

## Paul, Inclusion, and Whiteness: Particularising Interpretation<sup>\*</sup>

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### Abstract:

This article takes its point of departure from the effort to reflect critically on how my racial/ethnic identity shapes what I (and the academic tradition of which I am a part) see and ask (and do not see or ask) in our interpretative work. Selections from commentaries are used to illustrate the history of interpretation of Gal 3.28, and the findings are interrogated in the light of questions and issues deriving from the field of ‘whiteness’ studies. For a start, such studies may provoke us to think about how far Christianness – and unspoken assumptions about its superiority – shapes what is said about this text (e.g., in the frequent contrast drawn between Jewish exclusivism and Christian inclusivism). Furthermore, we may ask about the particular location of this interpretative tradition not only in religious terms but also in racial ones. The changing contours of interpretation help to show how it is, in part at least, shaped by its contexts of production in the white, Christian West: it may thus be ‘particularised’ in both religious and racial terms. Just as whiteness studies has criticised the tendency of the ‘white’ perspective to remain ‘unlabelled’, unspecific, implicitly ‘human’ and universal, so too we may critique the tendency of this tradition of biblical studies to avoid labelling and recognising its own specificity. Doing so, moreover, may help us not only to acknowledge our own particularity but also to recognise why we need the insights of differently located and embodied interpreters to reach towards richer insight. Recognising and labelling the particularity of our own perspective is thus one step

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towards equalising the value of the various (labelled and unlabelled) perspectives in biblical studies.

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In the course of my current research project on ethnicity, race and religion, it has come to strike me that I have spent the last twenty-five years as a New Testament scholar, without ever reflecting on how my racial or ethnic identity shapes what I do, what I see, what I ask and do not ask. I may of course be idiosyncratic in this regard, though I doubt that I am by any means unique. Why has it been so easy for me to avoid such questions, when for others with a different identity or context, it might have been quite impossible? (I suspect there are certain parallels with questions about gender or class, though I shall not pursue those wider questions here. Nonetheless, the intersections between the three key categories of gender, class, and race, call for careful attention.) The following case study, and the reflections upon it, constitute an attempt to reflect on issues of perspective and location in our discipline, issues in which I am myself thoroughly bound up and implicated.

Paul is frequently seen as the quintessential proponent of a Christian universalism that, unlike Judaism, reaches out to welcome and include all, regardless of their ethnicity, social status, or gender, transcending those boundaries and distinctions. We might study scholarly understanding of that Pauline vision in the broader constructions of Pauline theology, but as my initial formulation will already have signalled, Galatians 3.28 is a particularly iconic and influential expression of what is taken to be that inclusive Pauline programme.<sup>1</sup> As Ben Witherington noted in 1981, it has sometimes been hailed in modern times as a kind of ‘Magna Carta of Humanity’.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> For a study of the early interpretation of the verse, though focused particularly on the ‘male/female’ pair, see Hogan 2008. It is interesting to note her observation that a focus on the idea of the unique ability of Christianity to encompass all (including all ethnic groups, etc.) becomes prominent with the imperial triumph of Christianity in the fourth century (see pp. 165-92).

<sup>2</sup> Witherington 1981: 593. It is interesting, however, and relevant for the survey that follows, that Gal 3.28 appears very rarely among the biblical texts referred to in the memoirs and narratives of enslaved African Americans, as noted by Powery and Sadler 2016: 140 with n. 103. The vision of Gal 3.28 has, however, played a part in appeals for racial equality in African-American biblical interpretation; see, e.g., Wimbush 1995: 103-107; Braxton 2002: 92-96 – where the stress is on Paul’s obliteration of *domination*,

this study, I have therefore chosen to explore the shifting but familiar contours of this theme of Pauline inclusivism by examining commentaries on this verse. Commentaries are an especially significant genre for two reasons: first, they tend to encapsulate the perspectives of current (and earlier) research, and second, they are the main form in which biblical scholarship is communicated to a wider readership, and thence to a still wider audience through sermons, Bible studies, and so on. My aim is not to try to discern what Paul might have originally meant, but to examine the various ways in which commentators have expressed their sense of what he was proclaiming, and to see what this might tell us about the particular contexts in which those interpretations were (and are) produced. This will then lead to some reflections on the potential significance of particularising interpretation in this way.

### **Shifting Yet Familiar Interpretations of Gal 3.28**

We begin in 1921, with the ICC volume by Ernest DeWitt Burton. In his comments on Gal 3.28, Burton elaborates the significance of Paul's words as follows:

the sweep of his thought carries him beyond the strict limits of the question at issue in Galatia to affirm that all distinctions are abolished, and to present an inspiring picture of the world under one universal religion... It is only in the religion of Christ that Paul conceives that men can thus be brought together (Burton 1921: 206).

Burton is by no means alone in regarding Paul as having 'abolished' all previous distinctions, even if – as we shall see – more recent commentators have tended to modify such language, preferring to speak of transcending, relativizing, or even preserving them. But in contextualising Burton's discovery here of 'an inspiring picture of the world under one universal religion' it is significant to note not only the date and location – the USA in the early part of its rise to economic domination – but also that Burton, President of the University of Chicago from 1923-25, had earlier led 'a commission to investigate educational, social, and religious conditions in the Far East', thus fulfilling

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not of difference. On the ambivalent legacy of this and other Pauline texts, see Buell and Johnson Hodge 2004.

his 'longheld wish of going to China and assisting foreign missions'. He was also chairman of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting, then, to note a somewhat contrasting emphasis that emerged in a very different context – written by Albrecht Oepke, a member of the Confessing Church in Germany, in 1937 – that it would be a mistake to take Paul's declaration that 'there is neither Jew nor Greek' as any kind of support for internationalism. 'Paul speaks purely religiously. He is not concerned with a social, national or antinational programme, but solely with the rightful existence of gentile Christianity, and the unity of the Christian community.'<sup>4</sup>

Burton's comments do not explicitly contrast Paul's inspiring vision with that of his contemporary Jews, though this is a common feature of many commentaries.<sup>5</sup> For example, in a commentary published in 1968, William Hendriksen writes as follows:

