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READING BIBLICAL TEXTS TOGETHER

Pursuing Minoritized Biblical Criticism

Edited by

Tat-siong Benny Liew and Fernando F. Segovia

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This volume is dedicated to three of our colleagues, Laura E. Donaldson, David Arthur Sánchez, and Lynne St. Clair Darden, all of whom passed away much too early in their lives and in their careers. We are most fortunate to have the essays by Dr. Sánchez and Dr. Darden in the volume, while we utterly regret that Dr. Donaldson was not able to complete hers for publication. The work of all three always reflected sharpness of vision, excellence in scholarship, and power of commitment. Their voices and faces are, and will be, sorely missed. For their many contributions to the field and to minority biblical criticism, we stand in profound gratitude.

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Minority/Minoritized: A Note

The term *minority* is the designation most often used throughout the volume for both the critical approach under analysis, minority criticism, and the scholars who practice it, minority critics. At the same time, the term *minoritized* is also to be found in both regards. The two designations are synonymous; however, *minoritized* does convey a sense of agency and construction. In effect, when a critic wishes to bring across the sense of relegation to the margins or the periphery, then the term *minoritized* is employed.

A further word of explanation may prove helpful. First, *minority* forms part of an opposition alongside *dominant* to signify the presence of differential formations and relations of power in society and culture. Second, this opposition, dominant-minority, applies across the multiple axes of identity that mark human existence, including that of ethnicity-race. Third, the term *minoritized* emphasizes this relation of domination and subordination, superiority and inferiority, at work in all axes of human identity, whereby one formation erects itself as dominant while casting others as minorities. Consequently, a minority formation is the product of a process of minoritization, whereby that formation has been rendered minoritized by another.

In sum, this volume is concerned with minority ethnic-racial criticism, a variation of ethnic-racial criticism, within the paradigm of ideological criticism in the field of biblical studies. It involves critics who identify, and are identified, with ethnic-racial minority formations in their respective societies and cultures. These critics approach biblical criticism by foregrounding—in one way or another; to some degree or another—the perspective of ethnicity-race, with a focus on the unequal formations and relations of power regarding ethnic-racial identity. This they do with respect to the texts of antiquity, the interpretations of these texts, and interpreters behind such interpretations.

Translation of biblical texts continue to be one of the critical aspects of minority criticism. Some essays in the volume provide direct examples of the authors' engagement with the biblical texts and the struggles around English as the language to communicate the depth of the minoritized experiences. In other cases, authors engage the limitations of modern English language translations. Unless indicated otherwise, English translations of the biblical texts within this volume are taken from the NRSV.

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Abbreviations

1QH	Hodayot or Thanksgiving Hymns
AAP	<i>The African American Pulpit</i>
AARTL	African American Religious Thought and Life
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Freedman, David Noel, ed. <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
AE	<i>Asian Ethnology</i>
A.J.	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates judaicae</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ALH	<i>American Literary History</i>
ANET	Pritchard, James B., ed. <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ApNTC	Apostasy in the New Testament Communities
AQ	<i>Adoption Quarterly</i>
ASW	<i>Australian Social Work</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BA	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibLib	The Bible and Liberation Series
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTF	<i>Bangalore Theological Forum</i>
C&S	<i>Church & Society</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document
CH	Code of Hammurabi

CI	<i>Critical Inquiry</i>
CrossCur	<i>Cross Currents</i>
CS	<i>Cultural Studies</i>
CSSH	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
CTQ	<i>Catholic Theological Quarterly</i>
CTR	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
CurBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
Di	<i>Dialog</i>
Enc	<i>Encounter</i>
ExpOnl	<i>Expositions Online</i>
ExpTim	<i>The Expository Times</i>
Fran	<i>Franciscanum</i>
GLQ	<i>GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies</i>
HACL	<i>History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant</i>
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HLLR	<i>Harvard Latino Law Review</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IC	<i>Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture</i>
ICC	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
IM	<i>The Irish Monthly</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
IVBS	<i>International Voices in Biblical Studies</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCO	<i>Journal of Chinese Overseas</i>
JCT	<i>Journal of Constructive Theology</i>
JEGP	<i>The Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JGR	<i>Journal of Genocide Research</i>
JGRSA	<i>Journal of Gender and Religion in Southern Africa</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JQR	<i>The Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JRER	<i>Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</i>
KJV	<i>King James Version</i>

KTU	Dietrich, Manfred, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, eds. <i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995.
LD	<i>lectio difficilior</i>
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LitComp	<i>Literature Compass</i>
LS	<i>Latino Studies</i>
LXX	Septuagint
m. Nid.	Mishnah Niddah
MassRev	<i>Massachusetts Review</i>
MT	<i>Masoretic Text</i>
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEB	New English Bible
Neot	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NIB	Keck, Leander E., ed. <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i> . 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004.
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i>
NLH	<i>New Literary History</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OG	Old Greek
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
PCB	<i>Pacific Conservation Biology</i>
PerTeol	<i>Perspectiva teológica</i>
PJT	<i>The Pacific Journal of Theology</i>
PLJ	<i>The Pacific Law Journal</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
Prot. Jas.	Protoevangelium of James
R&C	<i>Race & Class</i>
RCL	<i>Revista de Crítica Latinoamericana</i>
RenQ	<i>Renaissance Quarterly</i>
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>

