”<sup>82</sup> In this context, the Bible served as confirmation for the veracity of scientific claims. Biblical texts such as the “Curse of Ham” in Gen 9:20-27 were regularly enlisted as a proof-text for the hierarchical division of humanity into three distinct racial stocks of Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid.<sup>83</sup> As a result, the first script was not only scientifically justified, but also biblically supported.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage in association with the Open University, 1997), 223-290; here 245.

<sup>82</sup> Louis F. Mirón and Jonathan Xavier Inda, “Race as a Kind of Speech Act,” *Cultural Studies* 5 (2000): 85-107; here 85.

<sup>83</sup> E.g., Martin Stanislaus Brennan, *The Science of the Bible* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1898), 90: “the most recent and most intelligent investigations affirm the Mosaic division of mankind into three principal races, corresponding to the descendants of Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham and Japhet, to be substantially correct.”

<sup>84</sup> On the use of such texts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Charles A. Gallagher (“White” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Racial and Ethnic Relations* [eds. Hernan Vera and Joe R. Feagin; New York: Springer, 2007], 9-14; here 11) offers the

The viewpoints and beliefs espoused by Enlightenment thinkers of the period illustrate the first script. A few representative examples may suffice:

Immanuel Kant: Americans and Blacks are lower in their mental capacities than all other races.

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following analysis: “The classification of the earth’s population into racial categories ostensibly based on sound scientific principles was nothing more than the religious dogma of the day given a veneer of respectability by the scientific community. Almost every scientific theory that justified and normalized white over non-white had some rationalization, empirical starting point, or assumption based in Holy Scripture. The supposed essential races of mankind (Negroid, Mongoloid, and Caucasoid) and which groups were destined to dominant became a scientific retelling of the curse of Ham, manifest destiny, and God’s will that heathens (anyone not white and Christian) must be converted, controlled, or eliminated. Science confirmed what Christian theologians knew all along: The white race was God’s chosen people and as such had the right to claim all natural resources and to subjugate any population deemed culturally inferior, heathen, pagan, or uncivilized.” For further discussion of the “Curse of Ham” text, see: David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1: “This biblical story has been the single greatest justification for Black slavery for more than a thousand years. It is a strange justification indeed, for there is no reference in it to Blacks at all. And yet just about everyone, especially in the antebellum American South, understood that in this story God meant to curse black Africans with eternal slavery, the so-called Curse of Ham.”

David Hume: I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences.

Ernst Renan: Thus the Semitic race is to be recognized almost entirely by negative characteristics. It has neither mythology, nor epic, nor science, nor philosophy, nor fiction, nor plastic arts, nor civil life; in everything there is a complete absence of complexity, subtlety or feeling, except for unity.<sup>85</sup>

However shocking or offensive these viewpoints may be today, they reflect fairly standard views of the Enlightenment period, from which the discipline of modern biblical scholarship originated. Besides Renan, other biblical scholars included under this category are Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Gerhard Kittel, and Walter Grundmann—all of whom have espoused anti-Semitic racial ideologies on biblical grounds.<sup>86</sup> In U.S. history, the biological myth of race has been used most notably to justify slavery, segregation, and eugenics. What all of these examples share in common is the assumption that race is a biological fact that can be used to classify ‘the human race.’

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<sup>85</sup> The following citations are quoted in Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1-2.

<sup>86</sup> For further discussion, see Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), especially chapter 4 (“The Making of Nazi Theologians”), 166-200. See also Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus*, 89-128; James E. McNutt, “A Very Damning Truth: Walter Grundmann, Adolf Schlatter, and Susannah Heschel’s *The Aryan Jesus*,” *Harvard Theological Review* 105:3 (2012): 280-301.

Based on the preceding analysis of the first script, the dominant representation of a white Jesus with blonde hair and blue eyes is not coincidental to the logic of modernity. Deracializing Jesus from a dark-skinned Mediterranean to a light-skinned Euro-American, as commonly represented throughout modernity, can be seen as a visual expression of the “Race is in our DNA” script: the white Jesus with blonde hair and blue eyes becomes the symbolic embodiment and antithesis of the racialized-other. Modernity’s discourse on race-ethnicity can be seen as a strategic representational process that has favored the political, social, and economic interests of the deracialized-self over and against the non-white other. This script has also thoroughly shaped the origins of modern biblical scholarship. In even stronger terms, according to Shawn Kelley, the intellectual heritage of modern biblical scholarship from Hegel and Heidegger to Bultmann and Crossan is “trapped in a racialized discourse.”<sup>87</sup> Although the first script is now largely defunct, it is an important script to bear in mind since it continues to have considerable influence in U.S. popular culture.<sup>88</sup> In fact, the influence of the first script can even be seen in the second script.

The second racial script is arguably the most recent and dominant script in American society: “We’re beyond race.” This can be seen as a direct response to the first

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<sup>87</sup> Kelley, *Racializing Jesus*, 211.

<sup>88</sup> A contemporary example of the “Race is in our DNA” conversation is the controversial book published in the mid 1990s that argued that minorities have demonstrated lower levels of intelligence based on genetic features: Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles A. Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

script insofar as the myth of scientific racism (i.e., the belief in biologically distinct racial groups) has been thoroughly debunked.<sup>89</sup> Markus and Moya point out that this script is common among middle and upper-class white Americans. The positive version of this script is an earnest disavowal of discrimination that insists that any and all difference race makes is merely superficial (e.g., “I’m colorblind”). But underlying this script is a

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<sup>89</sup> Differences among individuals within so-called “races” have been shown to exhibit as much, if not more, genetic variance than individuals between races, effectively rendering any system of racial classification arbitrary. A 1998 statement adopted by the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association is worth quoting at length: “In the United States both scholars and the general public have been conditioned to viewing human races as natural and separate divisions within the human species based on visible physical differences. With the vast expansion of scientific knowledge in this century, however, it has become clear that human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups. Evidence from the analysis of genetics (e.g., DNA) indicates that most physical variation, about 94%, lies within so-called racial groups. Conventional geographic ‘racial’ groupings differ from one another only in about 6% of their genes. This means that there is greater variation within ‘racial’ groups than between them. In neighboring populations there is much overlapping of genes and their phenotypic (physical) expressions. Throughout history whenever different groups have come into contact, they have interbred. The continued sharing of genetic materials has maintained all of humankind as a single species” (American Anthropological Association, “Statement on ‘Race,’ n.p. [cited 29 March 2014]. Online: <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm>).

paradox that at once acknowledges and simultaneously dismisses race. For instance, this script tends to obscure a more basic fact that the deracialized-self defies racial categories. That is, while racial differences may be excused and overlooked in the case of the racialized-other, the same does not hold true in the case of the deracialized-self for whom race does not apply in the first place.<sup>90</sup> In this way, the “We’re beyond race” script unwittingly reinforces white privilege at a structural level, even as it dispels the myth of scientific racism (i.e., the first script).

A recent illustration of the second script is MSNBC news anchor Charles Matthews’s widely publicized and criticized comments following the 2010 State of the Union address. He observed: “I was trying to think about who he was tonight. It’s interesting; he is post-racial, by all appearances. I forgot he was black tonight for an hour.”<sup>91</sup> Another example can be found in recent controversies around the role of race-

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<sup>90</sup> So Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 9-10: “One likely reason for the paucity of critical material on this large and compelling subject is that, in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse. Evasion has fostered another, substitute language in which the issues are encoded, foreclosing open debate. The situation is aggravated by the tremor that breaks into discourse on race. It is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference.”

<sup>91</sup> Originally quoted in Courtney E. Martin, “The Power of the ‘Post-Racial’ Narrative,” *American Prospect*, February 2, 2010, [www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=](http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=)

ethnicity in college admissions. A New York Times editorial examined a phenomenon called the “Asian Quota” whereby the enrollment of Asian students to Harvard University dropped approximately 5% during the last decade—a higher statistical proportion than the “Jewish Quota” of the 1920s. Remarkably, the number of Asian students admitted to Harvard University dropped over a ten year period when the overall number of Asian American college-age students spiked. The “Asian Quota” throws light on a specious logic that targets Asian or Asian American applicants, who have to score, according to some estimates, 200-300 points higher on the SAT than students of other racial groups.<sup>92</sup> It is one of the many examples that reveals the myth of meritocracy, the myth of the “American Dream.” As both examples indicate, contemporary U.S. society is not “beyond” but deeply entrenched in the discourse of race-ethnicity.

The third racial script is: “I’m \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m proud.” This script can be seen as a synthesis of the first two scripts. Although the biological myth of race has been

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[the power of the postracial narrative](#); cited in Ki Joo Choi, “Should Race Matter? A Constructive Ethical Assessment of the Postracial Ideal,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31.1 (2011): 79-101).

<sup>92</sup> It is no small irony that the common criticisms against affirmative action—i.e., that race should decisively not be a factor in college admissions of Black, Latino/a, and Native American students and instead that admissions should be merit-based—loses currency and, in the case of Asian or Asian American students, is quickly overturned as soon as it is realized that a merit-based system would yield an increasingly disproportionate number of Asian or Asian American college students.



scientifically disproven, the modern problem of race-ethnicity paradoxically persists.<sup>93</sup> But rather than being the source of rejection, exclusion and derision, race-ethnicity in this script becomes a source of affirmation, belonging, and pride. This script is arguably most common among U.S. minorities and can be illustrated by two major approaches to identity that flourished out of the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s.<sup>94</sup> The first is the identity politics movement, which emerged out the ferment of the social revolutions that marked the 1960s. In response to the student movement, the women's movement, and protests against the Vietnam War, new subjects of knowledge—gender, gay, lesbian, disability, ecological, ethnic, etc.—were formed.<sup>95</sup> The second and more recent approach, a politics of performativity, emerged in the 1990s as the insights of French poststructuralism found their way into literature and philosophy departments in the U.S. The differences between these two approaches may be illustrated by briefly tracing representative figures in the identity-based movements that flourished during the 1960s and 1970s.

One of the early and influential contributions to the women's movement was Dorothy Smith's Gynocentric feminism. Associated with the second wave of critical feminism, Gynocentric feminism posited that gender was a social construct designed to

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<sup>93</sup> This tension is artfully expressed as a rhetorical question by W. J. T. Mitchell (*Seeing Through Race* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012], xii): "How can anyone be a racist when there are no races?"

<sup>94</sup> The argument that follows draws on Seidman, *Contested Knowledge*, 203-220 and Fuery and Mansfield, *Cultural Studies and Critical Theory*, 142-155.

<sup>95</sup> Seidman, *Contested Knowledge*, 203.

maintain a male-dominated order and society. Smith argued that the female perspective was categorically different from the male perspective. From another corner of the identity landscape was the Afrocentrism of Molefi Kete Asante. Asante maintained that Afrocentrism (marked by an epistemology of unity and feeling) opposed Eurocentrism (marked by binaries of self/ society, nature/ history). Both philosophies of Asante and Smith can be seen as responding to white male hegemony, albeit in differing ways.

These perspectives, however, would become challenged by the antithesis of black feminism in Patricia Hill Collins. She argued that Afrocentrism assumed a male-dominated order, while Gynocentric feminism assumed a white-dominated order. This critique marks a decisive shift from an essentialist notion of identity in Gynocentric feminism and Afrocentrism to a politics of identity, since Collins assumes a unitary self-identified subject at the heart of her criticisms. The modernist perspectives espoused by Collins, however, would be further subject to critique by Judith Butler and Kwame Anthony Appiah from the standpoint of postmodern feminism and deconstruction, respectively. Butler critiqued the whole category of “woman” as the subject of feminist philosophy, while Appiah eschewed any type of core identity—white, black, male, female—as a reliable springboard for collective identity or action. The poststructuralist criticisms of Butler and Appiah also find resonance in recent approaches to identity in Asian American studies. For example, Tina Chen argues that a politics of impersonation is vital for Asian American subjectivities while simultaneously challenging it as a construct that enacts a multiplicity of allegiances.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> According to Chen, double agency is a way for Asian Americans to paradoxically enact their identities into existence: impersonation becomes both a strategy

This very brief and broad sketch illustrates the range of differences in the third script, and specifically between the two major approaches of identity politics and a politics of performativity. If the former posits a singular, closed subject (Smith, Asante, Collins), a performative approach recognizes the inherent instability of subject formation (Appiah, Butler, Chen). Moreover, if identity politics centers around a politics of visibility, calling for greater equality, inclusion, and access for disenfranchised groups, a politics of performativity questions the very notion, nature, and possibility of that unitary identity.<sup>97</sup> Rather than insisting on a politics of visibility, a politics of performativity

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of enactment used by Asian American subjects, as well as a metatextual reading strategy. See: *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); my thanks to Benny Liew for this reference. Raising similar concerns, Viet Thanh Nguyen (*Race & Resistance: Literature & Politics in Asian America* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002]) cautions against the hermeneutical practices of Asian American Studies in reifying the very same racist categorizations that it seeks to undo by understanding the limits of Asian American studies. One solution that Kandice Chuh (*Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2003]) offers is for Asian American Studies to become a “subject-less discourse.”

<sup>97</sup> Affirming the instability of identity is not to suggest that a performative approach makes light of identity. Commenting on Butler, Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield explain, “This is not to say that we simply invent our identities in some make-believe or idle way. Butler’s understanding of the function of identity here draws on psychoanalytic theory to see the process of self-identification as part of the complex way

turns the whole notion of identity around on itself.<sup>98</sup> In this way, a performative approach to identity offers important revisions to essentializing tendencies in the identity politics movement.

All three racial scripts may be viewed on a sliding scale of essentializing to pluralizing approaches to race-ethnicity. The tactic of the first script (“Race is in our DNA”) is to naturalize race, while the second script (“We’re beyond race”) seeks to diminish the social and historical significance of race. Both, however, are fundamentally related insofar as the pendulum has swung from one extreme to another. That is, the racializing logic of the first script (“Race is in our DNA”) has been replaced by a deracializing logic in the second script (“We’re beyond race”). Implicit in both approaches is an essentializing view of race as an objective feature that can be biologically verified or culturally dismissed. The third script (“I’m \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m proud”) occupies a mediating position that can move in either direction of an essentialist

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in which we seek to make ourselves in the world. ... This understanding of identities and the patterned behaviour that proves our connection to them is known as ‘performativity.’ We do not express our inner nature in our identities so much as we perform identities in order to give the impression that we have a recognisable, orthodox, acceptable inner nature, even if it is a radical or marginalised one” (*Cultural Studies and Critical Theory*, 153).

<sup>98</sup> As Fuery and Mansfield, *Cultural Studies and Critical Theory*, 154: “To be accepted one must conform to some set of recognisable practices and appearances. This undermines the rhetoric of identity politics, which validates self-expression, coded as liberation”.

or constructivist approach to race-ethnicity. Within this typology, the non-racial pattern of interpretation examined in Chapter 1 can be located within the deracializing logic of the second script (“We’re beyond race”). In fact, much of contemporary Matthean scholarship can be located here as we shall see.

An example among Matthean critics that illustrates the deracializing logic of the second script can be found in Donald Hagner.<sup>99</sup> In his survey of new methods in Matthean studies, Hagner says that he welcomes many of the newer reader-based methods that acknowledge the context of the interpreter. But he is also wary of these approaches. He explains:

The crucial involvement of the reader in interpreting the text will remain extremely important in the future discussion of how we arrive at meaning. Without ignoring the significance of this fact, the present author remains uneasy about moving to what would seem to be the logical conclusion of complete relativity in statements about the meaning of texts. To be sure, there can be no absolutely true interpretation. We deal necessarily with probabilities. And every author is inescapably the result of her or his background and works within a specific interpretive context.<sup>100</sup>

Hagner’s critique of reader-based approaches (i.e., “the logical conclusion of complete relativity”) is a slippery slope argument. Acknowledging that meaning occurs in a context is not to say that all meaning is relative. It is rather a way of situating the interpretive process within the proper limits and constraints of the overlapping historical, social, and political contexts that the critic occupies. To be fair, Hagner acknowledges as much, but what is not clear is whether he regards his own context as a context. His reticence reveals

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<sup>99</sup> Donald Hagner, “The Gospel of Matthew,” in *The New Testament Today* (ed. Mark A. Powell; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 31-44.

<sup>100</sup> Hagner, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 36.

a deep reluctance to acknowledge the contextual nature of his own scholarship and betrays an implicit belief that historical criticism is not contextual.

However, the deracializing logic of Hagner's assertions not only elide the contextual nature of the interpretive act, but also the contextual nature of methods themselves. Hagner correctly points out that all interpretive acts are contextual, but the same holds true for the methods that produce them. Just as words do not have inherent meaning, but find their meaning based on their use in a particular context—or, the relationship between sign, signifier, and signified is arbitrary (Saussure)—so, too, the methodologies that facilitate individual interpretive acts. By decontextualizing the methodology of historical criticism, Hagner's assertion reveals the extent to which modern biblical criticism has universalized Eurocentric methods and models. In the final analysis, Hagner's comments belie the genuineness of his welcoming of these newer methods, they also cast suspicions as to its underlying logic.

But why is Hagner reluctant to acknowledge his own context? Moreover, what are the broader social, institutional, and scholarly norms that make it possible for some biblical critics to simply do “biblical criticism,” while others are said to do “African American biblical criticism,” “Latino/a biblical criticism,” or “Asian American biblical criticism”? One answer, based on the theory of deracialization, is the privileged, unmarked, deracialized location the dominant critic occupies as someone for whom the categories of race-ethnicity do not apply. In fact, Hagner's critique finds expression in a broader logic in U.S. society that allows the dominant group to remain invisible. This logic is aptly summarized in the oft-quoted words of Toni Morrison: “In this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate.” Over and against this

deracializing logic, it is imperative to call for the same level of visibility and transparency for all biblical critics, including *Native American*, *African American*, *Latino/a American*, *Asian American*, and *Euro American* critics.

In sum, outlining these three racial scripts serves several purposes. The first is to show how ethnoracial discourses in the world of consumption are not unlike ethnoracial discourses in modern biblical scholarship. Within U.S. society in particular, the discourse of race-ethnicity has been used to naturalize human difference (“Race is in our DNA”); it has been dismissed as superficial (“We’re beyond race”); it has been used as a strategy to empower new identities (“I’m \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m proud”). Likewise, in modern biblical scholarship the discourse of race-ethnicity has been used to justify racial oppression on biblical grounds (“Race is in our DNA”); it has been used to dismiss newer reader-based approaches to biblical interpretation (“We’re beyond race”); it has been used as a way to promote reader-based theories and approaches (“I’m \_\_\_\_\_ and I’m proud”). But the primary purpose of outlining these scripts has been to further elucidate the deracializing logic at work that allows dominant Matthean critics such as Donald Hagner to remain invisible in the interpretive process. By underscoring this deracializing logic at work, the implicit connection between dominant readings and reading strategies and deracialized readers and reading locations can be further appreciated.

### **Deracialized criticism in the world of consumption**

A second and more concrete way a deracializing logic can be detected is the way Matthean scholars discourse about Christian origins. Arguably the most significant area of research in the modern history of Matthean studies is the *intra/ extra muros* debate

regarding the socio-religious location of the Matthean community. This debate focuses on the precise nature of the post-70 conflict between the Matthean community and the Judaism of its day: should the Matthean community be understood *intra muros* as a “Christian-Jewish” sect within the bounds of first century Judaism or *extra muros* as a “Jewish-Christian” group that has severed all ties with Judaism and now exists independently?

The standard view that has been dominant for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is that the Matthean community has completely severed ties with the synagogue across the street.<sup>101</sup> The Matthean community, then, is a Christian group that no longer has any affiliation with Judaism. A number of texts are cited in support of the *extra muros* position. For example, Paul Foster points to Matthew’s programmatic statement on the Mosaic law in

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<sup>101</sup> Scholars who take this position include Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992); Donald A. Hagner, “Matthew: Apostate, Reformer, Revolutionary?” *New Testament Studies* 49.2 (2003): 193-209; idem., “Another Look at “The Parting of the Ways,” in *Earliest Christian History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 381-427; Douglas R. A. Hare, “How Jewish Is The Gospel Of Matthew” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62.2 (2000): 264-277; idem., “Matthew: Christian Judaism or Jewish Christianity?” in *The Face of the New Testament: A Survey of Recent Research* (eds., Scott McKnight and Grant R. Osborne; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 264-82. For a review of 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship on this problem, see: Graham Stanton, “The Origin and Purpose of Matthew’s Gospel: Matthean Scholarship from 1945-1980,” *ANRW* 2.25.3 (1985): 1890-1951.



Matt 5:17-20,<sup>102</sup> the repeated reference to “*their* synagogues” (ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν, Matt 4:23; 9:35; 10:17),<sup>103</sup> and the Gentile mission in Matt 28 as evidence for the breach between the Matthean community and first century Judaism.<sup>104</sup> These three reasons—along with the sharp critique of the chief priests, scribes, and elders in Matt 23—point to the likelihood that the Matthean community has turned away from Judaism toward the Gentile world.<sup>105</sup>

On the other side of the debate is the less commonly held *intra muros* position, but one that has been gaining more support in recent scholarship. J. Andrew Overman and David C. Sim are representative of this view. Using the insights of social-scientific criticism, Overman argues that the Matthean community is comprised mainly of Jews who are in strident competition with post-70 “formative Judaism.”<sup>106</sup> Sim, who prefers the term “Christian Judaism,” locates the Matthean community as a deviant sect involved in intense debates with the synagogue across the street.<sup>107</sup> However intense these debates

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<sup>102</sup> Paul Foster, *Community, Law And Mission In Matthew's Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 144-217.

<sup>103</sup> Foster, *Community, Law And Mission In Matthew's Gospel*, 73, 255.

<sup>104</sup> Foster, *Community, Law And Mission In Matthew's Gospel*, 218-52.

<sup>105</sup> For further discussion, see: David L. Balch, *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

<sup>106</sup> J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World Of The Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990).

<sup>107</sup> Scholars who take this position include David C. Sim, *The Gospel Of Matthew And Christian Judaism: The History And Social Setting Of The Matthean Community*

may have been amidst the Matthean community, Sim finds sufficient evidence to conclude that a significant breach had not yet occurred. Overman and Sim represent a growing number of Matthean scholars who argue that the Matthean community represents one of the many diverse strands of first century Judaism. Yet despite having been discussed over the last fifty years, the Matthean *intra/ extra muros* debate has yet to be resolved.

My primary interest in this debate is not to defend either position, but to show how the dominant *extra muros* position that has held sway for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is yet another significant example of the deracializing logic at work in Matthean studies. There are two notable aspects of this debate for our purposes.

The first aspect is terminological. Crucial to this debate is the very definition of Christianity and Judaism in Matthew: what exactly constitutes Christianness and Jewishness, what are their differences, and where precisely does the Matthean community fall within the spectrum? The answers have been debated *ad nauseam* delineating any number of Judaisms (e.g., rabbinic Judaism, Hellenistic Judaism,

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(Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998). Other scholars in this camp include: Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and more recently, Anders Runesson, "Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History As Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127.1 (2008): 95-132; idem., "Judging Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew: Between 'Othering' and Inclusion," in *Jesus, Matthew's Gospel and Early Christianity: Studies in Memory of Graham N. Stanton* (eds. Daniel M. Gurtner, Joel Willitts, and Richard A. Burrige; New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 133-151.

Christian Judaism, Enochic Judaism, Pharisaic Judaism, formative Judaism, normative Judaism, apostolic Judaism, Matthean Judaism) and Christianities (e.g., Jewish Christianity, Gentile Christianity, Palestinian Christianity, early Christianity, apostolic Christianity, Matthean Christianity). But there are at least three underlying concerns with the terminology that frames the *intra/ extra muros* debate.

The first concern is that neither term—“Judaism” (Ἰουδαϊσμός) or “Christianity” (Χριστιανός)—actually occurs in Matthew. In fact, these terms are rarely attested in Christian texts from the first two centuries C.E.<sup>108</sup> But most tellingly, they do not at all occur in the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Secondly, given their absence in the Matthean text, the use of these terms in scholarly discussion raises certain questions about their historical validity. According to Anthony Saldarini, for example, both terms are historically suspect in the first century. He writes: “the use of the terms Judaism and Christianity in this context as the denominators for two separate religions is a major historical anachronism and category error.”<sup>109</sup> Third, there is a subsequent logical

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. Gal 1:13-14 for Ἰουδαϊσμός; Acts 11:26 for Χριστιανός.

<sup>109</sup> Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 2. Cf. Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations,” 100: “the very terms ‘Jewish Christianity’ and/ or ‘Jewish Christians’ must also be mentioned as problematic, since they tend to obscure what they intend to denote, namely, a belief in Jesus as the Messiah embodied in communities existing within the religious system of Judaism... ‘Christian’ as a name for Christ-believers in the first century is problematic, since it carries with it many meanings from later centuries.” See also, France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 101. The use of these terms by Matthean scholars is often times unclear and

concern to consider as well. If the terms “Judaism” and “Christianity” do not occur in Matthew and are historically flawed for demarcating two separate religions in the first century, then using these terms is a moot point. It is to have already decided the matter. The very definition one presupposes not only influences the analysis of the data, but is itself the condition of the subsequent investigation.

If the terms that frame the debate do not actually occur in Matthew, but are also historically and logically suspect, where, then, do they originate, and why have they become so entrenched in the history of Matthean scholarship? Strictly-speaking, an answer to this question will not be found in the world of production, that is, when examining actual scholarly reconstructions themselves. For the terms are not emic but etic categories with respect to the Matthean community. Logically, then, an answer can only be found with a view to both worlds of production and consumption because the terms are etic categories that Matthean scholars have imposed in their analysis of the Matthean community. Therefore, what is necessary is an ideological view that makes sense of the *extra muros* position within the discourse of Christian self-definition in the world of consumption—not merely the world of production.

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unhelpful. E.g., David Sim, “Christianity and Ethnicity in the Gospel of Matthew,” 185: “In other words, there was no expectation that Gentiles were to become Jews in order to become (Matthean) Christians.” Cf. 191: “Matthew’s position on this question need not remain a theoretical proposition. He provides a concrete example of the manner in which Matthean Christians (as Jews) are to deal with those of the Gentile world, and the role model is none other than Jesus himself.”

The second notable aspect of this debate, of necessity then, is ideological. It is therefore necessary to foreground the dominant Euro-American readers and readings locations in the world of consumption. A view from the world of consumption reveals a deracializing logic at work beneath the surface of the *extra muros* position. Underlying the *extra muros* position is the dominant representation of Christianity as being universal and non-ethnic. However, according to the theory of deracialization previously outlined, it is this very logic of negation, the logic of the non-racial, that requires investigation. To raise the issue in the form of a question: according to the *extra muros* position, what is the logic that maintains the tension between Christian universalism, on the one hand, and its non-ethnic character, on the other? Moreover, if the connection between the two is not logically necessary, why did they happen to become forged in modernity and imposed on the Matthean community?

One very important answer that Denise Buell and Susannah Heschel, among others, have offered is Christian anti-Judaism.<sup>110</sup> Ernst Renan's 1863 *Life of Jesus* occupies a prominent position in this history.<sup>111</sup> Renan is largely credited with

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<sup>110</sup> Denise K. Buell, "Constructing Early Christian Identities Using Ethnic Reasoning." *Annali Di Storia Dell'esegesi* 24.1 (2007): 87-101; here 88: "Early Christians use ethnic reasoning to legitimize various forms of Christianness as the universal, most authentic manifestation of humanity; ethnic reasoning also offers Christians both a way to define themselves relative to 'outsiders' and to compete with other 'insiders' to assert the superiority of their varying visions of Christianness."

