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Conclusion

In the book's Introduction, I noted (1) that research on social cognition has demonstrated that stereotyping is a mundane and ubiquitous phenomenon; and (2) that in antiquity generalizing and essentializing statements about ethnic groups were common and virtually uncontested. Taken together, these two observations suggest that it is highly likely that Paul and other early Christ-followers were on some level influenced by ethnic stereotypes and that traces of this influence may be detected in the Pauline epistolary. The case studies collected in this monograph have confirmed this hypothesis and have demonstrated that stereotypical conceptions of the collective character of ethnic groups are assumed, implied, reiterated, and reflected at various points on the pages of the Pauline corpus.

What I have covered of the Pauline letter archive in this study is quite limited. A number of letters have not been analyzed, and in the cases that have been discussed, the focus has been largely on one feature (e.g., fickleness in the letter to the Galatians, licentiousness in the Corinthian correspondence), rather than a full-scale analysis of all possible points of intersection between ancient stereotypes and the Pauline epistles.[1] A major question I have not addressed at all is the extent to which Paul

[1] Further analysis may uncover more points where Paul or authors writing in his name operate with positive stereotypical assumptions rather than the predominantly negative ones highlighted in this study. See, however, the discussion of Galatian hospitality on p. 89 n. 70 and the reference to "wise Greeks" in Rom 1:14 (cf. 1 Cor 1:22), discussed on pp. 141–44. The relative predominance of negative stereotypical traits may well be partially a function of the reality that Pauline epistles generally address some problem or challenge that has arisen in the local context.

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engages stereotypes about Jews/Judeans. As noted in the Introduction, I have not taken up this question given the study's focus on ethnic outgroups as well as the considerable volume of scholarly publications on early Christian anti-Judaism already available. The question of anti-Jewish stereotypes remains important, however, also in connection to the possible impact of ethnic stereotypes *about* Paul. When his interlocutors recognized Paul – based on, for example, his accent, message, or the company that he kept – as a Jew/Judean or a Tarsian from Cilicia (if Acts can be trusted on this point), or even simply as someone from the "East," stereotypical assumptions would have been triggered that shaped their view of Paul and likely influenced their subsequent interactions. Can we find traces of this in Paul's letters? Might, for instance, the suspicions raised about his reliability in the Corinthian correspondence, particularly with regard to finances, reflect stereotypical assumptions about the untrustworthiness of Cilicians?[2] The question of what knowledge, beliefs, and expectations would have been conjured by Paul's persona would require an extensive analysis given Paul's multiple identities. His Jewish/Judean or Israelite/Hebrew identity would have invited other associations than his Cilician identity, which in turn may have differed from the expectations generated by his Tarsian origin.[3] Further complicating the matter is the possibility that Paul may have internalized some of the relevant stereotypes to the effect that comments about, for example, his lack of trustworthiness could conceivably reflect not only how others perceived him but would also have aligned on some level with aspects of his self-perception.[4] It is difficult to answer questions of this sort with any degree of confidence, because it requires us to engage in the kind of speculation about Paul's psyche that this study's social-cognitive

[2] On stereotypical associations that Paul's Cilician identity may have invited, see J. Lionel North, "Paul's Protest That He Does Not Lie in the Light of His Cilician Origin," *JTS* 47 (1996): 439–63.

[3] How Paul was viewed may also have been influenced by stereotypical assumptions about what Heidi Wendt has termed "freelance experts" (Heidi Wendt, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2016]) or what Timothy Luckritz Marquis describes as "transient wanderers" (Timothy Luckritz Marquis, *Transient Apostle: Paul, Travel, and the Rhetoric of Empire*, Synkrisis [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013]).

[4] For a critical survey of empirical research on this phenomenon, see E. J. R. David, Tiera M. Schroeder, and Jessicaanne Fernandez, "Internalized Racism: A Systematic Review of the Psychological Literature on Racism's Most Insidious Consequence," *Journal of Social Issues* 75 (2019): 1057–86; Drexler James, "Health and Health-Related Correlates of Internalized Racism Among Racial/Ethnic Minorities: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* 7 (2020): 785–806.