In Paul's day, fratricidal class-distinctions were the order of the day, just as they are still in many quarters... the Jews drew a sharp line of separation between themselves and the 'swarms' or 'hordes' (*'goyim'*) of outsiders, heathen nations in contrast with Israel... Even proselytes to the Jewish religion were never fully 'accepted.' [No evidence is cited on this point.] After all, they were not 'children of Abraham.'... Gentiles, too, were often guilty of similar snobbery... What Paul is saying, then, is that all such distinctions – be they racial-religious..., social..., or sexual... – must be thoroughly and forever abandoned, since in Christ all are equal.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See 'Ernest DeWitt Burton', at <http://president.uchicago.edu/directory/ernest-dewitt-burton> (accessed 16 Sept 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Oepke 1937: 69-70: '...so wäre es ebenfalls verfehlt, das erste [Glied – sc. 'neither Jew nor Greek'] im Sinne eines blassen Internationalismus verstehen zu wollen... Aber Pls redet rein religiös. Es geht ihm weder um ein soziales noch um ein völkisches oder antivölkisches Programm, sondern lediglich um das Recht des Heidenchristentums, um die Einheit der Gemeinde. Die zunächst so international anmutende Formel wird daher recht verstanden geradezu zu einer Schutzformel für das "artgemäße" Christentum der Nichtjuden.' For an overview of Oepke's academic work (though not his political or ecclesial commitments), see Bardtke 1956; for a brief overview of his biography, see [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albrecht\\_Oepke](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albrecht_Oepke) (accessed 21 July 2017). See also Oepke's wider reflections on the origins of the Christian sense of 'Weltmission' and its relationship to issues of race and internationalism (Oepke 1932).

<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere in his commentary, though, Burton does make clear that the issue Paul confronts in Galatia is 'whether Christianity was to be a potentially universal religion or was to continue, as it was at first, a sect of Judaism' (Burton 1921: lxii).

<sup>6</sup> Hendriksen 1968: 149-50. Cf., similarly, Ridderbos 1953: 149-50. According to Ridderbos, the various 'oppositions' listed in Gal 3.28 are 'obliterated' (p. 149). Paul's concern in this context is with broadening 'the concept of Abraham's seed' (p. 150).

Very similar comments appear, somewhat later, in Leon Morris's 1996 IVP commentary:

in the first century the Jews despised the Gentiles (even proselytes were not fully accepted) [again this assertion lacks any evidence], the Greeks looked down on uncultured people outside their race, the Romans felt themselves superior to those they had conquered, and so on... Jews divided the whole human race into Jews and Gentiles and they saw only themselves as making up the people of God... The Jews were very proud of the fact that they were the descendants of the great patriarch [Abraham] and physically his heirs (Morris 1996: 121, 124).

These proud and divisive viewpoints may be starkly contrasted with Paul's vision:

that the great divide between Jew and Gentile that meant so much to the Jews in general is meaningless... when people are saved by Jesus Christ they are brought into a marvellous unity... Even the major divisions in the human race cannot do away with this unity (Morris 1996: 121, 123).

The commentaries cited thus far either appeared prior to the New Perspective era, or ignore or reject its findings.<sup>7</sup> Yet given the extent to which the New Perspective on Paul was presented as revolutionising our understanding both of Paul and of ancient Judaism, it is striking how far the contours of interpretation remain similar in clearly 'New Perspective' commentaries, even if the critique of Jews is more muted. Commenting on Gal 3.28, James Dunn, writing in 1993, notes how 'the Jew saw the world, as divided into two categories – the Jews and everyone else'; 'this "us/you" attitude', he suggests, 'has been rendered redundant by the fulfilling of the Abrahamic promise "in Christ" such that "in Christ" the profound barrier of the law can be, and has been ended' (Dunn 1993: 205-206). The reason, Dunn suggests, why Paul places the pairs in the sequence he does, with Jew/Greek at the head of the list, is that it is governed by 'the Jewish assumption that being "under the law" showed Jews to be more highly regarded by God than Greeks' (Dunn 1993: 207). The 'problem' which Paul's Jewish opponents represented may be recast – as one of 'ethnocentrism' rather than 'legalism', as Walter

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<sup>7</sup> Cf., e.g., Morris 1996: 85: 'He [sc. Paul] teaches that works of law are not a condition of salvation. People are justified before God, this apostle says, only on the grounds of Christ's sacrificial death. Salvation is appropriated by faith alone, not by any 'works of law', understand the expression how you will.' Morris 1988 ignores the work of Sanders and the issues it raises.

Hansen puts it, echoing Dunn's work, in his 1994 commentary – but the contrast between Jewish exclusivism and Pauline inclusion remains (Hansen 1994: 26).

While the negative language about Jewish exclusivism is somewhat less sharp than is Hendriksen's, for example, the basic point remains similar: Jews saw the world in binary us/them terms, whereas Paul relativizes all these profound distinctions, breaking down barriers, in Christ. Yet there is at least one point of notable difference, which it will prove significant to explore. In the earlier works by Burton, Hendriksen, and others, the divisions Paul lists in Gal 3.28 – and that between Jew and gentile in particular – are said to be 'abolished', 'abandoned', or 'obliterated' in Christ.<sup>8</sup> In the apocalyptic perspective of J. Louis Martyn there is also, albeit differently expressed, a strong sense that former identities no longer exist: 'The church', Martyn writes, 'is made up of former Jews and former Gentiles'; the community in Christ lies 'beyond religious distinctions'; 'religious and ethnic differentiations... are identified in effect as "the old things" that have now "passed away"'.<sup>9</sup> Dunn, by contrast, insists that 'Paul's point... was not that all of these distinctions had been removed'. They had, rather, 'been relativized' (Dunn 1993: 207).