<sup>111</sup> Denise K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 10: "For Renan, Jesus was an *Aryan Jew*,

introducing the language of race to define Christians as a racial group distinct from the Jews.<sup>112</sup> As Buell has persuasively demonstrated, it is precisely the discourse of Christian universalism that shaped scholarly representations of early Christianity as non-racial. But what this definition is predicated on, and indeed requires, is a racialized caricature of a

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and his main rivals, the Pharisees, were Semitic Jews. This racial mapping allows Renan to portray Christianity as arising naturally out of Judaism, while his category ‘Aryan Jew’ also permits him to write that Christianity ‘over time rid itself of nearly everything it took from the race, so that those who consider Christianity to be the Aryan religion par excellence are in many respects correct.’” Cf. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 346.

<sup>112</sup> So Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*, 38: “Renan’s contribution was an argument of racial purification through mutability: Jesus purged himself of Judaism, as did Christianity, and emerged transformed from Jew to Aryan. Renan’s contribution was to convert discomfort over Jesus’ Jewishness into a further indication of the Aryan genius, which knew how to transform an odious Hebrew monotheism into a glorious Christianity. The cleverness of Renan’s argument was that it made room for viewing monotheism as a divine gift and Christianity as the successfully human activity of transforming and enriching it on behalf of the Aryan race. In his interpretation, history became a tool of race, and race was a matter of purification and protection against contamination. More specifically, Aryans were the race superior to Semites but were in danger of doom through a degeneracy contracted via pollution.”

parochial and ethnic Judaism. In this way, Buell has perceptively identified the logic of anti-Judaism in the discourse of Christian universalism.

However, another important answer that merits equal consideration comes from the theory of deracialization. For if any explicit act of racialization involves an implicit act of deracialization, then it is not sufficient to examine the racialized-other (i.e., a racialized Judaism). It is also necessary to examine the implicit construction of the deracialized-self in the discourse of Christian universalism (i.e., a deracialized Christianity).

From this perspective, the discourse of Christian universalism is also complicit in the construction of whiteness in the world of consumption. Here, in the deep recesses of the *extra muros* position in the world of consumption, the logic of white invisibility and the discourse of Christian universalism are merged in such a way that whiteness and Christianness come to share similar properties. Both are non-racial. Both are universal. Both are invisible. But the connection is more complicated than simply equating the two (i.e., Christianness *is* whiteness/ whiteness *is* Christianness), since both are sourced in the same deracializing logic that has become the hallmark of the idealized Euro-American self. Tracing the Matthean narrative vis-à-vis the *extra muros* position suggests another answer. Indeed, it is the very process the *extra muros* position presupposes, along with the dominant way it has been coded, that deserves special attention.

The process that the Matthean community undergoes is a veritable process of deracialization. Where it was once ethnic and exclusive, being circumscribed by the particular boundaries of Judaism, the Matthean community now becomes non-ethnic and inclusive. According to the *extra muros* position, how did this deracializing process

occur? The Matthean community became Christian. The *extra muros* position, then, is part and parcel of the dominant narrative that represents Christianity as non-ethnic and universal. Moreover, the way this narrative functions in the world of consumption is noteworthy. In the world of production this discourse functions as a Christian narrative of how the once-ethnic Matthean community becomes non-ethnic (i.e., universalized as white). But in the world of consumption, this same discourse functions as a narrative of how the dominant-self becomes non-ethnic (i.e., universalized as Christian). In this way, the dominant definition of Christianity is not only sanitized of ethnoracial particularity, but is itself the means of that sanitation for the deracialized self. Indeed, it is precisely through the discourse of Christian universalism that the dominant white-self becomes deracialized (i.e., Christianness *becomes* whiteness/ whiteness *becomes* Christianness).

This theoretical account of the deracialized-self finds concrete embodiment in the Matthean community. For example, according to the dominant *extra muros* position, Matthew is read as a narrative that actually plays out the religious breach between Judaism and the Matthean community. In fact, one recent reading of Matthew goes as far as to claim that “Jewish salvation” initially prophesied in Matt 1:21, by the end of the Gospel, actually turns out to mean “Gentile salvation,” thereby excluding the Jews.<sup>113</sup> A universal, non-ethnic Christianity swallows up a particular, ethnic Judaism.

There is, then, to summarize, a deracializing logic at work in the discourse of Christian origins, particularly the *extra muros* position that defines the Matthean community as a non-ethnic entity that exists independently of first century Judaism. As

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<sup>113</sup> Karl McDaniel, *Experiencing Irony in the First Gospel: Suspense, Surprise, and Curiosity* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 116-117.



we have seen, not only does this debate show how deeply entrenched the religious-theological framework of Matthean scholarship is, drawing on religious categories that are marginally attested in extant early Christian texts, but it also conceals a dominant ethnoracial logic that simultaneously racializes Judaism and deracializes Christianity. What is at stake in the “parting of the ways” debate is not only the racialized-other, but also the deracialized-self, that is, the white Christian-self as such. Based on this analysis, the connection between dominant readings and reading strategies and deracialized readers and reading locations can be further appreciated.

### **Deracialized representations in the world of consumption**

Having identified the deracializing logic at work in the way Matthean scholars discourse about race-ethnicity and Christian origins, I turn finally to situate this deracializing logic in a broader economy of representations. My aim is to show how whiteness and Christianness are aligned in the default representations of Jesus in the world of consumption. In the realms of official, academic, popular, and indigenous knowledge, deracialized representations are least visible, implicit, visible, and most explicit, respectively.<sup>114</sup> Yet the basic deracializing ideology remains intact through its various manifestations—whether in the form of the political ideology that America is a

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<sup>114</sup> This typology of knowledge production is adapted from Clare Birchall, *Knowledge Goes Pop* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006); my thanks to Daniel Patte for this reference.

Christian nation (official knowledge);<sup>115</sup> the Euro-American quest for the Historical Jesus in dominant biblical scholarship (academic knowledge);<sup>116</sup> the portrayal of Jesus with blonde hair and blue eyes in film and artwork (popular knowledge);<sup>117</sup> or popular

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<sup>115</sup> For example, in the 2008 presidential campaign, John McCain was quoted as saying, “the Constitution established the United States of America as a Christian nation” when in fact the Constitution makes no explicit claim regarding the relationship between the U.S. and Christianity. See: John Fea, *Was America Founded As a Christian Nation? A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), xiv.

<sup>116</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza’s, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, 12.

<sup>117</sup> Deracialized representations of Jesus in Hollywood films are part of a larger genre called the white savior complex, which Hernan Vera and Andrew Gordon (*Screen Saviors: Hollywood Fictions of Whiteness* [Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003], 33-34) describe as follows: “The messianic white self is the redeemer of the weak, the great leader who saves blacks from slavery or oppression, rescues people of color from poverty and disease, or leads Indians in battle for their dignity and survival. This is a narcissistic fantasy found in many Hollywood movies. Often the white messiah is an alienated hero, a misfit within his own society, mocked and rejected until he becomes a leader of a minority group or of foreigners. He finds himself by self-sacrifice to liberate the natives. White messiahs are overwhelmingly male; women do not seem to qualify for this exalted status. Often the white outsider is instantly worshipped by the natives, treated like visiting royalty or a god... This is a reflection of American civic religion, which transforms collective endeavors into the battle of a lone individual against the forces of organized evil... The messiah fantasies are essentially grandiose, exhibitionistic, and

American iconography that represents mythic figures such as Santa and Jesus culturally marked as white (indigenous knowledge). Only when the patterns and practices of modern biblical scholarship are situated within this continuum—as a form of knowledge produced in a larger economy of representations—does the dominant deracialized representation of Jesus emerge as deeply problematic. When viewed within a larger economy of representations in the world of production the non-racial pattern can be seen as a strategic form of knowledge production where whiteness, by way of Christianness, transcends race-ethnicity, by way of whiteness—both of which are held in paradoxical tension by the deracializing ideology of white invisibility. In what follows, I provide a handful examples in popular and indigenous knowledge as an illustration.

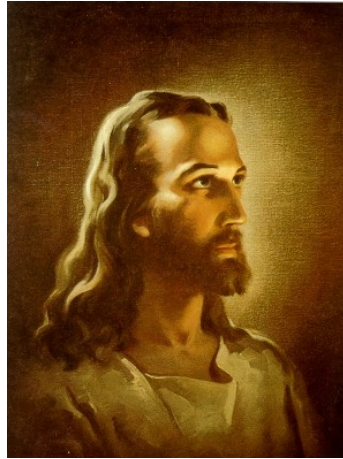
In popular knowledge, three examples may suffice. The quintessential image of the white Jesus is Warner Sallman's 1940 *The Head of Christ*.<sup>118</sup> By 1944, over 14 million prints of the image were sold by Christian publishers and marketers “in every conceivable fashion, placing it on bookmarks, calendars, Bibles, plates, stickers, buttons,

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narcissistic. In the white mind, racial others do not exist on their own terms but only as what Kohut calls ‘a self-object,’ bound up with the white self.”

<sup>118</sup> For background on Warner Sallman as an artist, see: Jack R. Lundbom, *Master Painter: Warner E. Sallman* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999).

and even lamps.”<sup>119</sup> Responses to the image included a range of interpellative responses: “That’s Jesus”; “That’s Him”; “There He is.”<sup>120</sup>



By the 1960s, *The Head of Christ* was the dominant representation of Jesus in the U.S., though not without some controversy.<sup>121</sup> But it quickly became the iconic American image of Jesus, being adopted by American Protestants, Catholics, and Mormons. Sallman’s *The Head of Christ* was certainly not the first visual representation of Jesus in the U.S., but its impact can be seen in subsequent white Jesus representations in American society.

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<sup>119</sup> Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God & the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 208.

<sup>120</sup> Blum and Harvey, *Color of Christ*, 209. Image courtesy of Google Images: <https://images.google.com/>

<sup>121</sup> Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 189: “According to the Protestant elite, evangelical or not, whatever art that Protestants had let into their churches or put in their homes was theologically suspect because it feminized the divine.”

For example, the blond hair, blue-eyed white Jesus has been the standard representation in modern Jesus films. As the spate of recent films suggests, the making of Jesus films remains a productive industry.<sup>122</sup> Biblical scholars have turned their attention to modern Jesus films and incorporated film studies as a subject of analysis.<sup>123</sup> Many of these depictions follow in the tradition of Sallman's *The Head of Christ*. The most recent example is the "Son of God" film:<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> For example: *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964); *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965); *Godspell* (1973); *The Messiah* (1976); *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977); *Jesus* (1999); *The Miracle Maker* (2000); *The Passion of the Christ* (2004); *Son of God* (2014). For further discussion, see: Adele Reinhartz, "Jesus Films" in *Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (London: Continuum, 2009), 211-221.

<sup>123</sup> See, for example: Matthew S. Rindge, Erin Runions, and Richard S. Ascough, "Teaching the Bible and Film: Pedagogical Promises, Pitfalls, and Proposals," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 13.2 (2010): 140-155; V. Henry T. Nguyen, "The Quest For The Cinematic Jesus: Scholarly Explorations In Jesus Films," *Currents In Biblical Research* 8.2 (2010): 183-206; Gregory J. Watkins, *Teaching Religion and Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>124</sup> Image courtesy of Google Images: <https://images.google.com/>



These images are significant not only in establishing whiteness as a social norm, but also in wiring the modern racial imaginary. David Morgan explains:

At the heart of popular response to Sallman's Christ is a sense of reassurance in gazing on what one immediately recognizes as "the savior I always knew." Every time an image of Jesus appears that does not contradict the long-standing paradigm of his physical appearance as a light-skinned Euro-American man...the paradigm becomes more archetypal, more transcendent, less historical. Each layer of visual sediment strengthens the persuasive power of Euro-American visual piety by corroborating the "truth" of Sallman's *Head of Christ* or any other "portrait" resembling it.

Each subsequent image that corresponds to Sallman's depiction becomes a reiterative citation that visually interpellates the white aesthetic represented in *The Head of Christ*.

With the widespread dissemination of Sallman's *The Head of Christ*, the figure of the white Jesus has become emblematic of the fusion of Christianness and whiteness.

This is demonstrated in how alternative representations are received. Morgan continues:

When the Caucasian appearance of Christ is replaced by characteristic features of other races, the visual negotiation of meaning that occurs in any portrayal of Christ is laid bare. The strangeness of these images to white viewers helps disclose the very artifice of representation, that is, how easily one's own race is naturalized as the appropriate basis for depicting any figure who wasn't light-skinned. The act of representation is an act of interpretation, a subtle racial appropriation.

The implicit nature of the ethnoracial norm that is established becomes evident only through the destabilizing depiction of a non-white Jesus. Morgan's analysis underscores

the performative nature of the white Jesus representation where the figure of Jesus serves as a proxy for whiteness. In fact, so closely have whiteness and Christianness been fused, that to call into question the legitimacy of the one is to call into question the propriety of the other. A further implication in this is that not only is Jesus made to advance whiteness, but also whiteness conversely becomes a portal for correct understandings of Jesus. So pervasive is this connection that Fox News anchor, Megyn Kelly, recently referred to Jesus' whiteness as a point of comparison to establish the fact that Santa, too, was white.<sup>125</sup> This is an interesting gaffe not only because it reveals the ideological nature of race (i.e., applying racial-ethnic categories to a fictional character), but also because it shows just how ubiquitous and deeply embedded the representation of a white Jesus is in the modern racial imaginary. These are just a few examples of how the deracializing logic fits within the knowledge economy of popular knowledge.

In indigenous knowledge, one example may suffice.<sup>126</sup> If one were to perform a Google Images search for "black Jesus," these images would populate the search.<sup>127</sup>

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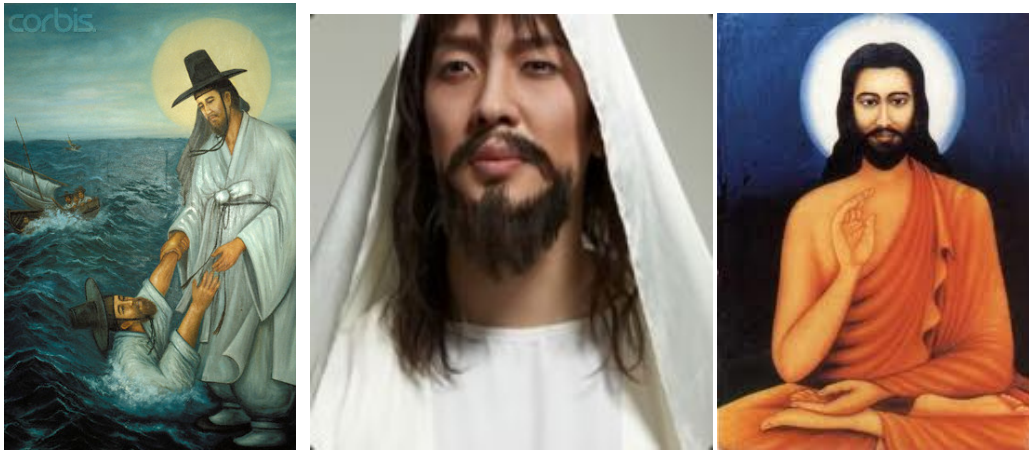
<sup>125</sup> "Megyn Kelly Addresses 'White Santa' Comments," *Fox News* n.p. [cited 17 June 2014]. Online: <http://nation.foxnews.com/2013/12/21/megyn-kelly-addresses-white-santa-comments>

<sup>126</sup> For other historical examples, see: Jerome Walters, *One Aryan Nation Under God: Exposing the New Racial Extremists* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2000); Chester L. Quarles, *Christian Identity: The Aryan American Bloodline Religion* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2004).

<sup>127</sup> The following images courtesy of Google Images: <https://images.google.com/>



Similarly, here is a sampling of images for “Asian Jesus”:



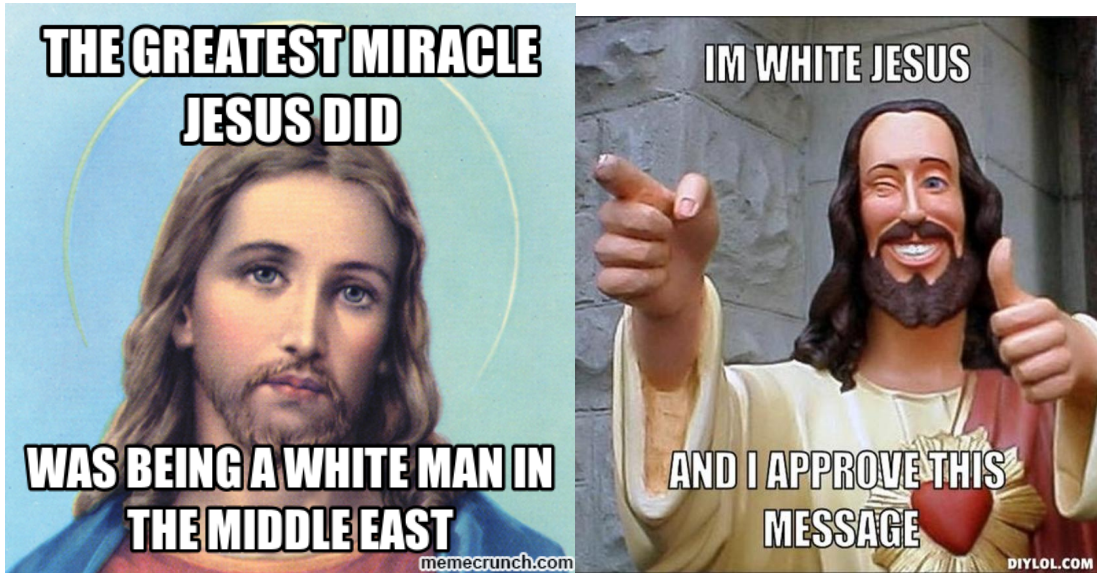
But if one were to perform a search for “Jesus,” the following images would appear:

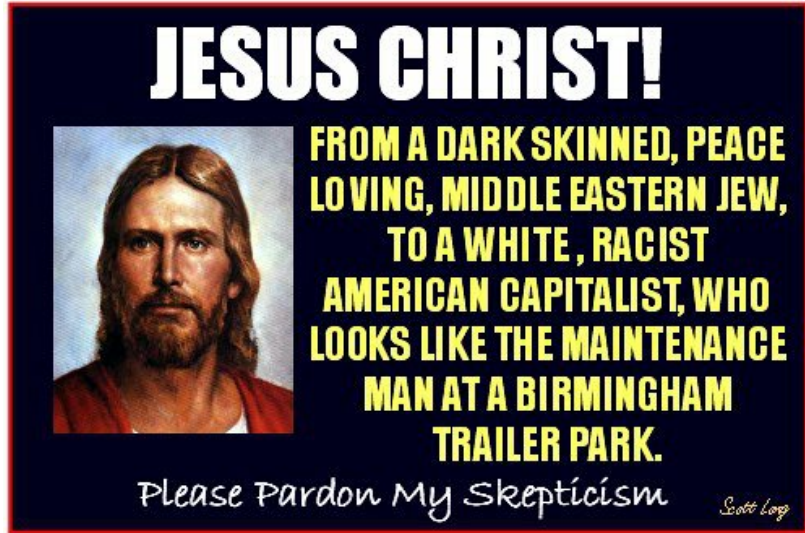


As these search results demonstrate, the explicitly racialized “black Jesus” and “Asian Jesus” stand in sharp contrast to the implicit, assumed, and unmarked “(white) Jesus.”



The following memes—many of which are widely circulated through social media on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—illustrate indigenous and vulgar ways in which the white Jesus image is signified in popular U.S. culture:





The ideological issue at root in these examples of indigenous knowledge is the normative logic of white invisibility and white privilege in dominant representations of Jesus.

My larger point in offering examples of various white Jesus representations in the realms of popular and indigenous knowledge is to locate scholarly representations as a form of knowledge production. From the standpoint of the knowledge economy in the world of consumption, the deracializing tendency in modern biblical scholarship can be seen as fitting within a larger pattern. In the world of consumption, then, the non-racial pattern of interpretation in Matthean scholarship is essentially a form of knowledge

production. Only when the trends and norms of U.S. biblical scholarship are located along side of other deracialized representations can the connection between dominant readings and deracialized readers be fully appreciated.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that there is more to the non-racial pattern of interpretation than meets the eye. As Chapter 1 demonstrated, dominant readings are methodologically produced by the reading strategies that locate the interpretive process solely in the world of production. However, as this chapter has tried to further demonstrate, there is a sense in which this is only a partial explanation. Dominant readings and reading strategies are superficial only to the dominant readers and reading locations in the world of consumption. When the non-racial pattern of Matthean scholarship is viewed as an objective rendering of Jesus as he was in the first century world of production, the dominant non-racial representation is rather prosaic and uncontroversial. In this light, religious-theological and socio-political readings appear to be objective scholarly attempts of rendering Jesus as he actually was in the world of production.

However, when viewed from both worlds of production and consumption, a very different explanation begins to emerge. When the artificial veil that separates the two is lifted, modern interpretations of Jesus can be seen as calibrated to a modern deracializing logic in the world of consumption that reinforces the commonplace definition of Christianity as transcending ethnoracial particularity. Implicit in this discourse is the very construction of the deracialized-self as concomitant with and contingent upon the explicit

construction of the racialized-other. Moreover, when situated in the world of consumption, dominant scholarly representations of Jesus can be seen as conforming to a broader economy of deracialized representations that conform to various types of official, academic, popular, and indigenous knowledge.

Despite the best intentions of dominant biblical scholars to be neutral and objective, the view from the world of consumption suggests otherwise. In the final analysis, the deracializing logic is not strictly about history, facts, historical facts, or the facts of history. It is an ideology. The underlying problem of the non-racial pattern, therefore, is not only methodological, as Chapter 1 argued, but also profoundly ideological.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONSTRUCTING AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH: MINORITIZED READERS AND READING STRATEGIES

#### **Introduction**

The argument up to this point has traced, in deconstructive fashion, the dominant narrative surrounding Jesus' identification as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*. Chapter 1 established the pattern of non-racial readings of the title and identified a methodological link between the history of interpretation and the history of methods. Chapter 2 proceeded to situate the non-racial pattern by further identifying an ideological link between dominant readings and reading strategies, on the one hand, and dominant readers and reading locations, on the other. Specifically, there is an implicit deracializing logic that ties the exegetical production of the dominant narrative to its ideological consumption. From this vantage point, the representation of a racially unmarked Jesus reveals a strategic alignment between whiteness and Christianness through a politics of invisibility. Yet this unmarking is essentially a form of privilege for the deracialized-self, eschewing the very category of race-ethnicity as only applicable to the racialized-other. In this way, Matthean scholarship can be seen as subtly producing and perpetuating a deracializing logic that drives the dominant narrative of a non-ethnic Christianity as transcending ethnoracial particularity. This summary brings the first half of the project to a close and serves as the basis for developing a constructive proposal towards an alternative narrative.

Chapter 3 marks this constructive turn in two ways. First, I engage in critical dialogue with a dominant critic's recent attempt to sort through the politics of race-

ethnicity in two minoritized representations of the Historical Jesus. As such, I am not primarily interested in the precise details of each minoritized proposal so much as the substance of the critique issued against them, which, as I will attempt to show, unwittingly reinscribes the ideology of white invisibility. So while the argument engages in deconstruction yet again, my primary aim is nevertheless constructive: to pinpoint how and where modern biblical scholarship continues to be mired in and haunted by the thorny problematic of race-ethnicity, even in the most constructive efforts to move past it. Second, I present a proposal for moving the conversation forward in a constructive manner. Reflecting both aims, Chapter 3 is organized in two main parts.

In the first half of the chapter, I engage an important essay by Jeffrey Siker entitled, “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus: Case Studies in the ‘Black Christ,’ the ‘Mestizo Christ,’ and White Critique.”<sup>128</sup> Siker’s primary focus centers around the “color of Jesus”—or, more specifically, the interaction between the quest for the Historical Jesus and two case studies in which minority depictions of the Historical Jesus have been racialized: James Cone’s black Jesus and Virgilio Elizondo’s mestizo Jesus.

Siker is an important interlocutor at this stage of the project for two reasons. First, he delivers a pointed critique that rightly problematizes the essentializing character of the black and mestizo Jesuses. At the same time, he also acknowledges the modern representation of the white Jesus with blonde hair and blue eyes that is ubiquitous in the racial imaginary of the West. By juxtaposing the minority claims of Cone and Elizondo

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<sup>128</sup> Jeffrey Siker, “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus: Case Studies in the ‘Black Christ,’ the ‘Mestizo Christ,’ and White Critique,” *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007): 26-53.

over and against the dominant representation of the white Jesus, Siker identifies a theoretical impasse of competing ethnoracial representations, even as he gestures towards ways of moving forward.

Second, Siker is an important interlocutor for an ethnoracial bias that his critique telegraphs. In fact, as we shall see, his overall critique of Cone and Elizondo reinforces a politics of deracialization and, in this way, fails to overcome the impasse of competing representations. But if Siker's proposal does not go far enough, what, then, is the way forward? Additionally, if the minority black and brown Jesuses are not viable alternatives to the dominant representation of the white Jesus—insofar as they recapitulate an essentialist understanding of race-ethnicity—is a solution even possible? Identifying the strengths and limitations of Siker's analysis not only renders visible the ideology of white invisibility, but also points to ways of moving beyond the theoretical impasse of competing ethnoracial representations of Jesus.

In the second half of the chapter, I present what I see as the proper basis for moving the conversation forward (i.e., what I critique Siker for not sufficiently addressing)—an approach that directly responds to, rather than circumvents, the dominant deracialized representation of Jesus. Specifically, if the underlying problem of the dominant narrative is not only methodological as Chapter 1 argued (i.e., dominant criticism), but also ideological as Chapter 2 argued (i.e., dominant critics), creating a gulf between the world of production and the world of consumption, then it is necessary to introduce other interlocutors into the conversation who are situated in the world of consumption: minoritized readers and reading strategies. For if the dominant narrative is produced by dominant biblical criticism, resulting in a deracialized representation of

Jesus, the promise of minority biblical criticism is engineering a counter-representation of sorts. One way this might be accomplished is to draw on the collective experiences of minoritized groups, as a way of coming together, in order to rethink the very terminology and meaning of race-ethnicity. My proposal to move beyond the impasse, in short, is not by way of a black, brown, red, or yellow Jesus, but by way of a *minoritized Jesus*—a heterogeneous representation of Jesus as a minoritized Judean based on the collective experiences of racialization by U.S. minority groups, including Native Americans, African Americans, Latino/a Americans, and Asian Americans.

This proposal provides a segue from the methodological and ideological critique of Chapters 1-2 and sets the stage for the project's final task in Chapter 4—the articulation of an alternative narrative of Jesus' crucifixion as a racialized-other in the Matthean passion narrative.

