

Race and Racism in the Sacred Texts and Human Contexts

Edited by

**Muhammad Shafiq, Thomas Donlin-Smith,
and S. Beena Butool**

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Dedication

To our donors, The Hickeys and their family, the founders of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), the members of the Conference Committee, and those who tirelessly support and work for the Hickey Center and IIIT Chair to promote peaceful coexistence through academic endeavors.

Table of Contents

Dedication	vi
Preface.....	ix
Introduction	xiii
<i>S. Beena Butool</i>	

Part 1: Race Based Theological Directions

Race and Religion: From the Hebrew Bible to Modern Western Academic Thought.....	1
<i>Ori Z Soltes</i>	
The Basis of Race, Religion, and National Origin in Christian Sacred Texts.....	14
<i>Starlette Thomas</i>	
Colonialism, Invention of Race, and Evolving Forms of Racism.....	39
<i>Sefa Secen</i>	

Part 2: Scriptural Roots of Racism

“Of That Born from The Handmaiden”: The Use of Genesis 16.12 in Introducing Muslims and Arabs in the Seventh Century.....	62
<i>S. Beena Butool</i>	
Reading the Qur’ān through the Oppressed: Farid Esack’s Liberation Hermeneutics.....	83
<i>Ghada Abdul Salam Ghazal</i>	
Resisting Erasure: Trauma and Meaning in the books of Jeremiah and Judith.....	105
<i>Katharine Fitzgerald</i>	

Part 3: Conception of Blackness and Resistance in Sacred Texts

'Blackness' and Beauty in Sermon 25 of St. Bernard of Clairvaux: A Medieval Meditation	124
<i>June-Ann Greeley</i>	
Gandhi, Thurman, and Lawson: Self-Governance as a Way of Peace and Change	144
<i>Christopher Key Chapple and Kim R. Harris</i>	
Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: US Citizenship, Religio-Racial Identity, and "Sacred" Texts in Troubling Times	165
<i>Juan M. Floyd-Thomas</i>	

Part 4: Race Based Theological Directions in Religions

Tracing "Race" in The <i>Platform Sūtra</i>	188
<i>John M. Thompson</i>	
A Case Study on Racism: Lessons We Learn from Ethiopian Jews and Others.....	211
<i>Saundra Sterling Epstein</i>	
Senegambian Cultural and Social Philosophies, Islam, Race, and Human Interactions	235
<i>Mariama Khan</i>	
The Migration of Racial Discourses in Biblical Interpretation: From Europe to the Korean Peninsula in the Long Nineteenth Century	257
<i>Ki-Eun Jang</i>	
Concluding Remarks	276
<i>Thomas Donlin-Smith</i>	
Editors and Contributors	279
Index	289

Preface

Racism, xenophobia, violence, and ethnic and religious hatred have fractured individuals and communities across the modern world. Amid the hostility and polarization that characterize much of the twenty-first century, humanity is desperately seeking healing and reconciliation. In our previous publications, we have addressed a range of social justice issues, including gender, wealth and poverty, the environment, the (de)legitimization of violence, mystical traditions, and questions of exclusion and inclusion in sacred texts and human contexts. This publication on Race and Racism further investigates and expands upon the concepts and issues of race within religious traditions.

The modern concept of race emerged primarily in Western literature during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, categorizing people according to physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, facial features, and other visible traits. Ethnicity, by contrast, generally refers to the cultural, social, and linguistic characteristics shared by a group of people. For example, while “Black” may be regarded as a racial category, it encompasses numerous ethnic groups distinguished by their languages, customs, food traditions, historical narratives, and other cultural values.

Sacred texts address not only the stories of creation but also the diversity of humanity expressed through differences in color, language, religion, and culture. The Abrahamic traditions describe the creation of Adam and Eve, the spread of their descendants, and the development of humanity into various racial, ethnic, and tribal communities, each possessing distinct languages, customs, beliefs, and social values. Religions originating in India present alternative creation narratives, including the cosmic egg and the creation of the cosmos through the

sacrifice of the Primordial Being, Mahapurush, narratives that have also been interpreted in relation to the emergence of social hierarchies such as the caste system. Similar creation accounts and explanations for human diversity can be found in Chinese religious traditions and many Indigenous faiths.

While racial and ethnic differences are natural and often shaped by historical and environmental conditions, racism, ethnocentrism, tribalism, and extreme nationalism undermine human dignity and social harmony. This publication examines the issue of race as it appears in both sacred texts and human societies, exploring its theological, historical, and social dimensions.

Our conferences consistently encourage critical reflection on religious traditions and their sacred texts. We are currently planning our next conference on Just Peace, with a particular emphasis on justice as a prerequisite for peaceful coexistence and the development of meaningful alternatives to the polarization and violence that challenge our contemporary world.