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approach was designed to avoid.[5] Even if unanswerable, however, the question of internalization is not without relevance, in relation to Paul but also in relation to his addressees. As we try to envisage, for instance, how the Galatians would have responded to Paul's missive, it makes a difference if we imagine them being deeply offended by the suggestion that they were prone to fickleness or as having internalized this stereotype to such a degree that they were primed to agree with Paul's assessment. Related to the issue of internalization is the question of what the use of a stereotype says about the stereotyping party. If "the imagination of the Other is simultaneously an imagination of the Self, each reflecting and refracting a kaleidoscope of contrasting attributes,"[6] what might the stereotypes analyzed say about the Pauline authors and their imagined communities?

This study has further been restricted in the sense that I have focused on stereotypes about groups that can be broadly categorized as "ethnic." However, many of the arguments advanced in relation to the essentializing and generalizing quality of much ancient thought as well as to insights derived from social cognition have broad applicability and do not depend for their validity on agreement about whether the group in question is identified as ethnic. Stereotype analysis can likewise be applied in studying social entities that interpreters prefer to categorize differently, for example, as local or regional groups. The methodological approach advanced in this study therefore has something to contribute to the study of Pauline literature in the broadest sense, since almost all Pauline writings (ostensibly) address locally situated communities. How culturally available knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about these groups may have influenced the author's perception, evaluation, and memory is a question worth asking for all of the documents that make up the Pauline letter archive.

Paul and his collaborators and imitators were not of course the only ones to address, whether fictively or not, local audiences. Other early Christian letters, such as 1 Clement and the letters of Ignatius are similar in this respect, and it may well be enlightening to explore to what extent these and other texts reflect stereotypical assumptions about their addressees. Narrative texts like the canonical and apocryphal Gospels and Acts likewise warrant attention in this connection, because they regularly feature interactions between people with different ethnic

[5] See pp. 17–18.

[6] Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown, *Racism*, 2nd ed., Key Ideas (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 86.

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backgrounds. Ancient ethnic stereotypes may be relevant for how these stories unfold (i.e., how they shape the interaction between the literary characters) and for how they may have been heard in their ancient contexts, as well as by later interpreters.[7]

Future research may also focus on broadening the evidentiary basis for stereotype analysis. In the present study, I have drawn almost exclusively from literary evidence. While I included a wide range of genres, from elite productions to evidence provided by proverbial expressions that may be reflective of views that had broader societal currency, I have not included material evidence like coins, statues, vases, and inscriptions.[8] The decision to focus on literary evidence is based (apart from considerations related to my own very limited realm of competence) on the relatively greater degree of precision with which texts inform us about the characteristics assigned to ethnic groups. However, material evidence may well confirm or complicate these depictions in important and interesting ways.

Despite these various limitations, I hope the book has compellingly demonstrated that it is worthwhile to inquire into the impact of ethnic and related stereotypes on early Christian literature. This remains the case even if we cannot always arrive at conclusive answers. With J. Z. Smith, I would like to emphasize the importance of a good question, which often outlasts any particular answers that we might formulate.[9] Even if we cannot determine the impact of stereotypes with certainty (as in the case of Paul's Corinthian correspondence), this impact should be recognized as a "known unknown," to borrow Donald Rumsfeld's infamous terminology.[10] Given the ubiquitous influence of stereotypes, we *know* that they

[7] For an example, see my "Aquila and Apollos: Acts 18 in Light of Ancient Ethnic Stereotypes," *JBL* 139 (2020): 177–89.

[8] For the view that proverbs reflect the knowledge of the less educated and less literate segments of society, see Teresa Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4–6, 30–31; Daniela Dueck, "Ethnic Types and Stereotypes in Ancient Latin Idioms," in *Rome: An Empire of Many Nations: New Perspectives on Ethnic Diversity and Cultural Identity*, ed. Jonathan J. Price, Margalit Finkelberg, and Yuval Shahar, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 42–57; Daniela Dueck, *Illiterate Geography in Classical Athens and Rome*, Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies (London; New York: Routledge, 2023), 111–25.