<i>Rom.</i>	Aelius Aristides, <i>To Rome</i>
<i>SAJE</i>	<i>South African Journal of Education</i>
<i>SAM</i>	St Antony's/Macmillan
<i>SASP</i>	Southeast Asian Studies Program
<i>SemeiaSt</i>	Semeia Studies
<i>Sir</i>	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SocText</i>	<i>Social Text</i>
<i>SP</i>	Sacra Pagina
<i>SPH</i>	<i>Social Process in Hawai'i</i>
<i>SPS</i>	<i>Social Policy and Society</i>
<i>SSQ</i>	<i>Social Science Quarterly</i>
<i>T@C</i>	Texts@Contexts
<i>TCS</i>	<i>Theory, Culture & Society</i>
<i>TL</i>	<i>Tydskrif vir Letterkunde</i>
<i>TLR</i>	<i>Texas Law Review</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>UCLALR</i>	<i>UCLA Law Review</i>
<i>UCLF</i>	<i>The University of Chicago Legal Forum</i>
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary

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Introduction

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Minority Biblical Criticism: Reading Texts Together as Critical Project

Fernando F. Segovia

The present volume on reading texts together forms part of an expansive and ongoing project on minority biblical criticism. *Reading Texts Together* is a sequel to the first volume, *They Were All Together in One Place? Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009), and thus constitutes a second phase of the project. The first phase sought to establish a point of departure for the project. The first volume pursued an incipient conceptualization and formulation of what such a critical undertaking would imply and entail. Now, years later, the second phase seeks to advance the project with a more pointed sense of direction and a more defined sense of integration in mind. The present volume undertakes these goals in the light of two, by no means unrelated, developments: the guiding parameters surfaced in that foundational moment signified by *They Were All Together in One Place?* and the rich trajectory of academic-intellectual production coming to light in the intervening years.

A program unit within the context of the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature has had a formative impact on the production of academic interpretation. This unit was launched as a deliberate and sustained follow-up to that first effort at minority criticism, propelled and chaired by the same individuals who had served as coeditors of the volume, namely, Randall C. Bailey, Tat-siong Benny Liew, and Fernando F. Segovia. The unit made its debut at the 2011 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, in San Francisco, under the designation “Minoritized Criticism and Biblical Interpretation.”

The unit’s initial program, it is worth recalling, included two highly successful sessions. One of these was a panel discussion on the topic “Interrogating Minoritization,” which consisted of critical reflections on the process of minoritization. The other was a panel review of an important work

on the tradition of Western crusades, historical and contemporary, against minorities on the part of the West, *We Are All Moors* (Majid 2009). This volume was authored by Anouar Majid, professor of English and vice president for global affairs at the University of New England, and was published in the same year as *They Were All Together in One Place?* (2009). Since that time, and thus for over a decade now, this unit has been addressing all sorts of topics and issues revolving around the task of minority biblical criticism, fostering in the process the goals of this undertaking in highly creative and distinguished fashion.

The present exercise in minority biblical criticism, whose beginnings go back to the work of this program unit, moves the project toward pronounced engagement with texts as well as enhanced interaction among scholars. For the former objective, a set of four texts was selected for analysis, all having the problematic of ethnic-racial identity, by way of dominant-minority formations and relations of power, at the core. For the latter objective, four corresponding sets of critics were formed, all involving representatives from the various ethnic-racial groups. The task assigned was to engage in critical analysis of the texts in question, taking their respective social-cultural contexts and critical-ideological perspectives into account. The questions of how and why were left up to the decision of each critic: in what way they were to approach the text and to what end they were to do so.

In what follows, I address various dimensions of this exercise in interpretation. To begin with, I situate the volume within the context of the ongoing project on minority criticism. This I do in two steps. I start by taking up the question of the whence: looking back at the driving forces behind as well as the noted limitations of its first phase. I continue by addressing the question of the whither, in the light of such limitations: looking ahead to the envisioned trajectory of the project beyond this second phase as well as setting forth the design and goal for this phase, this exercise on reading texts together. Second, I continue with a general presentation of the biblical texts selected for analysis and a pointed explanation for such selection as signifiers for the process of minoritization. To conclude, I set the exercise in broader theoretical perspective, looking at two discussions on and models for such comparative undertakings in minority criticism.

Reading Texts Together: Whence

At the time of the publication of *They Were All Together in One Place?*, toward the end of the first decade of the century, various strands of

ethnic-racial biblical criticism had already been underway for several decades. This development began with African American criticism, continued with Asian American and Latinx American criticisms, and involved throughout a number of ventures in Native American criticism. In contrast to the others, the latter took place along the lines of individual interventions, rather than as concerted effort. The reason was simply the lack of biblical critics from the indigenous nations and formations of the United States. In laying the foundations for minority biblical criticism, therefore, critics from these various groups took part, except, again, for Native Americans. To have followed the example set years earlier, at the turn of the century, by the volume *Beginning Ethnic American Literatures*—which appeared in the series *Beginnings* put out by Manchester University Press and which included the literary and critical production of all four ethnic-racial groups—would have been splendid (Grice et al. 2001). Alas, however, this was not to be and, quite regrettably, could not be.