At the Brian and Jean Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue and the IIIT Chair at Nazareth University, we believe that interfaith dialogue is essential for educating people to coexist peacefully while appreciating the dignity and worth of every individual. Guided by this conviction, the Hickey Center and the IIIT Chair organize international academic conferences on issues of social justice, as well as seminars and workshops that promote interfaith education within the broader community. Most importantly, we conduct annual Global Citizens Conferences for high school students throughout the Rochester region, preparing the next generation to become leaders in interfaith engagement and contributors to peaceful coexistence.

Nazareth College, now Nazareth University, was among the first academic institutions to establish a Center for Interfaith Studies and

Dialogue (CISD), founded on November 28, 2001, shortly after the tragic events of September 11. In 2004, the Center was integrated into the academic structure of the institution, and in 2011 it was renamed the Brian and Jean Hickey Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue in honor of two of its most dedicated and long-standing supporters. Around the same time, the Islamic and Interfaith Studies Chair was established through the generous support of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in Herndon, Virginia.

No institution can thrive without both collegial and financial support. The Hickey Center and the IIIT Chair have been blessed with the steadfast support of the administration, faculty, and staff of Nazareth University; the Department of Religious Studies; and our generous benefactors, especially Brian and Jean Hickey and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT).

The challenge of identifying the scholarly needs of the interfaith movement and designing programs to meet those needs would not have been possible without a team of committed religious leaders, professionals, and academics dedicated to the common cause of respectful dialogue, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence in our diverse world. The Hickey Center and the IIIT Chair are deeply grateful to all members of the Conference Committee, and especially to our co-editors, for their contributions to this scholarly endeavor.

In addition to those mentioned above, I would like to acknowledge my family. Their patience and understanding have been extraordinary, particularly that of my grandchildren, who are often disappointed when their grandfather is occupied with university work and unable to spend as much time with them as they would like. I thank my family for their unwavering support and for recognizing the importance of this work in advancing interfaith understanding. I am also grateful to Dr. Angela Herrald and the students of the Hickey Center for their dedication and hard work on this and many other projects.

The Hickey Center and the IIIT Chair remain indebted to their founders, community leaders, supporters, and friends who continue to inspire hope for the future and provide the encouragement necessary to sustain our shared commitment to respectful interfaith and intercultural dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

Thank you.

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Introduction

S. Beena Butool

Can sacred texts transmit the idea of race? Or is it human interpretation of the text that justifies divisions between humans based on race, color, and ethnic identity? As we bring together some excellent conversations on the topic of sacred texts and racism, we are curious about the role played by religious texts and their human interpreters in making societies conscious of people occupying different bodies, colors, ethnicities, and ranks inside society. For example, writing about the early modern Atlantic world, Heather Miyano Kopelson noted the “interaction of race and religion”¹ in defining human difference in determining the eligibility of some— Europeans, or Puritans specifically— and the ineligibility of others, such as Native peoples and African slaves, to become full members of the body of Christ throughout the seventeenth century². The key question addressed by the contributors of this volume asks if religion does indeed contribute to racial discrimination and the process of ‘othering’. As Marianne Moyaert contends in her recent monograph *Christian Imaginations of The Religious Other: A History of Religionization*, the process of religionization, i.e. the social construction of what religion is, often involves the construction of dichotomies: “the religious other is projected as the reverse image of the self ³.” Therefore, the distinctions between the faithful, the pagan, the Jew, and the Saracen in so far as they appear opposites are deeply embedded in the self-definition of a

¹ Kopelson, Heather Miyano. *Faithful Bodies: Performing Religion and Race in the Puritan Atlantic*. 1st ed., vol. 13, NYU Press, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.18574/9781479814268>, p.13

² Ibid. p. 12

³ Moyaert, Marianne. *Christian Imaginations of the Religious Other: A History of Religionization*. John Wiley & Sons, 2024, p. 15

religious community. Likewise associating goodness and purity as 'white', and evil and vice as 'black' or 'dark' inside certain religious contexts might serve the same purpose. Additionally, the process of 'othering' centered on race, embodiment, color, culture, and ethnicity is not new, even if the category of *race* is a more modern social construct. To assume that premodern cultures with their unfettered display of religion, scriptures, miracles, saints, and prophets did not engage in practices today termed as xenophobic or racist might not be entirely accurate. Then again, one must acknowledge that premodern societies were not exactly congruent with the systemic practices associated with racism today. Perhaps the central tension at the heart of this volume revolves around whether the phenomena of race and racism in the premodern period manifested the same way as they do in modern contexts.