This stress on the continuing and valued existence of the various identities now transcended and incorporated within the unity that is found in Christ is indeed a feature of a number of recent commentaries.<sup>10</sup> Hansen, for example, suggests that 'there is freedom in Christ to maintain and respect ethnic, social and gender distinctives', though they 'must not be allowed to cause divisions between believers in Christ' (Hansen 1994: 14). Witherington, in his 1998 commentary, insists that Paul 'is not suggesting here the obliteration of the distinctions he mentions in this verse', but instead sees Paul as

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<sup>8</sup> For a more recent example, cf. Lémonon 2008: 'les divisions traditionnelles qui constituent l'humanité sont abolies, en raison de l'unité en Christ Jésus'.

<sup>9</sup> Martyn 1997: 382-83. Cf. de Boer 2011: 244: 'the ethnic/religious/cultural distinction between Jew and Gentile... gives way to what amounts to a new humanity, defined by Christ.' A somewhat similar comment is also offered by Matera 1992: 146: 'Distinctions of race, class, and sex have been dissolved by the new creation that has occurred in Christ.'

<sup>10</sup> It is also an emphasis in plenty of wider recent treatments of Paul, e.g., Campbell 2006; Tucker 2011; Ehrensperger 2013. For this kind of language – transcending not abolishing – in a somewhat older commentary, see Mußner 1974: 264: 'Die In-Existenz der Gläubigen "in Christus"... transzendiert völlig diese alten Unterschiede und Gegensätze. Der Apostel will damit selbstverständlich nicht sagen, daß derartige Unterschiede äußerlich nicht mehr bestehen... *aber sie haben jegliche Heilsbedeutung vor Gott verloren*' (original emphasis).

articulating ‘a vision of humankind and human unity... a unity in Christ that transcends and also transforms these ethnic, social and sexual categories’.<sup>11</sup>

This theme of preserving distinctions within a unity in Christ is also expressed in George Brunk’s 2015 contribution to the Believers Church Bible Commentary series. Like Witherington, Brunk sees ‘humanity’s unity in Christ’ as ‘central to Paul’s gospel’ (Brunk 2015: 179). Yet he also insists that ‘Paul does not presume to obliterate all such distinctions in human experience’ but his ‘ideal is to put into practice as much freedom and equality as possible without violating another ideal specific to Christ and the new people of God’ (Brunk 2015: 182). None of these distinctions, however, ‘represents the ground of true oneness. Such oneness exists only in Christ Jesus’, the basis for ‘our social unity and cohesiveness’ (2015: 179).

An even more emphatic insistence on the preservation of difference and diversity, within a unity in Christ, is found in Peter Oakes’ 2015 commentary in the Paideia series. ‘Being in Christ means oneness’, Oakes remarks, while stressing that Paul’s aim ‘is to preserve social diversity rather than to eliminate it’ and ‘to be inclusive’ (Oakes 2015: 128-29). Oakes also contrasts Paul’s position with that of his opponents: ‘it is Paul’s opponents who are seeking to eliminate diversity. They want gentiles to adopt circumcision, to Judaize, to become Jews, losing their distinction in identity. Paul wants unity between gentiles as gentiles and Jews as Jews, all together in Christ.’<sup>12</sup>

It should be clear, even from these relatively few examples, that there are, on the one hand, certain common threads that continue through these commentaries on Galatians, spanning almost a century, but also, on the other hand, significant differences of emphasis that emerge as time, context, and perspective change. One might perhaps attempt to explain this by suggesting that the older commentaries are infected with their theological, missional, or specifically ‘Old Perspective’ presuppositions, while recent ones get us closer to the real historical Paul. Indeed, there remains a tendency in Pauline scholarship – though by no means only there – to expose the ways in which earlier

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<sup>11</sup> Witherington 1998: 280, 281, 278 respectively. Cf. also Légasse 2000: 279, who suggests that Paul’s ‘negation’ (neither Jew nor Greek) ‘ne supprime pas l’identité juive, mais elle lui refuse tout privilege devant Dieu et dans son plan de salut’.

<sup>12</sup> Oakes 2015: 128. This particular emphasis is stressed in one recent review of Oakes’ commentary: ‘We therefore agree wholeheartedly with Oakes that unity in diversity is a key topic of Galatians’ (Koet and van der Meij 2017).

interpretation was enmeshed in, and distorted by, the convictions and priorities of its context while at the same time claiming that the most recent perspective at last represents an opportunity to understand Paul as he really was, in his first-century setting.<sup>13</sup> Yet I think it can be shown how even the most recent commentaries remain – and unavoidably so – products of their particular context, and, more significantly, that exploring the shape of this particularity can be illuminating and important for our wider reflections on our discipline.

### **Detour and Return: Whiteness Studies**

In order to attempt this kind of particularising of these interpretations of Paul, and of the broader discipline of which they are a representative part, I first take what may appear an incongruous detour – into the field of whiteness studies. I hope, however, to show by the end of the essay the relevance of this turn.

Whiteness emerged as a particular focus of study within and beyond the field of critical race studies, in the USA in particular, from the early 1990s onwards, taking up the critique of whiteness as a form of racial privilege articulated by Black writers such as Audre Lorde and Toni Morrison (and, much earlier, W.E.B. DuBois).<sup>14</sup> For example, writing in 1999, Thomas Nakayama and Judith Martin note ‘an emerging and interdisciplinary interest in whiteness and its reconfiguration in an era of increasing multiculturalism in everyday life’, an interest ‘widespread across a number of academic fields’.<sup>15</sup> This interest in whiteness as a topic for critical analysis has spread to the field

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Dunn 1983: 186: ‘Sanders has given us an unrivalled opportunity to look at Paul afresh, to shift our perspective back from the sixteenth century to the first century... to see Paul properly within his own context’. More recently, see Nanos 2015, who explains the motivation for the ‘Paul within Judaism’ approach, opposing the overly Christianising stance of ‘old’ and ‘new’ perspectives on Paul, as attempting ‘to interpret Paul within his most probable first-century context, Judaism, before putting him into conversation with their [sc. scholars’] own contexts...’ (p. 2).