Nonetheless, this effort marked a significant breakthrough. Up to this point, the academic-scholarly paths of the various groups had remained virtually independent from one another. Each had given rise by itself to an area of study with an ever more extensive body of literature, an ever more expansive range of interests, and an ever more complex as well as sophisticated set of lines of inquiry. What the project aimed to do, therefore, at its foundational moment was to bring together critics from the various ethnic-racial movements and discourses to ponder the question of minority criticism *as such* and to work together toward this end. The goal was a critical undertaking—a movement and a discourse of its own—that would encompass the various paths at work without displacing, much less replacing, the concerns and objectives pursued by each strand. In other words, the objective was to begin to work together while continuing to work separately.

First Phase: Driving Forces

A variety of reasons lay behind this impulse toward coalition and dialogue behind the project. Now, in retrospect, with the benefit of more than a decade of hindsight, these can be theorized with much greater acumen and clarity. Three of these I characterize as primary or driving forces behind the launching of the project: challenging established practices, broadening epistemic horizons, and pursuing independent analysis. Each represented a

response to specific aspects of the field that were seen as lacking, in need of critical attention. Each, in turn, signified a corresponding move toward the correction of such perceived deficiencies, by way of redirection or reconstitution of the field.

The first such motivation was a felt pressing need, even after several decades of methodological and theoretical shifts in biblical criticism, to bring about further transformation in the field, both in terms of critical approach and in terms of critical representation. I describe this reason as a quest for voice and inclusion, in resistance to a tradition of silencing and exclusion. Another motivation was a growing desire for greater acquaintance and engagement with the realities and experiences, the movements and discourses, of other minority formations in the United States, following decades of research on and analysis of one's material and discursive reality and experience. This reason I characterize as a quest for universalism and solidarity, in reaction to a habit of particularism and separation. The third motivation was a perceived pressing need, after many decades of swift increase in numbers as well as sustained growth in research and publication, to work together outside the ambit of dominant criticism, varied as these scholars had become by then, both as individuals and as critics. I describe this reason as a quest for freedom and space, in resistance to a history of control and gazing.

With regard to the layout of the field, minority critics grew keenly aware of two persistent drawbacks, despite the far-reaching changes that had taken place since the mid-1970s and the breakup of the consensus of historicism. These drawbacks had to do with lack of access to critical approach and dearth of critical representation. On the one hand, criticism from an ethnic-racial minority lens still remained at the margins of the critical enterprise. Such a situation could be readily explained. From the point of view of the center, whatever happens in the margins is viewed as of interest primarily to the margins. The periphery is, by definition, inferior in quality and import, and hence of little if any concern to the center. On the other hand, criticism with an ethnic-racial minority presence still continued primarily by way of tokenism. This situation could be readily explained as well. From the point of view of the center, dealing with the periphery is relegated largely to the periphery, and for this minimal presence is required. The center, by definition, pursues its own concerns, which are seen as universal, and thus applicable to, indeed imperative for, the margins as well.

With respect to the vision of collaborative work, minority critics became increasingly cognizant of a critical vacuum in their midst,

notwithstanding the many material and discursive changes that had taken place in the United States since the 1960s as a result of the civil rights movement. First, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the Hart-Celler Act, signed by President Lyndon Baines Johnson, abolished the system of immigration by national origins and opened the gates for the arrival of immigrants from outside northwestern Europe. In the decades that followed, the numbers of immigrants to the United States from Africa and the Near East, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean swiftly multiplied. Second, protest movements arose among ethnic-racial groups in the United States, clamoring for civil rights, for justice and liberation. Soon thereafter, critical movements in the academy and the profession followed with a focus on analysis of such groups from a multidisciplinary perspective. Out of such academic-professional movements emerged in time the various strands of minority biblical criticism. It was troubling for critics that they did not know about one another as much as they should have, while facing similar social and cultural problems in the country.

With regard to a plan of action, minority critics remained painfully aware of a critical vulnerability in the pursuit of their craft, despite the vibrant development of their respective strands, the proliferation of scholarship, and the sophistication of such scholarship, since their commencement in the 1980s and 1990s. Not only had exposure to their critical perspectives and their critical voices alike remained under restriction by the center, as noted earlier, but also individual critics and critical angles were subject to tight, though subtle, supervision and observation by the center as well. This state of affairs called for careful attention on the part of minority critics to the various dimensions of their craft: their agendas for research and publication; their approaches to the impartation of the field, its layout and trajectory; and their modes of expression and behavior in academic-intellectual as well as academic-professional contexts. A perceived failure in any one aspect—academic, pedagogical, institutional—could cost them dearly in the advancement of their scholarly lives and careers.