### **The black Jesus and mestizo Jesus**

After noting the recent flood of third wave scholarship on the Historical Jesus, Siker turns to an examination of minority critic and theologian James Cone for whom the Historical Jesus is of paramount importance. The significance of Cone's desire to establish a reliable historical foundation for the black Jesus is not lost on Siker. He quotes Cone in saying: "If it can be shown that the New Testament contains no reliable historical information about Jesus of Nazareth or that the kerygma... bears no relation to the historical Jesus, then Christian theology is an impossible enterprise."<sup>129</sup> The relevant

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<sup>129</sup> James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 115; cited in Siker, "Historicizing a racialized Jesus," 31.



connection here is the precise mode of criticism: Cone is not working on a historical level per se (i.e., arguing that the Historical Jesus was racially black), but on a theological level. Siker explains:

One could say, then, that Cone does not so much *historicize* a racialized Jesus as he *racializes* the Christ of Faith. Namely, he does not retroject a racial identity onto Jesus, rather he projects the historical Jesus onto a racial identity. He does not map blackness onto Jesus; he maps Jesus onto blackness (emphasis original).<sup>130</sup>

In Siker's reading of Cone, the basis for Jesus' blackness is established by way of analogy—the Historical Jesus' identification with poverty and oppression presents a compelling parallel to the experiences of African Americans today.<sup>131</sup> Jesus is therefore rendered black by way of an “ideological move, a theological interpretation”<sup>132</sup> of “who Jesus *is* here and now, in *this* time and in *this* place” (emphasis original).<sup>133</sup> On this assumption, Siker finds Cone's black Jesus to hinge on a loose and tenuous connection that collapses first century oppression with the struggles associated with modern day blackness. But not only is Cone's construction of the black Jesus tangentially tied to the Historical Jesus, it is also based on a white-black dualism that simply inverts the racial order such that “ruling metaphors (white, black, brown) simply shift rather than being

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<sup>130</sup> Siker, “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus,” 32.

<sup>131</sup> Siker regards this connection to be more class-based than race-based: “If anything, Cone ‘classicizes’ Jesus, locating him among the poor and the oppressed as a social class” (“Historicizing a Racialized Jesus,” 32).

<sup>132</sup> Siker, “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus,” 32.

<sup>133</sup> Siker, “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus,” 33.

ultimately subverted.”<sup>134</sup> For these reasons, Siker, though appreciative of Cone in many ways, is critical of the dubious historical rationale undergirding Cone’s black Jesus.

If Siker is critically deferential to Cone, he is far less congenial in his reading of Elizondo. According to Siker, Cone’s minimalist approach to the Historical Jesus stands in marked contrast to Elizondo’s maximalist approach. Elizondo’s basic claim is that Jesus was not merely a Jew, but a mixed Galilean-Jew, who, as such, was a mestizo.<sup>135</sup> To quote Elizondo in his own words:

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<sup>134</sup> Siker, “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus,” 50. Elsewhere, Siker says with reference to Victor Anderson’s critique of how black theology simultaneously opposes and requires whiteness: “Thus, while Cone can in theory concede that the notion of a ‘black Christ’ is a symbolic Christological title that may not always be the most appropriate one, in practice it is difficult to see how Cone can articulate his Christology apart from the backdrop of whiteness from which and over against which Cone’s own theology emerges and develops” (“Historicizing a Racialized Jesus,” 35).

<sup>135</sup> It should be noted that there are a number of ethnoracial terms (e.g., biracial, multiracial, transracial) and analogues (e.g., hybrid, mestizo, mulatto, hapa) for describing the phenomenon of mixed races. For an overview of critical mixed-race studies and critical ethnic studies, see: Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, *Mixed Race’ Studies: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004). See also two recent journals: *Journal of Critical Mixed Raced Studies*, sponsored by UC Santa Barbara’s Department of Sociology, and *Journal of the Critical Ethnic Studies Association*, published by the University of Minnesota Press.

By growing up in Galilee, Jesus was a cultural *mestizo*, assuming unto himself the great traditions that flourished in his home territory...Culturally and linguistically speaking, Jesus was a *mestizo*. And we dare say that to those of his time, he must have even appeared to be a biological *mestizo*—the child of a Jewish girl and a Roman father...He appeared to be a half-breed.<sup>136</sup>

Siker takes Elizondo to task for his reconstruction of the Historical Jesus, and specifically his reconstruction of first century Galilee. Siker finds Elizondo's reading of first century Palestine vis-à-vis modern mestizo culture to be tendentious and charges him with anachronistically projecting a mestizo identity onto the Historical Jesus.<sup>137</sup> Siker argues that there is little evidence to support the claim that Jesus was a cultural and biological mestizo. Moreover, he is critical of the way Elizondo privileges mestizo identity by elevating it to the status of most fully human, which, as with Cone, "raises questions of whether Elizondo is simply replacing one hegemony with another."<sup>138</sup> But worse than the charge of anachronism and essentialism, Siker detects an even greater problem—Elizondo's reconstruction of rural Galilean Judaism as being sharply pitted against a corrupt Judaism of Jerusalem smacks of anti-Judaism.<sup>139</sup> For these reasons, Siker finds Elizondo's construction of the mestizo Jesus to be ultimately flawed. He concludes that both Cone and Elizondo represent two case studies of how Jesus—or, the Historical Jesus, to be precise—has been erroneously racialized.

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<sup>136</sup> Virgilio P. Elizondo, *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 79; cited in Siker, "Historicizing a Racialized Jesus," 36, 38.

<sup>137</sup> Siker, "Historicizing a Racialized Jesus," 32, 40-2.

<sup>138</sup> Siker, "Historicizing a Racialized Jesus," 46.

<sup>139</sup> Siker, "Historicizing a Racialized Jesus," 38-43.

Siker's sharp critique raises a number of valid points that deserve proper acknowledgment. For example, he correctly points out the liberties Cone and Elizondo take in their historical reconstructions. Cone's conflation of first century oppression with modern day blackness is simplistic, while Elizondo's reconstruction of first century Galilee is equally problematic. Moreover, both Cone and Elizondo appeal to modern ethnoracial categories that, when applied to the Historical Jesus, are technically anachronistic, albeit in differing ways. For if Cone racializes the Christ of Faith in light of modern day blackness, then Elizondo errs by mapping the modern mestizo back onto the Jesus of History. These are all valid points insofar as they go and corroborate Siker's conclusion that both Cone and Elizondo racialize the Historical Jesus.

However, there are also a number of questions that open up a different avenue of inquiry. For example, in the final section of the essay, Siker offers an important caveat that reveals a peculiar omission in his overall critique:

First and foremost, the work of such theologians as Cone and Elizondo shows us *the degree to which we already operate with a Jesus who comes to us "pre-racialized" as white*. This is one reason why claims about Jesus as "black" or "mestizo" stand out as they do (emphasis mine).<sup>140</sup>

Siker's concession raises a series of questions that require further investigation: What is intended by the designation "pre-racialized"? Does the pre-racialized white Jesus, being the dominant representation, have logical priority over the black, brown, red, and yellow Jesus? Or does white pre-racialization take temporal precedence? On what basis, then, would these competing representations be evaluated? Furthermore, are scholarly reconstructions of the Historical Jesus impervious to the politics of race-ethnicity?

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<sup>140</sup> Siker, "Historicizing a Racialized Jesus," 51.

Siker's analysis, and especially what is excluded from analysis, seems to suggest an affirmative response.<sup>141</sup>

Yet because these questions are not explicit, it is necessary to fine-tune our approach and dig deeper into the ideological significance of what Siker says, does not say, or fails to say, in his assessment of the black and mestizo Jesuses. To that end, before moving any further, it is necessary to take a brief detour to minority biblical criticism—a recent critical initiative spearheaded by Randall Bailey, Tat-Siong Liew, and Fernando Segovia<sup>142</sup>—in order to identify a more suitable framework of analysis.

### **Deracialization as dominantization: A dialectical approach**

Bailey et al. outline a number of animating principles that constitute minority biblical criticism's central aim of forging a coalition across ethnoracial lines.<sup>143</sup> But what

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<sup>141</sup> The very title of his essay (“Historicizing a Racialized Jesus”) confirms the suspicion that behind the act of “historicizing” lies a pure, untarnished Jesus who has been racialized by minority scholars.

<sup>142</sup> Randall C. Bailey, Tat-Siong B. Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia, eds., *They Were All Together in One Place: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

<sup>143</sup> These animating principles include the historical and theoretical frameworks, contours, and rhetorical dynamics of minority biblical criticism (Bailey et al., “Toward Minority Biblical Criticism: Framework, Contours, Dynamics,” in *They Were All Together in One Place: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009], 3-46).

is most relevant at this stage of the argument is the dominant-minority dialectic that frames minority criticism. Specifically what this framework accentuates is an approach that situates the discourse of race-ethnicity within the dialectical formations and relations of power. Within a dominant-minority dialectic, racialization is best understood as a discursive process of meaning-making whereby certain biological and cultural markers—as opposed to other intersectional signifiers such as gender, age, disability, and so on—are activated and negatively signified to the minority-other in implicit contrast to the dominant-self.<sup>144</sup> To foreground these dialectical perspectives, Bailey et al. parse “minority” as having at least three different nuances: first, the term refers to power (i.e., to minoritize), not strictly numbers (i.e., minority); second, the term involves process (i.e., minoritized, minoritizing, minoritization), not a fixed status (i.e., minority group); and third, the term is pyramidal, not necessarily linear (i.e., the minoritization of one group is part of a larger network of minoritizations).<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> For an excellent treatment of racialization and ethnicization as ideological processes through the dialectic of self and other, on which my approach lies, see: Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown, *Racism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 87-113.

<sup>145</sup> Bailey et al., “Toward Minority Biblical Criticism,” 6, 11-13. The model of minoritization that Bailey et al. develop dovetails with Foucault’s notion of biopower (*Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* [trans. David Macey; London: Penguin, 2003], 254-55): “The appearance within the biological continuum of the human race of races, the distinction among races, the hierarchy of races, the fact that certain races are described as good and that others, in contrast, are described as inferior: all this is a way of fragmenting the field of the biological that power

With this definition, Bailey et al. draw special attention to minoritization as a complex social formation that cannot be viewed in isolation. Instead, they underscore the making of minorities as necessarily relational, contextual, and interdependent, citing Kandice Chuh who observes “differences do not exist independently of each other. Rather, they converge and conflict and thus participate in each other.”<sup>146</sup> The qualification that not all individuals of a group are minoritized in the same way notwithstanding, there is, they argue, a discernible pattern at work. As an illustration of this complex interplay, Bailey et al. identify four minoritizing tropes that underscore how U.S. minority groups have been historically racialized: Native Americans as “being proud”; African Americans as “being inferior”; Latino/a Americans as “being illegal”; Asian Americans as “being foreign.”<sup>147</sup>

If, therefore, minoritization is not an isolated process that can be confined to a single group, but a divergent phenomenon that occurs across and in relation to numerous heterogeneous groups, then analyzing the racialization of one group, say, African Americans, is deficient. While such an approach may shed light on the ways in which African Americans have been historically racialized through the minoritizing trope of

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controls.” See also: Ellen K. Feder, “Of Monkeys and Men: Disciplinary Power and the Reproduction of Race,” in *Family Bonds: Genealogies of Race and Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 69-85.

<sup>146</sup> Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 148; cited in Bailey et al., “Toward Minority Biblical Criticism,” 12.

<sup>147</sup> Bailey et al., “Toward Minority Biblical Criticism,” 13, footnote 7.

“being inferior,” it would overlook the interrelated process of minoritization at work among, say, Asian Americans as “being foreign,” or how the two are closely connected.<sup>148</sup> Even so, contesting what happens to one minority group in isolation would yield a temporary and piecemeal solution, leaving the overarching system of racialization intact and unchallenged.

The way in which Bailey et al. theorize the discourse of racialization qua the dialectic of minoritization is theoretically astute and eminently practical. Their conceptual sequencing of minoritization vis-à-vis racialization further invites theorization of the parallel process of dominantization: how does the discourse of race-ethnicity

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<sup>148</sup> In his study of three recent examples of how Asian Americans have been racialized through the trope of foreignness, Neil T. Gotanda writes, “The attribution of foreignness to Chinese Americans is a racial practice—a practice that is clearly racist when used to attack individual Chinese Americans and create mass guilt by association. Those seeking to develop a politics of opposition have been hindered by their failure to appreciate that Asiatic-white racialization has diverged historically from black-white racialization. Because citizenship nullification is not invoked against a pan-Asian category such as Oriental or Asian but against a particular racialized Asian ethnicity/nationality category, pan-ethnic coalition opposing these racial practices should be aware of the overlapping but distinct practices. Failure to appreciate the historical complexity of Asiatic racialization may well undermine oppositional politics” (“Citizenship Nullification: The Impossibility of Asian American Politics,” in Gordon H. Chang, *Asian Americans and Politics: Perspectives, Experiences, Prospects* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 98.



function in the making of dominant groups? That is, if minority groups do not exist *a priori*, but are produced by virtue of power differentials in U.S. society and culture, how are dominant groups produced by recourse to the very same power differentials? Moreover, if the discourse of race-ethnicity is decisive in constituting minority formations, how does it function in the making of dominant formations? To be sure, Bailey et al. touch on dominantization in their discussion of the divide-and-conquer strategy and in their measured warning of assuming that there is a single and fixed dominant center.<sup>149</sup> In fact, their cogent analysis of the making of minority groups, already being dialectical, entails and presupposes an analysis of the making of dominant groups. But a sharpened account of the dialectic of dominantization vis-à-vis the discourse of race-ethnicity is also necessary.

To further develop their insights, a corresponding definition of the term “dominant” in dialectical relation to “minority” may be offered: first, the term refers to power (i.e., to make dominant), not strictly numbers (i.e., majority<sup>150</sup>); second, the term involves process (i.e., dominantized, dominantizing, dominantization), not a fixed status (i.e., dominant group); and third, the term is pyramidal, not necessarily linear (i.e., the dominantization of one group is part of a broader network of dominantizations). Although the definitions of “dominant” and “minority” are virtually identical, there is a crucial difference between the two with respect to the discourse of race-ethnicity.

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<sup>149</sup> Bailey et al., “Toward Minority Biblical Criticism,” 9-13.

<sup>150</sup> Hence the preference for the more accurate and awkward term “dominantization” rather than “majoritization.”

In the making of minority groups, the process of minoritization is coterminous with the process of racialization. That is, the degree to which a person is minoritized is often proportional to the degree by which ethnoracial signifiers are activated and negatively attributed in the meaning-making process. This racialized production of meaning ascribes inferiority to the minority-other, based on cultural or biological markers, although these markers *eo ipso* are arbitrary and possess no intrinsic meaning.<sup>151</sup> In the making of dominant groups, however, the correlation between the two processes of minoritization and racialization is inverted. That is, the degree to which a person is dominantized is often proportional to the degree of deracialization: ethnoracial signifiers recede into the background and become relatively insignificant. The same ethnoracial signifiers that matter a great deal in the case of the minority-other matter very little in the case of the dominant-self. From the vantage point of the dominant-minority dialectic, then, deracialization designates an implicit process of meaning-making whereby the dominant-self is made superior by becoming virtually exempt from and immune to ethnoracial signifiers.<sup>152</sup> What applies to the minority-other, simply put, the dominant-

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<sup>151</sup> That is, there is no essential meaning that makes people with one phenotypical feature, say, skin color, superior to people with different levels of skin pigmentation. Yet they are coded with a surplus of meaning that is mobilized through the discourse of race-ethnicity.

<sup>152</sup> Within this dominant-minority apparatus, the field of Whiteness studies functionally reverses the traditional emphasis in sociological and anthropological study that has treated U.S. race relations as a “minority problem.” It also specifies the dormant process of de-racialization, so to speak, as a “dominant problem.” Woody Doane

self transcends. In this way, minority biblical criticism highlights the dialectical formations and relations of power that builds upon and sharpens the discursive approach to racialization/ deracialization in Chapter 2.

If the discourse of race-ethnicity always functions within and is adjudicated by the formations and relations of power, the making of minority groups cannot be viewed in isolation—whether in relation to the making of other minoritized groups or in relation to the making of dominantized groups. Applied to Siker’s critique of Cone and Elizondo, a reading of how the black and mestizo Jesuses relate to the discourse of race-ethnicity is incomplete without a reading of how the Historical and white Jesuses also relate to the discourse of race-ethnicity. My reading of Siker in the next section is an attempt to address this gap. To that end, the dominant-minority dialectic provides a way to map the locations and relations of the four Jesuses invoked by Siker’s essay. This mapping, in turn, makes legible the implicit logic of deracialization in Siker’s critique.

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(“Rethinking Whiteness Studies,” in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism* [eds., Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva; New York and London: Routledge, 2003], 3-18; here 3) explains, “What is new and unique about ‘whiteness studies’ is that it reverses the traditional focus of research on race relations by concentrating attention upon the socially constructed nature of white identity and the impact of whiteness upon intergroup relations. In contrast to the usual practice of studying the ‘problem’ of ‘minority groups,’ the ‘whiteness studies’ paradigm makes problematic the identity and practices of the dominant group.” Steve Garner (*Whiteness: An Introduction*, 5) offers a similar assessment, “Indeed, for decades, the gaze of white academia has been trained on those defined as Other, whether using the terminology of ‘race’ or ethnicity.”

## **The Historical Jesus and white Jesus**

My reading of Siker, based on the dominant-minority dialectic, is fairly simple and straightforward: if Cone's black Jesus and Elizondo's mestizo Jesus are racialized, as Siker argues, then Siker's Historical and white Jesuses, I argue, are deracialized. The principal basis for this critique lies in Siker's uncritical use of the Historical Jesus and the omission of any critique of the Historical Jesus vis-à-vis the white Jesus. But to venture even further, a closer examination reveals a peculiar relationship between the Historical Jesus and the white Jesus. The connection between them, of course, is never explicitly affirmed by Siker. But it is also never denied, either. Nevertheless, there are three points of contact that point to an uncanny connection between the two—namely, their shared location, function, and privilege. Each of these points reveal the extent to which the Historical and white Jesuses, based on the dominant-minority dialectic, are effectively deracialized by Siker's critique.

First, the Historical and white Jesuses share a comparable deracialized location with respect to the discourse of race-ethnicity. Siker's analysis reveals a dichotomy at work between the black and mestizo Jesuses, on the one hand, and the Historical and white Jesuses, on the other. The former Jesuses are explicitly marked as being "racialized," but what about the latter? In the case of the white Jesus, Siker is explicit: the white Jesus is not quite racialized but "*pre-racialized*," that is, pre-racialization functions as a temporal marker signifying that white racialization precedes black and mestizo racialization. However, in the case of the Historical Jesus, Siker is implicit: but based on his starting point, and in contrast to the racially marked Jesuses of Cone and Elizondo, the Historical Jesus is presumably "*non-racialized*," that is, un-racialized or race-neutral.

So while the discourse of race-ethnicity is directly applicable to the black and mestizo Jesuses, it does not seem to have an immediate relevance to the white or Historical Jesuses, since the white Jesus is located *before* racialization (i.e., pre-racialization) while the Historical Jesus is located *beyond* racialization (i.e., non-racialization). In any case, whether pre-racialized or non-racialized, what is clear from Siker's critique is that both the Historical and white Jesuses enjoy a comparable location with respect to the discourse of race-ethnicity. This initial assessment leads to a second and more significant connection that underscores how the two Jesuses are deracialized.

Second, the Historical and white Jesuses share a similar deracialized function with respect to the task of criticism. According to Siker, Cone maps a black identity onto the Christ of Faith, while Elizondo maps a mestizo identity onto the Jesus of History. This conclusion, as we have seen, makes logical sense within the historicized rationale of Siker's critique. But what is noteworthy here for our purposes is the normative status the Historical Jesus is afforded in the argument. Siker seems to assume that the scholarly construct of the Historical Jesus is somehow impervious to or above the particularities of race-ethnicity. So throughout the essay, the Historical Jesus is never subjected to critique, but instead serves as a litmus test to gauge the extent to which Cone and Elizondo err in their respective constructions. Simply put, the Historical Jesus functions as an invisible foil that makes black and mestizo racialization visible.<sup>153</sup> But so, too, does the white Jesus. To quote Siker's concession again: "the work of such theologians as Cone and Elizondo shows us the degree to which we already operate with a Jesus who comes to us

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<sup>153</sup> The title of Siker's article confirms this assessment—Cone and Elizondo are two case studies of how the Historical Jesus is racialized as black and mestizo.

‘pre-racialized’ as white. This is one reason why claims about Jesus as ‘black’ or ‘mestizo’ stand out as they do.”<sup>154</sup> Both the Historical and white Jesuses are in some sense racially unmarked as preceding or circumventing the discourse of race-ethnicity. Both are also positioned beyond critique, since they serve as the very standard and point of departure for assessing black and mestizo racialization. The conclusion to be drawn here is that the Historical and white Jesuses share a similar deracialized function. Using the Historical Jesus as an unexamined standard and point of departure, therefore, already skews his analysis. The proof is in the pudding: both the Historical and white Jesuses, oddly enough, get a pass in Siker’s treatment of the problematic.

Third, the Historical and white Jesuses share a common deracialized privilege regarding the role of the critic. This privilege can be seen by comparing the respective visibilities of the critics involved. In the case of the black Jesus, Cone, as an African American, is named as its representative. Similarly, in the case of the mestizo Jesus, Elizondo, as a Latino/a American, is named as its representative. But in the case of the white Jesus, no one Euro-American individual is made to be its representative.<sup>155</sup> The same holds true in the case of the Historical Jesus.<sup>156</sup> To say it another way, there is

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<sup>154</sup> Siker, “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus,” 51.

<sup>155</sup> Or as Margaret L. Andersen says, “Whiteness just is; no white person is seen as representing their race” (“Whitewashing Race: A Critical Perspective on Whiteness,” in Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism* [New York and London: Routledge, 2003], 21-34; here 26).

<sup>156</sup> Interestingly, Siker does offer a footnote for third wave scholarship on the Historical Jesus, which includes James Dunn, N.T. Wright, John Meier, Bart Ehrman,

“Cone’s black Jesus,” there is “Elizondo’s mestizo Jesus,” and then there is “Jesus.” What are conditions that require Cone and Elizondo, as minority critics, to be named as representatives of the black and mestizo Jesuses, but do not require the same level of visibility or accountability for dominant critics in the case of the Historical and white Jesuses? What are the conditions, moreover, that allow the former to be scrutinized by the latter? If the black and mestizo Jesuses are duly critiqued vis-à-vis the Historical Jesus, should not the same critique be pursued regarding the white Jesus? In the absence of such a critique, how can the distance between the two Jesuses be gauged? Or is there a sense in which the Historical Jesus *is* the white Jesus? Siker does not say—nor am I suggesting that he actually believes the two are one and the same—but my point is that he does not have to as a dominant critic. It is precisely in between this unnamed space between the Historical Jesus and the white Jesus that the deracializing ideology of white invisibility is at work.<sup>157</sup>

A possible counter-argument at this point is that Siker acknowledges his social location, cites recent trends in Whiteness studies, and concludes with reflections on the politics of white critique. What more can possibly be required? I nevertheless maintain that these are relatively minor concessions that fall squarely within the rhetorics and rubrics of contemporary U.S. biblical scholarship. For example, it is insufficient merely

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Dale Allison, Luke Timothy Johnson, E.P. Sanders, and John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, and Ben Meyer—all white male scholars. See Siker, “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus,” 29; footnote 3.

<sup>157</sup> Or, to adapt Toni Morrison’s saying quoted earlier: in this country, “Jesus” means the white Jesus; every other Jesus has to hyphenate.

to self-identify as a white male, in so many words, as Siker does.<sup>158</sup> For unless biographical descriptions are properly theorized—that is, analyzed within the structures of domination and situated within one’s criticism and argumentation—the self-identification of the critic is gratuitous.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Thus, Siker (“Historicizing a Racialized Jesus,” 52) says: “At the same time, as a white theologian engaging seriously African American and Latin@/ Chican@ American voices, I feel that I need to be careful and respectful. Anybody reading a white theologian’s critique of racializing discourse should be suspect, and even calling attention to the need to be suspicious does not remove my tradition of privileged racial discourse. At the same time, if I take seriously the theological reflections of Cone and Elizondo, it means that having engaged their theological visions, my voice even as a white man needs to be heard and engaged in turn.” Of course, Siker is not alone here; judging by recent scholarship, confessional self-disclosures of one’s whiteness appear to be a popular trend. E.g., Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London: Routledge, 2002). xi.

<sup>159</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (*Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* [New York: Continuum, 2000], 23) makes this recommendation: “Historical-Jesus scholars must begin their inquiry by critically reflecting on their own social location in the kyriarchal structures of domination. This does not mean that we should engage in confessional litanies of biographical self-mirroring such as ‘I am a white, middle-class, European, immigrant wo/man scholar at an Ivy League institution in the United States’—litanies that ritually list biographical information without analyzing their function within the discourse of domination.”



Indeed, the ideology of white invisibility is elusive and only comes into view when dominant-minority formations are made explicit as a framework of analysis. For on the surface, Siker's criticisms are factually correct: Cone does not map blackness onto Jesus; he maps Jesus onto blackness. The problem with this assessment is that while his analysis is technically correct, it is besides the point; it is not incorrect because it is partially true. But that is precisely my point: the ideology of white invisibility qua ideology is not so much about "the facts." It is so deeply entrenched in the patterns and practices of dominant biblical scholarship so as to be, as it were, in the facts, in spite of the facts, and beyond the facts.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, in many cases ideology does not necessarily

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<sup>160</sup> By ideology here, I do not mean the classical Marxist sense of false consciousness. It is not as though dominant critics are under some sort of veil of ignorance or naiveté that newly proven scholarly data will once and for all demystify. For example, it is not as though, according to Marx's classic formulation, "Sie wissen das nicht aber sie tun es" ("they do not know it, but they are doing it"). Rather, to quote Peter Sloterdijk (*Critique of Cynical Reason* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987]; cited in Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* [London: Verso, 1989], 28), my point is that "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it." As the many references to the problem of racism and whiteness throughout his essay indicate, Siker is all too aware of the deracializing politics of whiteness. Yet something else remains—something deeper, more elusive, beneath the so-called facts of history. Žižek names the underlying problem as a newer form of ideology as cynicism, which may very well apply to this critique of dominant biblical scholarship in general and Siker in particular. Žižek writes, "Cynical reason is no longer naïve, but is a paradox of an

change as a result of new or better information, and in some cases ideology is even resistant to the facts. But that is why there is a deeper line of questioning that ideological criticism presses and pursues concerning the construction of knowledge: namely, which Jesus? Or, better, whose Jesus?

The problem of white invisibility, therefore, is not necessarily a matter of having the right information. It is a deracializing ideology that sustains the power and privilege of the dominant group by continually drawing attention away from itself as a representation. As an African American, Cone, of necessity, must be representative of all African Americans; as a Latino/a American, Elizondo, of necessity, must be representative of all Latino/a Americans. But in the case of dominant critics such as Siker, he need not be representative of all white Euro-Americans. In other words, white invisibility consists precisely in the power of representation that is paradoxically disguised as the universal representation that never requires representation. Race-ethnicity, according to this deracializing logic, always already applies to the minority-other, but does not necessarily apply to the dominant-self as such. Just as racialization refers to an explicit act by which Cone and Elizondo and their Jesuses become racially marked, the logic of deracialization allows Siker and his Jesuses to become racially unmarked in corollary fashion. In this way, whiteness remains a powerful and privileged position that is hidden from view, a normalized identity that is above scrutiny.<sup>161</sup>

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enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it” (29).