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Lorde 1984; Morrison 1992. On this point, note the comment of Roediger 2002: 20: ‘Characterizing the study of whiteness as a project of white scholars thus represents both a continued insistence on placing whites at the center of everything and a continuing refusal to take seriously the insights into whiteness that people of color offer’. Roediger’s early and important study (Roediger 1991) takes an important orientation from DuBois’ insight into the ‘psychological wage’ that being white paid (DuBois 1966: 700).

<sup>15</sup> Nakayama and Martin 1999a: vii. Among the representative collections indicating the interest in the subject, see Frankenberg 1997; Delgado and Stefancic 1997; Nakayama and Martin 1999b; Hayes and Hartle 2013. For the wide disciplinary interest, see also, e.g., Kennedy et al. 2005.



of theology too,<sup>16</sup> though barely, as far as I can discover, into biblical studies, with a few notable exceptions.<sup>17</sup>

A key reason for the emergence of this focus was the conviction that whiteness – that is to say, the racialized construction of ‘white’ as an identity<sup>18</sup> – had remained largely ‘invisible’ and thus unexamined in the field of race studies. Whiteness was too often an identity that, given its dominant position in Western societies, could be taken as normative, a kind of unlabelled position which stood as universal, unmarked, unraced. Thus Richard Dyer, in one of the early landmark works, speaks of ‘[t]he invisibility of whiteness as a racial position’ (Dyer 1997: 3), which he links with the tendency of the white perspective to function as the universal, ubiquitous, human perspective: ‘As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people.’<sup>19</sup> Ruth Frankenberg, one of the pioneers of contemporary whiteness studies, likewise speaks of the ‘seeming normativity’ and ‘structured invisibility’ that result from the privileged and dominant position of white people (Frankenberg 1993: 6; cf. also pp. 17-18). It is important to note, however, that this ‘invisibility of whiteness’ is itself a characteristic only of certain societies at certain points in time – perhaps most pertinently for Dyer and Frankenberg the multicultural Western societies of the latter decades of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, where societal commitment to racial equality coexists with the ongoing dominance of those raced as white.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For example, a major attempt to confront ‘the problem of whiteness’, seen ‘as the core theological problem of our times’ (p. 6) and ‘as the inner architecture of modern theology’ (p. 377) is Carter 2008. See also Jennings 2010; Yancy 2012a; Garrigan 2014; Thompson 2014.

<sup>17</sup> In the field of biblical studies, note the probing comments of Siker 2007: 47-53, and the recent essay by Buell, forthcoming. For a critical response to Siker’s article, arguing that it does not sufficiently confront the problems of ‘white invisibility’, see Park 2017. Note also some reflections from the South African context, e.g., Snyman 2008; Punt 2016.

<sup>18</sup> This is an important gloss, in order to make clear that the identification of certain groups as ‘white’, and others as non-white, and the boundaries for counting as white, are socially constructed, historically contingent, and ideologically loaded. See further, e.g., Roediger 1991: 133-63; Garrigan 2014, on the changing perceptions and constructions of Irish identity.

<sup>19</sup> Dyer 1997: 1. Cf., similarly, Yancy 2012b: 8; Hayes et. al. 2013: 2: ‘Whiteness is defined as an identity that is neither problematized nor particularized within discourses on race because it assumes a status of normalcy’.

<sup>20</sup> This is a point I owe to Mark Brett in a response he presented to a different paper of mine touching on this topic. Brett notes, for example, the explicit declaration of the superiority of the white race by the first Australian Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, in 1901: ‘There is no racial equality. There is that

Whiteness studies calls for the critical interrogation of constructions of whiteness, probing especially the veiling of its particularity. This forms part of the wider critical project of following through the implications of the realisation that knowledge is produced by located subjects. In Walter Dignolo's words, 'the knower is always implicated, geo- and body-politically, in the known'; and what is known is always known by 'a racially marked body in a geo-historical marked space' (Dignolo 2009: 4, 2 respectively). 'Naming "whiteness"', Frankenberg argues, 'displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance' (Frankenberg 1993: 6). Dyer, likewise, sees the unmasking of the particularity of whiteness as a crucial task in unveiling and counteracting its power:

There is no more powerful position than that of being 'just' human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can't do that – they can only speak for their race. But non-raced people can, for they do not represent the interests of a race. The point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all the inequities, oppression, privileges and sufferings in its train, dislodging them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in and on the world (Dyer 1997: 2).

Rooting this construction of whiteness in the colonial expansion of Western Europe, Frankenberg suggests that 'one effect of colonial discourse is the production of an unmarked, apparently autonomous white/Western self, in contrast with the marked, Other racial and cultural categories with which the racially and culturally dominant category is coconstructed'.<sup>21</sup> As Dyer puts it:

It has become common for those marginalised by culture to acknowledge the situation from which they speak, but those who occupy positions of cultural

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basic inequality. These races are, in comparison with white races – I think no one wants convincing of this fact – unequal and inferior. The doctrine of the equality of man was never intended to apply to the equality of the Englishman and the Chinaman.' ('Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, 26 September 1901, at <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22hansard80%2Fhansardr80%2F1901-09-26%2F0023%22> cited by Brett and accessed 25 July 2017). Examples from other countries could be added (Apartheid South Africa being an obvious example), as well as the recent rise of a kind of 'alt-right' white supremacism in the USA.

<sup>21</sup> Frankenberg 1993: 17. On the centrality of the colonial project in the making of modern Europe and its ideological (racial) foundations, see also Dignolo 2009: 16; and esp. Young 1990.

hegemony blithely carry on as if what they say is neutral and unsituated – human but not raced. As I shall argue later, there is something especially white in this non-located and disembodied position of knowledge, and thus it seems especially important to try to break the hold of whiteness by locating and embodying it in a particular experience of being white (Dyer 1997: 4).

The goal of critical whiteness studies, then, is to probe the ways in which whiteness, precisely as a racialized identity, is constructed and maintained. In this way, it is hoped that what is too often presented as an unsituated, non-specific, universal human perspective might be unmasked and made specific, identified, contextualised. Dyer refers, therefore, to ‘the project of “making whiteness strange”’ (Dyer 1997: 4).