All such circumstances played a role in informing and shaping the project for coalition and dialogue at the start. First, given the enduring sense of provincialism and exoticism attached to their work, minority critics looked to such a collaborative model as a way to exert greater pressure on the field, in terms of wider exposure to their angle of vision as well as greater access to the ranks of the academy and the profession. This strategy would allow critics to continue with their respective lines of inquiry, while presenting

such paths as variations within the same critical movement and discourse. Second, in light of a sharp sense of disconnection from and ignorance of one another, minority critics envisioned this collaborative model as a means to expand their historical and spatial as well as their social and cultural horizons. Thus, instead of taking the center instinctively as the point of reference, they would begin to take one another as points of reference within the same national historical-political context of the United States. Last, given the pervasive sense of examination and evaluation, minority critics looked to this collaborative model as a way to secure a place of their own and forge a way of their own, away from the power and the gaze of dominant criticism. This preferred path by no means implied a decision not to take into consideration methodological and theoretical issues outside the ethnic-racial lens of inquiry. What it did imply was a determination to avoid—at this point in time and for strategic reasons—the inevitable interventions and instructions, the irruption of the traditional reference point, to be expected from the presence of critics from the center.

First Phase: Limitations

Despite the success of the first phase of the project, this foundational consideration of minority biblical criticism, its vision and mission, did present a number of limitations. Such is the case, to be sure, with all discursive frameworks at the moment of formation and definition, and this proved no exception. Indeed, these lacunae were identified within the volume itself, a fact that testifies to the critical resolve and thoroughness of this initial effort. Consequently, the second phase of the project, as signified by this exercise on reading texts together, was devised in the light of and in response to such limitations. At this point, these lacunae and moves can be theorized with greater insight and lucidity.

Four of these limitations are named in *They Were All Together in One Place?* Two have to do with the question of scope and representation. First, the project had been conceived solely along the lines of ethnic-racial minorities in the United States. Second, even within the national context of the United States, ethnic-racial minority representation was deficient, given, as highlighted above, the absence of Native American critics. The other two concerned issues of method and theory. First, the vision of minority criticism was not sufficiently addressed, whether in terms of the individual discursive strands or in terms of the collaborative undertaking as such. Second, comparative analysis regarding the use of the rhetorical dynamics

and mechanics of interpretation, whether within the same discursive strand or across the range of such strands, is absent. Other lacunae were identified in the critiques offered by the scholars from other fields of study who served as consultants to the project; these were included as part 2 of *They Were All Together in One Place?* (Bailey, Liew, and Segovia 2009, 311–62).

To begin with, Mayra Rivera Rivera, presently Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Religion and Latinx Studies in the Divinity School at Harvard University, pointed out how, in addressing the problematic of ethnicity-race in texts and interpretations, minority critics had kept altogether silent regarding their religious-theological positions as scholars. It was imperative, she argued, to go beyond questions of method-theory and intersectionality and to be forthcoming about their religious-theological beliefs and the impact of their minority interpretations on such beliefs.

In addition, Evelyn L. Parker, now Susanna Wesley Centennial Professor of Practical Theology in Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, harped on the need for minority critics to move, in the pursuit of their craft, beyond attention to texts and interpretations. They should include, she urged, critical analysis of the various elements that frame and inform the execution of this task: the historical-political context within which it takes place, the mode and tenor in which it is conveyed, and the political ends that lie behind it. To this, she adds, in a highly insightful comment, the dimension of hybridity. While offered with intergroup material relations in mind, the suggestion can also be taken metaphorically, with reference to intergroup discursive relations.

Last, James Kyung-Jin Lee, presently dean of the Center for the Medical Humanities and associate professor of Asian American Literature and English in the School of Humanities at University of California-Irvine, emphasized the importance of paying attention to the national political context. Thus, he called for careful attention on the part of minority critics to the workings of dominant-minority relations and the character of minority status within the state. Toward this end, he urged critical analysis of the cultural logic at work in the state as well as critical construction of a contrarian cultural logic instead, one that would bypass a simple binary of affirmation or rejection and weigh instead a range of options.

Reading Texts Together: Whither

The limitations noted proved pivotal in defining the objectives and parameters for the future of the project, not only with regard to its next

and second phase but also with respect to a long-range plan of action, its vision and sequence. While some of these observations and recommendations were integrated into the crafting of the present exercise, reading texts together, others were set aside for later consideration. At this point, this process of planning and selection can be theorized far more sharply and more substantially. In so doing, I proceed from exclusion to inclusion.

Second Phase: Looking Beyond

I begin with two assessments that, although regarded as of the highest order, have been deferred for subsequent pursual. Both come from the set of external consultants. One has to do with the observation of Rivera Rivera regarding the absence of an explicit religious-theological framework in the project. The other involves the recommendation of Lee for similarly explicit attention to the national-political framework on the part of the project.

Rivera Rivera offered an incisive analysis of the project from the perspective of theological studies, bringing to light its disciplinary, hermeneutical, and theological dimensions; these she described as interlocking and reinforcing. What emerges through this exercise in minority criticism, she argues, with its focus on the problematic of ethnicity-race in interpretation, is a variation of postmodernist hermeneutics and an example of relational theology. Over against the dominant model of historical criticism, grounded in modernist hermeneutics and transcendental theology, the project embodies and advances a construction of God as immanent in creation, worldly and engaged, and of creation itself as relational, complex, and conflicted. For Rivera Rivera, this religious-theological dimension of the project calls for explicit unveiling and analysis.