With these questions and objectives in mind, the first contributor of this volume, Ori Steltzes, examines how scriptural devices were used to justify discrimination against Jews in nineteenth century Europe, particularly in Germany. Apparently, the nineteenth century secular European societies seem to have grounded their classification of humans in Genesis 9:18. The verse classified humans onto a biblical taxonomy; offsprings of the three sons of Noah helped demarcate people: Japheth spearheaded the descendants of Caucasian Europeans, Ham represented Africans, and Shem became the patriarch of Mongoloid Asians. Hence, scripture inscribed a process of 'othering' informed by religious narratives while simultaneously shaping secular academic sciences. Hence, Steltzes offers a narrative arc about the transmutation of the term "semitic" from a religious to a (secular) racial category in nineteenth-century Germany. Classifying all Jews, even those born inside Europe as 'semitic' subconsciously represented a biblically inspired anxiety to assure the superiority of the descendants of Shem (Gen 9:26-27), morphing into a xenophobic imagination about presumed Jewish supremacy over Germans in the secular German

republic. Therefore, individuals such as the pamphleteer William Marr (1819-1904) collapsed the biblical into the scientific. Notable in the nineteenth century was the juxtaposition of the *biblical* imagery of 'Shem versus Japeth' onto the *scientific* construction of 'semitic' versus 'European'. Marr famously published the pamphlet *The Way to Victory of Germanism over Judaism* in 1862, promoting a Christian-German spirit. His thoughts came full circle when the pamphlet was republished in 1879 with a new title, *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism*. In a way, Ori Steltzes sets the tone for this volume by showcasing the scriptural foundations of the so-called scientific construction of race.

The second chapter exposes the religious validations of racism furnished in early American history. Reverend Dr. Starlette Thomas, in her chapter "The Basis of Race, Religion, and National Origin in Christian Sacred Texts" exemplifies the theme of this volume when she examines the "Slave Catechism" recited inside the Churches established by European colonizers in North America:

"Question: Who gave you a master and a mistress?

Answer: God gave them to me.

Question: Who says that you must obey them?

Answer: God says that I must."⁴

The chapter is both descriptive and prescriptive. The first half of the chapter offers an excellent survey of the racial foundations of churches in early America. Catechisms and other church related instructions for African slaves conditioned slaves to internalize the master-slave relationship. Fictional and popular texts such as the *The Negro Servant* published in 1875 by the English evangelical clergyman Legh Richmond clearly demonstrate the social validation furnished by White slave owners for the divinely ordained status of African

⁴ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Down, Up and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 51.

slaves. Thomas's chapter can be a useful primer for anyone looking for a good survey and bibliography of the topic, especially since she knit the different historical epochs of American churches and their consequent segregation. She powerfully notes that the racial segregation of churches in North America is underwritten by the struggles of class, culture, and resources. Hence, "a racialized religion is a colonized religion". What prescription does the chapter offer? The (radical) idea of a "Raceless Gospel" that challenges the colonial and racial interpretations of scripture. The Raceless Gospel accompanies a list of seven demands that encompass practical and theological revisions and restores the worth of humans based on their "baptismal identity."

The third chapter by Sefa Secen offers a comprehensive survey of the different forms of racism alongside the various racism studies produced in the last five decades. The chapter echoes some of the conversations mentioned by other contributors of our volume. For example, Ori Steltzes mentioned the translation of biblical categories into secular categories of race such as the classification based on Noah's three sons. Correspondingly, Secen's chapter puts forth the historical account of how during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the scientific notion of race was increasingly premised on biological taxonomy. Led by naturalists, their effort was to classify and fit human beings on the three (scriptural) categories of "Caucasoid," (the biblical Japeth) "Mongoloid," (the biblical Shem) and "Negroid" (the biblical Ham). Classifications like these sought to reaffirm European superiority to justify European colonialism. Discussions of scientific racism branched out to debates inside sociology and anthropology, media studies, political economy, and religious studies adding richness to Secen's account of the history of racism. The chapter is useful in weaving the numerous studies together to call upon a "decolonial resistance" and "epistemic disobedience".

The second part of this volume revolves around the scriptural roots of racism. It begins with the chapter “‘Of That Born of The Handmaiden’: The Use of Genesis 16.12 in Introducing Muslims and Arabs in the Seventh Century” by Beena Butool. Several Christian ecclesiastical authorities mentioned the onslaught of Arab and Muslim armies in their letters and chronicles during the first wave of Muslim conquests (630-680 CE) waged inside Palestine, Syria, Egypt and beyond. One such account is attributed to Sebeos, the Armenian Bishop who is credited for offering a coherent account regarding the pretext of the Arab invasion of Palestine and Syria (636-638 CE). This chapter revolves around a particular section of Sebeos’s account, i.e. Chapter 42 of *The Armenian History of Sebeos Vol.I* [1999] wherein Sebeos invoked a line from Genesis 16.12 to introduce the Arabs raiding Palestine and Syria. He began by introducing the “stock of Abraham”; not the free ones, presumably from Sara, Abraham’s wife, “but of that born from the handmaiden” meaning Hagar, his African concubine. Thereafter, he quoted the biblical line “his hands on all, and the hands of all on him” (Genesis 16.12). In this chapter, Butool pays special attention to the use of Hagar and Ishmael, the principal figures referred to in Gen 16.12. Hagar and Ishmael were used as a trope for fashioning Arabs as descendants of the African concubine of Abraham and were juxtaposed against the more civilized offsprings of the free one, i.e. Sarah. Therefore, racial categories were quickly erected via scriptural validation to establish a racial identity of the incoming Arab armies, simultaneously furnishing a smokescreen that blurred the imperial factors behind the fall of the Byzantine empire.