It is important to stress that this project, for all its critical intent, aims fundamentally to explore and particularise the perspective and constructions of whiteness. In other words, it insists that one facet – and a crucial one at that – of the identities which shape the way we see and understand the world is that of race or ethnicity, socially constructed though these categories are, and that whiteness is one racialized identity that needs to be considered explicitly, just as much as other such identities – and perhaps, given its historical tendency to universalize its own viewpoint, all the more so. As is clear, for example from Frankenberg’s early study based on interviews with a range of white women, the aim is to explore the various ways in which whiteness as identity is constructed, including among those with clear and explicit commitments to racial equality and anti-racist action. Indeed, both Frankenberg and Dyer identify themselves within the focus of their critical investigations of whiteness; their projects are, in part at least, a probing of their own identity and its implications as those who are constructed – by others as well as by themselves – as white.

### **Returning to Paul and his Modern Interpreters**

Returning to Paul and his modern interpreters, I want to suggest that the discourse of whiteness studies might inform our critical reflections in two main ways. The first is to provoke us to consider possible parallels between whiteness and Christianness and the ways in which the latter influences interpretation through a perspective of presumed

normativity, implicit superiority, and universalising of particularity somewhat akin to the tendencies identified in critical analysis of the white perspective on the world. The second, entering more directly into the topic of whiteness, is to invite us to consider how far this tradition of Pauline interpretation is not only Christianly particular but also racially particular, the product of a particular location in both religious and racial terms.

*Making Christianness strange?*

I turn first to the issue of the influence of the Christian perspective on interpretation. While the Christian identity or alignment of the individual commentator, their institution, their commentary series and intended audience, may be explicit in some cases, such that the particular reading perspective is identified and acknowledged, I want to suggest that this Christian location influences interpretation more profoundly than is acknowledged or intended, often in a way that invites similar critical reflection to that presented in relation to whiteness.<sup>22</sup> In a sense, I want to press those of us who inhabit this tradition or are shaped by it, whether personally, institutionally, or academically, by highlighting the extent of this Christianising influence, not only to identify and particularise it, but also, in a sense, to render it strange, just as Dyer refers to the goal of whiteness studies as that of making whiteness strange.

One sign of this influence may be seen in the frequent tendency to depict the unity Paul announces in Christ as a hopeful, inspiring, positive vision – not least for the modern world – in contrast to all the other options available (a point to which we shall return). Put simply, being in Christ is presented as an acceptable and attractive form of belonging and inclusion, while other options are not. For Burton, Paul's is 'an inspiring

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<sup>22</sup> As Ian Paul pointed out to me, there are also crucial differences in considering 'Christianness' and 'whiteness' in relation to the earliest Christian sources: whiteness is not intrinsic to the character and identity of the sources in the way that Christianness may be said to be – though that would immediately need to be qualified by noting the risk that the contours of later Christianity may engender an anachronistic reading of the text. Christian interpretation is, one might say, going with the grain of the text. This raises the wider issue of how the commentator negotiates the path between rearticulating and reiterating what the text is taken to be saying – which *might* entail some notion that it is only in Christ that human groups can come together – and signalling some kind of historical and critical distance from those claims, for example in alerting modern readers to the ways in which they are contestable and theologically loaded, particularly when juxtaposed with claims about what Judaism (or other ancient alternatives) could not do. Otherwise, one risk is that readers of commentaries assume that the theological declaration – that being in Christ incorporates and transcends all other identities – is seen as an empirical and historical comparison. The connections between Christianness and whiteness in the Western interpretative tradition are another matter, to which I turn below.

vision', while for Morris what comes about in Christ is 'a marvellous unity' which '[e]ven the major divisions in the human race cannot do away with' (Burton 1921: 123; Morris 1996: 123). It is, for Witherington, 'a vision of humankind and human unity that still challenges us today' (1998: 281). Moreover, whether this vision is seen as obliterating former divisions, moving entirely beyond them in a new creation and a new humanity, or preserving them in a new unity in Christ, the basis for unity, inclusion, oneness is precisely Christ.

Three critical observations may be made. The first is to pose the obvious question: For whom is the vision of all humanity one in Christ hopeful and inspiring? It may be so for Christians, but for others it may sound more like a threat of religious, cultural, or political imperialism, as Daniel Boyarin, for example, has suggested (Boyarin 1994). The second is to observe that the positive claims made for this vision only work if being in Christ is somehow placed, literally, above all other forms of religious, ethnic, or social identification; only then can it accomplish a form of encompassing unity unattainable in other ways. Other particularisms are seen as transcended and incorporated into a new unity, a new particularism presented as a universal – and thus, implicitly, as superior to and categorically elevated above other particularisms. Being in Christ can abolish, transcend, or incorporate all other religious and racial distinctions and identities only if it does not itself count as a particular form of distinction, if it is not itself taken to represent a religiously particular form of belonging – just as whiteness often remains above the particularity of racialized identities. The third observation, then, building on this, is to stress that being in Christ is, in fact, a new and particular form of differentiation and identification, a new boundary-marker, just as exclusionary and particular as others – just differently so. Indeed, it is one that constructs its sense of belonging and identity precisely by drawing on various facets of ethnic discourse – ancestry, kinship, and so on.<sup>23</sup>

We may press our critical reflections further by observing something that is, as we have seen, prominent across a wide range of commentaries on Gal 3.28, namely, that the incorporation of people into Christ is not only seen as a means to achieve some kind

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<sup>23</sup> See further, e.g., Johnson Hodge 2007; Sechrest 2009; Hansen 2010. Not related to Paul, but of particular importance in stimulating recent investigation into the use of ethnic discourse in the construction of Christian identity is Buell 2005.