Toward this end, minority critics face a twofold task. First, they must be forthcoming about their convictions regarding God and creation. Second, they must address the relation between convictions and criticism: the ramifications of beliefs and practices on their work as well as the consequences of lenses and approaches on their stance. I believe that Rivera Rivera is right on target; I argue, however, that the point demands expansion. What she puts her finger on admits of a twofold development. On the one hand, the issue of reticence regarding religious-theological presuppositions in criticism presents another side as well, directly related to the status and role of the Bible. On the other hand, this issue affects not only

biblical criticism but also theological thought, in both a different and a similar way at once.

As Rivera Rivera has observed in this instance, biblical scholars tend not to expose, much less analyze, the religious-theological beliefs and practices that frame and inform their work of interpretation. Yet, in any reading of the Bible, critical or otherwise, there are presuppositions of a religious-theological nature at play. Just as true, I would add, is the failure of biblical scholars to disclose and discuss, by and large, their stance regarding the traditional religious-theological views of the Bible as inspired, revelatory, and normative. Yet, underlying any reading of the Bible, critical or otherwise, such presuppositions are also at work. All such notions, whether regarding God and creation or regarding the Bible, should be put on the table and should be made subject to ideological critique. Why should the religious-theological axis of identity, with its formations and relations of unequal power, be treated any differently from any other such axis, including that of race-ethnicity? Besides, if such exposure and analysis are absent, interpretation proceeds as if in unproblematic fashion.

I add further that theological scholars tend not to reveal, much less scrutinize, the rhetorical-ideological models and strategies that ground and shape their use of the Bible in the work of theological construction. In the process of invoking and deploying the Bible in any model of theological construction, there are presuppositions of a rhetorical-ideological character at play. Further, in the process of such constructions, theological scholars by and large refrain, alongside their critical colleagues, from disclosing and discussing their views regarding the traditional doctrines of revelation, inspiration, and normativity of the Bible. All such conceptions, whether touching on critical approaches or on the nature of the Bible, must be brought out into the open and ideologically dissected. Otherwise, interpretation comes across as unproblematic.

Here a final point is in order. Just as biblical scholars are, on the whole, not much conversant with the trajectory of theological studies, its movements and discussions, so theological scholars prove, by and large, not much knowledgeable regarding the path of biblical studies, its models and issues. Such is the case even though both endeavors represent constitutive areas of study within the field of Christian studies, whether pursued along ecclesial and confessional lines or along secular and humanist lines. One would think that scholars in related areas of studies within the same field would have a greater grasp of one another's framework and discourse, but such, alas, is hardly ever the case. Consequently, if presuppositions

on both sides, theological or critical, are to be openly set forth and critically weighed, the need for greater cross-disciplinary sophistication and dexterity is evident. After all, no less would be asked if the matter concerned other issues of identity—such as gender or economics, sexuality or ethnicity-race, geopolitics, and the like.

Lee advanced an insightful reading of the project from the standpoint of ethnic-racial studies, identifying its particular position, within a range of options open to minority movements and discourses, toward the dominant social-cultural formation; this he defined as centrist. What this exercise in minority criticism reveals, he argues, through its approach to the problematic of race-ethnicity in interpretation is a posture of engaged disconnection. In the face of the dominant national-political logic, the project signifies and promotes a twofold, contradictory sense of unavoidable complicity and determined resistance, avoiding thereby the opposite poles of the spectrum: on one side, a quest for other-assimilation, bowing to the mandate for uniform universalism; on the other, a drive for self-affirmation, rebelling instead for horizontal assimilation. For Lee, this national-political dimension of the project warrants close attention and examination.

In so doing, a twofold task awaits minority critics. To begin with, they must expose and assess the project of the state. Further, in the light of this critique, they must define what their own project as minorities will be, within the ambit of the dominant project, toward the dominant project. I agree wholeheartedly with Lee on this score; however, I believe that the point requires expansion. Such development can proceed along the following two lines. On the one hand, the issue of critical evaluation must be undertaken in broad, comparative fashion. On the other hand, this issue bears a second dimension, imperial-geopolitical, that envelops the first dimension.

There is no question that, from the beginning, the various minority strands of ethnic-racial criticism have taken the social-cultural context into consideration in their work. This they have done in the light of their origins as contextual movements and discourses, in opposition to the erasure of context and the claim to universality on the part of dominant criticism. There is also no question that the joint project of minority criticism had such critical analysis of the social-cultural context in mind. In this regard, both facets, the specific and the collective, are children of the linguistic and ideological transformation in the field. As with all variations of ideological criticism, they pay attention to the differential formations and

relations of power in society and culture in both texts and interpretations. Yet, as Lee has observed in this instance, such a focus on ethnicity-race has not foregrounded the national-political dimension of context in as systematic or sustained a fashion as it should have.

In this project, as well as in the various strands of the undertaking, I agree, a duly informed and persistent analysis of the dominant logic of the state is in order. For this task, I add, it would be incumbent on minority critics to look at various models of this dominant logic, taken from a variety of fields and a variety of pundits. In so doing, critics would engage in ideological critique before opting for a particular model or mixture of models. They would examine and assess the sources and objectives, the rhetoric and the slant, behind such all models. Toward this end, I add, a similarly informed and persistent analysis of the dominant logic of the empire is of the essence as well, since the state in question, the United States, has been and remains an imperial power. Here, too, it would be imperative for critics to look at various constructions of this imperial logic, drawing on a variety of opinions and a variety of commentators. This process would proceed on a similar key of ideological critique, leading to the selection of a particular construction or combination thereof. In both regards, whether as minoritized formations within the state or within the empire, with transnational links to the Global South, minority movements and discourse would then analyze the range of responses open to them and decide on an appropriate path of action toward the development of a contrarian logic.