The next chapter reiterates the scriptural focus of this section only to showcase the role of scripture in antiracism movements. “Reading the Qur’an Through the Oppressed” by Ghada Abdul Salam Ghazal sheds light on the Qur’anic understanding of liberation theology as expounded by Farid Esack. Foregrounded in South Africa’s struggle against apartheid, Esack firmly grounds his approach in the Qur’an’s

orientation toward racial justice. Esack viewed the Qur'an as a living discourse, moving back and forth between text and context to apply the Qur'an's anti-racist praxis. Therefore, in the South African context, the interpretation of the Qur'an became an act of resistance, an act of solidarity with the oppressed. Ghazal elucidates the significance of Esack's hermeneutic approach by first contextualizing Esack's method in the backdrop of Christian liberation theology. She then solidifies her argument by locating six different Qur'anic coordinates that are crucial to Esack's method, i.e. *taqwā* (piety), *tawhīd* (oneness of God), *al-nās* (humanity), *al-mustaḍ'afūn* (the oppressed), *'adl/qist* (justice), and *jihād* (struggle or strife). Thus, she demonstrates how Esack's interpretative method became revolutionary in reshaping the practice of Qur'anic interpretation, and the Qur'an became an active agent in promoting pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and anti-racist activism in societies like apartheid South Africa.

The next chapter offers new insights into the experience of trauma, particularly for persecuted communities. Katherine Fitzgerald, in "Resisting Erasure: Trauma and Meaning in the Books of Jeremiah and Judith," uses trauma theory as an interpretative lens for analyzing Jewish reactions to the Babylonian exile (597–538 BCE). The legacy of the exile was recorded in numerous books, but the books of *Jeremiah* and *Judith* are quite prominent for their recollections of the event. While the book of *Jeremiah* has often been examined for representations of the traumatic event, less attention has been given to the book of *Judith* to understand how trauma theory explains the post-exilic Jewish literature. The chapter is valuable for scholars of racism studies since the author diligently sketches two types of trauma theories. The first type of trauma theory, drawing on clinical psychology, centers on the individual. The second type, emanating from the field of sociology, promotes cultural trauma theory. Scholars contend that the cultural narrative of trauma serves a meaning-making process. Accordingly, the chapter demonstrates how the books of *Jeremiah* and

Judith are products of a meaning making process relevant for processing trauma by a persecuted religious community.

We then turn to the third section of this volume, centered exclusively on the conception of Blackness and resistance within sacred texts. The first chapter of this section examines the sermons of the twelfth century Cistercian monk Bernard of Clairvaux and his interpretation of the Song of Songs (1:5-6), a collection of love poems in the *Tanakh*. The author, June-Ann Greeley, examines Bernard of Clairvaux's discussion of the song in Sermon XXV. The song can be read literally: the speaker, a black woman, urges "the daughters of Jerusalem" to accept her and not to stare at her dark complexion, declaring "I am black but comely". The song unravels the earliest attitudes and perceptions towards blackness. However, Bernard of Clairvaux, writing in the twelfth century, interpreted the song allegorically rather than literally; easing the tension created by the woman's declaration, "black *but* comely". He noted how blackness was not always unsightly but could be, in many senses, a sign of beauty and mystique. The sermon offers Greeley a chance to examine the notion of blackness in the Middle Ages, all the while attempting to discover if whiteness existed as a category in the medieval world, not in terms of 'race' but as a cultural ideal of beauty. Alternatively, the chapter touches a sensitive vein: when exactly did people inside Europe begin to differentiate themselves as white from black? The chapter offers various clues, one of which dates back to the late Middle Ages, around the fourteenth century, when stained glass artists paid special attention to giving white or translucent flesh tones and fair hair to characters they represented as European. Therefore, one can trace the association of whiteness with beauty, purity, or saintliness beginning way before the modern period.

From notions of beauty, we shift to song and music, especially songs composed to protest oppression, seek freedom, and express hopes for

a more equal society. Christopher Chappel and Kim Harris combine their insights about Gandhi, Howard Thurman, and James Lawson. Songs and the art of song writing, used to promote and express activism, permeate the entire essay. The chapter is insightful as Chappel sketches Gandhi's journey from South Africa to India and notes how scripture impacted Gandhi's conceptions of non-violence. For example, the last eighteen verses of the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā* focus on Krishna's instructions to Arjuna regarding self-transformation and self-mastery. Therefore, the authors highlight how the verses counsel that a "careful direction of the senses can help shape one's emotional relationship with the world". The same verses inspired Gandhi to chart his course on the path of self-control, and to launch a movement of non-violence against British colonialism. Gandhi was also influential in shaping Howard Thurman's ideas in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, especially as Thurman recommended a "devastating sincerity" in face of oppression. Having personally met Gandhi in 1936, Thurman took direct counsel from him regarding fearlessness in speaking truth. Likewise, Rev. James Lawson traveled and stayed in India for three years learning the techniques of non-violence from fellow Gandhians and then taught these to train activists upon his return to Los Angeles. So, the *Bhagavad Gītā* and its principles of self-control and self-governance impacted both anti-colonial activists in India and civil rights activists in the US. If the *Gītā* inspired dialogues about self-reformation leading to autonomy, the songs of freedom composed by African Americans kept the Gandhian torch burning bright.