of human unity but also is specifically contrasted with Judaism's inability to do so. Judaism represents one kind of particularity – an ethnic, indeed ethnocentric, marked, exclusionary identity.<sup>24</sup> A vision of inclusion and unity can only, it seems, be brought about if this particularity – along with others – is either abolished, transcended, or comes to nest beneath the incorporating umbrella of being in Christ. Indeed, the rhetoric of scholarship frequently casts this primary competing particularism, Judaism, in terms that make it seem not just particular but unattractively so: whether Paul is seen as transcending fratricidal snobbery, or ethnocentric pride, his insistence that people pledge their trust and allegiance to Christ is somehow placed above the level of such divisions. For Hendriksen, Jews separated themselves sharply from the hordes of outsiders, even those who tried to join as proselytes, whereas Paul insisted that such divisions be 'thoroughly and forever abandoned, since in Christ all are equal' (Hendriksen 1968: 150). Morris, like Hendriksen, contrasts the divisions drawn by Romans, Greeks, and Jews – casting themselves as superior to others – with the 'marvellous unity' made possible in Christ (Morris 1996: 123). No sense of superiority here, of course. (Indeed, as an aside, we might ask what it reveals about our presumptions if such a claim does not immediately strike us as deeply ironic.) Dunn, we recall, suggests that the Jewish us/you attitude has been rendered redundant; for Oakes, Paul's opponents want 'to eliminate diversity', whereas Paul wants to preserve it, in a unity 'in Christ' (Dunn 1993: 205; Oakes 2015: 128).

We have already noted one key reason to be suspicious of such a contrast: namely that being in Christ is itself a particular form of identity and belonging, with its own exclusionary boundary and stark distinction between insider and outsider. Only by downplaying such exclusionary particularity can it be cast as a basis for human unity that encompasses and preserves diversity. But we should also consider carefully the nature of the Jewish alternative so frequently cast as the negative counterpoint to Paul's inspiring vision. There is, after all, evidence to indicate not only the widespread appeal of Jewish customs and practices to outsiders (cf., e.g., Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.282; Seneca,

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<sup>24</sup> Contrast the comment of Sze-kar Wan 2009: 258: 'the debate [at Galatia] was not between a status, rigid form of Jewish ethnocentrism and a supposedly more flexible, more inclusive form of universalism. Rather, both narratives were attempts at restructuring Judaism to accommodate the entrance of Gentiles.'

*De Superstitione*), but also opportunities for various levels of affiliation with Judaism, whether as sympathiser, godfearer, or full proselyte.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, it is relevant to note not only that one could join the Jewish community fully by becoming a proselyte (or, indeed, be deemed to have abandoned it through apostasy) but also that those identified as *Ioudaioi* could retain other ethnic identities.<sup>26</sup> So why should adopting this identity equate to ‘eliminating diversity’ – self-evidently a bad thing – whereas joining Christ, becoming a Christian, is to join a group that embodies hope for human unity and harmony in diversity? Is it not rather the case that we are contrasting two different bases for belonging in communities, both of which embody diversity and practice inclusion, albeit in different ways and with different rhetorical justification? Indeed, might one not suggest that Paul is less open to diversity, demanding exclusive allegiance to Christ, compared with the wider range of modes of affiliation that seem to have been possible and accepted in some Jewish communities?<sup>27</sup> Of course, that claim too is open to question and discussion; but it is at least within the range of what may plausibly be deduced on the basis of our historical evidence. So it is worth asking why it is that what Judaism offers tends not to be depicted as a (particular) model of inclusion, if becoming Christian can function as such. But the answer to that question is not difficult to discern: it is the Christianness of this scholarly tradition that most influences its presentation of the Pauline vision as a positive, inclusive, model for the whole world, as well as its corresponding depiction of the Jewish opponents’ vision as one that is clearly and self-evidently not so.

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<sup>25</sup> These assertions demand a fuller documentation than the scope here allows, which I plan to provide elsewhere; but for a recent overview of the evidence, see Donaldson 2007: 469-92.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. e.g., Acts 2.9-11; Philo, *Flacc.* 46; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.142. The evidence from Philo and Acts is discussed by Baker 2009: 79-99. Baker argues that these texts ‘depict Jews as a multi-ethnic or multiracial people’ (p. 81, cf. p. 93). Josephus’ reference to a certain Atomos, who is both *Ioudaios* and Cyprian ‘by race’ (*Ant.* 20.142 [Ἰουδαῖον, Κύπριον δὲ τὸ γένος]) is seen by Shaye Cohen as an indication that Jewishness has by this point become a ‘religious’ rather than ethnic identity (Cohen 1999: 79). But Philip Esler suggests, in disagreement with Cohen, that dual or nested ethnicity is not uncommon. See Esler 2003: 72-74.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Buell and Johnson Hodge 2004: 239-51; and also John Howard Yoder’s affirmation of Jewish ‘cosmopolitanism’ and rejection of ‘the standard claim that the difference between Judaism and Christianity is that Judaism is particular and Christianity is universal’, as (positively) discussed and presented in Givens 2014: 43-49, quotation from p. 49.

### *Christianness and Whiteness*

Thus far I have tried to suggest a certain parallel between the ‘white’ identity that whiteness studies seeks to particularise and the ‘Christian’ identity that so shapes the interpretation of Paul’s vision and also needs, I have suggested, to be particularised. But there is a further question to be probed, one that invites us to consider whether the correlation between whiteness and Christianness and their mutual implicatedness in the interpretation of Paul might be even closer. The question is this: Is the implicit superiority granted to what is taken to be Paul’s ‘Christian’ vision purely an issue of ‘religion’, a perspective deriving from the fact that most of Paul’s modern interpreters are located, either personally or institutionally, within the Christian tradition? Or is there also a racial dimension to the particular constructions of Paul’s inclusive vision we have surveyed?

To probe this issue, rather than highlight the constant themes of such interpretation, we might point to some of the ways in which articulation of the Pauline vision changes over time. In the 1920s, Burton could find in Gal 3.28 an ‘inspiring’ vision of the whole world under the Christian religion, an interpretation clearly shaped by the contours of modern Protestant missionary ambition. Much later, in a more chastened and ecumenically sensitive age, scholars eschew such explicit language of world domination, but nonetheless depict Paul’s vision as one that transcends other social, religious, and ethnic particularities, implicitly placing Christianity into a category above these other distinctions. Both the changes and the continuities in these scholarly depictions may be illuminated by considering the context of production of biblical scholarship in general, and Pauline interpretation in particular.