While both of these observations are regarded as indispensable, neither was adopted as the topic for the next phase of the project. The call of Lee to national-political consciousness and definition within the state was postponed until the third phase, an exercise on "Reading in These Times." In this forthcoming project, minority critics across the board have been asked to reflect on their status and role as biblical critics in the world today, nationally as well as globally. The call of Rivera Rivera to religious-theological awareness and definition in critical interpretation has been postponed until a later phase. What emerged instead is the present exercise on reading texts together.

Second Phase: On Reading Texts Together

This exercise deviates from the call issued, explicitly or implicitly, by the external consultants to move beyond the traditional concentration on

texts and interpretations—on matters of rhetoric and ideology as well as on issues of method and theory, respectively—in pursuing the task of minority criticism. This was not a call to set these aside as objects of inquiry; it was, rather, a call to amplify them. This exercise was an exhortation to bring other lines of inquiry to bear by placing this task within broader frameworks of reference—religious-theological, public-pedagogical, national-political. What the exercise signifies instead, through deferment of this call, is an abiding concern among minority scholars regarding the question of critical approach. This is a concern with a twofold focus on application and configuration. With regard to the former, it seeks a sharper grasp of ethnic-racial identity in the past—in texts and their contexts. With regard to the latter, it seeks a further fine-tuning of the ethnic-racial angle of vision in the present—in interpretations and interpreters. To put it succinctly, what the exercise signifies is persisting pondering on the dynamics and mechanics of minority criticism.

As such, the exercise conveys the sense that the achievements of the foundational phase regarding the quest captured by its subtitle, *Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*, numerous and pathbreaking as they were, are not yet sufficiently polished, and hence that further work is in order regarding both the execution and the forging of minority criticism. Toward this end, as captured by its title, *Reading Biblical Texts Together*, the exercise further signals the conviction that greater interaction is of the essence. The title for this volume signifies that indeed minority critics stand much to gain yet from continuing to focus on texts and interpretations, but that they should do so by working together, through sustained collaborative endeavor. Consequently, the exercise integrates a number of measures designed to promote this goal of increased dialogical interchange at various levels—design, participation, and exchange.

A first set of measures has to do with the layout of the project, the structure of the interaction—a question of method and theory. The desideratum for further work on texts and interpretations I named in my account of the limitations of the project, mentioned earlier. First, I noted that the vision and the mission of minority criticism needed to be unpacked further. Second, I added that such unpacking should include sustained and detailed analysis of the various strategies—the various sets of rhetorical and ideological dynamics and mechanics—activated by minority critics. This the exercise pursues through two procedural strategies. The first was to opt for a set number of texts in which the problematic of race-ethnicity features prominently. Four such passages were selected: two from the

Hebrew Bible, Gen 21:1–21 and 1 Kgs 21; and two from the Christian Testament, John 4 and Rev 21. The second was to have a set of minority scholars from across a range of ethnic-racial movements and discourses analyze each text. All would do so by taking into consideration their own contexts and lenses as minority critics. Thus, interaction is enhanced through a limited repertoire of texts and a broad repertoire of voices on each text.

The second set of measures attends to the roster of the project, the breadth of the interaction—a question of scope and representation. The desideratum for broader constitution I also mentioned in the account of limitations, also listed earlier. First, I brought out the national character of the project and the need to expand the conversation to a global level. Second, I emphasized the absence of Native American participation. These shortcomings the present exercise counters in two ways. On the one hand, it brings a global presence to the table by including the voices of minority critics from outside the United States. This was accomplished in all four sets: Africa and the Middle East—Revelation; Asia and the Pacific—Genesis, 1 Kings, Revelation; and Latin America and the Caribbean—John. On the other hand, it incorporates an indigenous presence as well. Two such voices were secured: one on Genesis and one on Revelation. However, at the beginning of the project, Professor Laura E. Donaldson had to withdraw, for medical reasons, from participation. Thereby, interaction is heightened by the addition of new faces and voices into the project—by no means at the ideal level desired but as a solid step forward nonetheless.

A third and final set of measures has to do with the extent of the project, the degree of interaction—a question of reception and discussion. A desideratum for comparative analysis was conveyed as well in our account of limitations. The analysis of the set of strategies deployed should be carried out in intense comparative fashion, bringing out similarities and differences in the process. This the exercise addresses in two ways. One measure involves the sets of critics. All members of each set comment on the interpretations of the text offered by the other members within the set. This interchange is included in the volume after the essays on each text. The other measure brings in an external critic. I offer a close reading of the dynamics and mechanics of each reading, set by set. The goal is to surface the various positions taken by the critics on texts (ethnic-racial construction advanced and ethnic-racial assessment offered) and interpretations (ethnic-racial context claimed, ethnic-racial lens marshaled, ethnic-racial objective pursued) alike. This comprehensive reading constitutes an exercise in gazing on the lives and labors of

minority critics—not from the outside but rather from the inside. Such gazing bestows on such criticism the attention and significance that it deserves, while presenting such criticism as a comparative foundation for future development. Thus, interaction is enhanced through further internal as well as external engagement.