The next chapter in the section on 'blackness and resistance' consists of the original keynote speech given by Juan M. Floyd-Thomas at our conference, deliberating on the theme of race and religion. Beginning with the memory of the founding fathers, especially George Washington and his commitment to religious liberty, Floyd-Thomas advances the tension between white supremacy and diversity. For

him, diversity centers on a “religio-racial identity,” and his coinage of the term a “religio-racial state” seems timely for the discussion of white American Christian nationalism. For Floyd-Thomas, the American republic is a democratic state that is neither entirely secular nor religious, involving certain compromises within the US Constitution that ensured the domination of a select group over others. The fact that the Constitution could not have been ratified without the Three-Fifths Compromise, and the status of citizenship for free Blacks was left at the disposal of states, exemplifies the tension. It was precisely due to this compromise that we see “the original blueprint for the rise of the oligarchy we are witnessing today”. Closely tied to the question of race is the question of immigration, emboldening claims of white supremacy and giving white citizens the right to both “wield and exceed’ the law. The author employs the triple categories of race, religion, and immigration to demonstrate how less powerful white citizens find whiteness to be their only safeguard once they experience a demotion in their economic class at the hands of a dominant white oligarchy. The xenophobia against immigrants conveniently comforts, validates, and fuels white Christian nationalism. Ironically the legacy of exclusion and domination coexists with the foundational documents underwriting American democracy. Democracy becomes a sacred vehicle to serve white supremacy giving rise to a religio-racial state.

We then arrive at the final section of this volume revolving around racially motivated theological directions within various religions. Investigating the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (六祖壇經 *Liùzǔ Tánjīng*) of the Zen Buddhist school, John Thompson traces mentions of race or racism inside the Sutra. The author challenges the notion that Buddhism is not racist. While examining a sermon by Huineng, the titular “Sixth Patriarch” in this Chinese Buddhist *Sūtra*, Thompson challenges the sanguine notion of Buddhism being devoid of racism. The *Sūtra* reveals an undercurrent of racism in its autobio-

graphical sections when Huineng meets the patriarch Hongren who reproaches him for being a *gelao* or a barbarian. Even as Zen/ Chan Buddhism seems to transcend racism, Thompson shows how ethnicity can collapse into race making discrimination possible. Although the doctrine that all people have the “Buddha nature” aligns with notions of human equality, the author shows how the same concept could be compatible with ideas of hierarchy and domination. Therefore, Chinese Buddhism, as well as Confucianism and Daoism, can exhibit discriminatory patterns: “Ultimate spiritual unity (be it “human nature” or “Buddha Nature”) does *not* mean that actual people are all equal socially and politically”. The chapter goes on to argue that discrimination based on class or ethnicity, such as the use of the term *gelao* (barbarian) was indeed racist. For example, deploying graphic, reptilian, or animal-like exonyms, for the southern non-Hans people was akin to a racist attitude where non-Hans were signified as savages. The tensions faced by Huineng in Hongren’s monastery because of being a *gelao*, forcing him to flee despite being robed as the next patriarch, enabled the author to showcase how racism was endemic to the Chan elite. Hence, sacred texts, like other things, are part of the human world, and can permeate a collective ego for the dominant group. But notions like ‘Buddha Nature’ have long aided Chan and Zen Buddhist monks to ignore the problems of discrimination embedded inside their *sanghas*.

In the next chapter, Saundra Sterling Epstein, despite acknowledging that dark skin is regarded as a sign of beauty in Jewish texts, explores the discrimination faced by Ethiopian Jews inside Israel. The Jewish community in Ethiopia dates to the sixth century BC. She notes the community as being humble, kind, and patient, but according to Epstein, “their patience and humility have worked against them in Israel, more a part of the Westernized world than what they know from their native culture”. The community has faced inequities within education and healthcare institutions, including harrowing incidents

of forced sterilization. The chapter locates the contradictions between the official declarations affirming the Jewishness of the Ethiopian Jews and the social discrimination they face based on their color. Despite Jewish texts supporting claims of Jewishness for Yemenite, Indian, Ugandan, and Ethiopian Jews, their presence remains a challenge for the Israeli state and society. For Ethiopian Jews, leaving their homes to immigrate to the Promised Land, only to find that they are not at par with Jews from other ethnic backgrounds, has been a significant shock. The racism by European Jews inside Israel against Jews of color is an ironic reminder of the 'European' versus the 'semitic' racial divide mentioned by Ori Steltzes in the first chapter of this volume. The chapter recounts numerous initiatives launched inside Israel for the development and integration of Ethiopian Jews in Israeli society. However, these efforts are marred by discrimination, often akin to the racism faced by Blacks inside America.