<sup>161</sup> Woody Doane, “Rethinking Whiteness Studies,” 16.

According to the terms and standards set forth in Siker's own argument, however, and in fairness to Elizondo and Cone, the Historical and white Jesuses ought to be subjected to the very same investigation pursued with respect to the black and mestizo Jesuses. Crucially: if the Historical and white Jesuses, too, are already a racialized or pre-racialized representation of Jesus—a Euro-American construct produced by dominant biblical scholarship and prevalent in U.S. popular culture<sup>162</sup>—criticizing how Cone or Elizondo racialize Jesus, without examining the former is a moot point. For the black Jesus, the mestizo Jesus, or any other ethnoracial representation of Jesus for that matter, is epiphenomenal to the dominant representation of Jesus in the Western racial imaginary. Based on Siker's acknowledgment—viz., that the “history of Western Christian theology (often articulated in art) has seen the ascendancy of Jesus as a white Christ with a resultant de facto white God endorsing white power claims over other

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<sup>162</sup> So Powell, Mark A., *Jesus As a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 77: “The *constitution* of the Jesus Seminar has been criticized and its claim to diversity rebutted. First, observers note that almost all members are white, male, and from North America. There was no apparent attempt to exclude others. Rather, the near homogeneity of race and gender is attributable to the current composition of the guild of biblical scholars as a whole, and participation of scholars from other countries was made difficult by location of the Seminar's meetings in North America. Even given the location on this continent, the Jesus Seminar did not draw from as broad a pool of candidates as one might expect” (emphasis original).

racial/ethnic groups”<sup>163</sup>—a more balanced and charitable reading would be that Cone and Elizondo present a much needed, if perhaps misguided, countermeasure to the dominant representation of Jesus in the West. Another possibility would be to approach the black and mestizo Jesus as tertiary representations symptomatic of a much larger problem that has precipitated these minoritized proposals in the first place.

In light of the preceding analysis, the work of Cone and Elizondo is more laudable than Siker gives them credit for.<sup>164</sup> In fact, their work can be seen as a broader and more sophisticated pushback against the dominant representation of Jesus in the West, and for this Cone and Elizondo are to be commended. But what about the specific content of Cone and Elizondo’s respective proposals? Granting Siker’s critique of anachronism, are the black and mestizo Jesuses viable alternatives? I do not believe so. To be sure, Jesus has been represented from a number of diverse perspectives, including

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<sup>163</sup> Siker, “Historicizing a Racialized Jesus,” 27.

<sup>164</sup> For a more generous reading of Cone’s black Jesus, see Karen Teel, “What Jesus wouldn’t do: A white theologian engages whiteness,” in *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* (ed. George Yancy, ed.; London: Routledge, 2012), 19-36. For Elizondo, see: Michael Lee, “The Galilean Jesus as Faithful Dissenter: Latino/a Christology and the Dynamics of Exclusion,” in *Jesus in the Hispanic Community: Images of Christ from Theology to Popular Religion* (eds. Harold J. Recinos and Hugo Magallanes; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 16-37; Rubén R. Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk: A Latino/a Perspective* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 84ff.

racial-ethnic, feminist, liberation, queer, and disability criticisms, to name a few.<sup>165</sup> These efforts can be seen as a much more expansive response to the dominant Western representation of Jesus as a white, able-bodied Euro-American male—a symbol that is equally significant for its racism as for its androcentrism.<sup>166</sup> However, many of these proposals uncritically use Historical Jesus scholarship as an objective starting point.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, many of these efforts reify the very misguided notions of race-ethnicity they set out to critique.<sup>168</sup> Instead of challenging dominant conceptions of race-ethnicity, they

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<sup>165</sup> For an overview, see: Delbert R. Burkett, *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Thomas Bohache, *Christology from the Margins* (London: SCM Press, 2008).

<sup>166</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, 18-20.

<sup>167</sup> The scholarly construct of the Historical Jesus, in part, reproduces the dominant conception of a white, Western, Euro-American Jesus, which explains why many African American, Latino/a American, Asian American, and third world theologies have been reluctant to join the search for the Historical Jesus. Schüssler Fiorenza's (*Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation*, 9) critique of Paula Fredriksen is relevant here: "I would argue, however, that Frederiksen does not problematize her understanding of humanity in light of the insight of feminist theory that both the modern-liberal and the confessional-orthodox Historical-Jesus research frameworks have unquestioningly relied on the Western definition of humanity as elite, white, educated masculinity."

<sup>168</sup> For example, in my assessment, many previous studies have approached the problematic from the standpoint of minority-othering, neglecting the process of dominant-selfing. Approaching the problematic of ethnoracial representations of Jesus in

reproduce its hegemonic logic by reinscribing the modern myth of race as a natural, visible, and biological fact. For these reasons, a different approach than what Cone and Elizondo propose turns out to be necessary.

In this regard, I fully concur with Siker. He rightly points out that Cone and Elizondo's reconstructions "fall into the same trap of essentialist discourse."<sup>169</sup> He also makes an important observation that "the subversion of all racial ruling metaphors ultimately benefits the dominant white racial group by endorsing the status quo."<sup>170</sup> In response, Siker concedes that it may be necessary not merely to make an "inclusive claim for minority identities, but by indeed making privileged claims for minority inclusion."<sup>171</sup> Siker's critique of the essentializing tendency of the black and mestizo Jesuses is on the right track, though he does not quite go far enough in critiquing the exclusionary practices of dominant groups or in spelling out how the subversion of ruling metaphors might take place. The impasse still remains.

### **Moving beyond the impasse? A post-theory proposal**

The argument up to this point has been that if it is fair to say that Cone and Elizondo have effectively racialized the Historical Jesus, then it is also fair to say that Siker has effectively deracialized the Historical Jesus. Although this critique more

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this way as a "minority problem" has relegated these studies as "special interest" projects that apply to a particular racial-ethnic group.

<sup>169</sup> Siker, "Historicizing a Racialized Jesus," 48.

<sup>170</sup> Siker, "Historicizing a Racialized Jesus," 50.

<sup>171</sup> Siker, "Historicizing a Racialized Jesus," 50.

sharply accentuates the theoretical impasse of racialized/ deracialized representations of Jesus, its primary intent is to point in a constructive direction. In the end, my point is that the dominant representation of the white Jesus should not be so easily dismissed (i.e., in the way of Siker) or simply traded for another ethnoracial representation (i.e., in the way of Cone and Elizondo). But what, then, is an adequate solution? If Siker deracializes what Cone and Elizondo racialize, is it even possible to move beyond the impasse of competing ethnoracial representations? While there are no quick or easy solutions, what I propose is one way of moving the conversation a step forward towards the goal of overcoming the theoretical impasse.

The basis for my post-theory proposal can be elucidated first by spelling out what it is not. On the one hand, the way forward is not a wholesale rejection of history as though ideology trumps all historical endeavor. Nor is the solution a simple return to a pre-modern form of historical interpretation that is pure and free of ideology. As we have seen in Chapters 1-2, the very least that theory does is relativize the stronger claims of dominant biblical scholarship that continue to insist on its own objectivity, neutrality, and universality. There is no denying that history has been and will continue to be a central preoccupation of modern biblical and theological scholarship. But the point of theory is not to displace history; it is only to show that there is no pure, unmediated ontological essence called “the past,” to which the historian has privileged access. To the contrary: that the meaning of history is not self-evident, but always already requires interpretation, is the very condition that makes historical writing possible.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, this is precisely why constructing an alternative narrative is crucial to counteracting the dominant

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<sup>172</sup> Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 5.

discourse.<sup>173</sup> At the same time, because the historian is always working with partial texts, images, and representations of the past, the task of interpretation necessarily involves something extra-historical—a politics or ethics.<sup>174</sup>

On the other hand, the way forward is not merely to prove an ideological point that all knowledge is socially constructed. Nor is it to cast a blind eye and carry on as if postmodernism never happened, as though that were possible or even desirable. Theory has rightly exposed the discourse of race-ethnicity as a quintessential speech act of modernity—not a constative utterance whose locutionary content corresponds to reality, but a performative utterance that creates the very thing to which it refers. Indeed, because race-ethnicity is performative, the need for theory is reiterative and on-going: to expose the new state of affairs that is created and recreated by the modern discourse of race-ethnicity, even as it seeks to rebuild itself in ever new ways. But a similar problem emerges with theory. Because the purpose of theory is deconstruction as deconstruction, the task of interpretation requires something extra-theoretical—again, a politics or ethics.

Neither a simple affirmation nor rejection of theory, then, the way forward post-theory, I argue, should be sufficiently demodernized, on the one hand, and also post-postmodernized, on the other—that is, a proposal that is at least theoretical and extra-theoretical. This means that any proposal to move beyond the impasse must be firmly located within the discourse of race-ethnicity and within the dialectic of the dominant-self

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<sup>173</sup> Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997), 163.

<sup>174</sup> Jeffrey T. Nealon and Susan S. Giroux. *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 108.



and the minority-other, since it is not possible to escape either the discourse or the dialectic. Therefore, the first move in this post-theory proposal is at least theoretical: to situate the critic and criticism within the discursive relations of race-ethnicity and dialectical tensions of dominant-selfing and minority-othering. Yet, once the dialectical formations and relations of power have been exposed, and the self duly located within the discourse, theory's work is momentarily finished and can proceed no further.

The second move, then, of necessity, must be extra-theoretical, requiring a politics or ethics. The basic question of this second move is essentially: What does one do with power? How can the self represent the other, and the other the self, in ways that are not beholden to a politics of racialization/ minoritization or de-racialization/ dominantization? In other words, if there is no way out from under power, what can one do constructively with or against power? If the lines demarcating self and other are already written, how might they be unwritten or written anew? Surely these are difficult questions without any simple solutions. Yet these are the questions that any post-theory proposal must tackle in order to move the conversation forward.

To summarize, I am suggesting that the task of interpretation is at least theoretical—situating the self within the discourse of race-ethnicity and the dialectic of dominant-selfing and minority-othering, since it is not possible to escape the discourse and dialectic of race-ethnicity. I am also suggesting that the task of interpretation requires a politics or ethics that is extra-theoretical—governing how one is to constructively negotiate these dialectical relations, since theory by definition exposes but cannot constructively manage power relations. Both moves are co-dependent, continually redirecting each other. The first move plays an active role in relation to the second,

deconstructing and tempering its claims. Yet the purpose of the second move is to depart in new and fresh ways, imagining creative and constructive possibilities for exceeding the boundaries of theory. In this way, my post-theory proposal is chastened by ideological criticism and racial-ethnic theory, yet seeks to move in productive fashion beyond the strict limits of deconstruction.

The essence of my proposal is to come up with new ways to discourse about race-ethnicity in order to break through the dominant-minority dialectic—a task for which minority biblical criticism is well-suited.<sup>175</sup> As we have seen, the dominant-minority dialectic deconstructs the discourse of race-ethnicity by exposing the formations and relations of power inherent in the processes of racialization/ minoritization and deracialization/ dominantization. But this dialectical framework is not only deconstructive. There is also a highly constructive possibility here as well. That is, if the minority-other is not a fixed status but part of a dialectical process of social formation that always involves the dominant-self and if what adjudicates the relations between the dominant-self and the minority-other is the modern discourse of race-ethnicity, then one way to change the *status quo* of dominant-minority formations is by creating an alternative discourse. For if division and discord are the direct results of minoritization vis-à-vis racialization or dominantization vis-à-vis deracialization, then one effective way to disrupt these processes is to create a different discourse, a new way of talking about race-ethnicity.

How might we discourse anew? How might we talk to one another about race-ethnicity in a such a way that does not “fall into the trap of essentialist discourse” as

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<sup>175</sup> My thanks to Fernando Segovia for this suggestion.

Siker so rightly warns against? One strategy is not to lift up the content of race-ethnicity (i.e., race-as-biology), to essentialize ethnoracial signifiers, as though race-ethnicity were a receptacle to be stuffed with biological or cultural materials. Rather, an alternative approach is to lift up the process of race-ethnicity (i.e., race-as-ideology), to expose it as a meaning-making device that codes and decodes what it means to be human.

On this logic, any alternative narrative that offers a counter-representation on theological grounds (*pace* Cone and Elizondo) is deemed insufficient for overcoming the impasse. Despite their practical utility in disrupting white privilege,<sup>176</sup> such representations recapitulate an essentialist understanding of race-ethnicity. In this context, claiming that Jesus was racially black on historical grounds, for example, as Cain Hope Felder and Julian Kunnie have argued,<sup>177</sup> trades one depiction for another and

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<sup>176</sup> For example, Karen Teel (“What Jesus wouldn’t do,” 20) says there is a need for Christian churches to use alternative images of Jesus. She explains: “in order to fight effectively against whiteness, white Christians must cultivate a particular existential and Christological *discomfort in our own skins*. Unless we feel viscerally that we are part of the problem, we may not be compelled to address it.”

<sup>177</sup> For historical arguments that Jesus was an Afro-Asiatic black man, see Cain Hope Felder, “Cultural Ideology, Afrocentrism, and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (eds. James H. Cone and Gayraud Wilmore; 2 vols.; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993), 184-95; here 192. See also Julian Kunnie who argues that the “Jesus of history points to a person of African-Asian culture who reflected the ethos of the civilizations of the ancient Egyptian/ African world of the first millennium BCE, and that the Jesus of theological proclamation was a construction of Roman imperial

repeats the hegemonic logic of the dominant discourse (i.e., that race-ethnicity is a simple and self-evident matter of phenotypes such as skin color).<sup>178</sup> Claiming that Jesus is black—whether on theological grounds as Cone argues or historical grounds as Cain Hope Felder argues<sup>179</sup>—represents a divisive and more contentious use of the discourse.

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hegemony institutionalized in the fourth century CE during the reign of Constantine, who moved from the radical decree of persecution of all adherents of the Christian faith to the outlawing of the Roman Empire” (“Jesus in black theology: The ancient ancestor visits,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, 94-110; here, 95.

<sup>178</sup> That is why my project intentionally refrains from representing an Asian Jesus or offering a distinctly Asian American reading of Jesus. For to do so recapitulates the very cultural and biological essentialisms and dynamics of power endemic to the politics of deracialization. More importantly, to do so reinscribes the modern myth of race as a natural, visible, biological reality, albeit under the identity politics guise of “diversity” and “multiculturalism.”

<sup>179</sup> For historical arguments that Jesus was an Afro-Asiatic black man, see Cain Hope Felder, “Cultural Ideology, Afrocentrism, and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (eds. James H. Cone and Gayraud Wilmore; 2 vols.; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993), 184-95; here 192. See also Julian Kunnie who argues that the “Jesus of history points to a person of African-Asian culture who reflected the ethos of the civilizations of the ancient Egyptian/ African world of the first millennium BCE, and that the Jesus of theological proclamation was a construction of Roman imperial hegemony institutionalized in the fourth century CE during the reign of Constantine, who moved from the radical decree of persecution of all adherents of the Christian faith to the

The black Jesus appeals to some, and while the mestizo Jesus might appeal to more, both are characterized by a privileged and exclusionary rhetoric that does more to divide and alienate than necessary.<sup>180</sup> But this also means that it is insufficient to engage the problem of competing ethnoracial representations of Jesus (*pace* Siker) without addressing the same vulnerabilities of dominant representations and the more fundamental problematic of race-ethnicity. Stated positively, the way to move beyond the impasse is to theorize race-ethnicity—to rethink its very terminologies, uses, and operations in dominant biblical scholarship.

In particular, I believe that the most promising suggestion for theorizing race-ethnicity is a reconsideration of Jesus’ “Jewishness”—or, more specifically, an examination of Jesus’ identity as a racialized Judean under Roman occupation. Here, the major achievement of the Third Quest in recovering Jesus’ Jewishness needs to be properly acknowledged.<sup>181</sup> At the same time, though, many of these historicizing efforts

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outlawing of the Roman Empire” (“Jesus in black theology: The ancient ancestor visits,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, 94-110; here, 95).

<sup>180</sup> The critique that minority responses often reinscribe the macro social structure by formulating claims of resistance in essentialist language has been made by Rey Chow in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 14, 32.

<sup>181</sup> For example, locating Jesus within Judaism—as the so-called third wave of Historical Jesus studies has sought to do—is an important corrective to the tendencies of anti-Judaism in the second wave. Most notably, the criterion of double dissimilarity functioned as a measure to determine authentic sayings of the Historical Jesus insofar as

are hampered by certain methodological limitations. The main limitation here is a strong essentializing tendency to ascertain an authentically “Jewish Jesus,” which is a problematic endeavor for several reasons. Merely affirming that “Jesus was a Jew” is insufficient because it does not address what race-ethnicity signifies in the world of production, how it signifies what it signifies, or how scholars may know when they have properly arrived at its significance.<sup>182</sup> Moreover, affirming that “Jesus was a Jew” invariably operates within, rather than challenges, the broader religious-theological framework of modern biblical scholarship.

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they differ both from first century Judaism and the early church. For a critique of double dissimilarity, see: Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *Die Kriterienfrage in Der Jesusforschung: Vom Differenzkriterium Zum Plausibilitätskriterium* (Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag, 1997). Theissen and Winter provide a comprehensive overview and critique of double dissimilarity in Historical Jesus scholarship. But this also erroneously separates Jesus from his Jewish environs and arbitrarily reduces what may be affirmed of the Historical Jesus (Brian H. Gregg, *The Historical Jesus and the Final Judgment Sayings in Q* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006], 30.). Therefore, while placing Jesus within Judaism has in certain respects alleviated the problem of anti-Judaism in Historical Jesus scholarship, it has not addressed the underlying problematic of race-ethnicity.

<sup>182</sup> Markus Cromhout, *Jesus and Identity: Reconstructing Judean Ethnicity in Q* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 63. In other words, simply affirming that “Jesus was a Jew” does not solve the problematic of race-ethnicity; for despite these pious affirmations, Jesus’ identity continues to be presented in ways that are decisively non-ethnic.

On this assessment, the goal of Third Quest studies to recover Jesus' Jewishness is deemed methodologically naïve. But there is an even bigger consequence still. These efforts unwittingly reinforce the modern myth of race-as-biology. Simply affirming Jesus' Jewishness, or reclaiming Jesus' "true" ethnoracial identity, whatever that might entail, does not settle the matter. So just as there are numerous ways in which Jesus' ethnoracial identity has been dismissed or bypassed in the dominant narrative, there are an equal number of attempts to recover Jesus' Jewishness in simplistic and problematic ways.

For these reasons, the first part of my proposal in theorizing the discourse is not to lift up the content of race-ethnicity (i.e., race-as-biology), to essentialize ethnoracial signifiers, as though race-ethnicity were a receptacle to be stuffed with biological or cultural materials. Rather, my proposal is to lift up the process of race-ethnicity (i.e., race-as-ideology), to expose it as a meaning-making device that codes and decodes what it means to be human. For this reason, I prefer the translation of Ἰουδαίος as "Judean" over "Jew," following Steve Mason's excellent article defending the term "Judean" as an ethnic and geographical descriptor rather than "Jew" as primarily a religious marker.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> An important debate that has emerged amid the recovery of Jesus' ethnoracial identity is the precise meaning of the term Ἰουδαίος and its cognates. The debate surrounding the precise definition of Ἰουδαίος used in Matthew and in other NT texts illustrates this conversation at work. On the one hand, scholars such as Elliot, Esler and Adam argue that the term is best rendered as "Judean." The advantage of this translation, it is argued, places Jesus squarely among his first century contemporaries (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, etc.). Moreover, on historical grounds, translating the term as "Jew"

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is anachronistic at best since the precise meaning of the term was in flux until Rabbinic Judaism, in which the term came to bear its religious-ethnic formulation as codified by Rabbi Judah the Prince in the Mishnah (200 CE). Therefore, for historical clarity and specificity it is best to render the term as “Judean” as a way of tying the term to a particular geographical locale in Judea or, more broadly, as any inhabitants in Palestine or the Mediterranean who identify “ethnically” with the state of Judea during the first century. Biblical grounds are also offered as Jesus never refers to himself as a *Ἰουδαίος* nor do his disciples; rather, Jesus self-identified as an Israelite, a Nazarene, a Galilean, etc. Others argue that the term “Jew” is apt because there is more continuity than discontinuity between first century Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism. Still others argue that just as a line of demarcation is made between pre-exilic Israel and post-exilic Judah, so too it is necessary to differentiate Rabbinic Judaism of the 4<sup>th</sup> century with the Judaism that preceded it. The work of Shaye Cohen and John J. Collins perhaps represent a middle way. The conclusions they reach are similar to each another in defining Jewish identity (*Ἰουδαίος*) as fluid identities hard to pin down on one particular issue. Cohen is clear that the line of demarcation between Jews and Gentiles was not explicit, and that Jewish identity ran in the general direction from an ethnicity to a religion—a process which he locates in the Hasmonean period. Collins is similar in his extensive survey of Second Temple literature: no one factor (e.g., covenantal nomism, circumcision) encompassed Jewish identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora but ranged from two poles of Jewish tradition and Hellenistic culture, though the most significant factor was religious practices. I find these conclusions of not fixing a hard and fast boundary around “Jewishness” salutary. For these reasons, the translation “Judean” is preferable because it



Therefore, the challenge of theorizing Jesus' race-ethnicity, particularly as it comes to expression in ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, is to signify it with language that is itself marked by an understanding of race-ethnicity as a process. To say it another way, the linguistic turn has shown that modern discourses such as race-ethnicity do not refer to a pre-linguistic, pre-social phenomenon; rather language itself is part of what constitutes and shapes perception of what it names.<sup>184</sup> Any post-theory proposal, then, must take seriously the intrinsic performativity of race-ethnicity as modernity's speech act that, by reiterative citation and repeated reference, creates the very thing to which it refers. Rather than utilizing an essentialist vocabulary of race-ethnicity, and thereby maintaining the racialization/ deracialization impasse, a minority biblical approach deploys an alternative vocabulary to mark the very process in the making of the racialized minority-other. My proposal thus augments previous approaches by articulating the theoretical and performative insights of racial-ethnic theory as signaled in the very language it deploys: a

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avoids the overly religious tone of the term "Jew." For a more comprehensive treatment, see: Steve Mason, "Jews, Judaens, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007): 457-512. For an alternative view, see: Daniel R. Schwartz, "'Judaean' or 'Jew'? How Should We Translate *IOUDAIOS* in Josephus?" in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World: Jüdische Identität in Der Griechisch-Römischen Welt* (eds., Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz, and Stephanie Grippentrog; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 93-110.

<sup>184</sup> Nancy Partner, "Coda. Post-Postmodernism: Directions and Interrogations," in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory* (eds. Nancy Partner and Sarah Foot; Los Angeles; Sage Publications Inc., 2013), 397-400; here 398.

*minoritized* Jesus. Applying this theoretical proposal in the specific context of Matthew, Jesus is racialized as “the *Judaized* king.”

Second, it is necessary to situate the discourse of race-ethnicity within the dialectic of dominant-selfing and minority-othering. This suggestion is consistent with and follows from the previous task of theorizing the discourse. If race-ethnicity is a modern speech act that does not refer to a pre-linguistic reality, but brings about a new state of affairs, then it is necessary to foreground the social relations by which the discourse of race-ethnicity is made intelligible. This involves foregrounding the interlocutors, who are implicated in the discourse of race-ethnicity. Any analysis of the discourse of race-ethnicity, therefore, must focus not only on the racialized other that is created through the speech act (i.e., the *minoritized-other*), but also the *de-racialized self* who performs the speech act (i.e., *dominant-self*). It is insufficient to treat the problematic of race-ethnicity in biblical criticism in the world of production without also analyzing how biblical critics are situated in the world of consumption. Therefore, the way in which race-ethnicity codes and decodes “the human,” as a meaning-making device, cannot be separated from the power-laden dialectic of dominant-selfing and minority-othering.

At this point, the approach of minority biblical criticism in situating critics becomes crucial. Rather than pitting competing representations of a black, brown, red, or yellow Jesus, minority biblical criticism binds the various racialized experiences of minority groups together (i.e., being foreign, being inferior, being illegitimate, being proud). One way to do this is to use the experiences of *minoritized* groups as a lens to shed light on the process of how Jesus is racialized a *minoritized-other*. While the precise

forms of racialization differ among minority groups (e.g., Native Americans as being proud, African Americans as being inferior, Latino/a Americans as being illegal, Asian Americans as being strange), the underlying process of making minorities remains the same. The first advantage of this proposal is it flags the representational process of race-ethnicity, seeking to be sensitive to the dialectic of dominant-selfing versus minority-othering, without reduplicating the racializing dynamics of the impasse. The second advantage of this response is that it brings together the collective experiences of various minoritized groups. It calls for critical conscientization of all critics and forms of criticism, both in the world of production and in the world of consumption. The way that it does so is by critically locating minority groups vis-à-vis other minority groups as a broader process of minoritizations. Minoritized groups have remained in isolation for too long. Bringing together an ethnoracial coalition by theorizing various experiences of minoritized groups presents the real possibility of engineering a new understanding of race-ethnicity altogether.<sup>185</sup>

So instead of pitting competing representations of a black, brown, red, or yellow Jesus, minority biblical criticism binds the various racialized experiences of minority groups together (i.e., being foreign, being inferior, being illegitimate, being proud). Theorizing these racialized experiences offers a taxonomy of minoritizations, so that minority groups can map their experiences, not in competition as singular or unique, but as part of broader economy of minoritizations. A new possibility that emerges in all of this is an alternative representation—not a Jesus who is racially black or brown, but a minoritized Jesus that appeals to the racialized experiences of various minority groups. In

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<sup>185</sup> Bailey et. al., “Toward Minority Biblical Criticism,” 14.

this way, an alternative discourse may emerge that subverts the dominant discourse, leading possibly to a new understanding of race-ethnicity altogether.<sup>186</sup>

Applied to the Matthean passion narrative in particular, situating the collective experiences of minoritization by U.S. minority groups as a lens becomes a critical way to rethink, reclaim, and redefine race-ethnicity. The best way to counteract the dominant portrayal of a white Euro-American Jesus is an alternative depiction that does not recapitulate its racializing logic (i.e., by way of a black, brown, red, or yellow Jesus), but is, instead, articulated in such a way that corresponds with the discourse and dialectic of race-ethnicity as firmly situated in the world of consumption. Moreover, how minority biblical criticism specifically articulates its claims for a minoritized Jesus is critical: it draws on the lived experiences of various minoritized groups to foreground a process-oriented approach to race-ethnicity. The advantage of this proposal is producing an alternative representation of Jesus as undergoing a process of racialization as a minoritized-other. In this way, a minority biblical approach underscores the need for proper contextualization among all critics and criticism in the world of consumption, even as it situates itself within the respective ethnic minority studies, traditions, and communities that comprise minority biblical criticism.

