

Foreword

What's at stake if White power and privilege are not examined and work towards transformation is not undertaken? Three writers respond.

What's at stake theologically?

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My theological roots are in New Testament studies and, more particularly, feminist biblical interpretation in a North American context. It is out of that perspective that I write.

The most recent chapter in feminist interpretation began with a concern to place women at the center of the biblical narrative, given that prior interpretive strategies seemed oblivious to women's leadership in the biblical text. These strategies thus denied that such leadership could become a reality in the church, particularly as it concerned women's ordination. This particular chapter of feminist work has had many revisions which, to map even briefly, shed light on Whiteness and its privilege as an identity marker.

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An initial stage sought to make the invisible visible, claiming that women should be partners in leadership with men in ministry. Work focused on bringing into full view the stories of women hidden by veils of translation, interpretation and worldviews that at best relegated them to secondary status, or at worst wrote them out of the story of Jesus and the early church.

A second phase recognized that not all women were the same, that women of a different colour or class or sexual identity were even more invisible. We

could make Sarah visible, but what did we have to claim about Sarah, not to mention Abraham and the system of patriarchy, for Hagar to become visible?

Women who were White, middle class and educated became aware of the fact that their visibility was increasing. At the same time, other women pointed out that it was not one size fits all, that this change resulted from certain women having a place of privilege on the patriarchal pyramid. It was in this stage that feminist research and writing moved from a naïve essentialism to womanist and *mujerista* theologies.

More recently, feminist biblical interpretation began to recognize the need to name the systemic nature of hierarchy and oppression suffered by both men and women who were not considered “normative.” This focus asked deeper questions about oppressive structures, worldviews, paradigms and metanarratives! Feminist work now required that we name structures of domination, assess them and begin to work for transformation in our communities, not just through our writing and research.

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What does all this mean for Whiteness as an identity marker? First it calls on me as a White woman, familiar with the oppressive nature of sexism, to do what I have asked my male colleagues

to do: admit that I am privileged. Second, I need to acknowledge that this privilege is something that I did not earn. It is an ascribed privilege afforded to me simply by virtue of the fact that I am White.

To be true to my feminist principles, I am called to unpack those things that are available to me, not because I have achieved more, but because I am White. Further, as I felt excluded or uncomfortable in the presence of sexism, I now have to recognize that I am the cause of others experiencing exclusion and discomfort in my presence. In terms of the privilege given to Whiteness, in this context I am the dominant one, mitigated only by the fact that sexism continues to exist.

This resource is written in the hope that those of us who have been confronted by other “isms” will apply those experiences to the privilege that Whiteness brings and work to change all patterns of exclusion. This is tough work, given the way in which privilege and hierarchy are built into every system of meaning.

It calls upon us to sort through the nature of privilege in all its colour-coded, gender-related, class and sexually differentiated contours. It means asking questions in order to discern what is going on every time we interact with others and try to make faithful decisions. It also calls us to the unpleasant role of the whistle-blower, to be like the widow, who in her encounter with the unjust judge, called out incessantly seeking to bring what was hidden and invisible into the public forum, naming it and calling out for justice.

Why do we do this? It is both simple and complicated. We do it because God calls us to be co-creators working with God to dare to bring into being a renewed creation.