[9] Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds., *Reading J. Z. Smith: Interviews and Essay* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 43–44.

[10] On the history of this expression and Rumsfeld's use of it, see Errol Morris, "The Certainty of Donald Rumsfeld (Part 2)," *New York Times: Opinionator*, March 26, 2014, https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/the-certainty-of-donald-rumsfeld-part-2/.

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must have impacted Paul's perception of and interaction with his audiences even if the shape and extent of this influence cannot be determined with certainty. Being aware of this "known unknown" allows for a more layered understanding of the social dynamics reflected in the Pauline letter archive and may help us move beyond a naïve approach to this corpus as a series of responses to and windows onto "what really happened."

Even if much remains to be explored, the terrain that this study has covered demonstrates that ethnic stereotypes exerted influence in different ways and allowed for a range of rhetorical usages. In some cases, the author(s) may not have been aware of this influence. Chapter 2 discussed a number of studies that demonstrate that the influence of stereotypes sometimes escapes the awareness of participants. They are convinced that their perceptions and evaluations are based solely on the facts that they witnessed, but stereotypes nonetheless had a demonstrable impact on what they observed and how they evaluated it. This may have been true for some of Paul's missives as well, for instance, those comprising the Corinthian correspondence. It is evident that Paul's emphasis on avoiding *porneia* was not based solely on the reputation of Corinth. He had visited the city, he was familiar with some of its inhabitants, and he responded in his letters to a number of specific issues and questions related to sexual ethics. Still, as I argued in Chapter 5, given the degree of overlap between the reputation of Corinth and Paul's emphasis on avoiding *porneia*, it is likely that what Paul perceived, how he evaluated it, and the significance he attached to it was shaped by stereotypical assumptions about Corinth and its inhabitants.

In other cases, ethnic stereotypes appear to have been intentionally used in the service of specific argumentative purposes. Titus 1:12 is arguably the clearest example. The author states plainly what he considered the Cretans to be like and indicates that this was not his own idiosyncratic assessment but a view deriving from "one of their own." Likewise, in Galatians, given the high degree of overlap between the description of the *Galatai* in ancient literature and Paul's depiction of them in his letter, along with his scolding them as "foolish *Galatai*," it is plausible that he intentionally employed this stereotype to convey to his audience that they were acting like typical, fickle Galatians and to persuade them to instead stand firm in their loyalty to him and his message.

These two examples illustrate that ethnic stereotypes are invoked with different degrees of overtness in the corpus Paulinum. Galatians is more subtle than Titus on this score. The author of Colossians, to give another example, trusts that the reputation of the Scythians is sufficiently well

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known that it does not need to be spelled out at all. Another noteworthy and perhaps related difference is that in Titus and Colossians, the texts invoke stereotypes about outsiders: Cretans and Scythians. In Galatians and Corinthians, by contrast, Paul's letters reflect stereotypes about the very people he addresses. The function of these stereotypes differs as well. In Galatians, the ultimate aim of invoking an ethnic stereotype was deliberative; Paul wanted to convince the Galatians to stay the course and remain true to him and his gospel. In order to do so he suggested to them that they were, at present, living up to the stereotype of the fickle Galatian. At other points, ethnic stereotypes served a primarily hortatory function. In most cases when Paul waxed eloquent about the moral outrages routinely committed by Gentiles, he did so in order to exhort his audience not to conform to a typically Gentile manner way of life. In Romans 1, however, Paul described the moral deficiencies prevalent in the Gentile world not so much to impress upon his audience that they ought not behave like this but rather in the service of an argument about universal sinfulness and the concomitant need of salvation for all. Similarly, in Colossians, the Scythians were brought in not to convince the audience to avoid a Scythian lifestyle but to support the author's claim about the possibility of moral transformation. Yet another, primarily polemical, function was served by the stereotype about the Cretans in Titus 1:12: the author sought to cast aspersions on his rivals and make the case that a forceful pastoral response was required.