In what follows, I present the set of biblical texts chosen for analysis and then a number of key insights drawn from the exercise. With respect to the texts, I begin by providing a description of the plot of the literary unit, an account of its position and role within its immediate narrative context, and a sense of its place within the narrative context as a whole. In the light of this background, then, I set forth the reason for selection: the set of elements that make such a literary unit particularly beckoning for ethnic-racial interpretation. With regard to the insights, I limit myself to a summary. This I expand at length in the concluding study, giving such readings the close analysis due as an envisioned foundation for future work.

Reading Texts Together: Choosing Texts

All social-cultural frameworks, I hold, are crisscrossed by differential formations and relations of power along the multiple axes of identity. This is true across time and space, transhistorically as well as cross-geographically. As such, I also hold that the cultural production of each such framework reflects and conveys, in some mode and to some degree, such unequal divisions and interactions of power along all lines of identity. This is true across the whole range of such production. Consequently, I further hold that each and every component of such production is subject to ideological analysis, that is, a critical study of the power dynamics and mechanics at work in the various axes of identity. This would apply to the entire realm of literary production. The biblical writings are no exception in this regard. They, too, stand as intersected by the entire range of differential formations and relations of power. They, too, are subject to ideological analysis regarding the dynamics and mechanics activated in the representation and wielding of power within all axes.

One such axis of identity has to do with the concepts of ethnicity and race as well as the processes of ethnicization and racialization. Its critical study constitutes the realm of ethnic-racial criticism, which, when practiced from the perspective of minoritized groups, becomes minority criticism. Theoretically, any text, regardless of length, may be analyzed from

the perspective of ethnic-racial criticism in general and minority criticism in particular. No text can escape from the intersectionality of power formations and relations. Practically, however, some texts lend themselves more readily than others to the pursuit of such analysis, given a greater degree of attention or a more explicit mode of presentation, or both, devoted to the ethnic-racial axis of identity. For this exercise in collaborative reading within minority criticism, four such texts have been selected, all of which bear prominently, in different ways, the problematic of ethnicity-race.

Genesis 21:1–21: Ishmael the Son of Hagar and Isaac the Son of Sarah

Genesis 21:1–21 depicts the fates, immediate and forthcoming, awaiting the children of Abraham and their respective mothers as promised by God. Their destinies for the future are all-important and reassuring—even if differentially so. These revolve around the covenant of God. A sharp difference in promises is marked: while benefits from God will flow on both, only one shall receive the covenant. Their destinies for the present are quite consequential, but clashing—even if ultimately resolved. These gyrate around the hearth of Abraham. A parting of the ways takes place: a separation steeped in familial conflict, marked by outright expulsion and deadly peril, but guided by divine intervention.

The future fates are dictated as follows. On one side, there is the younger Isaac, the son of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. He is born to her in old age, the result of a covenantal promise by God, in response to her inability to bear children. The covenant of God will continue through him—and his many descendants, as progenitor of many nations. On the other side, there stands the older Ishmael, the son of Hagar, an Egyptian slave of Sarah. He was born to her as a concubine of Abraham, handed over by Sarah for the purpose of procreation and inheritance, given her infertility. Through him—and his many descendants, as progenitor of a great nation—the blessing of God will flow, but not as the conveyor of the covenant.

The present fates are depicted as follows. At the request of Sarah, who seeks to preserve Abraham's inheritance for her son, Isaac, Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away, with but the barest of provisions, water and bread. Regarding this course of action, God signals approval to Abraham, while reaffirming the promise for Ishmael. While wandering in the wilderness of Beersheba, the supply of water runs out, bringing Ishmael to the point of death and Hagar to despair. Regarding this course of action,

God comes to the rescue of both, revealing a well of water and reaffirming, again, the promise for Ishmael.

As a narrative unit, Gen 21:1–21 forms part of the cycle of stories dealing with the figures of Abraham and Sarah in Gen 12–25. This cycle represents, in turn, the first of three major literary segments that recount the history of Israel's ancestors in Gen 12–50. Within this first segment, this unit brings to a climax the problematic situation created, as related in Gen 16–17, by the existence of the two sons, half-brothers, and the relationship between them—in light of the covenant established between God and Abraham. At issue are its line of inheritance and the transmission of its promises.

The unit sits between two narrative units having to do with the relationship between Abraham and King Abimelech (20:1–18 and 21:22–30). Its structure comprises four literary sections. The plot proceeds as follows: from fulfillment, through conflict and resolution, to fulfillment. The first section functions as the introduction to the story, presenting the birth of Isaac and hence the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah (21:1–7). The second brings to bear, on the celebration of Isaac's weaning, the conflict that leads to the expulsion and separation of Hagar and Ishmael from the hearth (vv. 8–14). The third brings the unit to a climax by showing the consequences of the expulsion: the specter of death for Ishmael and the divine rescue (vv. 15–19). The last section provides the conclusion, revealing, by way of a summary statement, the fulfillment of God's promise regarding Ishmael: his path of life in the wilderness, in the company of God and married to an Egyptian woman, like his mother and selected by her (vv. 20–21).