The next chapter is a case study of a West African region known as Senegambia (comprising land between Senegal river and the Gambia river). From premodern times, this region is known to have relations across West Sudan, Upper Guinea Coast, and with people across the Sahara and North Africa. The essay is rich in details about premodern Senegambia and the Mande speaking region and vividly pictures the savannas and gold mines of West Africa. According to the author, Mariama Khan, the region serves as a lesson for cross cultural relations. Racial relations across communities of West Africa remained cordial due to the alignment between Islamic and indigenous African value systems. Another reason for their cordiality rests in the evolution of heterarchy (unranked social structures) instead of a hierarchy within societies of west Sudan and the Upper Guinea Coast. Also, religious institutions have historically exhibited an egalitarian attitude. The author does acknowledge the stratification within the Mandinka and Wolof groups but also notes how stratification has not resulted in the marginalization of any group. Historically speaking, people in the

lower strata enjoyed greater freedom of expression in comparison to nobility. Also, certain groups like the *griot* were held in great esteem by the nobility owing to their cultural knowledge and expression. Therefore, the racial binary induced by European colonialism came as a shock for West Africans. For example, Europeans actively and openly expressed disdain for Senegambian conversation protocols. Ironically, the presence of Muslim interpreters liaising between European officers and Africans, brought into sharp contrast the colonial approach to different groups and races.

The final essay in this volume deals with the case study of the Korean Peninsula and how biblical interpretations of race traveled across Europe into Korea. Ki-Eun Jang's essay examines and contrasts the biblical origins of the construct of 'race' and its modern-day reception inside Europe and Korea. The modern conception of race, known as *injong*, entered Korea in 1876 with the arrival of Protestant missionaries. The chapter offers a useful survey of phrenological elements prized inside the (pseudo)scientific circles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Jang traces the importation of the European category of race into Korea and how it helped delineate what it meant to be a 'Korean' in the nineteenth century. However, the author reveals that the consciousness of race in Korea evolved in non-linear ways. For example, the essay examines a nineteenth-century travelogue *Sōyu Kyōnmun* (*Observations of A Journey To The West*, 1889), authored by Yu Gil-Jun (1856–1914), a Korean scholar who went on to impact the Gabo reform and was pivotal in collapsing the binary between the religious and scientific understanding of race. Similarly, publication of journals such as the Korean biblical studies journal known as *Sōngsō Chosōn* (*The Bible Korea*), founded in 1927 by Sok-Hon Ham, advocated for understanding the Bible as a cultural product open to reinterpretation. His interpretation of Genesis 9-10 validated the racial distinction of different groups of people. In a way, this last essay in our volume echoes Ori Steltzes, the first contributor, who noted

how the three sons of Noah informed racial consciousness of nineteenth century European intellectuals. Jang demonstrates how Korean intellectuals borrowed European ideas of race, science, and scripture to make sense of their own national identity, while at the same time being participants in an anticolonial struggle.

The collection of essays offers pointers that can aid further inquiry and raise questions of historical significance and contemporary relevance. We hope this volume becomes a conversation starter for questions on religion and racism. We also hope it reduces hesitancy in acknowledging the role of sacred texts in promoting racism. By no means is this collection exhaustive— so many topics remain unexplored. Nevertheless, this is a timely conversation, one that is useful for both academic investigation and interfaith dialogue.

Part I

Race Based Theological Directions

Race and Religion: From the Hebrew Bible to Modern Western Academic Thought

Ori Z Soltes

I: Race and Jews in the Nineteenth Century

“Race” enters into Western thought as anthropology emerges in the academy of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Ironically, in an academic world considering itself post-Christian and secular—in which the Hebrew Bible is studied no differently from the *Iliad*, the terminology of race is drawn from Genesis 9:18, referencing the names of Noah’s three sons—through the appropriation of those names by the burgeoning field of linguistics—as verbal instruments for categorizing humanity: the descendants of Japheth as Caucasoid Europeans, the descendants of Ham as Negroid Africans, and the descendants of Shem as Mongoloid Asians.

Among the further ironies of such terminology/categorization, two might be noted: one, that the term “Semite” comes most distinctly to be applied to the Jews, without regard either for the many Jews who do not originate in Southwest Asia or for the many Muslims who do—to say nothing of adherents to non-Abrahamic faiths from Asia; and two, that the biblical narrative presents Shem as destined to dominate his brothers (Gen 9:26-27) and yet “Semite,” in racializing Jews as non-European, is used to re-marginalize them after several decades of—theoretically—emancipatory inclusion in Western and Central European communities, by asserting that they can never be Europeans, which idea resonates with an ongoing reiteration of a European—“Japhethite”—superiority over Africans and Asians.[1]

By being embedded in anthropology, the term “Semite” came to be widely viewed as having a “scientific” basis—a secular, as opposed to a religious basis—and captured the popular German imagination. The German political pamphleteer William Marr (1819-1904) is arguably the most important propagator of this racialization idea as it applies to the Jews as “Semites.” He had been influenced in his earlier years by the liberal nationalist student movement—the *Burschenschaft* movement—that rejected the idea of Jews as members to its 1818 congress “unless they prove that they are eager to develop within themselves a Christian-German spirit,” inherently viewing them as of doubtful “Germanness” at best. To participate in the German state, Jews would be required to abandon any and all signs of ethnic and religious distinctiveness—whatever those signs might be—and to assimilate completely into the German *Volk* (again: whatever it is that defines *das Volk*, since nobody was actually providing a coherent and concrete definition).