In most if not all of these cases, the possibility of change is assumed. Despite the essentializing suppositions that underly ethnic stereotyping, the general thrust of the argument found in these letters is that moral and spiritual change is not only possible but required. With the partial exception of the Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor 12:2, p. 41), this change is not envisioned as implying the rejection of the audiences' current identities. The readers of Pauline texts are assumed to be capable of change regardless of and while maintaining their present ethnic identities. The Scythians can reject their immoral customs while remaining Scythians; the Galatians can become steadfast rather than fickle without rejecting their Galatian identity; the Corinthian believers are presumed to be able to avoid sexual malfeasance despite their being Corinthians, etc. It may be tempting to conclude from this that Pauline ethnic discourse is fundamentally different from the racist ideas with which some later interpreters associated him, on the assumption that racism emphasizes immutability and does not allow for change. Yet as Ann Laura Stoler has influentially argued with respect to modern racism, "the force of racial discourse is precisely in

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the double-vision it allows, in the fact that it combines notions of fixity and fluidity in ways that are basic to its dynamic."[11] In colonial contexts, for instance, it was common to claim that the "natives" belonged to an inferior race marked by fixed characteristics while also insisting that they had to adapt to become more like their colonizers.[12] The tension between fixity and fluidity attested in the Pauline corpus is not wholly unlike these modern discourses about race.

This brings us to those later readers of Paul who often took what was said or implied about the Cretans, Galatians, Scythians, Gentiles, and Corinthians as straightforward social description and concluded that these texts offered evidence that ethnic groups had distinct and uniform collective character traits. From their perspective, Paul's letters offered apostolic precedent and suggested divine approval for generalizing and essentializing claims about ethnic groups. The fact that in many cases Paul's letters confirmed claims made in much older (classical) literature was seen as especially compelling evidence that these character traits were immutable. In the case of the Corinthians, Galatians, Cretans, and Scythians, the apostle confirmed what had been said about them by ancient Greek and Roman authors, which affirmed for some of Paul's nineteenth-century readers that these groups' collective traits were stable and unalterable.

Furthermore, the Pauline corpus furnished British and other Western interpreters with a set of lenses through which to view contemporary ethnic groups. Paul's description of immoral Gentiles (now reconceived

[11] Laura Ann Stoler, "Racial Histories and Their Regimes of Truth," *Political Power and Social Theory* 11 (1997): 198, cf. 199: "Taking 'immutability' as the hallmark of racism does not explain much since it never was, nor is now, a necessary and sufficient condition for those invested in a racist logic." Stoler's insights are picked up and applied to the early Christian context by Denise K. Buell, "Early Christian Universalism and Modern Forms of Racism," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin H. Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 113–14; Buell, *Why This New Race*, 7–10.

[12] On the (im)mutability of "race," see further Susannah Heschel, "The Slippery Yet Tenacious Nature of Racism: New Developments in Critical Race Theory and Their Implications for the Study of Religion and Ethics," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 35 (2015): 7: "Characterizing modern racism as promoting a notion of immutable essence is … misleading. It is simply not accurate to claim that biological immutability differentiates modern racism from earlier forms of prejudice. It is the instability of race, not its immutability, that lies at the heart of its invention." In a major contribution to the study of racism in premodernity, Geraldine Heng similarly argues that "race or racism [do not] require human distinctions to be posited as permanent, stable, innate, fixed, or immutable" (Heng, *Invention*, 26–27).

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as non-Christians rather than non-Jews) influenced how missionaries and others viewed "heathens" outside of Christian Europe. Paul's description of the Galatians as fickle informed how nineteenth-century readers viewed the French, Irish, Welsh, and other groups claimed to be genealogically related to the ancient Galatians. The harsh statement about the Cretans in Titus 1:12 shaped how the inhabitants of the island were viewed by its modern visitors. In other cases, there was no immediate connection between the people that Paul described and those that inhabited the nineteenth-century world, yet Pauline texts still had an impact on attitudes toward ethnic and racial outsiders. From the allegedly consistently low morality of the multiethnic environment of Corinth, interpreters drew arguments against "race mixing" and in support of segregation. In the reference to the Scythian in Col 3:11, some uncovered support for thinking about select human groups as particularly low kinds of "barbarians," a category to which they assigned the "bushmen," "Negroes," and other contemporaries.