There are two main advantages of this proposal of theorizing the discourse and situating the dialectic. First, this post-theory proposal is consistent with an understanding of the discourse and dialectic of race-ethnicity as developed in Chapters 2 and 3. It draws critical attention to the very meaning and language of race-ethnicity, as it is deployed in dominant biblical scholarship, and pushes for all critics and criticism to be appropriately

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<sup>186</sup> Bailey et. al., “Toward Minority Biblical Criticism,” 14.

situated and located in the world of consumption. Second, the proposal foregrounds the need for a politics or ethics to govern the self's conduct within the discourse and dialectic. There are no simple or straightforward solutions to the problems left in the wake of modernity's discourse and dialectic of race-ethnicity. If the first step works at the level of ideological criticism and racial-ethnic theory, the second step works at the level of religious-theological ethics and construction. In this way, my proposal is at least theoretical, but also extra-theoretical.

## **6. Conclusion**

Minoritized groups have remained in isolation for too long. Bringing together an ethnoracial coalition by theorizing various experiences of minoritized groups presents the real possibility of rethinking and reconfiguring the formations and relations of power. A crucial question becomes: how can we represent and relate to one another in such a way that is not characterized by the dialectic of minoritization and dominantization? This is not an easy question to answer. But this much is clear: if any kind of progress is going to be made, it is imperative to create a strategic alliance across ethnoracial lines. Indeed, this is precisely why the call of minority biblical criticism to forge a coalition is indispensable. We must come together. We must stand with one another. We cannot make progress on our own. However, if we join together, there exists the possibility of challenging the hegemonic logic of the modern racial imaginary. But to do this, we must come together in such a way that is not beholden to a politics of visibility (per minority groups) or a politics of invisibility (per dominant groups). We must push past the identitarian frameworks that reinscribe modernity's racial logic and hierarchy through the

rhetoric of multiculturalism and inclusiveness. Instead, we must discourse anew in ways that continue to debunk the modern myth that race-ethnicity is a biological fact or cultural essence that hierarchically divides and differentiates. The way forward, then, can only be realized through a politics that eschews the entire framework of modernity's racialized hierarchy. To that end, the call for a coalition across ethnoracial lines is not only indispensable but also salutary.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROPOSING AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE OF MATTHEW 26-27: MINORITIZING JESUS IN THE MATTHEAN PASSION NARRATIVE

#### **Introduction**

If the dominant narrative follows a peculiar pattern of under-utilizing, eliding, and obscuring the politics of race-ethnicity in the world of production, resulting in a deracialized representation of Jesus in the world of consumption, then the primary logic in constructing an alternative narrative is a critical retrieval of race-ethnicity: to utilize the discourse and dialectic of race-ethnicity as a lens to show how the politics of race-ethnicity are ostensibly at work. To that end, my reading of the Matthean passion narrative positions the Matthean Jesus as being minoritized as a racialized-other: I argue that the hailing of Jesus as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* is not a messianic title, but a racial slur, that being hung on a Roman tree is a minoritizing act of imperial domination. Jesus' crucifixion sends a very loud and clear message: Roman superiority over Judean inferiority. The primary goal of Chapter 4, then, is to offer a reading that is attuned to the politics of minoritization and racialization.

The events following Jesus' arrest may be divided into four trial scenes where Jesus is made to appear before the Judean, Roman, popular, and divine courts. The trials move successively and in linear fashion, transitioning directly from one to the next—a process that is signaled by Matthew's repeated motif of Jesus being "handed over" (*παραδίδοται*, Matt 26:2), first by Judas's "hand" (*τὴν χεῖρα*, Matt 26:23), then over to the "hands of sinners" (*χεῖρας ἀμαρτωλῶν*, Matt 26:45) sent by the Judean elites, then finally to Pilate who "hands him over to be crucified" (*παρέδωκεν ἵνα σταυρωθῆ*, Matt 27:26) by

the Roman garrison. While the politics of racialization occur implicitly and to varying degrees in each trial, there is an overarching process of minoritization that governs the whole. Indeed, the entirety of the Matthean passion narrative—all that happens to Jesus from the very beginning of chapter 26 to his crucifixion and final cry on the cross at the end of chapter 27—may be understood as an interrelated process of minoritization/dominantization.

Equally important to the substance of this alternative narrative, however, is the basis for its claims. Thus the secondary goal of Chapter 4 is to foreground my particularized reading location as a minoritized critic in the world of consumption. In reframing how Jesus has been minoritized, I do so as a minoritized critic through the lens of four stereotypical tropes directed against U.S. minority groups: Native Americans as “being proud,” African Americans as “being inferior,” Latino/a Americans as “being illegal,” and Asian Americans as “being foreign.” Foregrounding this collective matrix of racialized experiences as a critical point of entry into the world of production is one way to destabilize the dominant narrative—a move that stands in contrast to the objectivist reading strategies and unmarked reading locations of dominant Matthean scholarship.

Reflecting these primary and secondary goals, two caveats regarding my proposed reading should be noted from the start. First, I do not present my reading as one that claims greater historical accuracy (i.e., that my reading of Jesus’ crucifixion as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* is a more objective rendering of the title’s original first century meaning, whatever that might entail or however that might be determined). Nor is it that the proposed method secures a more rigorous sociological analysis of race-ethnicity in antiquity (i.e., that my theory or method presents a more nuanced account of Judean



identity during the first century). Since all forms of reading are contextualized—not to say unhistorical—practices, it is necessary for any interpretive act to acknowledge its selective and subjective, porous and partial, measured and motivated character. This alternative narrative that foregrounds how the Matthean Jesus is minoritized and racialized is no different.

The second caveat is that I do not present this alternative narrative as bearing unique or privileged insight by virtue of appealing to how U.S. minorities have been racialized.<sup>187</sup> While these racial stereotypes are not unique to each group, they nevertheless represent classic minoritizing tropes that need to be taken up (even impersonated as Tina Chen argues<sup>188</sup>) in order to be properly dismantled. So while my social location does not grant me unique access, the historical experiences of these communities, and my formation in them, nevertheless make me a conscientized reader who has been made sensitive to the politics of minoritization/ racialization and dominantization/ deracialization.<sup>189</sup>

Three arguments structure my reading. First, I identify the dominant-minority dialectic that illumines Matthew's presentation. How Matthew frames the passion narrative may be understood as a dialectical framework of dominant-minority formations and relations. Matthew's text enacts the whole conflict of the passion narrative in the first

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<sup>187</sup> This is a fairly common objection raised against minoritized groups. See Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 99-107.

<sup>188</sup> Chen, *Double Agency*, xviii.

<sup>189</sup> Bailey et al., "Toward Minority Biblical Criticism," 31.

five verses of chapter 26, by means of literary juxtaposition, pitting a minority group (Jesus and his disciples [Matt 26:1-2]), against a dominant group (the chief priests and elders of the people [Matt 26:3-5]). This juxtaposition not only sets up the dominant-minority dialectic framing all that follows, but also indicates three points of tension that instigate the ensuing narrative. These three points of tension must be resolved in order for the predictions of Jesus and the plans of the Judean authorities to come to fruition.

Second, within this dominant-minority dialectic, and only inside of the dialectic, I show how Jesus is explicitly minoritized and implicitly racialized. My argument is that locating how Jesus is specifically racialized within a broader process of minoritization highlights how ethnoracial signifiers are mobilized, since the two (i.e., the discourse and dialectic of race-ethnicity), based on the theoretical arguments of Chapters 2-3, are inextricably linked. With this in mind, my reading focuses on three important aspects in the Judean, Roman, and popular trials: first, how Jesus is minoritized in general and racialized in particular; second, how the Judean and Roman authorities are conversely made dominant and invisible; and third, how blame is distributed throughout the narrative as a result of alliances that are formed. The passion narrative unfolds in each trial scene as the power of the chief priests and Pilate increase (dominantization) and the power of Jesus and his disciples decrease (minoritization), resulting in collateral damage as various individuals are erroneously held responsible.

Third, I show how Jesus strategically responds to these authorities by being virtually silent during the proceedings. Jesus rarely speaks and only when necessary. Moreover, when he does speak, his responses are enshrouded in ambiguity and brevity. Instead of answering to the human courts, Jesus subversively takes his case to a higher

court of appeals than even that of the Roman Empire—the divine courtroom. In making his final plea on the cross to God, however, Jesus is further minoritized as a foreign other who suffers divine estrangement.

In the end, Matthew's presentation of these events conceals his socio-political critique of the Judean and Roman authorities and fulfills a religious-theological imperative that is central to the Gospel of Matthew: of experiencing the love of God in the other, of encountering the divine in strangers.

### **The dominant-minority dialectic in Matthew 26-27**

Tracing this dominant-minority dialectic for our purposes makes the subtle dynamics of racialization intelligible. For it is precisely within this overarching framework of minoritization that the specific modality of race-ethnicity is operationalized (i.e., ethnoracial signifiers are activated and attributed to Jesus). What is first necessary, then, is to outline how this process of minoritization is established from the very opening of the passion narrative, before looking into the specifics of each trial.

Matthew opens the passion narrative by centralizing the escalating conflict between two groups: Jesus and his disciples versus the chief priests and elders of the people. The juxtaposition of these two groups in the opening of chapter 26 indicates a significant power differential between the two. On the one hand, Matthew portrays the first group as wielding great power and political savvy, as they orchestrate a strategic plan to play to their favor. Thus Matthew depicts the chief priests and elders of the people in a clandestine meeting with other high-ranking members of the Judean elite to formulate a plan to destroy Jesus. In contrast, the other scene describes a less formal

gathering that takes place among lowly members of the Judean masses. Matthew depicts Jesus and his disciples as reclining at table with a woman and a leper. The power differential is also reflected in the geographical and spatial descriptions where each respective meeting occurs. The Judean authorities are convened in session (another repeated motif throughout the passion narrative: *συνήχθησαν* Matt 26:4; *συνεβουλεύσαντο*, Matt 26:4; cf. *συμβούλιον*, Matt 27:1; *συνήχθησαν*, Matt 27:62; *συναχθέντες*, Matt 28:12) in a place of power in Jerusalem, inside the courtyard of Caiaphas the high priest, whereas Jesus is on the outskirts of Jerusalem in Bethany, in the home of Simon the leper.

However, there is also a striking similarity between the two groups. Both groups can be seen as moving towards the same goal. Matthew makes this connection explicit in the opening of chapter 26—Jesus predicts to his disciples (Matt 26:1-2, 6-13) what the chief priests and elders of the people covertly prepare to do, namely, apprehend Jesus in order to kill him (Matt 26:3-5, 14-6). What occurs from Matt 26:6 and following is the sequential alignment of this prophecy/ plan until Jesus is finally delivered over by Pilate to be crucified. The juxtaposition that opens chapter 26, then, not only reveals a significant disparity in power and highlights a shared objective between the two groups, but also foreshadows the unfolding plot of the minoritization of one group (i.e., Jesus and his disciples) and, conversely, the dominantization of the other (i.e., the chief priests and elders of the people). In this way, a dominant-minority dialectic sets the stage for all that follows in the passion narrative.

Beyond setting up the basic conflict of the passion narrative, Matthew's juxtaposition also presents three points of narrative tension that require resolution. The

first is a practical challenge: in order for the chief priests and scribes to kill Jesus, he must be charged; in order to charge Jesus, he must be put to trial; and in order to try Jesus, he must be physically apprehended. But, secondly, Jesus' popularity posed a more serious social challenge. The chief priests, scribes, and elders of the people are well aware that Jesus was highly esteemed as a prophet by the hoi polloi. So the potential for causing a disturbance was great because the crowds greatly favored Jesus. In fact, they were previously frustrated in their growing desire to arrest Jesus precisely because they were fearful of the crowds (ἐφοβήθησαν τοὺς ὄχλους, Matt 21:46). The risk for causing a disturbance, however, was heightened with the Passover fast approaching, given the sheer number of people who have gathered in Jerusalem (Matt 26:2).<sup>190</sup> Were Jesus to be tried in the popular court at this point in the narrative, he would likely find favor among the Judean masses, and the plans of the Judean authorities would be foiled. So not only is it necessary for the chief priests to identify a way to apprehend Jesus in a discrete manner, they also need to sway the crowds so as to avoid inciting a riot (Matt 26:5). That the Judean authorities are wary of a possible revolt reveals the precarious nature of the second challenge.

The third challenge is a point of ambiguity regarding agency: who or what is ultimately responsible for the prophecy/ plan coming to fruition? On the surface, Jesus' death is the direct result of the plans by the chief priests and elders of the people (Matt 26:3-5)—a plot that has been slowly developing throughout Matt 1-25. But how should

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<sup>190</sup> One estimate is that Jerusalem's population of 50,000 quintupled during Passover. See: Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 617.

the plans of the Judean authorities be reconciled with Jesus' own predictions of his death immediately in Matt 26:2 and previously in Matt 17:22 and 20:18? The ambiguity partially stems from the passive construction of Jesus' prediction: *καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδοται εἰς τὸ σταυρωθῆναι* (26:2). What precisely does the perfect passive *παραδίδοται* signify (particularly in contrast to the aorist middle *συνεβουλεύσαντο*, Matt 26:4)? To further complicate matters, there are numerous references throughout chapters 26-27 where Jesus is said to be "handed over" (*παραδίδοται*, Matt 26:2, 45; 27:2, 18, 26) from one courtroom to the next, changing hands from Judas to the Judean authorities to Pilate, and so on. By the time Jesus stands before the divine court, the number of people involved in his death is numerous, including Judas, the Judean authorities, the Roman authorities, the Judean masses who exclaim "His blood be on us and our children! (*Τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ἐφ' ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τέκνα ἡμῶν*, Matt 27:25)." From the opening of Matthew's narrative, then, it remains unclear who is ultimately responsible for Jesus' death. As we shall see later, this ambiguity is deliberate on the part of Matthew.

In summary, the juxtaposition that opens chapter 26 frames the conflict of the passion narrative within a dominant-minority framework, anticipating the end from the beginning. The plans of the chief priests will come to fruition as Jesus is lifted up on a Roman crucifix, above which is a sign that reads *Οὗτός ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* (Matt 27:37), culminating the process of minoritization. Yet Matthew's juxtaposition between these two groups also presents three specific points of tension that will need to be addressed by the narrative. In order for the plans of the Judean authorities to be realized, the first order of business is to identify a way to arrest Jesus by stealth, and, secondly, to minimize the risk of inciting a riot by manipulating the Judean crowds.

A third point of narrative tension is a sense of agency and responsibility: the chief priests plan what Jesus prophesies, and every character in the narrative seemingly lays hold of Jesus at some point, but who is ultimately responsible? These three points of tension are instrumental for the unfolding narrative.

Having established the dominant-minority dialectic that frames the passion narrative and having noted three points of tension that the narrative must address, the specific forms of minoritization/ dominantization in the Judean, Roman, and popular courts may now be considered. As we shall see, the first point of tension finds immediate resolution in the Judean court; the second point of tension, in the Roman and popular courts; and the third point tension, in the divine court.

### **Minoritizing Jesus in the Judean court**

The first evolution of minoritization is evident in the events leading up to the Judean court and culminates in contrasting fashion in what happens to Jesus inside of the Judean court and to Peter outside of the court. The dominant-minority framework that opens the passion narrative in vv. 1-5 is immediately followed by a series of events where Jesus and his disciples are minoritized. This minoritization process can be understood as a divide-and-conquer tactic deployed by the Judean authorities against Jesus and his disciples—a direct result of vv. 3-5 where various groups among the Judean elite, including the chief priests and other high-ranking members of the Sanhedrin, are depicted as devising a plan to apprehend Jesus surreptitiously.

What they seek in vv. 3-5 they find immediately in vv. 14-16 through Judas, who represents the first (and Peter the twelfth) disciple, who will turn against Jesus as a result

of the schemes of the dominant-Judean leaders. But the seeds of division are already present in the intervening story of vv. 6-13. In ironic contrast to the twelve named disciples, an unnamed woman approaches Jesus and anoints him with expensive aromatic oil of pure nard. In response to the anonymous woman's extravagant act, the disciples become indignant (*ἠγανάκτησαν*, Matt 26:8), reasoning that it would have been better to sell the oil for a large sum of money and given to the poor. Jesus defends the woman's act, interpreting its larger significance in relation to his immanent death (Matt 26:12-13) and final departure at the end of the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 28:18-20). The division among the disciples in vv. 6-13, and the growing alienation between Jesus and the disciples that it foreshadows, carries over immediately to what occurs in vv. 14-16

Immediately following Jesus' anointing, Judas is said to form an alliance with the chief priests. Matthew's report is matter of fact and does not provide very much elaboration: Judas asks and they pay. Then Matthew says that Judas began to look for the next opportunity to hand Jesus over (*παραδώσω*, Matt 26:15; hearkening back to Jesus' prediction [*παραδίδοται*] in Matt 26:2). The implicit contrast Matthew sets up here between the unnamed woman of vv. 6-13 and the named disciple of vv.14-16 is no doubt significant. The contrast is not only in terms of conduct (e.g., an act of devotion versus an act of betrayal) or cost (e.g., expensive nard versus thirty pieces of silver; *ἀργύρια*, Matt 26:15; anticipating Matt 28:12), but also in terms of character (e.g., an unnamed woman who is an outsider versus a named disciple who is in the inner circle of Jesus' trusted companions). The first practical challenge of physically apprehending Jesus will be an inside job. Already the minority group of Jesus and his disciples is beginning to break apart through the newly formed alliance between Judas and the Judean authorities.



The theme of division and discord continues into the next scene where Jesus and his disciples celebrate the Passover meal. The divide-and-conquer strategy can be seen in progressively stronger terms in the form of two more predictions, which, in turn, cause the disciples to become distressed (*λυπούμενοι*, Matt 26:22). First, in Matt 26:20-25, Jesus predicts that one of the disciples will betray him (*παραδώσει*)—specifically, the one who dips his hand (*τὴν χεῖρα*) into the bowl with Jesus, continuing the hand/ handling/ handing over motif. Second, in Matt 26:31-35 after the Passover meal, Jesus predicts that all of his disciples will be scattered (*σκανδαλισθήσεσθε*) and that Peter, in particular, will deny (*ἀπαρνήσῃ*) Jesus three times before the cock crows.

The fulfillment of the first prediction occurs at the scene of Jesus' arrest when he is betrayed into the "hands of sinners" (*χεῖρας ἀμαρτωλῶν*, Matt 26:45) and particularly by Judas, "the hander over" (*ὁ παραδιδούς*, Matt 26:46): "And he went up to Jesus immediately and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him." Judas's greeting and kiss constitute the first interpellative act of the Matthean passion narrative: Jesus is the hailed-one, the greeted-one, the kissed-one (*Χαῖρε, ῥαββί*, Matt 26:49 cf. *Χαῖρε, βασιλεῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων*, Matt 27:29). The fulfillment of the second prediction occurs at the end of the scene where Jesus says, "Have you come to arrest me with swords and clubs as though I were a robber?" (*Ὡς ἐπὶ ληστὴν*, Matt 26:55; cf. Matt 27:38). At the conclusion of this speech, Matthew records that all of the disciples deserted him and fled. The plans of the chief priests are brought one step closer to realization through Judas's act. Jesus is physically apprehended and the disciples are disbanded.

What follows next is another juxtaposition of scenes between Jesus inside of the Judean court proper (Matt 26:57-68) and Peter who follows Jesus outside the courtyard of

the high priest (Matt 26:69-75). The comparison between these two scenes is typically read as a contrast between Jesus' confession to be the Messiah and Son of God before Caiaphas against Peter's three-fold denial of Jesus. If Jesus makes a faithful confession of his messianic identity before Caiaphas, Peter's three denials show his unfaithfulness in contrast, just as Jesus predicted.<sup>191</sup> An alternative reading that differs from the aforementioned reading is to understand both scenes as the climactic conclusion to the first point of tension that is set up in Matt 26:1-5. The plans of the chief priests to apprehend, try, and charge Jesus is finally brought to fruition, by means of the divide-and-conquer strategy. Matthew signals this process that began with the first disciple, Judas, by juxtaposing Jesus' trial before the Judean authorities with the denials of the twelfth and final disciple, Peter. On this reading, the juxtaposition of scenes develops the final iteration of the divide-and-conquer strategy as the bond between Jesus and his disciples—or, in this case, Peter, the twelfth and final disciple—is completely severed. How these ties are broken is especially important for our purposes.

The scene inside of the Judean courtroom (Matt 26:57-68) unfolds as a series of couplets. There are two descriptions of Jesus entering the precincts of the Judean court (vv. 57-58); two sets of false witnesses called by the Sanhedrin (vv. 59-61); two

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<sup>191</sup> Concerning Matthew 26:58, Davies and Allison, vol. 3, 522: "This, a sort of parenthesis which prepares for vv. 69ff., invites the reader to keep Peter in mind throughout the following story. The upshot is contrast between faithful Lord and unfaithful servant. The contrast is all the more painful because Peter has already answered the high priest's question in the affirmative; that is, he has confessed Jesus to be the Messiah and Son of the living God."

questions directed to Jesus by the high priest (vv. 62-63); two verdicts of blasphemy (vv. 65-66); and two acts of mockery that conclude the scene (vv. 67-68). Throughout the proceedings of the Judean court the focus of the actions are on what happens to Jesus, rather than what Jesus himself does. Here, the Judean authorities are characterized as orchestrating all that takes place from the convening of the Sanhedrin, the calling forward of false witness, the questioning of the defendant by the high priest, and the delivery of the verdict of blasphemy. The mind of the Judean court has already been made as false witnesses are called forward to testify against Jesus. In the end, Jesus is made a proud blasphemer who is guilty of death.

What happens to Jesus inside of the Judean court also happens to Peter outside of the courtyard in Matt 26:69-75—both are minoritized. Yet there are also important differences between the two scenes. Just as Jesus is minoritized before the highest of Judean authorities, before the presence of the high priest Caiaphas, Peter is minoritized by the lowest and most common of authorities, namely, before two slave-girls and other individuals who were standing around. Another difference is that Jesus is minoritized as a proud other, who has blasphemed the court, while Peter, in contrast, is publically humiliated as he is brought to a point of denying Jesus three times. But perhaps the single most important difference for our purposes is the basis for how Jesus and Peter are minoritized. Inside of the Judean court, Jesus is minoritized with reference to *what* Jesus says (i.e., uttering what Caiaphas regards blasphemy). Outside in the courtyard, however, Peter is minoritized with explicit reference to *how* Peter says what he says.

How Peter is racialized outside of the courtyard becomes evident upon a closer examination of the three encounters. On the first occasion, a servant-girl (παιδίσκη)

approaches Peter and says to him, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean” (Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Γαλιλαίου, Matt 26:69), to which Peter responds, “I do not know of what you speak” (Matt 26:70). On the second occasion, another servant-girl approaches, sees Peter, and then turns to some bystanders as if to point back to Peter to say, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth” (Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου, Matt 26:71)—an allegation that Peter again denies. On the third occasion, the bystanders who were standing there (οἱ ἐστῶτες) come up to Peter and say, “Clearly, you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you” (Ἀληθῶς καὶ σὺ ἐξ αὐτῶν εἶ, καὶ γὰρ ἡ λαλιά σου δῆλόν σε ποιεῖ, Matt 26:73). In all three occasions, Peter vehemently denies any sort of connection, just as Jesus predicted earlier.

It is the basis for these associations that is of particular interest for our purposes. In each occasion, Peter is put on the spot, so to speak, accused as having some kind of tie to Jesus. Matthew underscores this connection with the repetition of μετὰ Ἰησοῦ in the first two instances, underscoring the close contact between Peter and Jesus. In the third instance, however, the differentiation is phrased in stronger and more aggressive terms as Peter is described not merely as being “with Jesus,” but as being “one of them” (σὺ ἐξ αὐτῶν εἶ, Matt 26:73). In the first two cases, ethnoracial signifiers serve as the marker for the association. In both instances, while it is Peter who is being racially marked most immediately, his racialization depends on a previous act of interpellation, namely, that of Jesus: “Jesus the Galilean” (Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Γαλιλαίου, Matt 26:69) and “Jesus of Nazareth” (Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου, Matt 26:71). Both titles racially interpellate Peter directly and Jesus indirectly. Something unspecified in Peter has triggered two individuals to somehow connect him ethnoracially to Jesus.

The extent to which these titles are derogatory slurs is difficult to determine from the context. But not all instances of racialization are necessarily derogatory. What is clear, however, is that these ethnoracial markers are used to single out Peter—that he, like Jesus, must be a Galilean or from Nazareth. Identifying Peter by way of either title Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Γαλιλαίου or Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου, then, is an act of racialization based on its primary interpellative function to identify Peter (i.e., “Peter the Galilean”) and differentiate him from the rest (i.e., “Peter of Nazareth”). In other words, these titles are ethnoracial signifiers that mark a minority group (Galileans) from a dominant group (non-Galileans). So even if the titles themselves may not be racially derogatory per se, or at least this is not an inference that can be drawn from Matthew’s descriptions, the negative meaning that is attributed to these signifiers is nonetheless evident.

The negative ethnoracial association is made explicit and heightened in the third instance where attention shifts secondarily from how Jesus is identified (i.e., as a Galilean or as a Nazarene) to primarily how Peter himself is identified. Peter is racially interpellated on the basis of ἡ λαλιά σου, which is variously translated “your accent” (NRSV), “your speech” (NKJV), or “the way you talk” (CEB). Evidently, for those who were standing outside of the courtyard, the manner of Peter’s λαλιά—that is, his manner of speaking, his regional slang, his dialectical peculiarities<sup>192</sup>—gave him away (literally “made it obvious” [δῆλόν σε ποιεῖ, Matt 26:74]). The increasing volatility of these three encounters can also be seen in the adamant negations with which Peter responds.

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<sup>192</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (ed., Frederick William Danker; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 583.

Matthew builds the sequence by prefacing each with a description of the illocutionary force of Peter's responses. On the first occasion, Matthew says that Peter denied it (ἡρνήσατο, Matt 26:70); on the second occasion, that he denied it with an oath (ἡρνήσατο μετὰ ὄρκου, Matt 26:72); on the third occasion, that he denied it with a curse and an oath (ἤρξατο καταθεματίζειν καὶ ὀμνύειν, Matt 26:74).

But what precisely did Peter's way of talking reveal and how did it reveal it? Regarding the first question, the context provides an important clue about which scholars agree: Peter's manner of speech likely revealed him to be a Judean, or, more specifically, a Galilean—just like Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Γαλιλαίου. Regarding the second question, however, the brevity of Matthew's text leaves the matter open to debate, whether it was the content or manner of his speech.<sup>193</sup> This has led scholars to consider the particularities of Peter's northern Galilean dialectic, seeking to account for the possible phonological, morpho-syntactic, and lexical differences in Aramaic.<sup>194</sup> These discussions can only lead to speculation. The important point to establish, though, is that Peter is interpellated, identified in terms of his provenance as a Galilean, based on his manner of speaking.

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<sup>193</sup> So Davies and Allison, vol. 3, 548: "Matthew does not help the reader understand why Peter's accent betrays him. Certainly all Galileans in Jerusalem for the feast are not Jesus' followers. Probably the thought is that Peter is already suspected on other grounds of following Jesus. His accent is simply supporting evidence."