Genesis 21:1–21 brings to the fore a number of issues that are central to the process of minoritization and hence of interest to the task of minority criticism. Among these, to my mind, one proves fundamental. This is a claim with two sides to it. On the one hand, it posits divine election on behalf of one ethnic-racial group—those who regard themselves as descendants of Abraham through Isaac. On the other hand, it asserts divine relegation to the other, competing group—those who are seen as descendants of Abraham through Ishmael. This latter fate does not signify rejection by any means, not absolute anyway, nor even subordination, not directly anyway. Relegation effectively means, rather, marginalization through distantiation. This claim receives the highest validation, placed at it is on the lips of God, as a character in the narrative. Closely intertwined with it is an account of the differential consequences for the two

formations in question, religious-theological as well as historical-political. From the point of view of divine presence and teleology, one group, the elect, places itself at the center of the world, while confining the other group to its periphery.

Around this bifurcation, a number of other elements central to the program and agenda of minoritization can be found. There is, first of all, recourse to a definition of identity through an oppositional relation of self and other, although not radically so, since the other, in its assigned marginalization, is allowed a connection, foundational as well as ongoing, with the one God. Second, one finds a clear invocation of notions of descent and culture, focused especially on the question of a privileged inheritance and relationship, a covenant. Third, one finds as well the question of aliens, their status and role, within a dominant social-cultural framework, here not only by way of first-generation aliens, and a female alien in particular, but also in terms of the second generation, the mixed issue of natives and aliens. Last, there is the problematic of slavery. This element appears in two ways: first, in terms of sexualized demands placed on women slaves for the benefit of the slaveholder, such as surrogate motherhood; second, in terms of treatment accorded at the hands of their masters, such as summary expulsion and abandonment to fate.

1 Kings 21: Naboth of Jezreel and Ahab of Samaria

First Kings 21 presents a conflict over a plot of land that leads to a twofold outcome, one immediate and the other forthcoming. The former takes place within the story itself; the latter is announced within the story but takes place at a later point in the narrative. The land in question is a vineyard in Jezreel. The setting for the conflict is laid out as follows. This is an ancestral plot of land inherited by Naboth, who is clearly a prominent figure in the region. He is thus identified as a native of the area. This vineyard lies contiguous to a palace of King Ahab, the ruler of Samaria, who travels to Jezreel from Samaria (21:1) after having journeyed from Aram to Samaria (20:43). He is identified thereby as an Israelite, but an outsider to this area. A third figure, Jezebel, his wife, is mentioned as residing in the palace. She has been previously identified not only as an outsider to Israel, a Sidonian, but also as a follower of Baal—in effect, she represents the ultimate other.

The plot of the conflict undergoes a threefold development. The point of departure is provided by a frustrated transaction: an offer by Ahab to

acquire the vineyard for use as a vegetable garden, by a mutually agreed-upon exchange, involving purchase or barter; and the rejection of the offer by Naboth on religious-theological grounds, namely, divine interdiction against the sale of ancestral land. Then, an escalation ensues, brought about by the intervention of Jezebel on behalf of Ahab, leading to a first resolution of the conflict. This has nefarious consequences for Naboth—a violent death and an unlawful seizure of the vineyard. Last, the climax is revealed, involving a second resolution of the conflict, through the intervention of God and the agency of the prophet Elijah. This brings nefarious consequences as well—not only for the perpetrators, Ahab and Jezebel, but also for their descendants, the house of Ahab.

As a narrative unit, 1 Kgs 21 forms part of a narrative division having to do with King Ahab of Israel (16:29–22:40). This cycle of stories, in turn, belongs within the expansive narrative segment that follows the beginning narrative of Solomon's accession to the throne and the death of David (chs. 1–2) and the subsequent depiction of the reign of Solomon (chs. 3–11), which ends with the apostasy of Solomon and the division of the kingdom. What follows, then, is a cycle of stories that trace the histories and relations of the split kingdoms, Israel and Judah (chs. 12–22). This cycle begins with Jeroboam in Israel and Rehoboam, son of Solomon, in Judah—the aftermath of a rebellion on the part of the northern tribes. The cycle ends with Ahaziah, son of Ahab, in Israel and Jehoshaphat in Judea. The narrative alternates between the northern and southern kingdoms.

Throughout, the ideological project of the Deuteronomistic History is evident. On the one hand, there is a demand for unyielding allegiance to God and observance of torah, if the blessings of election are to endure. On the other hand, there is a condemnation of any failings in this regard, yielding punishment by God as conveyed through prophetic figures. From this religious-theological optic, all monarchs are subject to denunciation, but the northern kings fare quite badly. King Ahab represents a salient example of this trajectory, and in such portrayal the episode of 1 Kgs 21 plays a major role—royal failure, divine condemnation, prophetic intervention.

Within the set of Ahab stories in 1 Kgs 16:29–22:40, which includes the activity of the prophet Elijah (chaps. 17–19), the unit sits between accounts of Ahab's Aramaean wars in 1 Kgs 20 and 1 Kgs 22:1–40. As it presently stands, the story follows a fivefold structure marked by changes in spatial settings and character interactions. The story moves as follows: vineyard, palace, town, palace, vineyard. At the center of it, therefore, lies the murder of Naboth.