In light of such readings of Paul, it is unsurprising that subsequent scholarship has moved in a different direction, especially after the racially motivated horrors of the Shoah. There is a notable shift in scholars' evaluation of Pauline comments about ethnic outsiders between the nineteenth century and the second half of the twentieth century. Even if it is by no means the case that all of nineteenth-century scholarship was monolithically racist or that all post-Shoah Pauline interpretation successfully avoids racist notions, the general contours of the scholarly conversation are apparent, and a shift over time in how a significant number of readers understand Paul is readily discernible. More recent scholarship is marked by a general tendency to argue for a version of Paul free from the prejudices and racist logic that quite a few prominent nineteenth-century readers had uncovered in his epistles.

Scholars active during the past several decades have at times been quite clear about this desideratum. David Garland's Paul "does not perpetuate the racist cliché that Scythians were monstrous and untamed brutes," Anthony Thiselton's Paul is not "incurably racist," and Charles Cranfield's Paul speaks of barbarians "without overtones of . . . prejudice or contemptuousness."[13] Other scholars keep their cards closer to their chests but arrive at similar results. Interpretations that maintain that Rom 1:18–32 does not reflect Paul's true view of Gentiles but rather those of

[13] See pp. 139, 141–42, 182–83.

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some unknown Jewish teacher, or that "Scythian" in Col 3:11 has a neutral or positive valence, or that Paul's emphasis on *porneia* has nothing to do with the reputation of Corinth, all contribute, intentionally or not, to the construction of a Pauline corpus free from stereotyping.[14] It is difficult to escape the impression that such exegetical results reflect the interpreters' cultural contexts rather more than that of Paul.[15]

It is true of course that Victorian-era interpretation likewise reflects its own Zeitgeist. The nineteenth century was in many ways an exceptional period. However, as I have shown at various points in this study, the suggestion that Paul provided his readers with apostolic fiat to engage in ethnic stereotyping was not unique to the nineteenth century but can be found in late antique and medieval as well as early modern sources. To the extent that views of racial and ethnic difference in these eras, including the nineteenth century, aligned more closely with those of the ancient world than of our own day and age, their interpretations may at times be more historically plausible.

Galatians offers perhaps the most compelling illustration. Despite our unease when reading J. B. Lightfoot's observations about the "Celtic blood" that determined the Galatians' collective character, he was right to note the parallels between how ancient authors described the Galatian people and how Paul portrayed them. The problem with Lightfoot and contemporary interpreters was not their historical and philological acumen (quite to the contrary) but their uncritical acceptance of ethnic stereotypes as accurate social description. The inclusion in this study of

[14] As signaled in Chapter 3, I consider it especially problematic when Paul is rendered free from stereotyping by assigning the blame for what he wrote to his Jewish background. Reconstructions of Paul that suggest that everything good or acceptable by twenty-first-century standards is central to Pauline thought (e.g., the universalism of Gal 3:28), whereas everything bad, such as ethnic stereotyping, is understood as a residue of his "Jewish" background are historically misleading and ethically questionable. Ever fewer contemporary portraits of Paul present the matter in such stark and simple terms, yet this conception sometimes still shines through in scholarly accounts, such as when emphasis is placed on the individual genius of Paul in promoting the good, while his promotion of the bad is framed in terms of the use of Jewish colloquialisms or stock phrases. Such language can easily be taken to suggest that Paul is somehow less directly responsible, as he is (quasi-unwittingly) reproducing the views of other Jews.

[15] A similar observation was recently made by Paul Sagar with respect to developments in philosophical discussion of the notion of equality: "the shift onto the egalitarian plateau in the West, in roughly the period since the Second World War, by academic philosophers and theorists at the same time as the general population, is a sign that all are moving in response to changes that have taken place in wider society. In this case, I suspect, the changes in philosophy are largely causally downstream of changes in social reality" (Paul Sagar, *Basic Equality* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024], 13).