<sup>194</sup> For further discussion, see Jonathan M. Watt, "Of Gutturals and Galileans: The Two Slurs of Matthew 26.73" in *Diglossia And Other Topics In New Testament Linguistics* (ed., Stanley E. Porter; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 107-120.

Beyond this, Matthew's text is silent and goes no further. At this point, the experiences of minoritized readers may offer some insight. From the standpoint of minoritized groups, how Peter is identified by his speech is not an uncommon experience. How one speaks—for instance, one's accent, pronunciation, or choice of vocabulary—is often used as an exclusionary measure. For example, while English accents differ among various U.S. minority groups, the function of differentiating one ethnoracial group from another, and minority groups from the dominant group, is still the same. Individuals in U.S. minority groups are especially sensitized to these dynamics, both in private and in public, depending on who or who may not be listening in on the conversation. But the experiences of minority groups goes much deeper. Many minoritized individuals are familiar with tacit microaggressions that occur instantaneously in social encounters before a single word is uttered. How a person looks, smells, sounds, comes across—these are all sensory, kinesthetic, and paralinguistic forms of identification and communication that are already at work long before a person opens their mouth to speak. What one says and how one says it (linguistic fluency) is certainly one basis for racial discrimination, but so too are paralinguistic dimensions such as how one acts, appears, smells, and comes across before the linguistic act (cultural fluency). To complicate matters even further, the marking of ethnoracial difference does not necessarily diminish when both linguistic and cultural fluency of the dominant group is achieved, as individuals of second and third generations of minority groups experience. Racial discrimination continues to happen despite achieving linguistic and cultural fluency. These insights suggest that what happens to Peter could fall under a range of possibilities from what he actually said, how he actually said it, or even how he looked as he said it.

In sum, inside the Judean court, what Jesus says leads to his minoritization. Outside in the courtyard, how Peter says what he says leads to his racialization. While Jesus is not explicitly racialized during the proceedings of the Judean court per se, he is implicitly racialized in what happens to Peter outside of the courtyard. Moreover, while Jesus is not directly racialized outside of the courtyard, Peter's racialization is logically and indirectly dependent on Jesus' interpellation. What these scenes reveal, then, is the continued minoritization of Jesus and his disciples both inside and outside the precincts of the Judean court. Jesus is made a proud other by members of the Judean elite and made an ethnic other by onlookers outside. Jesus has been racially marked by two titles as Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Γαλιλαίου (Matt 26:69) and Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου (Matt 26:71). Moreover, these interpellative acts form the basis for how Peter becomes racially marked by his association "with Jesus" (μετὰ Ἰησοῦ). Although it is not possible to know exactly what was being identified in Peter, what is important for our purposes is that Peter himself was being racially marked in some way as a Galilean, as a Nazarene, like Jesus.

### **Minoritizing Jesus in the Roman court**

The second evolution of minoritization occurs by way of Jesus' trial before Pilate the governor. Chapter 27 opens with a brief narrative description that marks a transition to the Roman court: in the morning, Jesus is led away and handed over (παρέδωκαν, Matt 27:2) to Pilate the governor. This editorial comment that Jesus was handed over in vv. 1-2 and the proceedings of the Roman trial proper in v. 11ff. are interrupted by an account of a second meeting that takes place between Judas and the chief priests (vv. 3-10). This scene is important on several counts, and not only as a transition from one trial to the



next. First, it marks the successful end of the divide-and-conquer tactic that has led, no less, to Jesus being secretly arrested and his followers being disbanded. That this process of minoritization occurs as a single chain of events is clearly marked between Judas's first meeting with the chief priests before handing Jesus over in Matt 26:14-16 and now in this second meeting after handing Jesus over in Matt 27:3-10.

Second, the scene narrates the consequences of their alliance, that is, the collateral damage or civilian casualty that results, as it were, as Judas is made to take the fall. Once Judas sees that Jesus has been condemned, he repents for betraying innocent blood (*παραδοὺς αἷμα ἀθῶον*, Matt 27:4; anticipating Pilate's words Ἄθῶός εἰμι ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος τούτου in Matt 27:24). The response of the chief priests to Judas is crucial: "See to it yourself" (*σὺ ὄψη*, Matt 27:4; also anticipating Pilate's ὑμεῖς ὄψεσθε in Matt 27:24). The chief priests deflect the blame, leaving Judas to take responsibility for his part—he returns the money, goes out, and hangs himself (*καὶ ἀπελθὼν ἀπήγγξατο*, Matt 27:5). The chief priests take the thirty pieces of silver and, instead of putting it back into the temple treasury, since it is blood money, purchase a field to bury foreigners (*τοῖς ξένοις*, Matt 27:7). As we shall see, both details in this intervening story contribute to what subsequently transpires.

With Judas committing suicide and the blood money reallocated, the alliance between Judas and the chief priests is effectively dissolved. But as one alliance comes to an end, another one begins to form between the Judean and Roman authorities. Matthew signals this transition by his editorial comment in the opening verses of chapter 27, which parallels the opening verses of chapter 26. In the morning after Jesus' trial before Caiaphas, the chief priests and elders of the people are convened in session yet again

(συμβούλιον ἔλαβον πάντες οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τοῦ λαοῦ κατὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, Matt 27:3-4; reminiscent of Matt 26:3-4). Having found a way to apprehend Jesus by stealth through one of the disciples, thereby alleviating the first point of tension that opened chapter 26, the plans of the chief priests have thus far prevailed: Jesus is bound in custody (δήσαντες, Matt 27:2). But now they must find a way to convict him under the sentence of death (ὥστε θανατῶσαι αὐτόν, Matt 27:1), and for that they hand Jesus over (παρέδωκαν, Matt 27:2) to Pilate, the Roman governor. By this exchange, a tacit alliance between the Judean and Roman elites can be seen as forming, which the proceedings of the Roman trial subsequently develop.

If the politics of racialization up to this point in the Matthean passion narrative have been subtle, occurring outside of the courtyard of Caiaphas and indirectly by way of Peter, they become explicit and directly attributed to Jesus in the Roman trial. In fact, the two titles by which Jesus and Peter were both racially marked outside of the Judean court—namely, Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Γαλιλαίου and Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου—are precursors to a third title by which Jesus is racially interpellated in no uncertain terms by the Roman court—namely, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων. Dominant interpretations of the Roman trial, however, give little indication that anything political, let alone ethnoracial, is going on.

As we have seen in Chapter 3, dominant scholarly interpretations tend to be overdetermined by the head noun ὁ βασιλεὺς, as scholars inquire precisely what type of king, messianic or imperial, Jesus was purported to be.<sup>195</sup> In my assessment, these

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<sup>195</sup> So France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1048: “But it is the term ‘king’ which is deliberately sensitive: a Roman governor dare not ignore a claim to political leadership

readings fail to appreciate the political or racial undertones of the title. Moreover, the traditional religious-theological interpretation is particularly susceptible because it tends to spiritualize the brutality and violence of Roman crucifixion—what Josephus called “the most wretched of deaths.”<sup>196</sup> Equally problematic, though, is the way in which Pilate is interpreted in neutral terms as though an innocent, oblivious, and even sympathetic figure. Over and against the dominant trajectory of interpretation, it is thus important to be as clear as possible about how my reading of the Roman trial differs from both traditional religious-theological and newer socio-political readings. Therefore in what follows, I clarify two important differences in my reading of the Roman trial in order to accentuate the racializing connotations of ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων. Both of these differences are developed in explicit counterpoint to the traditional religious-theological and more recent socio-political interpretations.

The first important difference in my reading is that the attribution of ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων title is not a positive evaluation; it is unmistakably negative. A crucial feature of the dominant religious-theological reading is of Jesus as a heroic messianic figure<sup>197</sup>—all of which comes to ironic and climactic expression in the passion narrative among the Jews, whose last official ‘king’ was Herod, now replaced by the direct rule of the Roman prefect of Judea.”

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<sup>196</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.203 (ET, H. St. J. Thackeray, 1928; 3.563). For a description of the torture of crucifixion, see Gerard S. Sloyan, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: History, Myth, Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 14-18.

<sup>197</sup> So Howard W. Clarke, *The Gospel of Matthew and Its Readers: A Historical Introduction to the First Gospel* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 207:

by means of his crucifixion as ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων. As we have seen, the interpretations of scholars such as R. T. France are typical in this respect: “[A]s with the Roman mocking, Matthew expects his readers to recognize that what is being thrown at Jesus in jest is in fact true...he *is* the king of Israel, though not in the political sense his mockers imagine...” (emphasis original).<sup>198</sup> In a similar vein, Daniel Harrington writes, “Jesus who is mocked as King of the Jews really is the Messiah (= King of the Jews), and so the soldiers unwittingly speak the truth in deed and word.”<sup>199</sup>

John Nolland, too, is no different: “‘King of the Jews’ is presumably meant to be an imprecise messianic designation on the lips of the Magi, of a kind that might be appropriate on the lips of non-Jews. In the Passion Narrative it appears again as a non-

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“In archetypal terms of hero-myth, a feast and a marriage traditionally end a success story, so Jesus’ life can also be seen—with some effort of the imagination—as a reenactment of a hero’s progress to kingship in which he survives an imperiled infancy; is initiated in the desert; takes a journey in the course of which he performs marvelous deeds; overcomes various foes, including a dragon (Satan) and death itself; and emerges victorious as a new king with his bride, the church.”

<sup>198</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1070.

<sup>199</sup> Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 396. This distinction may hold true in the Matthean narrative, but that is not the same as equating the “King of the Jews” title with “King of Israel.” It does not logically follow that the “Gentiles” and “Jews” of Matthew’s context would have understood the titles in the same way.

Jewish designation and again with messianic overtones.”<sup>200</sup> More recently, Joel Marcus has upped the ante on the dominant narrative by offering the following thesis: “The central irony in the passion narratives of the Gospels is that Jesus’ crucifixion turns out to be his elevation to kingship.”<sup>201</sup> For Marcus, Jesus’ exaltation does not temporally follow his crucifixion, say, at the resurrection or when the Son of Man returns in glory. Jesus’ kingship is substantiated *in crucifixion*.

These readings have the tendency of de-politicizing Jesus’ crucifixion—a fairly standard pattern of the dominant narrative. These readings, moreover, are often sentimentalized in U.S. popular culture where Jesus is depicted as a meek and mild king who will save the day with his heroic deeds. But what the traditional religious-theological reading tends to overlook is the physical and brutal spectacle of Roman crucifixion. While not every scholar cited above is guilty of spiritualizing the violence of crucifixion, this is a discernable characteristic of the dominant narrative. This overlooking of physical brutality is part and parcel of and goes hand in hand with dismissing the demeaning ethnorracial valences conveyed by the title.

However, a closer examination of the context in which the title is deployed yields a different picture. The title is reiteratively cited throughout the passion narrative beginning in Matt 27:11 by Pilate (“Are you ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων?”); in Matt 27:29 by the Roman soldiers (“Hail ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων!”); in Matt 27:37 on the sign over

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<sup>200</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 109. See also: David R. Bauer, “The Kingship Of Jesus In The Matthean Infancy Narrative : A Literary Analysis,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57.2 (1995): 306-323.

<sup>201</sup> Marcus, “Crucifixion As Parodic Exaltation,” 73.

the cross (“This is Jesus ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων”); in Matt 27:42 by the chief priests, scribes, and elders (“He is βασιλεὺς Ἰσραήλ”). The locution ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων is straightforward. On its own, there is nothing that clearly marks it off as a negative slur of any kind. But what Matthew’s editorial characterizations reveal is its decidedly negative illocutionary force. Matthew’s narrative descriptions leave important clues to the negative evaluations that the title communicates. The title is used in four different context, and in each Matthew’s characterization casts light on the decidedly negative illocutionary force of the utterances:

1.) The governor asked him (ἐπηρώτησεν), “Are you ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων? Jesus said, “You say so.” But when he was accused (κατηγορεῖσθαι) by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you (καταμαρτυροῦσιν)? But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge (ῥῆμα), so that the governor was greatly amazed” (Matt 27:11, NRSV).

2.) They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him (ἐνέπαιξαν), saying “Hail, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων!” They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him (ἐνέπαιξαν), they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him (Matt 27:29-31, NRSV).

3.) Over his head they put the charge (αἰτίαν) against him, which read, “This is Jesus ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων” (Matt 27:37, NRSV).

4.) In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him (ἐμπαιζοντες), saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the βασιλεὺς Ἰσραήλ; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, “I am God’s Son.” The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him (ὠνείδιζον) in the same way” (Matt 27:41-44, NRSV)

The heavy repetition of the title in the final scenes leading to the crucifixion scene underscore the derogatory nature of ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων as a racial epithet. In the first and third contexts, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων is deployed as a verbal accusation and written charge against Jesus; in the second and fourth contexts, it is deployed as a verbal

taunt, a way of mocking Jesus. Jesus is falsely accused as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* in the Roman trial and on the Roman cross. Then he is verbally assaulted and slandered as the same by the Roman soldiers and the Judean authorities.

There is no hint of irony in Matthew’s presentation of these scenes—only raw physical and linguistic violence done against Jesus. So notorious, dishonorable, and unspeakable was Roman crucifixion that Matthew only gives it passing mention as a participle in a dependent clause (“And after they crucified him...” Matt 27:35). That the title conveys a negative evaluation is also confirmed historically, as we have seen in Chapter 3, by the fact that early Christians did not use the *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* title as a source of veneration and worship points to the political and controversial nature of the title.<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, within the Gospel of Matthew, the title is only ever attributed to Jesus by Gentiles, that is, by non-Judean outsiders. Both points casts doubt on the likelihood that the title, whether historically or literarily in Matthew’s usage, was ever a positive designation.<sup>203</sup> This begs the question: Why have contemporary scholars interpreted *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* as a positive evaluation?

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<sup>202</sup> Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology*, 46.

<sup>203</sup> Craig Evans, “The Procession and the Crucifixion,” in *Jesus and Mel Gibson’s The Passion of the Christ: The Film, the Gospels and the Claims of History* (eds., Kathleen E. Corley, Robert L. Vepp; London: Continuum, 2004), 128-139; here 134: “The epithet ‘King of the Jews’ is Roman and was originally applied to Herod the Great. This detail’s claim to authenticity is strengthened when it is remembered that ‘King of the Jews’ was not the way early Christians spoke of Jesus, nor was it the usual title of the

A second important difference in my reading is that Jesus is crucified not merely for the seditious charge of purportedly claiming to be king (ὁ βασιλεὺς), but for being a certain kind of king over a very particular geo-political territory—that of Judea (τῶν Ἰουδαίων), or “over the Judeans” to be precise. So not only is my reading situated against a purely religious reading, but it also builds on and beyond a general political reading as well. Here the important contributions of the newer socio-political reading should be properly acknowledged, and in particular, Warren Carter.

Carter’s scholarship on Matthew has done much to correct the exclusive attention to religious matters. In chapter 9 of *Matthew and Empire*, entitled “Pilate and Jesus: Roman Justice All Washed Up (Matt 27:11-26),” Carter argues against the traditional reading of the Roman trial that generally minimizes political issues, exonerates Pilate of any blame, and renders his conduct as that of a neutral mediator between Jesus and the Judean authorities.<sup>204</sup> Carter rightly underscores the profoundly politicized nature of the awaited Jewish Messiah. An epithet of Christian invention would probably refer to Jesus as ‘Son of God’ or as ‘Savior of the world,’ not ‘King of the Jews.’”

<sup>204</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 145: “Many interpreters deny or minimize any political and Roman aspects of the scene, and focus almost exclusively on so-called religious and Jewish dimensions. That it should have to be argued, as I will do in this chapter, that Pilate is not invisible or inconsequential to the scene, or that Jesus’ condemnation to crucifixion by a Roman provincial governor has profound implications for interpreting this Gospel in relation to the Roman Empire, or that religious and political matters cannot be separated, indicates just how de-Pilatized and de-politicized is much contemporary scholarship on this scene.”



scene between Pilate, an imperial representative of Rome, and Jesus. Pilate's question ("Are you ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων?" [Matt 27:11]), therefore, implies treason against the Roman Empire. Carter paraphrases the question to highlight the politicized and seditious nature of the charge: "Are you the leader of this resistance?"<sup>205</sup>

Over and against a religious-theological reading, Carter's rendering captures the threat, challenge, and conflict conveyed by ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων. His political reading of the title moves in the right direction. But I would suggest going a further step to specify racial politics as a subset of imperial politics—a suggestion that few others such as Richard Horsley have made.<sup>206</sup> More specifically, in the form of a question: what is the

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<sup>205</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 16. Cf. Carter, *Pontius Pilate*, 118ff.

<sup>206</sup> One notable exception is Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), who suggests that "the modern imperial metropolis" (45) of Western readers, and in particular the modern theological schema that pits "Christian universalism" against "Jewish particularism" has led to certain misreadings. One of these misreadings in the Gospel of Mark that Horsley points to is the translation of *Ioudaioi* as "Jews"—what Horsley regards as "a vague, essentializing translation" (46). For these reasons, Horsley prefers "Judean" because it conveys a regional, not religious, reference (47). He writes (46), "Indeed, Mark's only use of the term *Ioudaioi* outside of the episodes of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus appears to be a regional reference to 'Judeans,' in connection with the Pharisees and scribes 'who had come from Jerusalem' (7:1-3). The title 'king of the Judeans' in the episodes of the trial, beating, and crucifixion of Jesus is used only by outsiders, the Roman governor and soldiers (Mark 15:2, 9, 18), who lumped all Israelites

difference between ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων and βασιλεὺς Ἰσραήλ? The common answer found in most commentaries is that the former is a Gentile term that signifies an outsider's perspective to the latter's "Jewish" term that signifies an insider's perspective.<sup>207</sup> This is the logic that leads to a further implication that both are, therefore, religious-theological terms that unilaterally signify Jesus' messianic identity (so France, Bruner, Nolland, etc.). But the same locution does not always mean the same thing in different contexts. Here, again, the collective insights of U.S. minority groups may shed light on a different perspective.

A common experience shared by various minority groups is the complex historical, social, legal, and political process by which any given minority group is constituted. It is all a matter of perspective. From the standpoint of the dominant majority, "Asian American" is a convenient label that describes a group with similar biological features, customs, and cultural practices. But from the standpoint of individuals within the minority group in question, the term "Asian American" itself is a problematic to be pursued and interrogated. For example, under what conditions do U.S.

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together as 'Judeans,' The chief priests use instead the pan-Israelite term 'the Messiah, the king of Israel' (15:32)."

<sup>207</sup> So: Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 396: "Nevertheless, the basic thrust of the Markan and Matthean accounts is the same: Jesus who is mocked as King of the Jews really is the Messiah (= King of the Jews), and so the soldiers unwittingly speak the truth in deed and word"; Yarbrow Collins, "Mark's Interpretation of the Death of Jesus," 553: "It should be recalled that 'messiah' was insider language and the equivalent outsider term was 'king of the Jews.'"

individuals who are, say, ethnically Thai, Hmong, Korean, Japanese, or Filipino—each with complex cultures, languages, and customs of their own—identify as “Asian American.” Identifying as such is not necessarily a choice for individuals in this collective, who, outside of the dominant racial discourse in the U.S., may not perceive of themselves as “Asian American.” In other words, the “Asian American” identity is a status that is made by power relations. The same logic applies across the board for “Native American,” “African American,” and “Latino/a American.”

In light of these perspectives, the difference between  $\delta$  βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων and βασιλεὺς Ἰσραήλ may reflect a similar dynamic of how minority-Judeans perceive themselves within the diverse populations of the Roman Empire and how dominant-Romans hierarchically classify its imperial subjects. Accordingly, the attribution of  $\delta$  βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων can be similarly understood as a process of identification made by power relations, that is, a process of minoritization whereby ethnoracial signifiers (τῶν Ἰουδαίων) are activated against a disenfranchised subject. To be more precise, Jesus is subjected to a process of minority-Judaization and dominant-Romanization.

To signal this process (i.e., how Jesus is racialized as a Judean subject under Roman occupation), I make use of an alternative reading of τῶν Ἰουδαίων as an attributive genitive. This rendering focuses less on the head noun  $\delta$  βασιλεὺς (i.e., “King of the Jews/Judeans”)—a characteristic feature of the genitive of description<sup>208</sup>—preferring to

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<sup>208</sup> See Daniel B. Wallace’s discussion in *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 73ff.

highlight the attributive quality of the genitive τῶν Ἰουδαίων that modifies the head noun. Accordingly, Jesus is the *Jewish* King; or, more specifically, to move away from the traditional religious-theological assumptions and deeply entrenched scholarly debates (i.e., whether the First Gospel should be situated in religious-theological terms as Jewish Christianity, or Christian Judaism, or something in between), the King of the *Judeans*, that is, the *Judean* King; or, even better, to accentuate the corollary processes of Judean minoritization and Roman imperial dominantization, “The *Judaized* King.” This alternative rendering functions as a shorthand that names the process of minoritization in general and racialization in particular, the very process by which Jesus is subject in the Matthean passion narrative.

One of the advantages of this translation is that it fits well within the minoritizing logic of the Roman trial where Jesus is legally accused, tried, and convicted as an inferior Judean king. Matthew’s depiction of Jesus and Pilate elucidates this connection. Both are described as a governor: Pilate is identified as a Roman governor (ἡγεμόνι, Matt 27:2), as is Jesus earlier in the opening of the Gospel as “governor of Judah”<sup>209</sup> (ἡγεμόσιν Ἰούδα, Matt 2:6). But in the proceedings of the Roman court, Jesus’ inferior status is highlighted as he is made to stand before Pilate who is seated in a position of power (Καθημένου δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος, Matt 26:19). This power differential hearkens back to the Judean court where the Judean council and Caiaphas are presumably seated in session (“The high priest stood up and said...” Matt 26:62). Jesus responds saying that in the eschatological judgment, the tables will be turned as the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of power (ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καθήμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τῆς δυνάμεως, Matt 26:64). The

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<sup>209</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 158.

theme of sitting as signifying authority and power carries over into the crucifixion itself where the Roman soldiers are depicted as sitting (καθήμενοι, Matt 27:36) and watching over Jesus.

Jesus' inferior status is also on display in the scene before the Roman soldiers. Jesus is made inferior as a Judean subject through a parody of what has been called "the mocking of a king."<sup>210</sup> This ancient practice of miming conquered kings occurred in Alexandria as attested by a group of texts Philo and the *Alexandrian Acts* called the *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs*.<sup>211</sup> Philo describes how Agrippa is degraded through a mock coronation that includes a full assembly of actors.<sup>212</sup> These dramatic displays were also performed in ancient carnivals commemorating Saturn or, its Greek equivalent, Chronos.<sup>213</sup> In these instances a mime representing a conquered king hears court cases,

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<sup>210</sup> Yarbrow Collins, "Mark's Interpretation of the Death of Jesus," 552.

<sup>211</sup> Herbert Box, *Philonis Alexandrini: In Flaccum* (London/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), xl-xliii, 91-2; Herbert A. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), cited in Yarbrow Collins, "Mark's Interpretation of the Death of Jesus," 552.

<sup>212</sup> For a description of the primary source material, see: Adela Yarbrow Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (ed., Harold W. Attridge; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 723-729.

<sup>213</sup> For an excellent description of how these festivals parallel Mark's passion narrative, see: Nicole W. Duran, *The Power of Disorder: Ritual Elements in Mark's Passion Narrative* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 79-87; my thanks to Daniel Patte for this reference.

passes judgments with reed in hand, and receives mock obeisance in a very public display.<sup>214</sup> These historical examples provide a model to the ridicule Jesus receives as a type of deposed carnival king in Matt 27:27-31. In light of these connections, what the Roman soldiers do to Jesus is profoundly racialized insofar as what Jesus is made to represent. The soldiers dress Jesus in a purple robe, crown him with thorns, place a reed in his right hand, and exclaim “Hail, the Judaized King!” Jesus is made to represent a conquered Judean king and the conquered territory of Judea and its inhabitants. In this way, the message of Roman superiority and Judean inferiority is dramatically enacted by the whole Roman cohort.

The public nature of the mockery continues in the next scene as Jesus is led away to be crucified. The Roman crucifix itself was a public spectacle, often positioned for optimal visual effect.<sup>215</sup> Not only was there an inscription for all to see (Οὗτός ἐστιν

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<sup>214</sup> Walter G. Headlam and A. D. Knox, *The Mimes and Fragments* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2001).

<sup>215</sup> Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 1998), 53: “Used earlier in the Near East and probably invented by Persia, crucifixion at Rome seems to have developed from a form of punishment (the public carrying of a cross, being bound to it, and whipped) to a form of execution (being attached to a cross and suspended). Usually this form of execution was authorized by the Roman court; the victim was stripped and scourged; a horizontal beam was placed on his shoulders; and he was marched to the execution site, usually outside the city walls, where a vertical stake was set in the ground and the man was bound or nailed to the cross. The normal form of execution for criminal slaves, crucifixion was used frequently against rebellious Jews and

Ἰησοῦς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, Matt 27:37), but there were also shouts of the same that could be heard from below by the Judean authorities and crowds. To paraphrase, the basic message of Jesus' crucifixion was: "Look, a Judean king!" In other words, the ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων title is an expression of Roman ridicule.<sup>216</sup> These four successive scenes send a very strong and unequivocal message of Judean inferiority and, conversely, Roman superiority.

This politicized reading of the title is confirmed by examining a previous reference of Jesus as ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων. Early on in the Gospel of Matthew, the gentile magi of the east come inquiring about the newly born Judean king (ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, Matt 2:2). This scene, and indeed the whole narrative of Jesus' birth in a manger, is often romanticized and sentimentalized by the dominant narrative as Jesus, the meek and mild God-man-king, is born with no place to lay his head. The traditional religious-theological reading reads this inquiry by the magi with great hope that the long-awaited king has arrived. But what this reading misses is that it does not end so well for ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων.

What happens in between first occurrence of ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων in Matt 2:2 and chapter 27 is the making of Jesus as "The Judaized King." As the interaction with King Herod in Matt 2:3ff. and the proceedings of the Roman trial in Matt 27:11ff. make plain, the birth of Jesus as ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων is rather dark and ominous,

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Christians. For exemplary effect, crucifixions were held at well-travelled public roadways, offering a stark contrast to the hallowed burials of good citizens nearby."

<sup>216</sup> Davies and Allison, vol. 3., 615.

foreshadowing his death. The fact that King Herod, who Josephus describes as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*,<sup>217</sup> is alarmed is ample support for taking the title in more geo-political terms. Just as King Herod, as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*, is king *over* Judea, so too is Jesus racialized as such, as being an inferior king *from* Judea (i.e., a minority-Judean). The title *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*, then, should strike the reader as deeply troubling and ironic, as a highly politicized and contentious signifier.

In sum, two differences characterize my attempt to decipher Jesus' death on a Roman cross as a kind of ethnoracial lynching in which the reiterative citation of *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* is a profoundly politicized and specifically racialized slur. In this way, Jesus is made out to be an inferior Judean king both by Pilate's condemnation of Jesus and the antics of the Roman soldiers. If the traditional reading minimizes politics due to its overly religious-theological framework, the more recent socio-political approach offers an important corrective by underscoring the political nature of the Roman trial. My reading thus builds on these efforts and goes a step further to foreground the politics of race-ethnicity. The way this racializing occurs, in its most basic form, is by the reiterative citation of imperial dominance that Roman crucifixion asserts: Roman superiority over Judean inferiority.