Marr, however, eventually came to reject any possibility of assimilation at all, since he considered Jews an entirely different *race* from that which included Germans (Lutherans and Catholics, albeit many of them, including Marr himself, considered themselves post-Christian atheists), and in fact preached, in his 1862 pamphlet “The Way to Victory of Germanism over Judaism,” that “Germans and Jews” were locked in a longstanding war derived from their racial differences. He warned that Jews, allowed by the process of Emancipation during the previous 80 years to dominate German industry and finance, were winning that war. Initially all but ignored, the pamphlet—under a slightly different title “The Victory of Judaism over Germanism”—re-issued in 1879, became a best-seller.

In order to fend off what would be the end of Germany (he called it “*finis Germaniae*”—using Latin to offer a more “scholarly” carapace for his boney words), Marr founded the *League of Antisemites*—the

first entity devised specifically to combat Jews as a threat to Germany. Whereas hatred of Jews—*Judenhass*; essentially as a Christ-denying or even Christ-killing religion—had a long history in the German states, the idea of *Antisemitismus* claimed a scientific basis. One might add another, more personal irony to Marr's share in this development. It is at least amusing to consider the fact that the first three of Marr's four wives were all either Jewish or half-Jewish (and there have also been assertions that he renounced his antisemitic perspective late in his life[2]).

Nor was the idea limited to Germany. France had prided itself on its openness, thanks to the Revolution—in the aftermath of which the Jews were specifically re-designated in a decree of September 28, 1791 as Frenchmen who happened to be Jewish, as opposed to the previous view of them as Jews who just happened to live (albeit for two millennia!) in France. Yet in 1886, Edouard Drumont (1844-1917), a journalist and politician, published his volume, *Jewish France (La France Juive)*, in which he offered warnings to his fellow French Catholics similar to those issued by Marr to German Lutherans and Catholics, regarding the danger of a takeover by members of the Jewish "race." Drumont founded the *Antisemitic League of France* in 1889 and was the key articulator of the antisemitism that exploded to the surface in France during the 1890s in the context of the Dreyfus Affair.[3]

II Biblical Texts, Ethnicity, Universalism

The narrative of the Hebrew Bible—a sacred text for both Jews and Christians, and two of its parts in particular also sacred to Muslims—itself offers a complex and interesting development regarding ethnic categories, connected to the evolution of its sense of God. In Gen 28, with Jacob's comments when he awakens from his dream of a stairway/ladder connecting heaven and earth, with beings ascending and descending along its rungs, it is rather clear that for Jacob, and presumably his fellow Hebrews, God is perceived as personal and

localized;[4] the story of Moses and Aaron in Egypt as well as the articulation of the Second Commandment suggest an ethnocentric God. The Israelites are commanded to have “no other Gods before me” (Ex 20:3)—not “no other gods, period.” And indeed, the pharaoh’s priests are able to perform some of the same legerdemain performed by Aaron and Moses—from turning their rods into serpents to the first handful of plagues—but Aaron’s rod-serpent swallows all of theirs, and they cannot keep up with what Moses effects all the way through the Tenth Plague (Ex 7:10-8:7; 8:16-24, which carries through the fourth plague; but the entire plague narrative doesn’t finish playing out until Ex 12:30). The God of Israel is more powerful than the Egyptian gods, but does not demand of Its adherents that they don’t believe in the existence of those other gods.

Only by the time of the Babylonian exile does a sense of God as universal appear with clarity. The Judaeen remnants of the once much larger Kingdom of Israel contradict the norms of their era when they recognize their exile and the Temple destruction that preceded it not as the victory of Babylonian gods over their God, but as a punishment administered *by* their God—the *only* God—for their failure to live up to the precepts of the Covenant. The prophetic warnings (particularly those in Jeremiah, beginning with 1:13) had been fulfilled; and the additional promise—that, if they turned back to God, then God would turn back to them—was confirmed when a mere 48 years later the Babylonian Empire was swallowed up by the Akhaemenid Medo-Persian Empire, and the Shah invited the Judaeans to go back and rebuild their Temple, even offering them help and support to do so. Indeed, Shah Cyrus II “the Great”, is referred to (in Isaiah 45:1) as anointed (Heb: *mashiah*; Gk: *khristos*) by God to facilitate this process of return and reconstruction.