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nineteenth-century interpretations of such texts as Galatians and Colossians has brought to light neglected exegetical perspectives that have considerable merit, provided that we reconceive of them as evidence of ethnic stereotyping rather than as evidence of the inherent, immutable nature of ethnic groups.

While much nineteenth-century scholarship is deeply problematic when it comes to questions of ethnicity and race, more recent scholarship has not always found compelling ways to respond to instances of ethnic stereotyping in the New Testament texts either. The sections on the history of interpretation in this study have demonstrated that the moral questions that these moments in Paul's letters raise are not merely hypothetical; these texts have been used to legitimize racist and related discourses in the nineteenth century and other eras. We cannot assume that such inferences will no longer be drawn by readers of this literature in our ostensibly less racist present-day societies. Indeed, texts like Titus 1:12 are featured in present-day arguments on the internet by white supremacists who find support in such passages for a basic tenet of their racist ideology – their belief that certain ethnic groups are of unalterably inferior character. Nineteenth-century interpretations may have been rejected in scholarly circles, but to some nonnegligible extent they reflect deductions that non-professional readers of Paul may draw as well, whether consciously or not, about the apparent acceptability of generalizing and essentializing assessments of ethnic outgroups.

Scholarly interpretations of the last several decades have, however, often denied or ignored the moral challenge that Pauline ethnic stereotypes present. A favored line of argument continues to be that Paul "obviously" did not mean every Gentile or Cretan or Galatian but only some of them. While perhaps true, this gets to the heart of the problem with ethnic stereotyping: It offers a generalizing assessment even in the face of obvious exceptions and counterevidence. If we do not signal this as problematic, and only state or imply that Paul surely meant some, not all of these people, we signal to those who take Paul as an example that it is acceptable to speak about ethnic outgroups in such a generalizing manner. Another strategy is to affirm the basic accuracy of Pauline assessments of ethnic groups. Although less common than in years past, New Testament scholars still sometimes suggest that the claims made in Pauline texts about Gentiles, Cretans, and others are accurate. This line of argument suggests that such utterly foolish or depraved ethnic groups actually exist and lends credence to racist ways of construing human difference. A final and perhaps most common strategy has been to ignore

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the issue: recent commentaries on Galatians have largely ignored Lightfoot's observations about Galatian fickleness, scholars who believe that Col 3:11 assumes a negative image of an ethnic group rarely address the ethical questions this raises, and even in commenting on Titus 1:12's harsh and sweeping indictment of an entire ethnic group, many commentators see fit to ignore the moral elephant that this passage ushers into the room.[16]

How then to respond to these texts? For many readers whose focus is exclusively historical, this question will have little urgency. Yet for those who approach Paul from a religiously committed perspective, the implications of this study are more challenging, and I want to end this book by offering some reflections on how to negotiate this complicated aspect of the apostle's legacy. I suggest that rather than ignoring or denying the issue, it would be more compelling, both ethically and intellectually, to acknowledge the moral challenges that these texts present. This does not mean anachronistically holding Paul accountable for every aspect of the reception of his writings. Nineteenth-century readings of Paul were not some inevitable endpoint of a trajectory initiated by the apostle; Paul's legacy developed in many different directions. It would be reductive to lay the blame for all painful moments in the history of effects at the feet of the apostle. Paul did not, for instance, argue in the Corinthian Correspondence (or anywhere else) that "race mixing" was to be avoided, even if that is the lesson that some of his modern interpreters drew from it. Yet it is equally untenable to maintain that all implications that were later drawn are without any basis in Paul's letters.

It may be instructive to draw a comparison with another set of New Testament texts with a deeply problematic legacy: the anti-Jewish passages, including Paul's infamous claim that "the Jews ... killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God" (1 Thess 2:14–15).[17] It would be anachronistic in the extreme to blame Paul

[16] Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 49–64, argue that historical criticism was attractive to biblical scholars because it allowed them to sidestep the moral criticism of the Bible which had been prevalent during the Enlightenment. Regardless of the historical accuracy of this reconstruction, this dynamic can be discerned in quite a number of commentaries on, e.g., Titus 1:12, that spend considerable time on historical-critical questions (e.g., the origin of the saying) and in so doing fulfill their scholarly duty of offering substantial commentary on the text but avoid having to address the text's harsh and sweeping indictment of the Cretans.