### **Minoritizing Jesus in the popular court**

The third evolution of minoritization occurs by way of Jesus' trial before the Judean masses—Jesus is made an illegal other, treated as a common criminal by the

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<sup>217</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 16.311; cf. 17.271-4.



popular court (Matt 27:20-26; 38-44). While the politics of racialization are not explicit here, as in the Judean court, the scene of Pilate and the crowds serves an important function: it juxtaposes how Jesus is minoritized by the highest court of appeals, as represented by Pilate in the Roman trial, to the very lowest and common form of authority, as represented by the Judean masses. Moreover, the scene dramatically depicts how blame is shifted yet again as a result of the alliance between the Roman and Judean authorities. In other words, the Judean masses are manipulated twice over, first, by the cunning of the Roman and, subsequently, by the Judean authorities.

My reading of the popular trial again demurs from dominant narrative that renders Pilate an innocent party. In traditional religious-theological readings Pilate is often interpreted as a neutral figure who is haplessly caught between the angry Judean mob, on the one hand, and the envious Judean leaders, on the other. Forced to mediate between both groups, Pilate does the best he can to maintain order. If Pilate is guilty of anything, so goes the traditional reading, he is guilty of making a rash and expedient decision in authorizing Jesus' crucifixion. Some traditional readings, however, go beyond a neutral depiction and actually portray Pilate in a positive light. Some go as far as to call Pilate the first Christian<sup>218</sup> and read the sign over the cross to be the first sermon to be preached ("The Gospel according to Pilate"<sup>219</sup>)—both classic examples of how Christian theology becomes a cipher for imperial politics in general and ethnoracial politics in particular.

In explicit counterpoint to this tendency to overlook or spiritualize the passion narrative, my reading situates Pilate's decision to turn to the crowds as a far more

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<sup>218</sup> Concerning Matt 27:17, e.g., Gundry, *Matthew*, 561.

<sup>219</sup> Concerning Matt 27:37, e.g., Bruner, *Matthew*, 735.

calculated move. As we have seen in the Judean trial, there is a distinct pattern that forms. The formation of an alliance leads directly not only to Jesus' minoritization, but also indirectly to a falling out of sorts as a result of the alliance. So in the Judean court, Jesus is minoritized as a proud other, the Judean authorities are made dominant, and Judas takes the fall. This same pattern structures the Roman trial: Jesus is minoritized as an inferior other, Pilate and the chief priests made dominant, but who is made to the fall? Unlike Judas, Pilate does not take the fall. Instead, Pilate sees what the Judean authorities are up to and strategically maneuvers around them.<sup>220</sup> In other words, Pilate, in league with the Judean authorities, masterminds a way to shift the blame away from himself to the crowds in a series of exchanges that lead directly to the third courtroom scene, the popular court.

The transition from the scene of Jesus before Pilate (Matt 27:11-14) to the scene of Jesus with Pilate before the crowds (Matt 27:15-26) is abrupt. The scene is introduced by an editorial comment that it was a custom for the Roman governor to release a

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<sup>220</sup> Pace, Davies and Allison, vol. 3, 583: "Because Pilate believes Jesus unworthy of death he schemes to set him free by offering an amnesty. The ploy fails...Here we begin to learn that Pilate's title is ironic: the governor leaves the governing to others." Cf. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1047: "The intervening verses focus not on the trial of Jesus as such but on Pilate's abortive attempts to find a convenient way to avoid pronouncing the sentence demanded on a man he has apparently concluded is not guilty from a Roman point of view but who is clearly anathema to the Jewish establishment."

prisoner during the Passover.<sup>221</sup> The historical evidence for such a custom aside, Matthew's comment sets the stage for the proceedings of the popular court. In Matt 27:17, Pilate, who Matthew depicts to be seated in a position of power (Καθημένους, Matt 27:19), makes a proposition to the Judean crowds (τῷ ὄχλῳ, Matt 27:15), relinquishing his prerogative to issue the final verdict. He asks the crowds to choose between Jesus Barabbas<sup>222</sup> or Jesus who is called the Christ (Ἰησοῦν τὸν λεγόμενον χριστόν, Matt 27:17). Pilate is said to put the offer to the crowds twice—once at v. 17 and again at v. 21. What occurs between these verses is Matthew's editorial explanation of what lies behind Pilate's offer. In effect, Matt 27:18-20 can be read as Matthew's way of specifying the illocutionary force of Pilate's proposition to the Judean crowds.

What appears to be a simple locutionary utterance stipulating the release of one of two prisoners, in fact, turns out to be a much more premediated move. Matthew divulges the motivation behind Pilate's proposition by an editorial comment in the following verse: "For he had known all along that it was for jealousy that they handed him over" (ἦδει γὰρ ὅτι διὰ φθόνον παρέδωκαν αὐτόν, Matt 27:18). Matthew signals the strategic nature of Pilate's ploy by means of the pluperfect ἦδει. In other words, Pilate knows. In fact, he has known all along. Moreover, Matthew knows that Pilate knows that he will not be so easily manipulated by the Judean authorities. But the Judean authorities also know,

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<sup>221</sup> For discussion on the dubious historicity of this custom, see: Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 668ff.

<sup>222</sup> For an argument of the likelihood that "Jesus Barabbas" is a reliable reading, see: Robert E. Moses, "Jesus Barabbas, a Nominal Messiah? Text and History in Matthew 27.16-17," *New Testament Studies* 58.1 (2012): 43-56.

too. They know that Pilate knows that they know. That is why Matthew depicts the Judean leaders keeping pace with Pilate, so to speak, as already having prepared the witness. Matthew depicts the chief priests and elders as having persuaded (ἔπεισαν, Matt 27:20) the crowds to ask for Barabbas's release and for Jesus to be killed. In this way, Jesus is made into an illegal other, a common criminal recalling his words in Matt 26:55 ("Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a robber [ληστῆν]?"). In this way, Jesus is made an illegal other by the popular court. The release of Barabbas, a known criminal, also anticipates Jesus' crucifixion between two robbers (δύο λησται) in Matt 27:38.

At the center of all the posturing and positioning that takes place in Matt 27:18-20 is a dream (κατ' ὄναρ, Matt 27:19) by Pilate's wife. The account is brief and its significance has been interpreted in various ways. The most common interpretation is that Pilate's wife's dream attests first and foremost, to the innocence of Jesus, and secondarily to the innocence of Pilate. The scene who subsequently washes his hands in what many interpret as a symbolic gesture renouncing his participation. However, the similarities between this episode and Judas's second meeting with the chief priests suggests otherwise. After having an unspecified dream, Pilate's wife sends a short and cryptic message to her husband: "[May there be] nothing between you and that righteous one" (Μηδὲν σοὶ καὶ τῷ δικαίῳ ἐκείνῳ, Matt 27:19). Here, I agree with Derek Dodson that the saying is reminiscent of how the chief priests respond to Judas (Τί πρὸς ἡμᾶς, Matt 27:4). But I disagree that her message "is a warning for her husband not to involve himself in

the judgment of this innocent man.”<sup>223</sup> Just as the phrase *Τί πρὸς ἡμᾶς* in Matt 27:4 is a way of deflecting blame, *Μηδὲν σοὶ καὶ τῷ δικαίῳ ἐκείνῳ* in Matt 27:19 represents a similar rhetorical move.<sup>224</sup>

That both statements can be read in this way is also confirmed by the parallel repetitions of what the chief priests say to Judas (*σὺ ὄψη*, Matt 27:4) and what Pilate says to the crowds (*ὕμεῖς ὄψεσθε*, Matt 27:24); and the repetition of “*Ἡμαρτον παραδοὺς αἷμα ἄθῳον* (Matt 27:4) by Judas and *Ἀθῳός εἰμι ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος τούτου* (Matt 27:24) by Pilate. But perhaps the most compelling clue that shows how Pilate as complicit in Jesus’ crucifixion is through the repeated motif of *παρέδωκαν*, of Jesus being handed over. The culmination of this motif finds expression in Matt 27:24-26. After the crowds demand that Jesus be crucified, having been persuaded to do so by the chief priests, Pilate ceremoniously washes his hands in a symbolic performance reminiscent of a Jewish purity ritual. Then “all the people,” that is, the entirety of the crowd (*πᾶς ὁ λαὸς*, Matt 27:25) takes the fall as they cry out, “His blood be on us and our children!”<sup>225</sup> The

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<sup>223</sup> Derek S. Dodson, *Reading Dreams: An Audience-Critical Approach to the Dreams in the Gospel of Matthew* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 165.

<sup>224</sup> So Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1172: “The statement is made in terms of the interests of Pilate and his wife and not in terms of the interests of Jesus.”

<sup>225</sup> This small phrase *πᾶς ὁ λαὸς* (“all the people”) has generated much anti-Semitism in the history of interpretation. For an alternative interpretation of this text, see: Catherine Sider Hamilton, “‘His Blood Be Upon Us’: Innocent Blood And The Death Of Jesus In Matthew,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70.1 (2008): 82-100.

exclamation of the people cannot be properly understood without properly understanding Pilate's public hand-washing ritual.

Pilate's performance brings to culmination the repeated hand/ handling/ handing over motif. All throughout the passion narrative, even from Jesus' opening prediction, Jesus is being handed over (*παραδίδοται*, Matt 26:2) from Judas' hand (*τὴν χεῖρα*, 26:23), to the hands of sinners (*παραδίδοται εἰς χεῖρας ἁμαρτωλῶν*, 26:45-6), to the crowds who grab Jesus (*ἐπέβαλον τὰς χεῖρας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν*, 26:50), to the Judean authorities who hand over Jesus out of jealousy (*διὰ φθόνον παρέδωκαν αὐτόν*, Matt 27:18), then to Pilate (*παρέδωκαν*, Matt 27:2). It is in this broader progression that Pilate's hand-washing ritual should be understood. Pilate represents the ultimate human agent who finally "hands over" Jesus to be crucified (*τὸν δὲ Ἰησοῦν φραγελλώσας παρέδωκεν ἵνα σταυρωθῆ*, Matt 27:26). Pilate thus represents the final link in the chain that began with Jesus' prediction and the Judean leaders' plans. In the broader context of Jesus being handed over, far from proving innocence, the scene of Pilate's hand-washing ritual represents his complicity.

Matthew notes that Pilate was well aware that it was for jealousy that the Judean authorities handed Jesus over (*διὰ φθόνον παρέδωκαν αὐτόν*, Matt 27:18). Yet Pilate continues the pattern, releasing Barabbas free and "handing" Jesus over to be crucified (*παρέδωκεν ἵνα σταυρωθῆ*, 27:26), not in spite of the jealousy of the Judean leaders, but precisely on account of it. Pilate makes a mockery of both the Judean leaders and the Judean masses by crucifying a Judean man under the banner of "The Judaized King." Seen from this angle, Pilate is not an innocent bystander who has no choice but to succumb to the demands of the Judean mob. Jesus' Roman crucifixion is the result of a Roman trial carried out through Roman soldiers at the behest of a Roman governor. In the

end, Jesus is crucified by the Romans, convicted by a Roman court, carried out by Roman soldiers. Pilate is a crucial agent, therefore, in the minoritization, racialization, and crucifixion of Jesus. That Pilate's hands are not guiltless is also evident from the final concluding line of Matt 27:26 where, based on the syntax, it is Pilate himself who scourges Jesus before handing him over to be crucified (τὸν δὲ Ἰησοῦν φραγελλώσας παρέδωκεν ἵνα σταυρωθῆ). Based on the progression of the handing over motif as Matthew presents it, Pilate is the final authority and, therefore, the least innocent of all those who hand Jesus over.

A crucial aspect of this chapter's argument involves reading tacit racial valences in the passion narrative by reframing the crucifixion as an act of racial violence. The main piece of evidence that is re-examined is the repeated epithet ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων as a racial slur. In opposition to readings that portray Pilate as an innocent Gentile and the people (παῖς ὁ λαός) as representing all Jews everywhere, this chapter investigates the ways in which imperial authority (Pilate) co-opts religious authority (Jewish leaders) for its own purposes. It is finally in the Roman court, at the intersection of religious and imperial power—i.e., theopolitics—in which Jesus is racialized, interpellated as a racial subject. In this vein, the title ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων functions as a racial slur, a tool of imperial control. The crucifixion, then, with its public and grotesque lynching of Jesus' mangled body together with the sign that announced "This is Jesus, king of the Jews," is a speech act, a reiterative citation of Roman imperial power.

In sum, Jesus is minoritized yet again in the popular trial through cunning schemes of the Judean authorities who persuade the crowds to ask for Barabbas, a known

criminal. But ultimately, Jesus is minoritized on account of Pilate's manipulation of the Judean leaders by appearing to diminish his own agency by turning the decision over to the Judean masses. In this way, the second point of tension in the opening of chapter 26 finds resolution. The Judean crowds are tricked into condemning Jesus by the Judean authorities, who are strategically manipulated by Pilate.

### **Minoritizing Jesus in the divine court**

If Jesus is subject to a process of minoritization by the Judean, Roman, and popular authorities as a proud, inferior, and illegal other, how does Jesus respond? The short answer is that Jesus is virtually silent throughout the proceedings. In fact, there is a noticeable pattern where what Jesus says progressively diminishes in each court. A closer analysis Jesus' brief responses in each trial reveals a strategic maneuver at work, leading eventually to his final cry on the cross in the divine court.

In the Judean trial, Caiaphas says to Jesus: "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God?" Jesus' response is two-fold. His first response is brief: "[If] you say so" (Σὺ εἶπας, Matt 27:64). Here, Jesus can be seen as evasive and avoiding a direct response. That Jesus is being intentionally ambiguous, neither affirming or denying Caiaphas's question, is evident by comparing to Mark's unequivocally affirmative response to the same question: "I am" (Ἐγὼ εἰμι, Mk 14:62). Luke's depiction retains Mark's "I am," but, like Matthew, is also evasive: "You say that I am" (Ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι, Lk 22:70). So in comparison to Mark and Luke, Matthew's depiction is terse and ambiguous (literally: "you say"). But why would Jesus offer an evasive response? The most compelling reason is that σὺ is emphatic: by



phrasing the answer in terms of the question, Jesus is turning the question back around on the interrogator as if putting the burden of proof on Caiaphas.<sup>226</sup> Jesus recognizes that Caiaphas's question is a ruse, placing him under an oath (Ἐξορκίζω σε κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος, Matt 26:63), in order to condemn Jesus no matter what he says.<sup>227</sup> To paraphrase Jesus' response, Jesus says to Caiaphas, "Whatever it is you are saying, it is you who are saying it."<sup>228</sup>

That Jesus turns the question back on Caiaphas is evident by how the second response begins. Jesus says, "But I tell you" (πλὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, Matt 27:64). The adverb πλὴν functions as an adversative conjunction (cf. Matt 26:39, 64) that contrasts what Caiaphas says (Σὺ εἶπας) from what Jesus now says (λέγω ὑμῖν). What precisely is it that Jesus says? Jesus issues a threat of eschatological judgment when the tables will be turned, that is, when the Son of Man, not Caiaphas (Matt 26:62) or Pilate (Matt 27:19), will be seated at the right hand of power (καθήμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τῆς δυνάμεως, Matt 26:64).

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<sup>226</sup> So Gundry, *Commentary*, 545; quoted in Davies and Allison, vol. 3., 529.

<sup>227</sup> Skinner, *The Trial Narratives*, 58: "The verb Ἐξορκίζω in 26:63, in its syntactical context (κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ), does not mean that Caiaphas orders Jesus to reply to the council 'under oath,' as if Jesus must swear upon a higher authority. Rather, the high priest himself brings the interrogation before God, for the oath language calls for Jesus' answer to be made in God's hearing, perhaps so God might bear witness to the answer's truth... The question lays a trap; it makes it doubtful that Jesus could give any kind of a positive answer that would not be considered blasphemous in this setting."

<sup>228</sup> Or as Skinner (*The Trial Narratives*, 58) renders the phrase, "so you said."

The very language of seeing (ἀπ' ἄρτι ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, Matt 26:64) as a signifier of judgment and responsibility also recalls the chief priests response to Judas (σὺ ὄψῃ, Matt 27:4) and Pilate's response to the crowds (ὕμεῖς ὄψεσθε, Matt 27:24).

In the Roman trial, Pilate asks Jesus, “Are you ‘The Judaized King?’” (Σὺ εἶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων; Matt 27:11). Jesus' response is virtually the same, brief, and ambiguous: “[If] you say so” (Σὺ λέγεις, Matt 27:12; Mk 15:2; Lk 23:3; cf. Σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεὺς εἰμι, Jn 18:37). Again, Jesus does not affirm or deny the charge.<sup>229</sup> Rather, his response is similarly vague and rhetorical, putting the question back on Pilate. Here, also,

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<sup>229</sup> With reference to Mark 15:2, Adela Yarbro Collins (*Mark: A Commentary* [ed., Harold W. Attridge; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007], 713) writes, “Jesus’ answer, ‘You say (so)’ (σὺ λέγεις). It is neither a denial nor an affirmation. W.C. Allen argued that Jesus answered ambiguously because ‘He claimed to be the Messiah, but in a sense different from any current meaning attached to the title.’ Although the notion of the Davidic messiah or the messiah of Israel is reinterpreted in Mark, the reason for Jesus’ ambiguous answer may lie in its similarity to his response to the question about paying the taxes to Caesar. His answer there is equally evasive. He avoided saying anything that would provide grounds for a charge against him before the Roman governor. Mark portrays Jesus as replying boldly, clearly, and fully to the high priest in 14:62. The ambiguous answer here may be due to the evangelist’s, or more likely his source’s, recognition of the social reality that provincials needed to be wary when dealing with the representatives of imperial power.”

the ambiguity of Jesus' response can be seen in Pilate's response. After Jesus equivocally responds with *Σὺ λέγεις*, Matthew says that the Judean elites began hurling accusations against Jesus, to which Jesus remains silent. If *Σὺ λέγεις* was a clear affirmation, then the chief priests would not have proceeded to accuse Jesus. Moreover, were *Σὺ λέγεις* an affirmative response, Pilate would have taken the assertion as sufficient evidence of treason and convicted Jesus himself. That Pilate does not do so, however, makes Jesus' response all the more curious, puzzling, and ambiguous. Rather, the fact that Pilate is greatly amazed by Jesus' silence casts more doubt on the traditional reading of *Σὺ λέγεις* as affirmative.<sup>230</sup>

One counterargument to this reading of *Σὺ λέγεις/ εἶπας* is that *Σὺ εἶπας* is used earlier by Jesus to Judas's question: "Surely not I, rabbi?" (*Μήτι ἐγώ εἰμι, ῥαββί;*, Matt 26:25). For Davies and Allison, who acknowledge the ambiguity of the phrase elsewhere, Matt 26:25 is one example where "an affirmative sense is demanded."<sup>231</sup> But does it have

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<sup>230</sup> *Pace*, Davies and Allison, vol. 3., 581-2: "You have said so"—*σύ* answers *σύ*—is seemingly ambiguous and yet in fact marks courageous agreement: Pilate has unwittingly spoken the truth and Jesus does not deny it. It is thus odd that, to judge from his response, Pilate does not take the treasonous affirmation to be a threat to Rome. Evidently Pilate views Jesus with incredulous contempt: he is too important to be dangerous." A similar tension is present in Carter's reading in *Pontius Pilate*, 88 and 118.

<sup>231</sup> So concerning the use of *Σὺ εἶπας*, Davies and Allison, vol. 3., 528: "This expression, absent from Mark, has already been used in v. 25, where an affirmative sense is demanded. The related *σύ λέγεις* of 27.11 is also positive: Pilate unwittingly speaks the

to? The brevity of the account, again, and the lack of any recorded response indicate that the words themselves are not without ambiguity. Jesus' response does more than affirm. But my point is not that the phrase is a simple negative acknowledgment either. I would argue that the response is ambiguous because it does not directly answer the question, but places the onus of responsibility back on the questioner who admittedly knows the answer. That is to say, Jesus' response is intentionally brief (only two words) and the *σὺ* is emphatic (*you say so yourself*) so as to make the questioner answer their own question. Jesus' response is less a simple affirmation or denial of Judas's questions, so much as it turns the very question back on Judas: "[whatever] you yourself are saying." The rhetorical move of shifting the question back on Judas is especially a *propos* given what he will soon do. But Matthew provides no further elaboration about how the disciples react to Jesus' prediction, leaving the matter unspecified.<sup>232</sup>

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truth: Jesus is the king of the Jews; see p. 581. So even if the rabbinic parallels are ambiguous, Matthean usage encourages one to think the words positive."

<sup>232</sup> The ambiguous nature of *Σὺ λέγεις/ εἶπας* can also be seen in the reactions of Pilate and Caiaphas. In the Roman trial, Jesus' discrete response engenders more accusations to be hurled upon him by the chief priests and elders (Matt 27:12-13). On Pilate's part, he does not respond with an accusation of his own, but is amazed by Jesus' silence. In any case, Jesus has not said much to lead to a clear affirmation or denial, and that is my point about the ambiguity of this phrase. In the Judean trial, Jesus' response, as we have seen, contrasts what Caiaphas says to what Jesus says. Presumably, then, Caiaphas' response of blasphemy (Matt 26:65) is a response not to *Σὺ λέγεις*, but to the threat of eschatological judgment Jesus issues.

The pattern of ambiguity, evasion, and silence on Jesus' part continues as he is mocked by the Roman soldiers, who torture him with a mock coronation, and by the Judean leaders, crowds, and the two robbers, who hurl insults as he is hanging from the cross. But what is the significance of this pattern? Why does Matthew portray Jesus as being virtually silent during the proceedings of the Judean, Roman, and popular trials? One answer, based on the development of the Matthean passion narrative, is that Jesus' silence corresponds with the degree to which he is progressively minoritized. Nothing that he says can change the minds of the dominant-Judeans and dominant-Romans in power. So, instead, Matthew depicts Jesus being intentionally silent before the Judean, Roman, and popular courts. Jesus' silence can be seen as a subversive critique of the human courts, a strategic response of non-response. The strategic nature of Jesus' silence is made evident in his final response on the cross: rather than answering to the human courts, Jesus takes his case to the highest authority that is above the Judean masses, the Jerusalem council, or even Caesar himself—the divine courtroom.

Matthew's account of the final scene of Jesus' crucifixion is fairly brief. Several different groups are depicted as being present in the scene (Matt 27:32-56): Roman soldiers who lead Jesus from Pilate's headquarters to Golgotha; Simon of Cyrene who is compelled to carry the Roman cross; two robbers between whom Jesus is crucified; indiscriminate people who pass by and yell obscenities, along with the chief priests, scribes, and elders who, with the robbers, also mock Jesus; and, finally, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee who look on from a distance. Despite the verbal taunts heaped upon him, Jesus does not respond directly to any of the taunts. Instead, at the ninth hour, around three o'clock, in a

climactic scene of the Matthean passion narrative, the one interpellated and convicted as “The Judaized King” utters a final cryptic cry in Aramaic: Ἡλὶ ἡλὶ λεμὰ σαβαχθάνι; (Matt 27:46a).

Much has been written about the linguistic form and textual variation of Jesus’ final words, as transliterated in Greek by Matthew, and particularly its relation to Psalm 22. The various versions of the specific line in Psalm 22 are as follows:

- MT:                   אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי לְמוֹהַ עַבְתָּנִי (Ps 22:2)
- Targum:           אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי [אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי] מוֹחֹל מוֹהַ שְׁבַקְתָּנִי (Ps 22:1)
- GNT:               Ἐλωὶ ἔλωὶ λεμὰ σαβαχθάνι; (Mk 15:34)
- Ἡλὶ ἡλὶ λεμὰ σαβαχθάνι; (Matt 27:46)

These extant versions of this saying reveal the likelihood that the Aramaic transliterations of Matthew and Mark are not relying on the Masoretic Text. If there is any demonstrated reliance on this oral saying, it is more likely that Matthew and Mark are using the Septuagint, if at all. While the first three words are virtually identical,<sup>233</sup> it is the fourth word in Matthew and Mark that disagrees with the MT (σαβαχθάνι versus עַבְתָּנִי), which suggests Matthew’s and Mark’s reliance on another source independent of the MT.<sup>234</sup> This is also confirmed by the Aramaic “abandon” (שְׁבַק) more closely attested by the Targum. Although the Targum is likely much later than Matthew and Mark, the fact that

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<sup>233</sup> The minor variation is Mark’s ελωι to Matthew’s ηλι, which is closer to the Aramaic אֱלֹהֵי/אֱלֵי.

<sup>234</sup> Frederick E. Greenspahn, *An Introduction to Aramaic* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 8.

it agrees with the Gospel writers against the MT is still significant.<sup>235</sup> This probability is heightened when Matthew's and Mark's Greek translation of the Aramaic saying is compared against the Septuagint:

MT: אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי לְמוֹה עֲבַחְנִי (Ps 22:2)

LXX: Ὁ θεὸς μου ὁ θεὸς πρόσχες μοι ἵνα τί ἐγκατέλιπές με; (Ps 21:2)

GNT: Ὁ θεὸς μου ὁ θεὸς μου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με; (Mk 15:34)

Θεέ μου θεέ μου, ἵνατί με ἐγκατέλιπες; (Matt 27:46)

Apart from πρόσχες, the versions are virtually identical, making the LXX a more likely source.<sup>236</sup> Other citations of Psalm 22 (LXX) weaved throughout the passion narrative

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<sup>235</sup> Bruce Chilton, Darrell L. Bock, and Daniel M. Gurtner, eds., *A Comparative Handbook to the Gospel of Mark: Comparisons with Pseudepigrapha, the Qumran Schrolls, and Rabbinic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 512. See also Martin McNamara, "Targumim," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible* (ed., Michael D. Coogan; 2 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 342-356; here 349.

<sup>236</sup> See the extensive redactional and text-critical discussion of this saying in Donald Senior, *The Passion Narrative According to Matthew: A Redactional Study* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1982), 295-299. For the Markan saying, see: Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, "Challenging the Divine: LXX Psalm 21 in the Passion Narrative of the Gospel of Mark," in *The Trial and Death of Jesus: Essays on the Passion Narrative in Mark* (eds., Geert Van Oyen and Tom Shepherd; Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 119-148.

also attest to this probability.<sup>237</sup> Tracing the saying's Aramaic connection will be significant for the proposed interpretation.<sup>238</sup>

Also in contention is not only the form of the saying but also its meaning. What does Jesus intend by uttering this Aramaic line from Psalm 22? Traditionally referred to as the cry of dereliction, the history of interpretation on this saying reflects a number of interpretive possibility. A common religious-theological move scholars have made is to make Jesus' final cry less aggressive. The basis for this interpretation is that Psalm 22, though beginning with lament, ends in praise—as is typical of individual psalms of

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<sup>237</sup> For Matthew, see: Maarten J. J. Menken, "The Psalms in Matthew's Gospel," in *The Psalms in the New Testament* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 61-82; Davies and Allison, vol. 3, 624-5. For Mark, see: Ahearne-Kroll, "Challenging the Divine," 120-32; Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 172-5; Holly J. Carey, *Jesus' Cry from the Cross: Towards a First-Century Understanding of the Intertextual Relationship between Psalm 22 and the Narrative of Mark's Gospel* (London: T & T Clark, 2009).