Modern historical-critical New Testament scholarship developed in Western Europe precisely during the period when European colonialism was at its height, and mission and empire collaborated in an awkward (and sometimes uneasy) alliance. As Shawn Kelley (2002) has shown, Orientalist views of Western Europeans in comparison with their African and Asian counterparts are infused into the early work of the discipline, and transferred to the USA in the scholarship of the 1970s (where Kelley’s survey ends). In other words, woven into the discipline’s early fabric is an ideology of religious and racial superiority which reflects its specifically European origins: it is in



Christianity that humanity finds its highest freedom and calling, and in the peoples of Western Europe that this is first and most clearly realised.<sup>28</sup>

The enduring themes of the interpretation of Galatians 3.28, as noted above, indicate something of the ongoing legacy of this conviction: it is in Christ that the most attractive, plausible and compelling basis for human unity is found. But at the same time, the changes in tone and focus indicate a shift in the kind of relationship that the Christian West has with the rest of the world and in the ideological convictions of the West. In an era of the United Nations, decolonisation, inter-religious dialogue, and so on, it is no longer plausible, or decent, to speak quite so nakedly of one's dream for the 'abolition' of old differences and 'the world under one universal religion'. Instead, in a context where the language has shifted to that of multiculturalism and the valuing of diversity, it is I think significant that these have become precisely the kinds of things that are now seen in Paul's vision.<sup>29</sup> The modern Western model of multicultural liberalism – with its values of tolerance, freedom, and diversity – has now been 'found' in Paul and expressed through exegesis of his letters.<sup>30</sup> Drawing attention to these parallels of ideology and language may help to indicate how such readings of Paul are much more enmeshed in their particular contemporary context than is generally acknowledged or intended.<sup>31</sup> In other words, this language itself reflects its own socio-political context, in

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<sup>28</sup> The critical self-examination that this history calls for is not restricted to the field of theology and biblical studies, but applies to other fields too, not least Classics, Philosophy, and Anthropology, which have had (or at least, in some cases sought) to address the implicit notions of Western European superiority woven into the construction of the disciplines. See, for one example, the debate surrounding Bernal 1987; 1991, which goes to the heart of some of the convictions at the heart of the discipline of Classics.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the reflections of Barclay 1996, on the ways in which the New Perspective on Paul fits well into a multicultural era.

<sup>30</sup> This suggests that finding *analogies* between the biblical text and the contemporary situation may be a prominent (but implicit) strategy in this kind of biblical interpretation, just as it is a more explicit strategy in (for example) African-American biblical interpretation: see Sechrest, forthcoming.

<sup>31</sup> I want to avoid overly self-referential reflections, but this is a point at which to signal an acknowledgment that my treatment of Paul's ethics, in Horrell 2015, also reflects this kind of enmeshment – and explicitly so, since it reads Paul in conversation with contemporary (Western!) theoretical debates between 'liberals' and 'communitarians', finding fruitful material in Paul for thinking about the tasks of sustaining diverse, multicultural societies. I do, however, suggest that any appropriation of Pauline thought in such a context will need to go beyond and even against Paul. I also indicate that Paul's emphasis on solidarity in Christ should not be assumed as a superior basis for group cohesion compared with Judaism's focus on Torah, but simply as different (Horrell 2015: 214 n. 87), and that Paul's strategy remains problematic for the integrity of Jewish identity since, as Boyarin argues, it in effect reduces it 'to a matter of taste' (Boyarin 1994: 32; cf. Horrell 2015: 44-48). As I suggest, there is an interesting parallel here with the way in which Stanley Hauerwas complains that modern political liberalism reduces Christian

which certain ways of talking of difference are more acceptable and attractive than others. Moreover, by finding in Paul precisely the model of tolerant inclusion of difference that is so valorised in Western liberalism, interpreters add legitimation to that contemporary model, providing it with biblical precedents and foundations. There is even a parallel between the commentators' declaration that freedom, tolerance and diversity can be found in Christ and the model of British society promoted by recent Prime Ministers – David Cameron especially and Theresa May also – that the 'British Values' of freedom and tolerance derive from the Bible and from our status as a Christian country.<sup>32</sup> There is, we might suggest, a non-coincidental structural similarity between the scholarly construal of Paul's vision and the kind of vision that undergirds the project of Western political and multicultural liberalism. I should be clear that in making this point I do not intend to imply any rejection of these values nor to deny that I find them valuable and important – though strategic appeals to them deserve critical scrutiny; but I do want to identify their particular context of production.

Just as whiteness studies has drawn attention to the ways in which whiteness can operate in an unmarked, unacknowledged way, masking its own particularity, so too in these readings of Paul, and of Gal 3.28 in particular, we may suspect the hidden particularity of Western Christian universalism to be present. At the very least, it should be clear that the interpretation of Paul in the commentaries we have surveyed is enmeshed in and reflective of a particular cultural and ideological context.

One further observation from the field of whiteness studies also bears consideration in our field. I noted earlier Dyer's observation that 'those marginalised by culture' now commonly 'acknowledge the situation from which they speak', whereas 'those who occupy positions of cultural hegemony blithely carry on as if what they say is neutral and unsituated – human but not raced' (Dyer 1997: 4, quoted more fully above).

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commitment to one among many viable options, such that it ultimately 'does not matter' (see Horrell 2015: 223-24).

<sup>32</sup> For the connection between the Bible and British Values, see David Cameron's speech marking the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the King James Bible (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-ministers-king-james-bible-speech>). On Britain as a Christian country, and the importance of this in relation to 'our values', see, e.g., David Cameron's Easter address in 2014 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/easter-2014-david-camerons-message>); see also *Church Times*, 16 April 2014: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2014/17-april/comment/opinion/my-faith-in-the-church-of-england>). Cf. also Theresa May's Easter speech in 2017: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/easter-2017-theresa-mays-message>. For further discussion, see Crossley 2016: 283-97; and Crossley, forthcoming.