[17] The comma at the end of 1 Thess 2:14 is perhaps the most consequential comma in all of the New Testament, as it determines whether Paul speaks of "the Jews" in a universal or a restrictive sense (i.e., only those Jews who engaged in the activities he enumerates).

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and other early Christians for the Shoah on this basis, yet there is an undeniable connection between early Christian anti-Jewish rhetoric and the long and painful history of anti-Semitism that culminated in the Holocaust. It is deeply problematic if interpreters today, who are (or ought to be) aware of what this kind of rhetoric can lead to, choose to ignore the historical roots of anti-Semitism found in the New Testament canon.[18] I suggest that this also applies to the instances of ethnic stereotyping analyzed in this study. This body of literature harbors a harmful potential that interpreters should not whitewash or gloss over if they care about avoiding the destructive ideas that have been legitimated by invoking these texts.

Facing these moral challenges does not have to result in "canceling" Paul altogether, although some may prefer to take this route. Yet another set of challenging New Testament texts, those concerning slavery, may be useful to consider in this connection. It cannot be denied that the New Testament condones slavery and it would be unreasonable and unethical to suggest that this is not a moral problem. Interpreters generally acknowledge this, yet contextualize New Testament statements about slavery in various ways. They may point out that the Bible was never intended as a guidebook that pertains in equal measure to all facets of life and that Pauline texts can remain theologically useful even if their position on slavery is considered unacceptable. They may also note that legal slavery was exceedingly common in antiquity and was hardly ever questioned by anyone. This does not make it morally right, but it does render its continued practice by early Christ-followers more intelligible. Finally, they may bring the texts into critical conversation with other passages in Scripture that suggest different perspectives on slavery and freedom.[19]

In support of the latter option, see Frank D. Gilliard, "The Problem of the Antisemitic Comma between 1 Thessalonians 2.14 and 15," *NTS* 35 (1989): 481–502; Stanley E. Porter, "Translation, Exegesis, and 1 Thessalonians 2.14–15: Could a Comma Have Changed the Course of History?," *The Bible Translator* 64 (2013): 82–98. Yet even on the restrictive reading, Paul advances the historically problematic claims that Jews, rather than Romans, killed Jesus (ἀποκτεινάντων Ἰησοῦν).

[18] I note in this connection the disturbingly common interpretive practice of ignoring potentially problematic interpretations and implications of texts like John 8:44 and Matt 27:25. Any sense of the reception of these texts should make it very clear that it is important that commentators discuss these challenges and help the reader respond to these texts in ways that avoid the repetition of history.

[19] Another useful set of comparanda is Pauline texts that suggest a very restrictive role for women. See, e.g., Frances Taylor Gench, *Encountering God in Tyrannical Texts: Reflections on Paul, Women, and the Authority of Scripture* (Louisville: WJK, 2015),

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A similar approach can perhaps be fruitfully applied to texts promulgating denigrating ethnic stereotypes. Interpreters may argue that these passages have limited bearing on central theological notions. They may also want to point out that in antiquity, ethnic stereotyping was exceedingly common to the extent that – as I have argued throughout this study – it is only to be expected that early Christian texts engage in it as well but that over the course of many centuries, and for very good reasons, we have sought to move away from these conventions. And finally, interpreters may want to bring these texts into conversation with parts of Scripture that may serve as a counterbalance or corrective.[20]

We should not lose sight of the fact that the New Testament on many occasions instructs believers to love and respect each other. Such passages can be found in all of the letters discussed in this study, sometimes in the immediate context of a text that trades on a negative ethnic stereotype. For instance, immediately after Colossians invokes the ethnic stereotype of the Scythians as deeply immoral (3:11), the readers are urged to "clothe [themselves] with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience ... above all ... with love" (Col 3:12, 14). The virtues that they are called to adopt are ultimately incompatible with any form of discrimination of fellow members of the Christ-communities.