<sup>238</sup> So Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 115: "The priority of the Aramaic is underscored by Matthew's alterations. He has tried to make a clearer connection between the 'Eloi' and Elijah's name by changing the opening words to Hebrew ('Eli, Eli...'), but the rest of the saying is preserved in Aramaic."



lament.<sup>239</sup> By appealing to how the psalm ends, many interpreters have softened the force of Jesus' final cry, motivated mainly by religious-theological concerns in depicting Jesus' faithfulness and obedience until the end.<sup>240</sup> These readings typically point out several

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<sup>239</sup> Claus Westermann's classic study identifies the following constituent parts in the structure of the individual lament genre: address, lament, confession of trust, or assurance of being heard, petition, vow of praise. While not every psalm contains all of these components, these represent the basic scheme of the individual lament genre. See: *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 64. For an excellent, recent history of scholarship of the cause, function, and nature of the change of mood in the lament psalms in general, see: Federico G. Villanueva, *The Uncertainty of a Hearing: A Study of the Sudden Change of Mood in the Psalms of Lament* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Sung-Hun Lee, "Lament and the Joy of Salvation in the Lament Psalms," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (eds., Peter W. Flint, Patrick D. Miller, Aaron Brunell, and Ryan Roberts; Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, 99; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 224-247; here 224-225; LeAnn Snow Flesher, "Rapid Change of Mood: Oracles of Salvation, Certainty of a Hearing, or Rhetorical Play?" in *My Words are Lovely: Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms* (Robert L. Foster and David M. Howard, eds.; London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2008), 33-45.

<sup>240</sup> As John Nolland (*The Gospel of Matthew*, 1208) writes, "There has been no end of Christian embarrassment about Jesus' questioning of God in this way and of Christian theological reflection about the place of his being abandoned by God his Father in the atonement wrought by Jesus on the cross." For further discussion and history of scholarship, see: Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1205ff.; Davies and Allison, vol. 3.,

different features as support: the motif of the righteous sufferer in the Psalms and the Wisdom of Solomon;<sup>241</sup> the temporary nature of God's momentary abandonment;<sup>242</sup> the form of lament as a prayer to God;<sup>243</sup> the conclusion of Psalm 22 that begins in lament but ends in praise;<sup>244</sup> the personal form of address ("my God") that expresses a loyal relationship between Jesus and God.<sup>245</sup>

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624ff. For Markan scholarship on the same passage, see: Matthew S. Rindge, "Reconfiguring the Akedah and Recasting God: Lament and Divine Abandonment in Mark," *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 131.4 (2012): 755-774.

<sup>241</sup> So George W. E. Nickelsburg, "The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative," *Harvard Theological Review* 73.1-2 (1980): 153-184; idem., *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

<sup>242</sup> So Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1208: "But Matthew also makes use of Ps. 22 in this respect. Ps. 22 does not deny the difficulty, but it finds solace in recognizing that the situation is only temporary. And so it will be with Jesus."

<sup>243</sup> So Senior, *Matthew*, 332: "In the spirit of the psalm, Jesus prays to his Father even in the midst of abject desolation, remaining the obedient Son of God to the end."

<sup>244</sup> So Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 399: "While not downplaying the mental and emotional sufferings of Jesus, it is necessary to read the whole psalm and to recognize the profession of trust in God's power that forms its climax (see Ps 22:22-31)." Also Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 535: "The cited verse from the *beginning* of Ps 22, though, indicates that this is not the final word. The Psalmist's sentiments change

My reading of the saying's form and function moves in a different direction. It seeks to appreciate the force, finality, and *sui generis* nature of Jesus' final words as a theo-political critique—not merely as a theological, de-politicized utterance. So I tend towards an understanding of the utterance, in relation to his other verbal responses, as the cumulative and climactic response to all that has preceded. Thus it is necessary to read Jesus' words in Matt 27:46 within the context of his earlier sayings in the Judean, Roman, and popular courts. Doing so underscores Jesus' final utterance as being both deeply theological and profoundly politicized.

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through the course of the Psalm; God's deliverance and goodness are encountered again, just as Jesus will subsequently encounter God's vindication.”

<sup>245</sup> So France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1076-7: “But it is surely also significant that Jesus, like the abandoned psalmist, still addresses God as ‘my God’; this shout expresses not a loss of faith, but a (temporary) loss of contact.” It should also be noted that, among all of these readings, France's comes the closest to acknowledge the force of Jesus' utterance. For France also writes with respect to Psalm 22, “In the end, the psalm turns to joyful thanksgiving for deliverance in vv. 22-31, and some interpreters have suggested that it is the latter part of the psalm that Jesus has in mind as well as its traumatic beginning, so that this is in effect a shout of defiant trust in the God whom he fully expects to rescue him. But that is to read a lot between the lines, especially after Gethsemane where Jesus has accepted that he must drink the cup to the full: he did not expect to be rescued. The words Jesus chose to utter are those of unqualified desolation, and Matthew and Mark (who alone record this utterance) give no hint that he did not mean exactly what he said” (1076).

The theological nature of the utterance is evident from the object of the vocative address Ἡλὶ ἦλὶ: God is twice invoked. That Jesus invokes God, particularly in this his final speech, is not an insignificant act. As we have seen, Jesus has been virtually silent before the human authorities, responding in curt and ambiguous fashion with Σὺ εἶπας before Caiaphas and Σὺ λέγεις before Pilate. Equally significant here is the manner in which he makes his address. Jesus addresses God in judicial language, as though bringing a legal complaint before a judge, through the language of the psalmist's lament. In effect, Matthew portrays Jesus as taking his final plea into the highest court of appeals—the divine courtroom. If up to this point, Jesus has been silent, submissive, and indeed almost passive, he now erupts and makes himself heard with a loud voice (φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, Matt 27:46). By itself, this act is significant given how quiet and evasive Jesus has been during the proceedings of the Judean, Roman, and popular hearings.

The substance of Jesus' legal complaint is also remarkable. What Jesus does in this climactic moment is brings charges against God in the form of a lament. This is the same tension and ambiguity between the plans of the chief priests and predictions of Jesus with which chapter 26 opened—the same sense of responsibility and agency that has been developing through each trial. Who is handing Jesus over? Who is the subject of the passive παραδίδοται? Who is ultimately responsible? Jesus' final cry on the cross makes the answer to these questions absolutely clear. Taken at face value, the meaning of

the words (“Why have you forsaken me?”) is simple and straightforward: Jesus blames God. Jesus’ final plea suggests that all that has taken place is the direct result of God.<sup>246</sup>

Accordingly, there is no ounce of praise or doxology in this final plea, only anguish; no possibility or hope for divine deliverance, only death. Jesus suffers estrangement as a foreign other in the divine courtroom. His last words conclude his hearing in the divine courtroom and is met with divine silence and divine absence. The tension of the passion narrative finds resolution in two segments. The first conflict leads

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<sup>246</sup> The repeated use of the divine passive throughout the First Gospel also lends itself toward reading *παραδίδοται* as a divine passive. Referring to the second passion prediction in Matthew 17:22-23, John Meier (*Matthew*, 195) writes, “The passive voice of ‘delivered’ (*paradidosthai*) may indicate that God is the chief agent of the passion (divine passive), just as he is the agent hidden in the passive voice of ‘he will be raised.’” On the same passage, see: Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 450. For further discussion of the passion predictions and the use of the divine passive, see: Davies and Allison, vol. 2, 655-61. The use of the divine passive in Matthew is not uncommon. The divine passive also occurs in the genealogy (*ἐγέννησεν*) of Matthew 1 (Richter, *Enoch and the Gospel of Matthew*, 129); the Beatitudes (*παρακληθήσονται*, etc.) of Matthew 5 (Hare, *Matthew*, 28); Jesus’ teaching to ask and it will be given (*δοθήσεται*) in Matthew 7 (Evans, *Matthew*, 167); the miracle stores in Matthew 9 (Grant R. Osborne and Clinton E. Arnold, *Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 327); and the resurrection scene (*ἡγέρθη*) that concludes the Gospel in Matthew 28 (David D. Kupp, *Matthew’s Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God’s People in the First Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 211), etc.

to the proceedings of the Judean court: the chief priests plan what Jesus prophesies, and Judas takes the fall. The second conflict leads to the proceedings of the divine court: Pilate carries out what the chief priests desire, and the crowds take the fall. Yet, in spite of both conflicts and their resolutions, Jesus puts the final blame on the divine courtroom. In this way, the third and final tension, concerning the question of responsibility and agency, finds resolution in Matt 27:46. Matthew's presentation of the prophecy and plan coming to fruition is told in terms that are deeply theological: God is portrayed as finally and ultimately handing Jesus over to die.

The force of Jesus' final words, however, is not only or merely theological. It is also profoundly political. In fact, the two are connected so that the theological and the political are forged as one and the same theopolitical critique. The politicized force of Jesus' words can be seen in the very act of taking his case into the divine courtroom. In other words, by bringing his complaint before the divine authority is an implicit critique of the Judean and Roman authorities that even their authority is derivative of another. Justice will not be had by the human courts which fail to give Jesus a fair hearing and trial. So in this light, Jesus' act of invoking the divine name on the cross is an affront to the elites of Jerusalem and of Rome. Moreover, the politicized nature of Jesus' speech is seen from the lament form itself. The way in which Jesus is mocked and taunted from below is through the language of Psalm 22; his final response follows suit, in the language of Psalm 22. By lamenting the laments of the psalmist, Jesus' Aramaic locution also implicitly locates those around him as his enemies. His use of Psalm 22 is primarily directed to God, but is an implicit response to the taunts below.

The politicized nature is furthermore heightened in light of how cryptic is Jesus' cry. The cryptic nature of the saying is evident in Matthew's narrative descriptions. Jesus' final cry is uttered in complete darkness that is said to cover the whole earth (*παᾶσαν τὴν γῆν*, Matt 27:45). What he says on the cross is just as brief, inchoate, and ambiguous as his previous responses of *Σὺ λέγεις/ εἴπας*. In fact, so enigmatic are his words that there is immediate confusion among the bystanders who think that Jesus is calling out for Elijah. As most commentators point out, the confusion is likely the result of an oral/ aural misfire. This is one credible explanation for Matthew's redacted *Ἥλι ἡλί* ("My God, my God!"), which sounds closer to *Ἥλιαν* ("Elijah")—the first three letters being identical—compared to Mark's *Ἐλωὶ ἐλωὶ*. But Jesus is not calling for Elijah, and Matthew clears up the possible confusion with an editorial aside immediately after translating the Aramaic locution: "which is to say, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (*τοῦτ' ἔστιν· Θεέ μου θεέ μου, ἵνατί με ἐγκατέλιπες;*, Matt 27:46b).

Jesus' final words is reminiscent of Peter's earlier episode. As we have seen in the Judean trial, the dynamics inside the courtyard, where the Sanhedrin is convened, is mirrored outside the courtyard, where Peter is said to have followed Jesus. Three times Peter is interpellated as having associations with Jesus, and the basis for these associations are made along ethnoracial lines: Jesus' identity as a Galilean (27:69), as a Nazarene (27:71), and Peter's accent (27:73). This juxtaposition establishes how Jesus is racially marked in dominant-minority formations and relations, which continues in the Roman trial. When Jesus the Judean subject finally speaks, he does so in his own ethnic Aramaic dialect as a Galilean. But in bringing his final complaint before the divine courtroom, Jesus issues a theopolitical critique. But nobody around—not the Judean

authorities and the Roman soldiers below, or the two robbers beside, or Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee from afar—understands. The Aramaic locution, then, serves as a final response to the human courts, concealed by an ethnic and regional dialect. Only the reader is made aware of what reportedly happens, by way of Matthew’s editorial translation, in the final moments before Jesus’ death. Jesus. The minoritized Judean, who presumably speaks to Pilate in Greek, now speaks in his own common language as a Galilean Judean. But only the reader understands.

### **Divine strangers or strangers in the divine?**

In the end, Matthew’s presentation of the events surrounding Jesus’ crucifixion conceals his critique of human authority and advances a religious-theological imperative that is central in the Gospel of Matthew. This religious-theological imperative can be elucidated by turning to two of its most prominent expressions in the Gospel of Matthew. The first example is in Jesus’ teaching on the first and second greatest commandments:

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets (Matt 7:12, NRSV)

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love you’re your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt 22:36-40, NRSV)

Jesus says that the first and greatest commandment is to love God, which is closely tied to the second greatest commandment of loving one’s neighbor. The relationship between the two commandments is crucial. The love of God is prior to and more fundamental than love of neighbor. Yet the love of neighbor is integral to love of God. Here, the dialectic



of self and other is at work in the religious-theological ethic the Gospel of Matthew advances. According to Jesus' teaching, loving one's neighbor as self is a fundamental aspect of loving God. Applying Jesus' teaching as expressed in Matt 7:12 and Matt 22:36-40 clarifies two important ethical commitments that should be a part of the dialect of dominant-minority formations and relations: first, that loving the other should be proportional to loving one's self; second, that loving God should be proportional to loving the other. In stronger terms, the love of God is concomitant with and is dependent upon love for the other; one cannot claim to do one without the other.

If Matt 7:12 and Matt 22:36-40 specify an ethical obligation between self and other, Matt 25:31-46 centralizes that obligation christologically on the Matthean Jesus. In Matt 25:31-46, Jesus tells a parabolic story of eschatological judgment where all the nations are hypothetically brought before Jesus, the Son of Man, who is enthroned as king.<sup>247</sup> The king passes judgment, separating the sheep to his right hand from the goats to his left hand. The basis for this judgment, however, is crucial. The king welcomes the sheep for offering food, drink, welcome, clothing, healing, and visitation when he was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, sick, and in prison and rejects the goats for failing to do so.

Both groups ask when they did or failed to do these things for him, to which the king replies, "Truly I say to you, whatever you did to the least of these my brothers and sisters (ἐνὶ τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου), you did it to me" (Matt 25:40). In other words, the

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<sup>247</sup> Virtually every aspect of this story has its own interpretation from who does the judging (i.e., Jesus or God) to who exactly are being judged (i.e., Christians or Gentiles) to the scope of judgment (i.e., followers of Jesus or the entire world). For a summary of the main perspectives, see Ulrich Luz's *Hermeneia* commentary.

standard of judgment is based on the extent to which one provides food to the hungry, gives drink to the thirsty, clothes the naked, takes care of the sick, and visits those in prison—all of which becomes interpreted in relation to Jesus the judge. The punch line to the story comes at the end of each judgment: while both groups are judged according to the same standard, neither group was actually aware of what they did or failed to do. The sheep were as oblivious as the goats as the conduct of both are measured in relation to Jesus. While the parabolic story does not refer to the process of dominantization, minoritization, or racialization specifically, the differential locations and connections between the self and other is mapped in collective and relational terms. The basic question concerns what one does for the other, however that other may be defined in relation to the self. Accordingly, what self does unknowingly for the other, who lacks food, clothing, medicine, etc., is a function of what one does in relation to God.

All three examples in Matt 7:12, Matt 22:36-40, and Matt 25:31-46 clarifies the religious-theological imperative that comes to climactic expression in the divine trial scene. Having been made a proud other in the Judean court, an inferior other in the Roman court, an illegal other in the popular court, the Matthean Jesus is now made a foreign other in the divine court. Suffering divine estrangement, Jesus dies as the Divine Stranger. Matthew's organization of the trial scenes highlights this point. The Judean trial is portrayed as a fraudulent attempt of seeking justice. As Jesus is passed on to the Roman supreme court, the spurious nature of the case is heightened, as Jesus is unfairly treated by Pilate and the Roman soldiers. But the case, for Matthew, does not end there. On the cross, Jesus takes his case to the highest court of appeals—the divine courtroom. By appealing to a higher authority, Jesus' final words offer a subversive critique of any

authority that would allow this kind of minoritization to take place. Yet this depiction of the Matthean Jesus as the Divine Stranger who suffers divine estrangement creates a new religious-theological possibility: of seeing the divine in strangers, of encountering the love of God in the other, of loving your neighbor as yourself. Matthew's presentation of Jesus' minoritization as a racialized-other underscores that the divine is in the dominated. The Matthean God is among the oppressed, the racialized, and the minoritized—and what one does in relation for the minoritized-other, according to the Gospel of Matthew, matters greatly, irrespective of recognition or intention.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, my reading contests conventional religious-theological and recent socio-political interpretations by presenting an alternative (i.e., racialized) narrative—a critical retrieval of the politics of race-ethnicity in Jesus' crucifixion. Specifically, I argue that Jesus is minoritized as a racialized-other in the Jewish, Roman, and divine trial scenes of the Matthean passion narrative. From this perspective, the hailing of Jesus as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* is not a messianic title, but a demeaning racial slur that proclaims Roman superiority over Judean inferiority. To underscore how Jesus is minoritized, I suggest an alternative rendering of *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* as “The *Judaized* King.” The advantage of this translation is that it reflects the discourse and dialectic of race-ethnicity at work: it underscores the performative quality of the phrase, respecting its linguistic dimension as a racial speech act, while also recognizing the dialectical and relational context in which it is deployed.

Specifically, Jesus is minoritized in four ways by the Judean, Roman, popular, and divine authorities: he is made proud in the Judean court; he is made inferior in the Roman court; he is made illegal in the popular court; and he is made foreign in the divine court. In other words, Jesus is effectively racialized above, beyond, below, and outside of the dominant and normative center of power. All four authorities can be seen as engaging in dominantization, the specific racializing modality of which is the reiterative citation of Jesus as ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων. Lynched on a Roman tree, Jesus is estranged as the Ultimate Other, the Divine Stranger, who is pushed to the outer limits of that which is proud, inferior, illegal, and foreign: “The Judaized King.”

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I offer a summary of the main arguments of each chapter and present three contributions of the project as an exercise in minority biblical criticism. The basic problematic that situates the dissertation has been identified as a non-racial pattern of interpretation of the Matthean Jesus' identification as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the title is repeatedly applied to Jesus, forming the basis for his trial, conviction, and crucifixion. Traditional scholarship has understood the title primarily in religious-theological terms as signifying Jesus' messianic identity. More recent scholarship, in contrast, has focused on the title's socio-political significance in the first century context of Roman imperialism, broadening the exclusive religious-theological focus and de-politicizing pattern of the traditional interpretation. Yet despite the ways in which Jesus' ethnoracial identity is repeatedly invoked, both approaches have understood the citation of *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* thoroughly in non-racial ways.

This pattern of downplaying the politics of race-ethnicity, as Chapter 2 argued, is a matter of perspective. When the non-racial pattern is viewed in neutral terms as an objective rendering of the Matthean Jesus as he actually was in the first century world of production, the prevailing non-racial representation is relatively unproblematic. However, when situated within a larger perspective that spans both worlds of production and consumption, a different logic rises to the surface. Situated in the world of consumption, the non-racial representation of the Matthean Jesus can be seen as one of the many instantiations of a deracializing ideology at work in the world of consumption. But it is only when the context of real readers and reading locations is foregrounded that the deracializing logic can be appreciated. The move from Chapter 1 to Chapter 2, therefore,

was to situate and make sense of the dominant non-racial narrative among dominant deracialized interlocutors.

Chapter 3 presented a proposal in critical dialogue with Jeffrey Siker for moving the conversation forward in a constructive manner. The specific challenge was to formulate an alternative approach, in terms of method and theory, that is sensitive to how race-ethnicity has been essentialized and operationalized throughout modernity, while at the same time being cognizant of theory's possibilities and deconstructive limits. That is, while theory is indispensable for exposing the formations and relations of power, it is unable to manage these formations and relations constructively. This tension was illustrated by the impasse of competing representations of Cone's black Jesus and Elizondo's mestizo Jesus vis-à-vis Siker's "(white) Jesus."

Recent U.S. minority responses have offered variegated representations of a black, brown, red, and yellow Jesus, so to speak, from the respective criticisms of African American, Latino/a American, Native American, and Asian American studies. These constructive efforts—arising from various quarters in the academic guild of religion-theology by theologians, ethicists, and biblical scholars—can be seen as a broader response to the dominant depiction of Jesus as a white Euro-American male with blonde hair and blue eyes. While these counter representations have served important and necessary functions to destabilize dominant representations, they are nevertheless, according to the framework developed in Chapter 2, theoretically deficient. For example, Cone's Black Jesus and Elizondo's Mestizo Jesus unwittingly recapitulate and reinscribe the very same misguided notions of race-ethnicity they set out to critique. For instead of challenging dominant conceptions of race-ethnicity, they reproduce its hegemonic logic

by trading one racializing depiction for another. Yet all the while, the dominant representation of Jesus remains deracialized, unquestioned and unaddressed.

Therefore, my proposal for moving the conversation forward was to address the deracialized Jesus head on: rather than pitting the black Jesus against the brown, red, or yellow Jesus as an alternative, minority biblical criticism calls for an ethnoracial coalition to rethink the discourse and dialectic of race-ethnicity itself—indeed to overturn the underlying definition of “the human” modernity presupposes—and to do so in such a way that does not recapitulate a politics of invisibility (per dominant groups) or a politics of visibility (per minority groups). This proposal provided a segue to the final task pursued in Chapter 4—an alternative reading of the Matthean passion narrative.

If the dominant narrative has the tendency of strategically overlooking the politics of race-ethnicity, resulting in a deracialized representation, then an alternative narrative is to situate the Matthean Jesus as a racialized Judean. To that end, Chapter 4 offered an alternative reading of Jesus’ crucifixion as a Roman lynching of a Judaized-other through the lens of four classic tropes by which U.S. minorities have been racialized—being proud, being inferior, being illegal, and being foreign. While these racial stereotypes are not unique to each group, they nevertheless represent classic, historical racializing depictions in the U.S. that need to be taken up in order to be properly dismantled. In this way, Chapters 3 and 4 present a resolution to the dominant narrative by recourse to an alternative narrative through minority interlocutors.

My reading thus represented a critical departure from the dominant narrative, arguing that the hailing of Jesus as *ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων* is not a messianic title, but a racial slur, that his crucifixion is a grotesque act of minoritization, and specifically,

Judean racialization. Lynched on a Roman tree, Jesus suffers divine estrangement as the Divine Stranger, the Ultimate Other, who is minoritized as a proud, inferior, illegal, and foreign other: “The Judaized King.” This reading qualifies traditional approaches that tend to gloss over the brutality of Roman crucifixion and sentimentalize the Matthean Jesus as a heroic figure (i.e., the long-awaited king who will save the day). It is also an attempt to sharpen more recent socio-political readings that do not fully appreciate the racializing dimensions of Jesus’ crucifixion as a marginalized Judean.

There are three main contributions this dissertation makes as an exercise in minority biblical criticism. The first contribution is a more developed account of the politics of deracialization. Chapter 2 developed a discursive theory of deracialization, while Chapter 3 developed a dialectical theory of deracialization. The advantage of the former is that it underscores that both the racialized-other and the deracialized-self are both implicated by the discourse of race-ethnicity. Accordingly, there is an inverse relationship between dominantization and racialization: if the degree to which an individual is minoritized is commensurate to the process of racialization, then conversely the degree to which an individual is dominantized is proportional to the process of deracialization. The advantage of the latter is that it highlights the dialectical relations of power that shape dominant-minority formations. Racialization/ deracialization are not isolated processes that take place in relation to individuals or groups in isolation. They are interdependent processes that occur within and across a broader social network of hierarchical relations. Taken together, the discursive and dialectical emphases of Chapters 2 and 3 indicate just how pervasive, deeply entrenched, and all-encompassing



the problem of racialization/ deracialization is in contemporary U.S. society and culture, including the modern history of biblical scholarship.

The second contribution, by way of the first, is a broader challenge to dominant biblical criticism. This challenge may be expressed as a question that frames the project in a slightly different way: How was it possible that the discipline of modern biblical scholarship was used to sustain, rather than critique, modernity's economy of white racial domination? The answer that this project has tried to develop is one that drills deeper and deeper into the epistemological roots of modernity. I am convinced that the dominant Western representation of the white Jesus is a hermeneutical key that has significant explanatory power in elucidating how the modern discourse of race-ethnicity has been merged with the modern discipline of biblical scholarship. By representing Jesus through and from the standpoint of the idealized modern individual, the ideology of Euro-American supremacy was located as the normative center of the dominant racial imaginary.

However, the problem of the dominant narrative is more pervasive than the visual depiction of Jesus with blonde hair and blue eyes and yet more elusive than the locution that "Jesus is white." It is an ideology. It is a strategic form of knowledge production where whiteness, by way of Christianness, transcends race-ethnicity, by way of whiteness—both of which are held in paradoxical tension through a deracialized representation of Jesus. From the theoretical vantage point of deracialization, then, the dominant narrative can be seen as a much larger representational phenomenon that mobilizes Jesus (or, more specifically, ancient constructions of Jesus) through a deracializing logic (or, more specifically, contemporary constructions of whiteness). In

this way, Christianness is rendered non-racial through a politics of invisibility. The result has been two harmful signifying practices in the world of consumption: the divinization of the white Euro-American dominant-self (i.e., the superior human, the god-like) and the dehumanization of non-white minoritized-others (i.e., the subhuman, the less than human). This is a massive theological and ideological problem that is now a fundamental part of biblical discourse.

The third contribution follows from the first two—a more realistic and measured account of how fractured and hierarchical American society has become as a result of the ways in which the rhetoric of Christianness has been deployed. Yet all is not lost. Realism is not the same thing as pessimism, nor is it a panacea. Although the framework of deracialization has deconstructed the formations and relations of power endemic to the ways the Bible has been used, there is also a highly constructive possibility here as well. If a significant part of the dehumanizing damage has been accomplished by problematic religious-theological appeals to biblical authority, then it stands to reason that at least one solution that can be forged, and indeed must be forged, is through a religious-theological rationale, among others.

In conclusion, what has the white Jesus model, and the politics of deracialization on which it is based, gotten us? The answer is a racial imaginary of hierarchical formations and relations of power (i.e., the white, black, brown, red, and yellow Jesuses). What might a minoritized Jesus model, then, give us? One possibility is a renewed discourse where power is not used to oppress and divide, but used to build up and unite. But in order for this to happen, we must forge a coalition and come together in ways that are not beholden to a politics of dominantization/ minoritization or racialization/

deracialization. Dominant critics and minority critics alike must find new ways of discoursing, new ways of relating to one another. How might this be possible? If the purpose of literary and cultural theory in general, and racial-ethnic theory in particular, is to show that it is not possible to escape the dialectic of dominant-selfing and minority othering, but to be properly situated within these lived relations, then one possible solution is to develop an ethic, beyond theory, of constructing self and other in a way that is not beholden to dominantization/ minoritization or, consequently, a politics of invisibility/ visibility. Here, the alternative narrative of the Matthean Jesus' minoritization as a racialized-Judean represents a possible starting point for how such a discursive and dialectical path might be forged: to see the divine in strangers, to encounter the love of God in the other, to love your neighbor as yourself—irrespective of self and other.

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