The ethnocentric idea contends with that of a universal God as Second Temple Judaeanism evolves—for the stories of both Jonah and Ruth

emphatically underscore a non-ethnic, universal God and push emphatically against a narrow ethnic sensibility. Jonah is sent, against his will, to preach repentance to the Ninevites—i.e., the Assyrians, the very group that had swallowed up the Northern Israelite Ten Tribes 140 years before the Babylonians swallowed up Judah. And they hearken to him, beginning with their ruler, repenting their immoral behavior and avoiding the destruction about which Jonah warned them. Ruth the Moabite—the Moabites, like the Assyrians, and a few other groups, such as the Philistines and Ammonites, are considered among the worst enemies of the Israelites—embraces the God of Israel, ending her story as the great-grandmother of none other than the great King David.

III Post-Hebrew Biblical Race/Ethnicity, Religion and Politics

In any case, as one moves more deeply into the Second Temple Period, the difficulty of defining “Judaean” proves challenging—at least for non-Judaeans—not only in terms of the nature of God as universal or ethnocentric that might be associated with those thusly labeled. The term offers at least three different connotations regarding what the Judaeans *are*. One definitional aspect for them pertains to ethno-blood line (and therefore, in the much later terminology of the nineteenth century West: race). That is, “Judaean” may refer to someone who is descended from the Israelite tribes (themselves understood to be the blood-line descendants of the sons of Jacob-Israel) or more specifically, the tribe of Judah.

The term may also, however, be used with a religious basis, referring to someone who believes that divinity is manifest only through the God whose primary shrine is the Temple in Jerusalem. One might indeed have come to embrace the Israelite-Judaean God, rather than having been born into that religious tradition; like the biblical Ruth—

or much earlier, the Midianite father-in-law of Moses, Reu-El/Jethro, a former Midianite priest, no less—which is to say that one might have come to adjust one’s understanding of divinity to conform to that of the Israelite-Judaeans.

Indeed, more troubling is the one extraordinary instance when the Judaeans, led by their Hasmonean King John Hyrkanos, defeat the Idumaeans in battle in 128 BCE and force an Idumaeen conversion to Judaeanism (some argue that the conversion was not forced). The grandson of Antipater—the Idumaeen king who, with his people, accepted that conversion, and became a Judaeen by religion—was none other than Herod the Great, who in 37 BCE became the King of the Judaeans. He was thus also a Judaeen politically, as were the workers whom he imported from Idumaea to work on the transformation of the fishing village of Straton’s Tower into a major East Mediterranean port named in honor of the Roman Emperor: Caesarea. Herod was ethnically half Idumaeen and half-Nabataean (on his mother’s side), and at least half Judaeen by religion (he would perhaps still have been pagan on his mother’s side), and fully Judaeen in the political sense.

These complications would only increase both for the Judaeans and for the Roman pagans ultimately governing them sometime before the death of Herod in 4 BCE. Between the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth a bit more than a generation later, and in the century or so following from the time of the Crucifixion until the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-5 CE), Judaeanism evolved to become Judaism and Christianity; each embraced a universalist understanding of God in its own way. The pagan Romans would have had very little understanding of the religious differences between the “Judaeans for Jesus” who became Christians and the “Judaeans not for Jesus” who became Jews.[5]

Eventually, however, by the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt—which was fought to gain political independence, (just as the First Revolt of 65-70 CE had been), as opposed to being a struggle against reli-

gious oppression—and the last years of Hadrian's (r 118-138) emperorship, the Romans began to recognize a distinction between the two groups. They also saw a difference between the association for—at least some—Jews between religion and political/national self-consciousness and the lack of such an association for Christians. Thus, while both groups are still referred to and thought of by the Roman authorities as "Judaean,"[6] the first group is forbidden from entering Jerusalem after the Bar Kokhba Revolt and the second is not.

In the following 180 years or so, however, the legitimate/subversive distinction came more commonly to be applied by the Romans in the opposite direction: the legitimacy accorded to Judaeanism back in 63 BCE under Pompey was retained (except during the tale-end of the Hadrianic period and its immediate aftermath) by those we would call "Jews" and not those we call "Christians." [7] The latter, deriving the centerpiece of their religious identity from their association with Jesus as the *Christ*—were treated as political subversives. The term for such subversion is *superstitio*—and given that Jesus had been crucified by the Roman authorities as a political subversive—his crime, according to the Gospels (Matt 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, John 19:19) and in the evolving Christian tradition, was to have presumed to be, or to have been perceived by his followers as, "King of the Judaean" (and the Emperor is the only legitimate king of all those governed by Rome)—then those who called themselves "Christniks" would have been assumed to share in that subversion.

Paul sets key foundation stones in place for the edifice of Christianity in preaching to non-Judaean and emphasizing—over against the more ethnocentric view of Peter and James—the redemptive role of Jesus as directed to all of humankind. That non-ethnic, non-racial sensibility will embed itself in Islam as well. Indeed, where Judaism is born long after the Judaean state has lost its independence, and Christianity spent 350 years evolving between the time of the Crucifixion