Beyond these more general exhortations, New Testament texts at various points move in the direction of questioning the validity of ethnic barriers and inequalities. These texts include passages from the Gospels, such as those describing Jesus' interactions with Samaritans, as well as parts of Acts.[21] They also include sections of the corpus Paulinum. Ephesians 2:11–22, for instance, which refers not just to the inclusion of

who discusses various strategies for reading these passages critically but also taking them seriously as part of Scripture.

[20] On this strategy to deal with texts that present ethical difficulties, see Ellen F. Davis, "Critical Traditioning: Seeking an Inner Biblical Hermeneutic," *The Anglican Theological Review* 82 (2000): 733–51, in which she argues that this is a mode of responding to the tradition that is attested within the canon itself. For further, thought-provoking reflections on how to respond to xenophobia in the (Hebrew) Bible, see Brian Rainey, *Religion, Ethnicity and Xenophobia in the Bible: A Theoretical, Exegetical and Theological Survey*, Routledge Studies in the Biblical World (London; New York: Routledge, 2019), 246–85. Readers interested in these issues may also find rich inspiration in Sechrest, *Race & Rhyme*.

[21] See my "Aquila and Apollos: Acts 18 in Light of Ancient Ethnic Stereotypes," *JBL* 139 (2020): 177–89.

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Gentiles along with Jews in God's salvific plan, but also emphasizes the peaceful coexistence of these two groups within the community:

> For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. (Eph 2:14–16)

In the vision outlined here, there is no place for divisions along ethnic lines.

Paul's letter to the Galatians gestures in this direction too, albeit more indirectly. Despite what is often maintained, this is not immediately evident from Gal 3:28 ("there is neither Jew nor Greek"), which in context conveys that everyone can become a child "of God through faith" by means of baptism (Gal 3:26–27) and can therefore be reckoned among "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:31). Galatians 3:28 conveys that everyone can be an heir to Abraham, a privilege previously restricted to free Jewish males but now extended to female, enslaved, and non-Jewish people.[22] The passage is about inheritance rights, not about social equality. Earlier in the letter, however, Paul insisted in his discussion with Cephas that Gentiles should be able to have full table fellowship with Jews (Gal 2:11–14). Gentiles should be fully integrated into the community and treated as equals. The thought expressed in Gal 3:28 evidently had social ramifications for Paul.

A final passage I would like to consider at this juncture is 1 Cor 12, where shortly after Paul writes "in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free" (12:13), he adds:

> The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (1 Cor 12:22–26)

[22] See Esau McCaulley, *Sharing in the Son's Inheritance: Davidic Messianism and Paul's Worldwide Interpretation of the Abrahamic Land Promise in Galatians*, LNTS 608 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 162–67.

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While it is true that Paul does not dispense with a taxonomy of more and less "honorable" members, it is evident that he seeks to counter any notion that "inferior" members do not fully belong or are not entitled to the same level of care. Gentiles and Jews ought to have the same care for one another as they have for members of their own ethnic group.[23]

If and how we can reconcile these egalitarian impulses with the sometimes very negative ethnic stereotyping encountered over the course of this study remains an important question. It is tempting to posit a degree of cognitive dissonance or tension between ideal and reality, but in large part the incongruity can be squared by noting that all of the passages cited in the immediately preceding paragraphs pertain to members of the Christian community. Within the community, people with different ethnic backgrounds are to be regarded as equals. This ideal was not, however, explicitly extended to those outside of it. Still, these passages present a vision that contemporary readers need not restrict in their application to the Christian community alone and may take as a framework and inspiration for striving toward a more equitable society.

[23] Note also the unusual density of "brotherhood" language in Paul's letters, to which John Kloppenborg has drawn attention ("Egalitarianism in the Myth and Rhetoric of Pauline Churches," in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack*, ed. Elizabeth A. Castelli and Hal Taussig [Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996], 247–63): "In Pauline churches in particular, a rhetoric of belonging based on the language of 'brother- and sisterhood,' was nurtured. This feature is perhaps the most striking innovation of Pauline associations" (259).

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