For Dyer this legitimates and motivates the programme of whiteness studies: the attempt to show how ‘this non-located and disembodied position of knowledge’ is peculiarly and distinctively white and thus to particularize (and problematize) its claims.

Dyer’s remarks may provoke us to think about the recent history of biblical studies, in which there have indeed been critiques of the dominant white tradition of historical-critical exegesis with its European origins and American continuation, along with an insistence on the locatedness of all interpreters.<sup>33</sup> Alternative perspectives exist in the academy, and are labelled in ways that, in Dyer’s words, ‘acknowledge the situation from which they speak’: African-American, Latin-American, Asian hermeneutics and so on. But while these are thus identified as ‘located’ interpretations, contextual readings, and so on, what remains – and remains at the centre – is just biblical studies: the unspecified, unmarked, but largely white, Western project of a particular kind of historical and often theologically inflected exegesis (cf. also Buell, forthcoming).

As R.S. Sugirtharajah remarks, asking how much has changed since the publication of *Voices from the Margin* in 1991: ‘Not much, as far as the attitude of the mainstream is concerned. The practice of treating American and European interpretation as ‘the’ interpretation and labelling the enterprise of others – “Asian”, “African” and so on, or in gender or ethnic terms – persists. Those who work on the margins are unable to shake off the exotic tag attached to them.’ (Sugirtharajah 2008: 8)

Part of the purpose of the preceding critical survey of interpretations of Gal 3.28 is to illustrate some of the ways in which such interpretation is enmeshed in its wider religious, political, and racial histories and contemporary contexts. In so doing, I intend to show *that* it is white, Western interpretation, and thus to locate it, religiously, geographically, and historically, *to particularise* it in a way that opens it to critical scrutiny precisely on the grounds of its (often obscured) particularity. That does not mean, needless to say, that it is worthless, incorrect, or lacking in historical and contemporary insight. But it does mean that it is the product of a particular location – one with

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Myers 1991. Cf. also the more recent comments of Dube 2012: 17-18: ‘mainstream academic biblical studies and theology is steeped in Eurocentric perspectives... Those of us who come from former colonies drink our fill, as we inevitably become colonized by the terms of the discipline’. For the emphasis on the locatedness of all interpreters, see Segovia and Tolbert 1995.

religious, socio-political, and racial dimensions to it – and that alerting ourselves to that particularity has important consequences for how we conceive our task and relate ourselves to others who are similarly engaged. Indeed, one of the main consequences of critically particularising our own interpretation of the New Testament, acknowledging the partiality and specificity of our insight, is to indicate that we need the priorities and insights of other perspectives – of other differently embodied interpreters – if we are to enrich and extend our knowledge (see further Wei Hsien Wan, forthcoming). This need not mean, it seems to me, that these various perspectives are simply articulated and affirmed as valid reflections of various locations; there can, and should, be critical assessment and cross-perspective debate about the plausibility and value of different interpretations. But considering how best to facilitate this would also require, among other things, critical consideration of the various means by which power operates in (and beyond) academic disciplines. It may be an ideal to aim towards critical interaction in which, in Jürgen Habermas’s words, nothing compels except ‘the unforced force of the better argument’ (Habermas 1993: 23), but much critical self-reflection is needed to even begin to approximate such a goal. One of the main challenges of whiteness studies in particular, it seems to me, is to provoke us to discomfort with a situation in which the unmarked (white Western) tradition of New Testament studies may be implicitly felt to be a self-sufficient core discipline, generating reliable historical insight and globally relevant commentary, inducting an increasingly diverse range of new students into its particular methods, obsessions, foci and agenda, while other perspectives – though welcomed as part of a diverse and tolerant discipline – are in practice seen as optional, perhaps even faddish, and literally peripheral. What would it take to move to a situation in which there is a non-hierarchical appreciation of our diversely embodied perspectives and an acknowledgment that any progress in interpretation requires their full participation?<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Braxton 2002: 18: ‘A liberating African American hermeneutic should not covet the oppressive title of “the proper interpretation of the text;” it merely wants its validity to be recognized so that it can take its rightful place alongside other interpretive models and create a dialogue *among equals*’ (my emphasis).

## Conclusion

It is easier to see how the past of New Testament studies was implicated in religious and racializing ideologies than it is to identify such things in the present, in ourselves. That use of the first person plural is significant, for my intention in the preceding survey is not to impugn or criticise individual interpreters I have cited, still less to imply anything about their personal convictions or commitments on such issues as Jewish-Christian dialogue or inter-racial justice. But in a sense that is precisely the point, not least in terms of the insights we might derive from whiteness studies: I am attempting not to isolate selected figures for particular criticism, which would falsely suggest that the issues can be addressed at an individual level, but rather to probe and to particularise an exegetical and disciplinary tradition that has both religious and racial aspects to its location, and one in which I am myself implicated. Let me put it in the form of a question: Can we possibly imagine that our own reconstructions of the earliest Christian communities and exegesis of the Pauline letters are not shaped, inflected, by our contemporary social, political, religious and racial location? And though it may be uncomfortable to acknowledge it, is not our racialised identity one significant part of that complex intersection of facets of identity to which we should – indeed must – pay attention? Part of the force of whiteness studies is to insist that if we find it reasonable to think that, say, African-American interpreters, or other interpreters raced as non-white, might find their identity and experience relevant in shaping their reading of the New Testament, so too those of us raced as white should equally expect that our ethnic or racial identity constitutes part of the package of factors that shapes our reading. I may well be wrong in the way I have tried to identify some of the respects in which interpretation of Paul – and of Gal 3.28 in particular – remains enmeshed in the ideological particularity of the white, Christian West. But I would challenge those who think so to propose their own critical analysis of how this particularity becomes visible in our exegesis. Assuming that our interpretation is uncontextualised – unmarked, unlocated, *unraced* – is, I would suggest, no longer a feasible option.

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